

The Bubble World of Polarization

Failing to Realize the Blind Spots in the Cartoon Controversy

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In a world of wrenching change, the Danish cartoon affair has widened a growing fissure between Islam and the West, especially the Islamic world view the “war on terrorism” as a “war on Islam”, where memories of colonization and of the Crusades are drawn, when Western invaders ridiculed the Prophet Muhammad as an imposter.

The publication of satirical cartoons led to violence, arrests, inter-governmental tensions, and debate about the scope of free speech and the place of Muslims in the West. What seemingly started off as a local difficulty about community integration in Denmark following the publication of the controversial cartoons has been later escalated into a worldwide chasm. It would be naive to suggest that the western media did not know what they were getting themselves into, especially since Muhammad is a man, whose influence covers over 1.3 billion people in the world today.

According to the Muslims, any image of Muhammad is blasphemous, while some Westerners perceive its publication as a core right of free speech to depict anything. A number of governments, organizations, and individuals have issued statements defining their stance on the protests or cartoons. Such dilemma raise two main questions: “Why do westerners still fail to realize the blind spots in the controversy?” and “Who hates who in this media hostility?”

Free speech protects the rational mind: it is the freedom to think, to reach conclusions and express one’s views without fear of coercion of any kind. And it must include the right to express unpopular and offensive views, including outright criticism of religion. If intimidation and threats are allowed to compel writers, cartoonists, thinkers and institutions of learning into self-censorship, the right to free speech is lost. If Muslims are allowed to pressure critics of Islam into silence, critics of religion will be next. And then everyone else. (Brook 2006)

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), with a membership of 56 Muslim nations, protested to the Danish government. And the most respected authority in the Sunni Muslim world, Mohammed Sayed Tantawi, Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, declared that the “Al-Azhar protested against

these anti-Prophet cartoons with the UN's concerned committees and human rights groups around the world." (Qurechi 2006)

The Muslim Protests

The furor over the Prophet Muhammad drawings is a small part of an expanding divide between Islam and the West, or what international leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu described as the "symptom of a more serious disease" (Smith 2006) In Arab/Muslim media many perceived the cartoon controversy as the newest example of cultural confrontation between the Western world and Islam, between the belief that religion should not set any barriers on that sort of expression on one hand (from many media in the West), and the belief that Muslims should not be insulted on the other hand.

Nevertheless, the cartoon imbroglio has given ammunition to the two entrenched forces for censorship within the Muslim world, namely, authoritarian regimes and their Islamic fundamentalist opposition. Both would prefer to silence their critics through the evincing outrage over the Danish cartoons, the authoritarian regimes diverted the attention from their own political and military failures and bolstered their religious credentials against the Islamists who sought to unseat them.

Egypt perceived the insult as a wrong answer to solve cultural differences and accordingly Egyptian officials withdrew from a dialogue they had been conducting with their Danish counterparts about human rights and discrimination. Thousands of Muslims protested in Copenhagen in November 2005 and this began the great cartoon debate. Two cartoonists fearing for their lives went into hiding and the Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami party offered large amounts of money to anyone who killed the cartoonists. (Spencer 2005)

Malaysia's Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, described the publication as the latest sign of a deepening gulf between the West and Islam. "The demonization of Islam and the vilification of Muslims, there is no denying, is widespread within mainstream Western society", he added: "The West should treat Islam the way it wants Islam to treat the West and vice-versa. They should accept one another as equals." But he warned that Muslims should also refrain from "sweeping denunciation of Christians, Jews and the West." (Krishnan 2006)

The non-Arab/Muslim public and media did not understand the sudden escalation of anger in the Muslim world over the offensive cartoons, which were republished in Norway and subsequently in other European countries. Waves of agitation for boycotting Danish products gradually grew across the Arab world, resulting in negative diplomatic ramifications. For example, Afghanistan's President, Hamid Karzai called the printing of the images a mistake, and hoped that this would lead to the media being more responsible and respectful in the future, and Bahrain's parliament demanded an apology from Denmark. (Habib 2006)

Libya closed its embassy in Copenhagen in protest and threatened to take "unspecific economic measures" against Denmark. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia called its ambassador to Denmark home, while religious leaders urged boycotting of Danish products. The boycott was later then realized in several other Gulf countries, including Yemen and Iran. Mobile phone messages calling for a boycott listed Danish and Norwegian products. Meanwhile, a spate of protests erupted on the West Bank; members of Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades carried out a major protest, with demonstrators burning Danish flags and calling on Palestinian authorities to cut diplomatic ties with Denmark. They threatened Dames to leave immediately (BBC News 2006).

This marginalization of reality explains the strong wave of criticism that slammed what were seen in the Muslim/Arab world as double standards by the EU for keeping silent about the cartoons, while insisting on enforcing economic sanctions against countries that publish anti-Semitic material.

Surprisingly, the global media and politics all over the world have always dealt with issues with a double standards for example, Arabs are not considered as semites,⁷

What is meant here is that being anti-semitic includes many forms – slurs, violence, economic and political sanctions, standards of behavior, and studied ignorance and indifference to facts. (Levy 2006)

In that context, the laws criminalizing Holocaust denial or minimization were adopted well into the 1990s in France, Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, and other European countries (and several countries outside Europe) France's 1972 Holocaust denial law expanded, by the 1990 Gayssot law to extend sanctions to denial of other crimes against humanity and points of view deemed racist. British legislation against incitement of racial hatred was expanded in 1986 and was extended again in February 2006, the latter time to criminalize intentionally "stirring up hatred against persons on religious grounds". (Alexander 2006)

This is spreading to the European Union level, where a stream of rules now prohibits the broadcast, including online, of any program or ad that incites "hatred based on sex, racial or

ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation" or – crucially – is "offensive to religious or political beliefs". In May 2005, *Le Monde*, France's premier center-left newspaper, was found guilty of defaming Jews in a 2002 editorial that criticized Israeli policies while referring to Israel as "a nation of refugees". (Alexander 2006)

The appeals court found that such juxtapositions made Israelis synonymous with Jews, so criticism of the former constituted incitement of hatred against the latter. After it published a series of controversial cartoons of Muhammad, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* was formally investigated to determine whether the cartoons constituted prohibited racist or blasphemous speech.

However, the Muslim reactions were mixed. A host of organizations, including the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, the Federation of Arab Journalists, the International Union of Muslim Clergy, the Islamic Conference Organization, the Arab League, and the Egyptian Parliament, all joined the fray, issuing statements

condemning the cartoons. This radical camp urged the Danish government to make a more formal apology and acknowledge that freedom of expression does not mean people are free to insult prophets. (Saleh 2007b)

In this context, an economic boycott was advocated by some Muslim groups to deliver the message that Muslims were still ready to take action because the Danish media continued to show disrespect. However, the majority of the moderate Muslims believed, like the prominent Islamic scholar, Abdel-Sabour Shahine, that the Islamic world should show more tolerance by promoting dialogue with the West and educating them about Islam. He said, in *Al-Abram Weekly* (February 2-8, 2006): "The Qur'an ordains Muslims to engage in peaceful dialogue and use a more logical approach with those of different creeds".

A Diverse Muslim World

This chapter attempts to explain the controversy over the publication of the Danish cartoons in the light of the current global drift of skepticism and pessimism about Islam. One important reality is the blind spot about the heterogeneity of the Muslim fabrics and the complete polarized coverage of western media in framing this controversy. For example, the Jordanian journalist Jihad Momani wrote: "What brings more prejudice against Islam, these caricatures or pictures of a hostage-taker slashing the throat of his victim in front of the cameras, or a suicide bomber who blows himself up during a wedding ceremony?" (Slackman and Fatah 2006)

A quote in the international edition of the *New York Times*, by Muhammad al-Assadi condemned the cartoons but also lamented the way many Muslims reacted. "Muslims had an opportunity to educate the world about the merits of the Prophet Mohammad and the peacefulness of the religion he had come with", Mr. Assadi wrote. He added, "Muslims know how to lose, better than how to use, opportunities". (Slackman and Fatah 2006)

The heated emotions, the violence surrounding protests and the arrests have sent a chill through people, mostly writers, who want to express ideas contrary to the prevailing sentiment. It has threatened those who contend that Islamic groups have manipulated the public to show their strength, and that governments have used the cartoons to establish their religious credentials.

More than 11 journalists in five countries faced prosecution for printing some of the cartoons. Their cases illustrate another side of this conflict, the intra-Muslim side, in what has typically been defined as a struggle between Islam and the West. (Slackman and Fatah 2006)

Both Arab and Muslims in general got involved in a game between two sides, the extremists and the governments in the middle of a tidal wave, which faces 1.3 billion Muslims. Nevertheless, it has magnified a fault-line running through the Middle East, between those who want to engage their communities in a direct, introspective dialogue and those who focus on outside enemies. Besides, it has also underscored a political struggle involving emerging Islamic

movements, like Hamas in Gaza and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and Arab governments unsure of how to contain them.

There are intervening questions related to the western and Muslim media unanswered: Why are liberals on both sides silent? How can moderate journalists write? Who is going to protect them? Who is going to publish the Muslim moderate voice in the first place? With the current media hostile effects in the current global polarized media that is overwhelmed with spin doctors, the list of taboos has been increasing daily all over the world. You should not write about religion. You should not write about politics. Then what is left?

While the cartoons have infuriated Muslims, the regional dynamics underlying the conflict have been evolving for decades, during which leaders have tried to stall the rise of Islamic political appeal by trying to establish themselves as guardians of the faith. It is logical to deduce that even the western governments have resorted to the very practices that helped the rise of Islamic political forces in the first place. They have placated the more extreme voices while arresting and silencing more moderate ones.

The chapter suggests two overlapping factors in the nature of the coverage of the controversy. The first is the highly selective representation of events in the news, influenced by the ideological structure of prevalent news values, emphasizing conflict and polarization. The second factor is tied to a Western-based interpretation of Muslims. Those outside Islam tend to make sweeping generalizations about Muslims in Muslim/Arab countries and Muslims who are either immigrants or native-born in non-Muslim countries. Yet Muslims represent a wide variety of beliefs and ethnicities, ranging from Albanians, Afghans and Algerians to Yemenis. Between these two ends of the spectrum are Arabs, Bengalis, Bosnians, Caribbeans, Chinese, Indians, Indonesians, Iranians, Lebanese, Pakistanis, Palestinians, Senegalese, Sudanese, Somalis and Turks. Such diversity is not only evident in the national origins but also in the various schools of Islam that historically fragmented the communities.

In the Arab/Muslim world, the controversy had a three-fold background. First, the public have conflicting loyalties to the state and to Islam. Second, the mix of fundamentalism and secularism among different social strata potentially may stimulate destabilizing the social texture of Muslim societies. Third, the diffusion of political Islam in the Arab/Muslim world and its alleged links with *Al-Qaeda* and the banned Muslim-brotherhood group created an acute moral panic.

This chapter seeks to map the real setting, especially that the western media in most cases are still blind to read events correctly and realize within a context of mutual understanding and respect the reasons behind the controversy. Given the teaching of Islam, which promotes tolerance of all religions and cultures, how did local media cover this controversy? Finally, and most importantly, was it a matter of freedom of expression or religious intolerance?

Theoretical Perspectives: Three Inspirations

Revisiting the coverage of the caricature in some Muslim countries has here been informed by a combination of three theoretical approaches: news framing, the muted group theory, and the self-discrepancy theory. I concentrate mainly on the examples from Pakistan and Egypt.

The news framing theory (Entman, 1993) suggests that media and opinion leaders select certain frames to support particular ideologies, such as a disregard for Islam. The muted group theory (Kramarac, 1981) explores the experiences of subordinate groups who are marginalized by mainstream media. Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins 1989) argues that people are strongly motivated to maintain a sense of consistency among their beliefs and self-perceptions. When experience is somewhat less than we think we *can* achieve, we tend to feel sadness, dissatisfaction or even depression. When experience is less than what we feel we *should* achieve, we experience fear, worry and other anxieties.

In the news coverage of the cartoons, these three theoretical dimensions help us to understand the phenomenon of "group think". This phrase was coined in the 1970s by the American psychologist, Irving Janis, to describe a process by which a group can make bad or irrational decisions characterized by uncritical acceptance of a prevailing point of view (Janis 1972) In a group think situation, each group member attempts to conform his or her opinion to what they believe to be the consensus of the group. This conformity may result in the group ultimately agreeing upon an action that each member might individually consider unwise.

Group think is a severe problem in Arab/Muslim society, including Egypt and Pakistan, because it threatens to turn the general public into believers and followers of rituals. Hence, it reduces the communication of the group with outsiders. News coverage influenced by group think may result in the eruption of wrath, where a mob reaction tends to use force and violence to convince non-believers. Cohen describes this constructed "moral panic" in his book *Rokh Devils and Moral Panics* (1972). Moral panics allow "the manufacture of news". In such processes certain groups are defined as a threat to societal values and interests by stereotypical representations in the mass media. Moral barricades are manned by editors, Muslim religious leaders, politicians and other "right-thinking" people.

Religion and Politics

The socio-political relation between Islam and the West provides a basis for a series of myths that are used by both the government and radical religious groups in mobilizing public responses to contemporary events.

Two such powerful myths are linked to the concepts of the Islamic State and the Secular State. The earlier identifies persistent underlying religious tension as a possible source of political conflict; the latter refers to an ever-present

conspiracy by neo-liberals' constituents to separate the state and politics from religion. Thus the term "myth" here does not refer to a fabricated nature of the scenarios presented but highlights the importance of their content in legitimating political policy and in initiating social action.

Historically, there has been a conflicting relationship between the Orient and the Western cultures, due to the continuous attempts of the West to manipulate the Middle East. Undoubtedly, the West has played a part in stimulating further friction with its growing ethnocentrism (Hassan 1997)

Western media has intensified this disharmony by continuously representing Islam as a threat to western civilization, using images of oriental irrationality and fanatical masses (Juerg 1995). It has even been suggested by some western scholars that Islam is a role model of a culturally-defined racism (Hippler 1995). In this context, Islamophobia has been mobilized to support discriminatory practices.

While there is no space to provide a full historical background, a number of key historical features require appropriate attention. First, both Egypt and Pakistan are consolidated as independent states that can be characterized less in terms of a revolutionary overthrow of colonial rule than as a series of initiatives, unanticipated reversals and exigencies to which the political leadership responded in overwhelmingly pragmatic terms. Secondly, most of the historical time line reflected that the political arena in Egypt and in Pakistan, though different, does not reveal states which could survive as viable, independent democratic nations. As early as 1953, for example, late president Nasser got rid of Egypt's first president Mohammed Naguib when he suggested implementing notions of democracy and citizenship; and in the beginning of the 1980s, Sadat was assassinated because he confronted the fundamentalists. Pakistani experienced a similar scenario, when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was deposed in 1977, and assassinated in 1979, while Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in 2007, when she tried to implement democracy.

The Islamic Identity

In the pre-Islamic era, a person's social identity was derived solely from his membership in the tribe. Membership entailed taking part in all tribal activities, especially those involving the tribal cult. However, as Asian (2006) notes, after the advent of Islam, the "Kharaajites" Shia't Ali emerged as a small faction that represented the first self-conscious attempts at defining a distinctive Muslim identity. They based their leadership on the most pious person in their community irrespective of the tribe, lineage and ancestry.

Islamic-Western history may be viewed in terms of changing power relations. The Islamic ascendancy includes the period from prophet Mohamed's exodus from Mecca to Medina (622) to the fall of Grenada and the expulsion of Muslims from Spain (1492). The Christian West realized Islam's potent presence on its doorstep in Europe at the time of Charlemagne (768-814), and thus

a western counter-movement by a series of Christian crusaders emerged from the eleventh century into the Ottoman period. In 1683 the expansion of the last Moslem empire to Europe was stopped at Vienna.

Western ascendancy and the subsequent domination of the Islamic world emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, marked with the industrial revolution and technological and economic development. Islam has remained, in the eyes of the West as a strange culture (Saleh 2006). Arabs/Muslims themselves have perpetuated the belief that identity can be authentic only if its features spring from a particular environment and develop according to specific conditions. Many Arabs and Muslims tend to believe that preserved original identity can only exist within a cultural environment that is cut off from foreign influence, which explains many of the phobias related to globalization. (Saleh 2007a)

It is important to explain the notion *jihad* for Muslims. It means "to strive" or "to struggle", and is considered a duty by most Muslims. *Jihad* appears frequently in the Quran and common usage as the idiomatic expression "striving in the way of God (*al-jihad fi sabil Allah*)". A person engaged in *jihad* is called *mujahid*, the plural is *mujahideen*. A minority among the Sunni scholars sometimes refer to this Islamic duty as the sixth pillar of Islam, though it occupies no such official status. *Jihad* is directed against the devil's inducements, aspects of one's own self, or against a visible enemy. The four major categories of *jihad* that are recognized are *jihad* against one's own self (*Jihad al-Nafs*), *Jihad* of the tongue, *Jihad* of the hand, and *Jihad* of the sword. Within In the Arab/Muslim world, territorial expansion has always been associated with religious proselytizing: each religion was the "religion of the sword", which Islamic jurisprudence *jihad* is usually used in reference to military combat. It is worth noting that notion of "holy war" did not originate from Islam, but from the Christian Crusaders, who gave a purported theological legitimacy to what was, in reality, a battle for land and trade routes?

In the twentieth century, the Arab/Muslim media that has been directly and indirectly influenced by mainstream western media have contributed to the West's public ignorance of Islam. Weak Arab media and political patronage, in addition to economic stagnation, contributed to the existing hawkish climate of extremism. This climate helped to foster an ethnocentric discourse.

Globalization has in late modernity increased regional disparities within and between countries and has aroused fears among people from the Muslim world, who suffer from economic marginalization and, often as a result, dehumanization and degradation. These conditions have resulted in national chauvinism and religious revivalism. The influence of western culture has stimulated new evolving identities and enhanced disparities in income and changing life styles.

There is an obvious radical and explicit anti-Islamic presence in the western media, which adds to the continuous construction of villains for the western public to mock and hate. (Saleh 2007a)

Twofold Challenge

Currently, Islamic societies face a twofold challenge: external domination and internal decay. Muslims have had to admit that the western domination of the Islamic world became a reality only when the Islamic societies had disintegrated and degenerated into corrupt and fragmented entities alienated from Islamic values of piety and justice. The responses to this dual challenge have been correspondingly twofold: external defense and internal reform. In contrast, the mainstream West perceives the independence, democracy and development in Islamic countries through the historical distortions, prejudices and contemporary ideological mystification.

The two modern ideologies of progress, liberalism and Marxism, have a strong secular bias. Thus, they are predisposed to view any religious manifestation with disdain. Muslims believe that the Quran is the word of God, but its interpretation is left to the "Ulama", or the learned, who have developed the science of "Kalam" (theology) and the "Sharia" (laws). The phrase "Islamic fundamentalism" is misunderstood, much as Christian fundamentalism is misunderstood to apply to those groups who follow the literal word of God. Hence, applying the same label for Taliban in Afghanistan, who endorse medieval practices, and the Welfare Party in Turkey, that came to power through parliamentary elections and carried out progressive practices, demonstrates Western ignorance.

Caricature Controversy in the Muslim Press

As protests against the cartoons turned violent in the Middle East on February 4, 2006. Danish and Norwegian embassies were torched in Syria, most protests in Pakistan, Egypt and Indonesia in the immediate aftermath of the controversy remained peaceful.

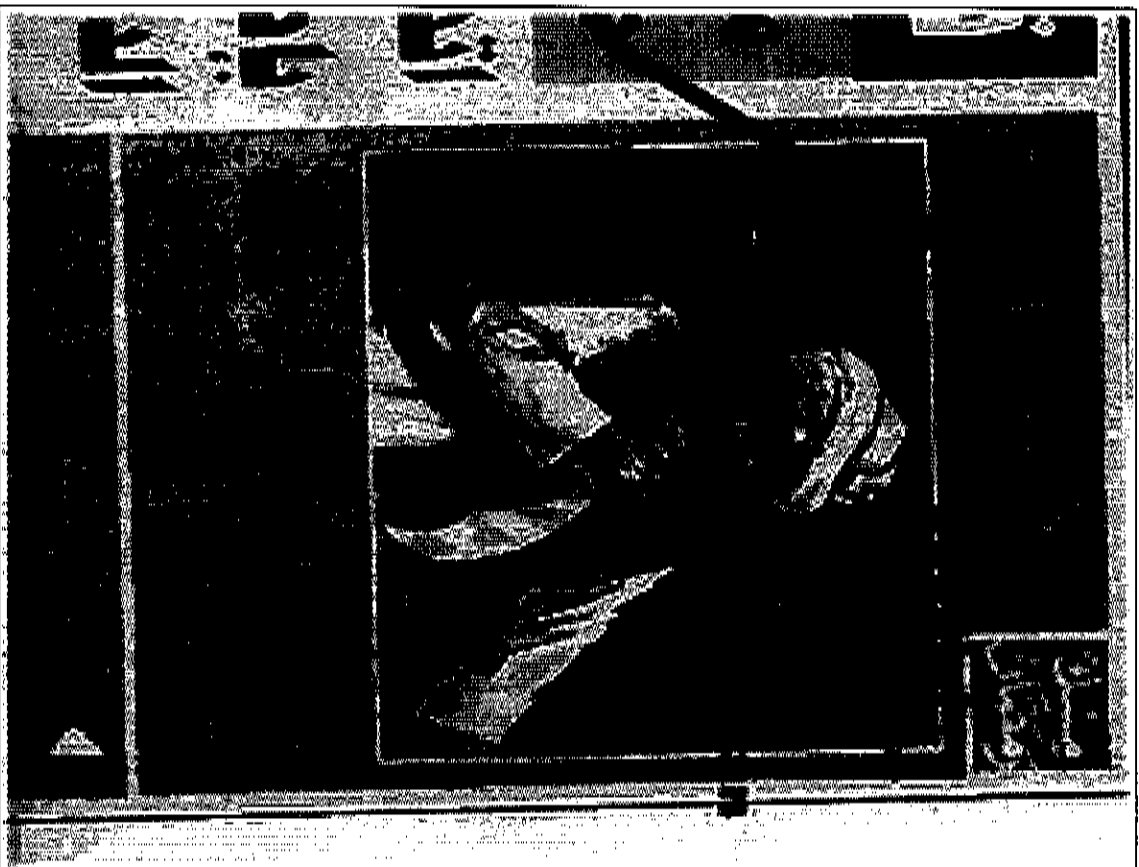
As the NBC-news anchorman Tom Brokaw asked in the middle of the crisis, the puzzling point for the people in the West is that when Islamic suicide bombers attack a Muslim mosque and kill Islamic women and children, there's no outrage in the rest of the Islamic world? But when cartoons are published, it just becomes another jihad against the United States and against Western nations (Brokaw 2006)

While Muslims across the world have rioted against countries whose newspapers have published cartoons of the prophet Muhammad, there was no uproar when the same caricatures were prominently displayed in an Al-Fagr Newspaper in October 2005.

The Egyptian paper criticized the bad taste of the cartoons but it did not incite hatred protests. The timing and the motivation of the publication can be traced back to spin doctors of Muslim extremists in Europe and the so-called secular governments of the Middle East, who tried to stipulate violent responses to the cartoons as a politically motivated act. It is worth mentioning that despite

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Picture 1. Mohammed Cartoon on Egypt's Al-Fagr newspaper cover in October 2005 (courtesy: Freedom for Egyptians)



Note: <http://www.wnd.com/ed/r/asp?ntfo://freedomforegyptians.blogspot.com/2006/02/cartoons-were-publis-hed-five-months.html>

the fact that many editors who tried to reprint the cartoons in the Middle East were arrested, the Egyptian editors went unharmed.

In contrast, newspapers in the Muslim Asian countries have been largely unified in their strong condemnations of European newspapers' decisions to

publish the controversial cartoons that initially appeared in Denmark's *Jyllands-Posten*. At the same time, most of the newspapers have been equally intolerant of the violent protests that erupted in the aftermath of the publication of the cartoons, condemning these acts as an over reaction to a provocation that should have been regarded as an insignificant insult (Krishnan 2006)

Since the publishing of the caricatures in September 2005, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf said that the controversy over editorial cartoons of the Islam's prophet, Mohammed, has united moderate and radical Muslims. In the meantime, thousands of Pakistanis protested, and there were several instances of violence, as the caricatures continue to fuel anti-western rage across the Muslim world (Sand 2006)

In Pakistan, more than 10,000 outraged protesters rallied outside the capital, Islamabad, shouting anti-western and anti-Jewish slogans. The Pakistani protesters were increasingly venting their anger at an ever-wider list of alleged villains, including Jews, Americans, and various European countries. And in several cases, the demonstrations also erupted into violent clashes with authorities.

In the northwestern city of Peshawar, police fired tear gas and used wooden clubs to disperse up to six-thousand angry protesters. As the Pakistan's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Tasneem Aslam, called for the United Nations to take a greater role in resolving the global dispute:

There is already a consensus on this issue among Muslim countries that, while we believe in the freedom of expression, it is not a license to hurt the sensitivities of others. (Sand 2006)

In the Pakistani press, universal condemnation of the cartoons was accompanied by a reproachful attitude to the violent protests that had been witnessed in Pakistan and across the Middle East. But the first violent protests in Pakistan occurred on February 13, when students in Peshawar clashed with police and attacked public property and Western holdings. But Ifran Husain wrote in his February 11 column in Karachi-based *Dawn*.

Firstly, most people forget that the stricture against depicting Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) in an illustration applies only to Muslims. Secondly, the offending (and offensive) cartoons first appeared in September without provoking a reaction except for some mild protests.

By February 15, violent riots in Peshawar were another reminder of Pakistan's precarious state. An estimated 70,000 protesters took to the streets in the frontier city – the unofficial capital of Pakistan's radical Muslim movement. Peshawar is the gateway to the tribal region on the Afghan border, where the Taliban continues to operate with the support of the local population.

Armer Ahmad Khan, the BBC's Karachi correspondent, said that most of the Pakistani media were reproachful of the decision of European newspapers to run the cartoon based on the narrow line between provocation and insult. However,

the initial Pakistani response to the publication of cartoons in in Denmark, both within the media and in the social sphere, was mild and measured.

Such situation could be explained as a result of Pakistan's stringent blasphemy laws which prevent any open discussion of such religious questions. As mentioned by Khan on February 7, article, there were other cases of blasphemy instituted against teachers for trying to explain to their students that the Prophet's parents could not have been Muslims for the simple reason that they died before the advent of Islam.

In contrast, in Bangladesh where official responses to the controversy were strong the media were also critical of the violent protests across the Muslim World (Krishnan 2006). Indian newspapers joined their South Asian counterparts in their harsh condemnations of the publication of the cartoons as irresponsible journalism. The editorial of The Hindu stated on February 9: "At a time when Muslims across the world feel deeply offended by prejudiced stereotypes of Islam post-9/11, the cartoons have not just been insensitive, they have been downright provocative".

Most newspapers in Southeast Asia tried to strike a balance in their coverage by reflecting different political and religious colors, and criticizing any violent protests. Mainstream media were following a polarized approach in their criticism of Western media. For example, an editorial in the Singapore-based *Straits Times*, February 9, accused the western media of having a "cavalier attitude" toward Islam, while an editorial in the *Jakarta Post* the day before described publishing the cartoons as an attack on Islamic civil liberties.

Nevertheless, some journalists have completely defended the publication of cartoons in the name of freedom of expression and were unequivocal in their censuring of the Muslim world's reactions. The overwhelming response of Asia's media has been one of traversing the middle-ground between freedom of expression and violent protests, reflecting an optimism that a solution to the escalating controversy might yet be reached.

The coverage of the cartoon controversy in Egypt was rather different. For example, the opposition paper, *Al-Waahid*, had less coverage of the cartoon issue than the government-leaning *Rosa-Al-Youssef*. In general, the balanced frames of opinions and reports seem considerably higher in the government-controlled newspaper. However, there was a general trend among the different newspapers, regardless of their affiliation, to provide more rational reports than to attempt to mobilize readers. The Muslim weekly, *Al-Iqtana al-Islami*, had the most balanced mix between rational and mobilizing reports (and also the largest number of items in each category) *Wakani* had the second greatest number of pieces employing rational language, while *al-Destour* and *Attabar Al-Younn* were third.

Al-Fagr, a private newspaper, took a civil stand against publishing the cartoons, though it has published some of them in the beginning of the controversy. However, it has always argued that violence confirms the misperceptions of Islam. Thus, it showed a balanced understanding of the communication problem surrounding the issue. Here are some of the headlines of Al-Fagr:

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Mob reaction does not deal with the Muslim rights to respond to the western blasphemy but rather maximizes its negative impact.
February 2, 2006.

Why does the West use cartoon for blasphemy instead of developing new bridges of cross cultural dialogue?
March 13, 2006.

Al-Dastour, private newspaper, had a more diversified reaction. Although its ownership is the same as of *Al-Fayr*, its take on the issue was less balanced and leaned more towards mobilizing readers. While taking issue with the violent reactions, it also questioned the effectiveness of more peaceful responses, and resorted to the language of cultural conflict.

Why do Muslims exaggerate in their reactions?
January 25, 2006.

Jeopardy of the freedom of press: who loses in this cartoon controversy?
February 22, 2006.

Al-ahabiy, a socialist partisan paper, also leaned toward a more thematic approach, attempting to mobilize readers. It took a stance against the US, as could be expected. The paper also argued that the mob reaction and violent demonstrations were weakening Muslims' rights.

Strikes reflect a more hidden level of anger: Ain-Shams university students rally and have problems with the Egyptian police.
February 8, 2006.

Islamic anger deepens the perception of Muslim terrorist's behavior.
February 15, 2006.

Al-Ikhtar Al-Alyoumi, a government-owned newspaper, catered to a variety of opinions, but it, too, leaned toward a thematic approach with articles aimed toward mobilizing readers. Its reports emphasized the conflict between the West and Muslims and blamed the West for what it saw as double standards. But it also expressed concern about the need for better dialogue and mutual understanding.

There is a western conspiracy against the Muslims; Freedom does not guarantee the right of Blasphemy.
February 11, 2006.

A call for Respect and understanding: how can we stop the loop of labeling?
February 25, 2006.

Watani, a religious newspaper published by the Coptic Orthodox Church, took a diversified approach that could be described as bold because it overcame the hyper-sensitivity of such a religious issue. Nevertheless, it was able to touch upon very important interrelated aspects of the cartoons in a rather balanced way:

All people should unite against Wahabism or fundamentalism. It is a real challenge with regard to activating the means of coexistence between Muslims and Christians.
January 29, 2006.

Muslim fundamentalists are the cause of this controversy and reaction has to be different.
February 5, 2006.

Al-Hewaza al-Aslami, a religious newspaper published by al-Azhar, took a more balanced approach overall and argued for communication that bridges religious difference. However, it also dealt with other issues, such as economic freedom, which is surprising, given its original religious role:

Religious integrity saves humanity from hatred and intolerance.
January 26, 2006.

Current turmoil and the means to react; Failure of current Islamic discourse.
March 9, 2006.

Al-Waqifa, the daily publication of the main opposition party in Egypt, is very liberal in its ideology. It was successful in dealing with the story in a rather objective and bold manner. *Al-Waqifa* dealt with freedom issues but also wrote about religious issues in a fairly constructive way. It sought to raise awareness about different interpretations of religious traditions and teachings:

The role of western media in labeling Islam raises a question; when are we going to have a Muslim media that reflects the real Islam.
January 20, 2006.

Why did not Muslims and Christians unite when there were other cases of blasphemy? There is a clear absence of accountability in Egyptian media.
February 9, 2006.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter attempted to investigate news coverage of the cartoon controversy in the Muslim world. The intention, though, was not to prove anything, the reality is that most of the Western media still insists on clustering the Arabs and Muslims in one category. Indeed, there are occasional exceptions to the rule. One can conclude with three main observations: First, there is a disproportional representation of the facts and exaggerating the implications of incidents such as ignoring moderate views in the Muslim world, by only focusing on the extreme ones. Besides, governments tend to support directly or indirectly the anti-western movements. Second, symbols and labels were often intentionally used to create images that identify "folk devils" with the western role in stigmatized behavior. Third, the news coverage reiterated "crisis" scenarios that were well-known by the public from past history, drawing from orientalism, neo-crusader movements and the conspiracy theories.

There are some clear implications of increasing religious fundamentalism. The cartoon controversy was not a cause but an effect or a sort of crystallization of a crisis that frames an intersection between politics and religion. Such a system breeds intellectual corruption when it systematically subordinates journalistic integrity to other considerations, such as money, politics, religion and fear.

Perhaps the real problem has been the lack of respect for other cultural and social norms demonstrated by some of the western media. As always, the reality of applying the theoretical ideals of Western freedom in a heterogeneous world is complex. Though, the escalation of the controversy suggests a much larger underlying problem for Muslims – the extent to which they cherish and support freedom. Typically moderate Muslims adhere to the approach of civility and integrity through peaceful relations with the West in a positive and respectful manner. The Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) once said, "He that is the most righteous amongst you is the one who practices patience in the face of anger".

In short, depicting the Prophet Mohammed with a bomb in his turban would be similar to putting Jesus in a pornographic movie holding the switch to a nuclear bomb. Both instances are examples of preposterous professional conduct. Nonetheless, neither of these provocations legitimate the killing of human beings.

During the controversy, some Muslims advocated global laws for religious practice. Human rights, however, are not interpreted as universal but cultural and dependent on faith. The research findings warn against this kind of advocacy because it violates and betrays the basic assumptions of tolerance, that others should live freely according to their beliefs. More importantly, the research highlights the danger of the press abandoning tolerance under certain circumstances in favor of a passive acceptance of intolerance.

The Muslim (Sunni) faith forbids drawing the prophet. But expecting one's religious rules to apply to all others, especially in a free society, is ill-judged and unfair. Expecting others to change or modify their behavior out of respect

for yours, or anyone's faith is not democratic. As Martin Luther King Jr. noted, we don't communicate because we fear one another. At the same time, there is no excuse for anyone to offend others unless the other is practicing double standards by being intolerant to the tolerant.

Freedom of speech is a universally-accepted right, but we must carefully realize the fine line of distinction between free speech and hate speech. The cartoons can be seen as a form of hate speech, by stigmatizing all Muslims.

The question that remains unanswered is: "What was accomplished by printing the cartoons?" Some would argue that groups with particular interests for inciting violence wanted the Danish journalists to keep on publishing them so they could continue to mobilize the crowds, in other words seeing the caricatures as part of a larger conspiracy. To a degree, this is part of a broader issue of how to deal with cultural differences: by confrontation rather than by appeasement.

The potential for offense is not an argument against publication. Within the context of a pluralistic democracy, tolerance does not mean respect. It means "to endure", or "to put up with". Tolerance works against borderline theocracy, the legal imposition of the religious dogma of a vocal minority upon others. Hence, the direction of the news coverage of the controversy can be seen as a consequence of the growing influence of chauvinistic strains in the Arab/Muslim society, which seem to be tolerated by the government.

Having said so, Sunni Muslim fundamentalist leaders expressed anger over the Danish cartoons, but no comparable indignation over suicide bombers who attacked Shiite Muslim mosques during Ramadan in Iraq. In Pakistan, blasphemy laws have been used by fundamentalists to attack Christians and Hindus. Indeed, the Muslim societies have paid a dear price for the militants in their midst.

Many of the liberal scholars within the Muslim world have had to flee to the West to avoid being silenced or killed. Fazlur Rahman, a brilliant and deeply religious Pakistani scholar of Islam, had to flee his native land for the University of Chicago. Similarly, the Islamic studies scholar Nasr Abu Zayd fled Egyptian Islamists for the Netherlands. Naguib Mahfouz, recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, was stabbed in the neck in Cairo and barely survived; the Egyptian writer Faraj Foda was not so lucky as he was later assassinated by the fundamentalists.

Among some Muslims residing in Europe, the proposed solution is more censorship – that these cartoons and similar expressions should be banned as hate speech. By that logic, also Salafist diatribes against Shites should be banned, as well as the writings of Maulana Abul Ala Maududi and his Jamaat-e-Islami, which were instrumental in persecuting the Ahmadiyas, a Muslim minority in Pakistan.

In contrast, the answer is not more censorship but rather a commitment to liberal democratic politics that uses such freedoms wisely and responsibly. Worse, these actors in Europe insist on handing Muslim radicals a platform from which to pose as defenders of the faith against an alleged Western as-

sault on Islam. The loudest and most murderous forces have chosen to forget the spirit of the Quran, which opens with an invocation of God's mercy and compassion and which repeatedly urges believers to practice patience and kindness. There is something very ugly about the power of the radicals, their recourse to violence, their anti-intellectualism and their ability to trample on humanistic Islamic tradition.

During the caricature crisis it was right and proper for Muslims to be offended, to be hurt, to protest. But we should be wary of the authoritarian voices that claim to speak and act in the name of Islam. The answer is not more violence and censorship, but rather peace, mercy and compassion as the essence of Islam favors peace and the "Grand Jihad" of self-discipline.

There is burning questions here that nobody really attempted to answer: "Why not accept these expressions of regret and move on? What is to be gained by the continuing violence and hysteria?", and "Who Hates Who in this Controversy?"

Notes

1. Semite is a person descended from Shem, a member speaking any of the semetic languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Assyrians, or Phoenicians as mentioned in Webster New World Dictionary, 1980, (p.1295)
2. *Merram-Webster's Encyclopedia of World Religions*. Wendy Domiger (ed.) (1999) p. 571. See: *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, Josef W. Meri (ed.) (2005) Routledge, p.419; John Esposito (2005), *Islam: The Straight Path*, p.93; Humphreys, Stephen (2005) *Between Memory and Desire*. University of California Press, p 174-176; Firestone, Ruvven (1999) *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam*. Oxford University Press; "Djihad". Encyclopedia of Islam Online. Retrieved on 2007-05-02.

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