

## Introduction

In January 2015, as I was preparing the 10th issue of this journal, the massacre of 12 people in the headquarters of French satirical magazine [\*Charlie Hebdo\*](#) became international news. Perpetrated by two young men who claimed to represent Islamic fundamentalism, the massacre gave rise to a focus on words such as terrorism, satire, freedom of speech, and censorship. At the same time, two lesser known events invaded my own personal story and the history of my country, Mexico: the censorship by MVS, a Mexican media conglomerate, of the journalist [Carmen Aristegui](#) with an aim to control the information she diffused, the investigations she lead, and the staff in her radio program, which is one of the last programs that has some credibility in Mexican media. More locally, and even closer to home for me, reporter [Moisés Sánchez](#) was found murdered on January 26<sup>th</sup> in the state of Veracruz after a long series of threats by the mayor of Medellín de Bravo, Omar Cruz. His murder added to a sustained and systematic killing of journalists in [Veracruz](#), bringing the number to 15 since the current governor [Javier Duarte](#) assumed his office in 2010. [Reporters Without Borders](#) (RSF), a non-profit organization that defends the freedom of information and of the press, has called [Mexico](#) the deadliest country in the Western hemisphere and in the Americas for journalists. [Article 19](#), an independent Human Rights organization, considered Veracruz “one of the most dangerous regions in the world for the press.” Unesco’s director general [Irina Bokova](#) and [Christophe Deloire](#), the Secretary of RSF, have repeatedly called on Mexican authorities and the president Enrique Peña Nieto to address the journalists’ murders to no avail. As [Temoris Grecko](#), a freelance writer for Mexican journal *Proceso*, has stated, Mexican journalists are perhaps not being massacred in the same way that those in France are, but they are being slowly and more effectively exterminated. As I was finishing this edition in July 2015, *Proceso*’s photojournalist [Ruben Espinosa](#) and social activist Nadia Vera were found tortured and assassinated in an apartment in Mexico City where they had sought refuge after having been intimidated by officials in Veracruz.

The attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* mobilized the whole world and split people’s opinions, especially on the Left after the hashtag #JesuisCharlie asked people to express solidarity with the magazine and thus, with freedom of speech. People on social media immediately embraced the slogan. Yet many critics condemned the killings but refused to condone the magazine’s views, and as a consequence they were criticized by various French writers who came to argue that people were ‘lost in translation’ and could not understand French culture, humor, and their satirical tradition. What this event brought to the light is how satire, humor, images and words are signifiers in a chaotic world where understanding is always close to breaking down. They are always sites of negotiation. *Charlie Hebdo* is a magazine of blunt and obscene satire that attacks politics, religion, and social issues. It offers, as many defenders have stated, a space in which the most extremist views are mocked, in particular the blatant racism voiced by the National Front (FN) and the Le Pen family in France. Satire against these prejudices is largely exploited by the magazine, yet representation, as we know, is always a slippery game. *Charlie Hebdo* seeks to attack bigotry but by ‘imagining’ it, it provides a visual outlet to what it condemns: racism rooted in ignorance. The *Charlie Hebdo* killings and the debate that it started in the West about freedom of speech motivated a number of questions: what are the limits of what can be said or drawn? Why does someone have to die because of a picture or a text? And what does this say about how we are living as a society or as a nation?

We live in a moment when both the politically correct and an increasing public tolerance to hate speech are simultaneously becoming the norm. The crux of the matter, though, is probably not

what we say or represent but rather what we think. Ethics, civility, and a respectfully engaged, honest (even loving) dialogue can be a way in which we can, once again, sit, talk, be heard, and negotiate meaning in the face of increasingly radicalized political stances. Silence in this case only feeds those with louder and angrier voices. As [Slavoj Žizek](#) said in the wake of *CH*'s events, we may want to confront the passion that fundamentalists have with our own renewed ethical and political passion.

The Spanish Inquisition has long disappeared but new regimes of control of speech are operating vigorously. [China](#) makes Western companies like LinkedIn, Google, and Skype comply with their Golden Shield surveillance system and report any comment unfit for the Republic—namely words such as “Tiananmen,” “Tibet,” or “89.” The dark ages made their comeback when ISIS or Daesh burnt in February 2015 the [Mosul](#) Public Library in Iraq. This library held a collection of 8000 rare old books and manuscripts, among which one could find Syrian works, books from the Ottoman era, and the collections of 20 notable families. Nonetheless, at the same time that these events of silencing are taking place, we are told to have unlimited access to information, as Julian Assange and Edward Snowden have confirmed via the phenomena of [Wikileaks](#) and the [NSA leaks](#).

Revisiting silence, censorship, regulation and freedom of speech have thus become imperative. The articles presented here engage in a dialogue not only with silence as an imposed action but also with silence as a productive and reproductive force. Jan Hoffman reports on violence against journalists in Brazil who have been accused of criminal defamation as a way for the legal system to control the press. She analyzes the intersection of the criminal defamation laws and hate speech in Brazil as they relate to the legal system in the United States and proposes a way to harmonize free speech and its limitations in modern democratic states. Carolina Rocha traces the history of regulated film in Argentina from 1957 to 1976 and argues that, contrary to what has long been maintained, censorship began during the *revolución libertadora* and was passed by the *democratic* government of Arturo Frondizi (whose term of office extended from 1958 to 1962). Considering the Spanish inquisitorial system as it was implemented in the Americas in the eighteenth century, my article analyzes the case against a folk song called “Jarabe gatuno” o “Pan de jarabe” in order to reveal how censorial discourse gets contaminated by what it has deemed to be ‘obscene,’ and ends up reproducing and using its same rhetorical devices. A poetics of censorship thus emerges that is closely dependent on the ‘obscene.’

The second part of this issue explores more productive ways of using silence, of refusing censorship, or of transforming silence into a sign of resistance. Marcus Brasileiro analyzes the Brazilian poet Torquato Neto (1944 – 1972), whose poetry developed subjective strategies to resist the authoritarian agenda of Brazilian dictatorship. María Arenillas focuses on *Diario de una princesa montonera -110% verdad-* (2012) by Mariana Eva Perez, the daughter of a *desaparecido*, and affirms that Perez gives voice to other stories, hidden by the happy-ending narrative that was imposed by the collective “Abuelas de Mayo,” when children of *desaparecidos* were restituted and their stories ‘repaired.’ Following this dialogue with memory studies, Karin Davidovich analyzes the role that silence (as expressed in ellipses or omissions) plays in the testimonies of women detained by the last military dictatorship in Argentina (1978-1983). Studying Graciela Fainstein, Graciela Lo Prete, Nora Strejilevich and Alicia Partnoy, Davidovich finds that only by resorting to silence was it possible for these women to communicate trauma and to question the limits of language and memory.

Against the belief that silence ‘concedes,’ Sara Muñoz Mariana argues in her analysis of *Tristana* (1892) by Benito Pérez Galdós, that the protagonist’s silence is a device to manifest indifference, rebelliousness, and a way to empower herself by refusing language. This positive approach to the possibilities of silence is similarly explored by Mathieu Raillard. Focusing on the Spanish eighteenth-century literature, Raillard reveals that, contrary to our belief that both silence and solitude are antithetical to friendship and sociability, they are in fact complimentary as demonstrated in the works

of Juan Forner, Leandro Fernández de Moratín, Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos and Juan Meléndez Valdés. Silence, Raillard argues, is a positive component, alongside with friendship, in the acquisition of wisdom and in the establishment of the neo-Pythagorean archetype of the contemplative thinker.

Much solitude and silence was needed for the authors of this issue to produce the essays presented here and for the anonymous peer-reviewers who contributed to this issue's positively censored and careful publication. This issue is also accompanied by a Mexican folk poet's *décimas* written in protest of the censorship against Carmen Aristegui. We face many silences, as poet Guillermo Velázquez reminds us, not just the silences imposed violently by censorship but also those imposed by oblivion, omission, disengagement, or fear. By voicing silence, we hope to shed light on the possibility of speaking bravely, ethically, and wisely.

Elena Deanda-Camacho  
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