

## TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ Polo



## In the humbling wake of Charlie Hebdo

*Communal responsibilities as well as personal rights*

**A** week into New Year 2015, as Parisians approached lunchtime, two black-masked and heavily armed men shouting in Arabic, entered the offices of the weekly journal *Charlie Hebdo*. Across town another gunman burst into a Jewish grocer. Sixteen parents and grandparents, sons and daughters, they methodically murdered. Twenty-one more were wounded.

Those who perished are mourned and will be missed, always. Some injured will recover, but some will suffer forever. This essay is not intended to minimize their pain or their families' anger. It is not intended to humanize the cruelty of those causing it all.

In the weeks following the Paris tragedy, private sorrowers and public demonstrators debated the societal necessity of the kind of journalism we now code as "Charlie Hebdo." While it's hard to contribute anything new to this important discussion, I would suggest a slightly different quiet and public inquiry. Also an important one.

It's an important perspective, because millions of ambitious families are moving across our precious planet's well-worn face. Jumbo-jetting, instant Twittering, and free Skyping are erasing the mountain ranges and broad seas that once distanced

our distinct cultures and our great religious traditions. It's important because today, there's a lot of rub between us.

Our rub is unavoidable. And good. Contrary cultures elbow to elbow can make some beautiful noise, like the contagious joy of Mexican salsa or the irresistible serenity of Vedic chants slipping out of hip yoga studios and onto our morning city streets. Locally, according to the Immigration Policy Center, the rub of America's free market with Oregon's Asians adds \$6.1 billion and 26,779 jobs to our state's rapidly globalizing economy. Our optimistic Spanish-speaking families' annual rub adds another \$8.4 billion and 13,916 jobs to our noisy lives. Our rub's revenue rises every year.

### Equal opposites: Reverence and irreverence

Our cities are a mélange of raucous American democracy mixing it up with three cultural elements central to our immigrant communities: Old World resilience, old-school sincerity, and reverence.

Resilience means stubbornness. Sincerity is the opposite of sarcasm. The third element, reverence, is harder to translate into urban English or modern French. Reverence humbles us. Those who know reverence in our bones, in these aching hearts, immediately recognize reverence

in others. Our eyes soften. No political science necessary.

As a New American, I know *irreverence* is more familiar to our more settled neighbors. I get it. Our family laughs along with Jon Stewart, with Maz Jobrani and Carlos Mencia (Persian- and Honduran-American comics). We understand the societal value of irreverence.

However, as a community lawyer — as one of those guys working the intersections of our city's 70 or so energetic ethnic streams with our robust mainstream — I worry about our new homeland's evaluation of *reverence*. Since that murderous episode in Paris, many New Americans worry about how we might move something so essential to our shared humanity into that intersection. Our reverence.

This inquiry is about bringing reverence back into our public square. Not as replacement for irreverence, not at all. But as an equal opposite, like black and white, like night and day, like life and death.

### Everyone knows reverence

In 1965, Newcomers and settled neighbors alike watched evening news stories about the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Humbled we were, by his polished obsidian eyes. Fifty years later, no one I know will say a bad thing about the Reverend Dr. King. Not around our kitchen tables, not in our Starbucks lines. Reverence for him resides in our aching bones. In these broken hearts.

There's a white-washed bike trimmed with festive flowers on a busy inner-southeast arterial named for el señor César E. Chávez. It memorializes the passing of two precious lives, right there. Every workday, thousands of our hearts momentarily pause when they pass by it. This moment is reverence.

Sixteen urgent salmon miles east of Portland, 100-year-old Douglas fir and ancient massif curtain River Columbia's grand gorge. Sixteen millennia of native nations have lived and loved here. Their generous ancestors crowd their river's

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shore. I am as hushed here as in any house of god. This speechlessness is reverence.

About this giant American and these sacred places, our state and national constitutions give us the right to say ugly things. But most won't. And the reason we don't, without argument, is our silently shared reverence.

Naturally some Portlanders and some Parisians, don't ache or didn't break in those ways we abbreviate as "reverence." They don't know it. These neighbors matter no less (but no more) than everyone matters. Healthy societies have always cultivated communal duties as much as ensured private rights. Indeed, our deep differences, our beautiful rub, require both.

Our words and our images span the distances between our hearts, our parts of town, our sides of our precious blue planet, in an instant. Best if, in that instant before an edgy idea leaves our lips, we considered each carefully. Quietly. Are they unkind to others? — Like our old-school moms and grandmas used to tell and tell us. Always. Everywhere.

*Nota: My gratitude to cosmopolitan urban planner, Professor Nohad Toulan (1931-2013); to Muslim Educational Trust elder Wajdi Said and civic activist Rania Ayoub; for their patient persistence in a world of hurt, in a universe of Love. Three generations of local and global teachers, they are. Al'hamduillillah. -- Polo*

## Snails slither into spa scene in Thailand and around world

*Continued from page one*

one of the partners, gently applying one to his forearm. He does confess to eating escargots ("but not mine"), plans to breed some for the table, and is currently experimenting to produce "the perfect snail caviar."

A chosen few get plucked from the farm for duty at the spa, where I opted for the 45-minute Snail Spa Celebrity Course. For \$30, it's a bargain compared to the \$200 customers must shell out at Tokyo's Ci:z.Labo, a beauty salon where snail massage made its debut in 2013. Spas have also opened in China and London, and the French duo is expanding to Bangkok this month.

Given its novelty, Chiang Mai public health inspectors have descended on the spa to determine whether the treatment was safe and if imported snails — officially classified as "alien creatures" — might prove harmful to local species. Results of the investigation have not yet been released.

While the facials are new, concoctions made from snail mucus are said to date back to ancient Greece, when the great physician Hippocrates reportedly crushed snails and sour milk as a cure for skin inflammations. In recent times, the French have turned this essence of escargot into assorted creams and lotions.

The fluid, exuded by snails when under stress, is known to contain beneficial nutrients and antioxidants, but Bangkok-based Dr. Dissapong Panithaporn and other dermatologists say that there has been no significant scientific research on how these actually work when applied to the skin.

Champeyroux, a manager in France's nuclear power sector before falling in love with Chiang Mai some years ago, says his all-natural line of snail products, Coquille, acts against burns, acne, stretch marks, scars, and aging. The two women next to me concurred.

Taksaphan na Pohn, a 22-year-old recent university graduate, said she had earlier tried laser and other techno-treatments, but after some research decided that "natural therapy" was better. She said snails helped clear her acne when she was stressed during her studies.

"My face is firmer and softer," she said. "But you don't get immediate results. It shows gradually."

Like for many, the prospect of having my face crawling



with slimy hermaphrodites (snails are unisex) did not immediately appeal. Although from my own research I decided it might be preferable to another natural therapy — *uguisu no fun*, or nightingale feces facial, which has been around in Japan for centuries.

So after being slathered with one of Champeyroux's

### My Turn: Blinded by colorblindness

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walk into public spaces, open fire, and still walk away with their lives. In those cases, we are told we must understand 'why' and change laws or [the] mental health system to make sure it never happens again. ... The audacity of whiteness and anti-black racism is condemning black bodies for their own deaths, while seeking understanding for white criminals."

What their piece reveals is that colorblindness benefits whiteness, whereby these shooters are protected by the invisibility of whiteness as a racial category in the same way the criminal justice system's racial stratification and disenfranchisement

remains invisible as well.

It is also telling that in the persistent colorblind focus on individual actions (by white male shooters or racist bigots), we deny the same kind of individuality to people of color and especially — in light of the series of state violence — to African Americans who are represented in terms of criminality and potential threats to social order.

The recent swell of protest and the insistence that "Black Lives Matter" point precisely to the problems of colorblindness. We are not a post-racial and colorblind society so much as we have become blind to these forms of racial violence and racial segregation.

**HELPFUL HERMAPHRODITES.** A customer receives a beauty treatment with snails at a snail farm in Chiang Mai province, in northern Thailand. Opinions differ about whether snail facials are an effective way to plump up skin in need of repair or rejuvenation or if they are merely another marketing ploy. (AP Photo/Denis Gray)

creams, the beautician plopped down the first of half a dozen mollusks on my face. A balmy coolness I sensed as they proceeded to slide over my cheeks, furrow through my eyebrows, and tickle my lips, taking particular liking to my nose since snails are fond of climbing.

Opening my eyes, I got a macro lens view of one critter perched on my nose tip. Its twin, antennae-like feelers were weaving about, possibly seeking an escape route with its tiny eyes. The snail's 14,000 microscopic teeth produced a slight, not unpleasant, scratching when it slid toward my nostrils.

So if truth be told, I sort of missed my harmless, sensuous sextet when they were dislodged, clinging to my skin with a gentle suction.

Maybe I won't eat another escargot again.

*Denis Gray, who has reported on Southeast Asia for The AP for more than 40 years, recently experienced a snail massage to report on the beauty trend.*



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