

Article No. #

Tales of Transgression or Clashing Paradigms: The Danish Cartoon Controversy and Arab Media

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Abstract

This study looks at the extensive coverage of the Danish cartoon controversy on the web pages of the two leading Arabic satellite TV stations, al-Arabiya and al-Jazeera, to examine the reemerging thesis of “clash of civilizations” and rising anti Americanism on Arabic media. The analysis identifies “transgression” as an overarching frame, but finds less support for a dominant “clash of civilizations” frame in Arab media. The media coverage appears to “legitimize” Muslims’ reactions to the publication of Prophet Muhammad cartoons, without abetting the “clash” thesis as some have proposed.

Introduction

While a Danish publication of a dozen cartoons in the waning months of 2005 caricaturing Prophet Muhammad as terrorist has enraged many Muslims and led to rioting in Muslim nations, it has simultaneously posed significant questions about the deeper implications of such a row. Those implications prominently focus on the cultural differences and value systems between two worlds, the worlds of Islam and the West. Despite a large variability, world press commentaries and editorials have boiled the issue down to an essential conflict between free expression and censorship for religious considerations in this case (Brooks, 2006; BBC World Press Review, February 03, 2006). Two media narratives have consequently been constructed about either a potential reconciliation of those differences, or the inevitable nature of the collision of these worlds. The latter narrative of “collision” hearkens back to existing thought and paradigms on a “clash of civilizations” that were promulgated in the early 1990s by authors like Samuel Huntington (1993). More importantly, the media represent a key player in the cartoon controversy as both ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ at the same time. The ‘causal’ aspect narrowly lies in the publication of those controversial cartoons whereas the ‘effect’ aspects center on media practices, specifically in the conversations about free expression that the controversy subsequently engendered.

This research paper scrutinizes those intricate issues through an examination of how Arab media have covered the incidents enveloping the cartoons’ publication and controversies. The driving theoretical force

behind the project is the poignancy of the “clash of civilizations” paradigm in this incident that I seek to investigate through the lenses of media coverage. The central research question focuses on how Arab media have framed the cartoon row and what space, if any, has been allocated to a “clash of civilizations” frame. That research question invokes and examines the perception of Arab media as being anti-American and anti-Western in their coverage (Cochrane, 2004; Darwish, 2003). Studying Arab media coverage here utilizes framing analysis to draw sense out of the larger media picture presented to Arab audiences. Due to practical considerations, examination of Arab media is limited to two powerful media outlets in the Arabic speaking world, al Jazeera and al Arabiya (*Media Tenor*, 2006). Access to their broadcasts is solved through an examination of six weeks’ stories that both networks posted and archived on their Arabic language websites. The analysis of the immediate coverage identifies a number of news frames, both primary and supplementary, that, as this article will argue, could usefully be classified as a “meta-narrative” frame of “transgression” rather than a “clash of civilizations.”

Al Jazeera and al Arabiya news channels represent a new breed of journalism that is entirely dependent on satellite broadcasting in challenging a traditionally state-dominated news media in the Middle East. The advent of satellite news media in the region has been conducive to constructing a transnational Arab audience from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf (Zayani, 2005). News Satellite Television Channels, like al Jazeera and al Arabiya, address this broad and heterogeneous audience composing the Arab Street (Hafez, 2001; Zayani, 2005). As a CNN-styled news network launched in 1996 around the Arabic speaking world, al Jazeera boasts its freedom from the shackles of censorship and government control commonly inhibiting the region’s mass media (El Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002; Zayani, 2005). Al Jazeera’s preeminence in the global media scape has been linked to its exclusive coverage of America’s war in Afghanistan, its airing of Bin Laden’s videotapes as well as its access to opposition groups in the Middle East (El Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002). In the face of this dominance of the Arab media scape, al Arabiya was launched in 2003, just a few days prior to the US attack on Iraq, as a rival to and competitor with al Jazeera for basically the same audience. Based in Dubai Media City, the United Arab Emirates, al Arabiya claims “to quench the audience’s thirst for credible, trustworthy, timely, and relevant news” (Al Arabiya homepage, 2006). Although it is a debatable issue, both al Jazeera and al Arabiya proclaim their independence from their sponsoring states, Qatar and the UAE respectively, and market their news brands as modern and “timely” with both a highly professionalized reporting style and a seasoned staff (Zayani, 2005; *Media Tenor*, 2006).

The study looks at the immediate coverage of the cartoon controversy on the web pages of these two leading Arabic satellite TV stations, al Arabiya and al Jazeera, to examine the reemerging thesis of “clash of civilizations” and a “rising” anti Americanism on Arabic media. The paper proceeds with a theoretical background to illuminate both the “clash of civilizations” and the anti-Western/American perception of these networks. After the background context of the cartoon coverage, the paper offers a methodological rationalization of its framing approach. A rigorous analytical discussion of al Jazeera’s and al Arabiya’s

media coverage will answer the formulated research questions in seeking to ponder the validity and validation of a “clash of civilizations” paradigm.

“Clash of Civilizations” and Anti-Americanism as a Framework

The Cold War’s conclusion upon the demise of the Soviet Union has ushered many theories and paradigms that forecasted the future challenges facing the United States’ military supremacy and its global hegemony. The most well-known of these paradigms, which has received considerable scholarly and policy attention as well as rebuttal, remains Samuel Huntington’s (1993) thesis that the world was on the verge of a civilizational clash. Conflict between civilizations, according to Huntington, will in all likelihood be the next phase of global conflict to plague the modern international system since the Peace of Westphalia and the end of a “long twilight struggle” against communism (Huntington, 1993). While the earlier global conflicts, the world wars or the Cold War itself, were primarily “Western civil wars,” or inter-civilizational conflicts that primarily plagued Western civilization, the next phase will witness an intra-civilizational war. The “clash of civilizations,” argues Huntington (1993), will occur because of the fundamental, perhaps existential, differences among civilizations along cultural, linguistic and, more importantly, religious front lines. Globalization and the information revolution have only exacerbated these divisive lines, transforming cultural differences into an acute consciousness. With information and technological revolutions, traditional gatekeepers and safeguards of national identity and the nation state are weakened (Huntington, 1993). The blurred boundaries have revived the ancient religious rivalries, in what Gilles Kepel termed “la revanche de Dieu” (“the return of god”), and the logic of the crusades between the Islamic Orient and the Christian West. The war of civilizations, predicted Huntington, will assume its battleground along civilizations’ fault lines, specifically in countries whose cultural identity is somewhat “torn” between the West and the rest (Huntington, 1993).

Huntington’s grim vision was challenged at the time of its publication by scholars who considered his stark differentiation between civilizations to be crude and messy. Albert L. Weeks (1993), for instance, counter argues that civilization identity remains fractured at best and nation states still constitute the main engine of international politics. Professor Weeks quotes Raymond Aron’s assertion that “In our times the major phenomenon [on the international scene] is the heterogeneity of state units [not] supranational aggregations,” or civilizations (p.54). Outside the United States and the Western world, Huntington’s thesis has engendered similar refutation and critique. Kishore Mahbubani of Singapore attacks these “clash” arguments for failing to realize that civilizations have been around for centuries with no existential threats to one another. For Mahbubani (1993), Huntington’s thesis could be indicative of Islamophobia or a nascent absorption of “European paranoia about Islam” (p. 37). Overall, it appeared nobody was wishing for a “clash of civilizations” nor holding Huntington’s predictions as historically inevitable (Mahbubani, 1993).

While I have focused mainly on Huntington’s clash of civilizations’ thesis, Benjamin Barber’s influential *Jihad vs. McWorld* paints, more or less, a similar version of a global clash albeit with an important

difference. For Barber, the collision between the two worlds, however, is due to the increasing “universalization,” if not outright assault, of Western values and the economic forces of capitalism and globalization (Barber, 1992). The global ascendancy and dominance of Western culture brings friction and backlash from other parts of the non Western world, or even violent civil wars that “the Coming Anarchy” somewhat differently portrays (Kaplan, 1994). In essence, the clash between the world of Jihad and the McWorld is not as happenstance as Huntington would have us believe. While being nuanced, Barber’s argument is more general and forewarns of a collision between “the two axial principles of our age—tribalism and globalism” that could herald an invincible threat to democracy in general (Barber, 1992). In a different fashion, Francis Fukuyama’s *The end of history* (1992) also celebrates the supremacy of Western civilization, the triumph of democratic principles even in the face of unprecedented challenges. The conclusion from these landmark works articulated a specific version of future clashes with different premises, outlooks and consequences with an overemphasis on internal conflicts instead of civilizational clashes (Barber, 1992; Kaplan, 1994).

Huntington’s thesis could have remained an unfortunate intellectual escapade had al Qaida’s September 11th attacks on America and the subsequent war against Iraq not occurred. For many, both al Qaida’s attacks and the atrocities of Iraqi insurgents, in the aftermath of America’s occupation of the country, have conveniently been branded as attacks from a desperate bunch of madmen who “hate our freedom” in the famed words of George W. Bush. The implicit analogies to a civilizational war or conflict in American political discourse, only too numerous to cite, have in effect resurrected Huntington’s long shadow over the current international political spectrum. The immediate shock after the events of September 11th, the “end of history” and of the world as “we” know it, the outrage almost unanimously shared in America during those early days, got gradually encapsulated and filtered into a simplified question, “why do they hate us?” (Iskander, 2005). The question was officially uttered and reiterated in press briefings and newspaper headlines, among talking heads on television shows and think tanks, and finally fermented in the *9/11 Commission Report* (Iskandar, 2005). While the “clash of civilizations” may not have been explicitly invoked in the attempts to answer that question, American officials and the policy elite frequently referred to the so called anti-Americanism preached on Arabic media, like al Jazeera news television channel, as a veritable source of fomenting hatred against America and the broader West (Rumsfeld, 2006).

To be sure, American officials have also sought to rationalize America’s unpopularity, if not outright hostility to the US, as being partially due to a breakdown of America’s communication with the Muslim world (Hughes, 2005). The Bush administration seriously mulled over calls for the invigoration and rejuvenation of public diplomacy, reaching out to, and “communicating” with the Islamic world at large. Observers can cite Colin Powell’s appearance on MTV to explain American values to youngsters from around the world, the hurried appointment of Charlotte Beers of Madison Avenue as the US Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy, and her subsequent replacement by Karen Hughes (a close Bush confidante) in the same office to indicate the president’s own involvement in this concerted effort. To

highlight the anti-Americanism raging in the Islamic world, Secretary Hughes often mentions that she keeps on her desk an air gram from the 1950s. The air gram claims that

Anti-Americanism is resurging in the Arab world. Bombings vitriolic public statements, diatribes and fantastic rumors in the press all testify to the rekindling of Arab animosity against the United States. Whether prompted by Muslim extremists, whether encouraged by irresponsible journalists or by weak government officials who seek to divert attention from their own inadequacies or whether attributable to a sincere objection to America's part in the region's development, the current emotionalism bodes no good (cited in Hughes, 2005).

The challenge facing America is neither new nor easy to overcome, argues the US Undersecretary through this air gram. But using that air gram to demonstrate her point also serves to bolster the impression of a "vitriolic," anti-Western discourse that is allegedly rife in Arab media. References evidently remain more about the present status of America's relations with the Islamic and Arab worlds than a distant past. But recent events, such as the Abu Ghraib abuse scandal or prophet Muhammad's cartoon controversy still confront these efforts at "communicating" with the Muslim world (Rumsfeld, 2006). Such events drastically reflect and precariously lend credence to the "clash of civilizations" determinism.

The cartoon controversy and the riots it has evoked provide an ideal setting for examining the resurgence of these "conflict" discourses, i.e. a "clash of civilizations" and the anti-Western biases of Arabic media. The present research interrogates these concepts through an examination of Arab media's immediate coverage of the controversy enveloping the recent publication of Prophet Muhammad satirical cartoons in a Danish newspaper. Analysis of the coverage will serve as an empirical validation or refutation of these policy claims, focusing on the extent to which Arab media subscribe to a "clash of civilizations" paradigm or engage in demonizing Western civilization. The following section foregrounds the key issues and background context involved in the cartoon controversy through a brief look at European media sources.

Issues of Context in the Danish Cartoons

On September 30, 2005, *Jyllands-Posten*, a Danish conservative newspaper, published about a dozen editorial cartoons, portraying the Muslim prophet Muhammad as terrorist (*The Guardian*, February 06, 2006). Since Islamic traditions and Muslim religious tracts unanimously prohibit any visual representation or portraiture of prophet Muhammad, a number of Muslim leaders in Denmark felt outraged at what they perceived as an insensitive and blasphemous breach of a holy stricture and demanded an apology from the newspaper (Brooks, 2006). Both Danish officials and *Jyllands-Posten* initially dismissed these protestations as irrelevant, professing their respect for freedom of expression (*The Guardian*, February 06, 2006). Indignant at being spurned, Danish Muslim leaders decided to publicize the cartoons in the Middle East and the wider Muslim world to amass larger support. The controversy simmered for three months only to flare up later as violent protests and rioting against Denmark broke out across the Muslim world, vandalizing Danish embassies in Syria and Lebannon with a few protesters killed in the process (*The Middle East Times*, February 06, 2006). Boycotting Danish products, Muslim political leaders also

demanded an official apology. Perceiving these Muslim protests as an attack on Western values and specifically on freedom of expression, a number of European newspapers in France, Germany, Poland, Finland, Norway, Switzerland, among others, decided to reprint the Muhammad cartoons in solidarity with *Jyllands-Posten* (BBC News, February 04, 2006). Condemnation still trickled from the Muslim world, criticizing the newspapers publishing the cartoons and accusing them of conducting a “vicious, outrageous and provocative campaign” as a Pakistani parliament’s resolution phrased it (*The Guardian*, February 06, 2006). In a scenario similar to Salman Rushdie’s affair, the Danish cartoonist who drew the cartoons went into hiding after receiving death threats. Until the end of February, 2006, the violent protests and riots in the Muslim world were showing no abating signs.

For European media establishment, prophet Muhammad’s depiction in the Danish cartoons and their republication in continental newspapers encapsulated a wider gulf than that which immediately greets the eye. The incidents and the riots evoked have been construed as a tension, if not worse, between a world that enshrines freedom of the press in its culture thought /history and another world that deems freedom as subservient to religious strictures (BBC World Press Review, February 03, 2006). “Freedom of expression, including the freedom to poke fun at religion, is not just a hard-won human right but the defining freedom of liberal societies,” argued *The Economist* (February 09, 2006). Freedom of speech overrides any squeamishness about religious sensitivities, most European newspapers declared (*Economist*, February 09, 2006). Political correctness should not morph into self-censorship. However, a few voices in respectable European media outlets articulated a different view than the prevalent attitudes of the unquestionable privilege of free speech. Therefore, *The Guardian* praised British newspapers for refraining from cartoon republication because of their offensive nature, and France’s *Le Figaro* and *Liberation* viewed the matter as a “misuse” of free speech (BBC World Press Review, February 03, 2006).

The opinions construing the controversy as a culture or civilizational clash constitute an important concern to the present project. Political leaders, not only the media, actively evoked this frame of a clash between two worlds, one defending free speech while the other advocates an absolute respect for cultural values (Harkin, 2006). An Italian minister wore a t-shirt embroidered with the Danish caricatures in protestation against the perceived attack on free speech only to be fired from government for this action (*The Guardian*, February 18, 2006). While the West is the land of “liberalism, human rights and democracy” (Huntington, 1993), the Muslim world has less respect for such values, the argument cropped up. That is why some European leaders felt it unnecessary for their governments to apologize for their press’s practices. Upon the cartoons’ republication in some German newspapers, for instance, Wolfgang Schaube, a German minister, came to their defence: “Why should the German government apologize? This is an expression of press freedom” (*The Guardian*, February 06, 2006). Turkey’s Prime Minister, however, perceived the cartoons as a cultural attack, asserting that “Caricatures of prophet Muhammad are an attack against our spiritual values. There should be a limit of freedom of press” (*The Guardian*, February 06, 2006). To conclude, the reactions engendered by the controversial Danish cartoons and the civilizational clash thesis appear to fit well as framework for a rigorous study.

Rationale and News Framing as Methodology

While the above responses in the European press background the generally charged atmosphere in Europe, this paper will focus exclusively on Arabic media's coverage of the cartoon controversy. In framing the Danish cartoons and the ensuing Muslim reactions, Arabic media have a "favorable" news item that could suit their supposed anti-western/American bent, or merely enable the "clash of civilizations" to loom large in their coverage, if they wish to do so. If the proposition that Arab media's anti-Americanism is real and valid, their coverage of the Danish cartoons could only highlight these tendencies. In a similar fashion, Huntington's "clash of civilizations" offers another frame that could be exploited by Arab media networks. To reiterate, Huntington's thesis describes the west as the land of "liberalism, individualism, market economy, human rights and democracy" (among other things). In case of Arab media's adoption of "the clash of civilizations" frame, these Western traits would be highlighted as Western justifications for the publication of Prophet Muhammad's cartoons. Even further, it is reasonable to expect media coverage to elaborate on the dissimilarities and differences between the West and the Muslim Orient.

The former loosely formulated hypotheses will be examined through the vehicle of framing analysis. For methodological clarifications, framing analysis broadly refers to how a situation is defined in a media text as well as the cognitive structures that definition evokes in the audience (Goffman, 1974; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). In other terms, textual patterns invoke specific frames in the mind, structuring our comprehension of the situation. While this earlier conceptualization of framing appears a valid and attractive approach to the study of media texts, it still remained difficult to objectively assess media "frames" providing only incoherent and vague pathways to media researchers. Gitlin's conceptualization of framing was among the first to concretize the theory and its application in an analysis of how the mainstream media "framed" the student movement in America during the Viet Nam war. For Gitlin (1980), "frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (p. 6). Underlined in Gitlin's is the precept of "tacit," implicit, and unspoken practices in the formulation of frames. That definition also underscores the "principles of selection, emphasis and presentation," tilting it in the direction of conscious practices (Gitlin, 1980).

The tension between conscious/explicit and unconscious/implicit strategies in media framing has haunted subsequent attempts to outline what researchers mean by framing and how to analyze media frames. Whilst submitting that frames constitute the necessary context, be it cultural, sociological or ideological (Hertog & McLeod, 2001), some scholars specified whereby those frames are positioned. For instance, Entman (1993) defined these locations as the communicator, the text, the receiver and the culture/context within which the text operates. These locations do not preclude the earlier processes of selection and exclusion of bits of information underscored in the earlier definitions, however. Indeed, Entman (1993) reiterated a similar theoretical position in reminding us that the essence of framing is to "select some

aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52). Frame construction, and, by extension, their identification hinges on the stock phrases, metaphors, sources, symbols, images and keywords (Entman, 1993).

A recent review of these framing definitions and mechanisms sought to articulate and conceptualize frames as “meta-narratives,” overarching ideas that permeate media coverage and highlight a loose narrative in media texts (Douai, 2005). In simple terms, a “meta-narrative” is the most general news frame to be gleaned from the extended media coverage of an incident. It should combine both the primary frame(s), i.e. the most frequent frame (s), and the supplementary frames (those of lesser prominence or special presence) in one narrative that comments on the event, the media text and the pre-existing frames as well. Upon examining the news stories selected from the coverage of these Arab news channels’ websites, this research seeks to uncover whether a “meta-narrative frame” that could be identified as a “clash of civilization” frame is in prominence or abeyance. Rather than being solely limited to stock phrases, keywords, visual information and metaphors which traditionally make up a frame (Entman, 1993), the present project further looks at supplementing frames, those that might appear marginal or incidental. The interplay of the “sub-frames” with a primary frame should constitute the larger “meta-narrative” frame in the corpus of media coverage. While examinations of frames have mainly been microscopic, the “meta-narrative” approach offers a macroscopic vision to handle media texts. Consistent with the accumulated framing literature, the following analysis will focus on those stock phrases, metaphors, sources and keywords to identify the primary and supplementary frames that build up the larger “meta-narrative” frame in the stories scrutinized here.

Research Questions and Method

A set of interrelated queries guide the present project. Stated clearly, however, the goal will be to answer the following main research questions:

1. Which frames, both primary and supplementary, dominate the coverage of the cartoon controversy in Arab media?
2. Do these frames present a distinct “meta-narrative” frame that could be generalized to mainstream Arab media’s coverage of the cartoon controversy?
3. To what extent does Arab media’s immediate coverage of the cartoon controversy highlight or oppose the “clash of civilizations” frame?

A framing analysis utilizing textual analysis methodology and a quantitative approach will highlight plausible answers to these interrelated set of research questions. For feasibility and methodological concerns, the researcher examines six weeks of online coverage (from January 11 through February 15, 2006) in two well-known transnational Arabic news TV networks, al Arabiya and al Jazeera. These news stories were published on the networks’ websites and closely reflect the actual broadcasts. Hence, a study of these online stories should provide a sense of similar frames broadcast on the air.

Primary and Secondary Frames of the Controversy

A close examination of the immediate coverage of the Danish cartoon controversy yielded clear and significant results in the sense that it was able to elucidate the frames permeating that coverage (Table I). Frequencies of the frames in the stories of each network provide justification for the distinction between a primary and supplementary frames in each network (Table II). Since total coverage between al Jazeera and al Arabiya varied by 30%, comparisons are based on percentages of the total number of stories in each outlet. The primary frame common to both al Arabiya and al Jazeera is the “official” frame representing 43.2% and 38.6% of the total coverage of each outlet respectively. The official frame, which is source-based, handles and organizes the incident from the prism of official persons, through direct quotes and the like. That frame outlines and reconstructs the parties’ positions and complaints (Arabs and Muslims versus Danish officials). While it is less cumbersome to include the Danish official position vis a vis the controversy, the coverage of official Muslim and Arab opinions conceivably flounders and struggles to issue a homogenous articulation of the latter. One plausible explanation is that Muslims and Arab leaders have very little in common besides the outrage felt at the publication of prophet Muhammad’s cartoons in the Danish newspaper.

Table I. Frames summary

Media outlet	Primary frame	Supplementary frames	Meta-narrative frame
Al Arabiya & Al Jazeera	- “Official”	- “Economic” - “Freedom of expression” - “conflict”/“popular protest” - “clash of civilizations”	- “Transgression”

Table II. Frequencies of the frames in the total stories of each network

Media outlet	“Official”	“Freedom of expression”	Economic	“Conflict”/popular protest	“Clash of civilizations”

Al Arabiya	43.2%	27%	16.2%	10.8%	2.7%
Al Jazeera	38.6%	15.7%	15.7%	25.7%	4.3%

The analysis should draw attention to existing differences between al Arabiya and al Jazeera’s handling of the Muslim ‘official’ narrative and framing of the incident. At least in the stories retrieved from its early coverage, al Jazeera appears to build the impression of unanimous condemnation and outcry pronounced by all Muslim officials, be they representatives of political or religious authorities. None of their disagreements in how to tackle the issue, if any exists, seeps into al Jazeera’s coverage. In brief, for al Jazeera, leaders of Muslim nations, or *Umma*, express a righteous wrath at the “sacrilege” perpetrated by the caricatures of the prophet. Latter discussion will seek to elaborate on this notion.

Al Arabiya, on the other hand, presents an official frame with less homogeneity, highlighting disagreements and dissonance among members of the Muslim establishment. Al Arabiya’s “official” frame remains more careful in presenting the fractious nature of the Muslim position. Divergences and disenchanted views are more markedly focused on religious leaders’ opinions and *fatwas* (edicts) concerning the caricatured portrayal of the prophet. The research detects a tension between two strands of opinions and reactions, one that is peaceful in seeking to portray outrage and demand an apology without pushing their cards to extremist reaches. The other strand reflects a more militant position whose proclivities might potentially channel the outrage into violence as indicated in the death *fatwa* by a Kuwaiti preacher. Additionally, al Arabiya also contextualized and provided ample space for Danish official viewpoints. That is why it is only fair to assess al Arabiya’s immediate coverage as having successfully problematized the “official” frame.

Framing “mechanisms” do not in any way exclude the existence of multiple frames (Tankard et al. 1992), making it further plausible for overlapping frames to coexist. Arab media’s immediate coverage of the cartoon controversy exhibited analogous strategies of multiplying its frames. It is inescapable to observe similar supplementary frames in the coverage of both al Jazeera and al Arabiya, supplementary frames that are largely content based. Through explicit referencing and terminology, both news outlets provided ample grounds for an “economic” frame, a “freedom of expression” frame, as well as the traditional “conflict” frame germane to news coverage. Very few stories used a “clash of civilizations” frame, but mostly in refutation of the “clash” thesis (as discussed below; also, see Table II). These supplementary frames largely function as bulworks for the “official” frame explicated above. Further, the interplay among all frames, as in the case of the official Danish response to the predicament posed by the cartoon publication, is frequently asserted throughout the coverage. The Danish official frame does not fail to highlight how freedom of expression is a cornerstone in their value system that would not be jeopardized

because of outside pressure and economic boycott (the 'economic' frame). What that also reveals is a sophisticated treatment of news on the part of Arab media, notwithstanding their differences. Almost certainly, the nature of the incident has imposed such a treatment and impelled a 'frame interplay.'

Finally, the interplay of these frames also reflects a temporal landmark in the coverage. While early stories, especially in the case of al Jazeera, huddled the official frame, latter coverage focused more on the "popular" aspects of the controversy. "Popular" here indicates how the "conflict" generated by the cartoons was taken to the "streets" in massive protests, demonstrations and occasional violence against Danish national symbols. Al Jazeera's coverage glows with details of these popular protests, precariously bordering on incendiary glorification and legitimization of popular outrage. One explanation of that tendency definitely rests in its audiences, or the audiences it usually has in mind, mainly a Muslim and Arab audience. Some studies have suggested that al Jazeera functions as a "pan-Arab" network, intimating both a wider audience and a mobilizing force (Zayani, 2005). Vestiges and traces of that function presumably find echoes in that section of the coverage. Al Arabiya's coverage remains more restrained, balanced and impartial in its frames, whether at the level of official discourse or its coverage of the popular protests. That probably argues for the competitive relationship between al Arabiya and al Jazeera.

Transgression as a 'Meta-Narrative' Frame

The preceding explication of the news frames emanating from Arab media's cartoons' coverage shows major similarities between al Arabiya TV and al Jazeera TV. Of importance in framing analysis is the notion that frames purport to present a "definition of a situation" through selection and exclusion of bits and pieces of information. The 'official' frame per this definition offered exactly the same version of events, accounting for Muslim and Arab officials' discontent with the Danish publication of Prophet Muhammad's cartoons. It went even further in excluding "popular" narratives, that is, how Muslim public opinion initially reacted to the notorious publication. Previous analysis suggested that to be a primary frame because it occupied a large amount of the coverage during the period analyzed. Supplementing frames functioned as parallel lenses for Arab and Muslim audiences to complement their grasp of the details of the situation. These strategies and frames amalgamate into a unique perspective of Arab media's treatment of the controversy. Further, as previously mentioned, both primary and supplementary frames form what could be called a "meta-narrative" frame of "transgression" in Arabic media. The following section proceeds with an analysis of the implications of such a label as well as how a "meta-narrative" frame of "transgression" informs comprehension of Arab media's coverage of the controversy.

A "meta-narrative" frame basically subsumes all pre-existing frames in a large corpus of news texts over an extended period of time. It is thus loose and general in the sense that it emphasizes inclusion over exclusion. As indicated in the literature review, analyzing media texts from the vantage point of "meta-narrative" frames offers several advantages, chief of which is a reexamination of the subsumed frames as well. A meta-narrative frame will be useful in interrogating the existing frames in media coverage of

international conflict to check how those frames assign blame for a deteriorating situation, for example. Moreover, that analytical strategy provides ample grounds for judging whether or how media coverage of conflict initiates either a demonization or glorification of the parties in a cross border and extended conflict.

In the present project, witness how such a “meta-narrative” frame of “transgression” operates in Arab media’s coverage of the cartoon controversy. The subsumed frames first presented the parties of the conflict, Danish versus Muslim leaders, in starkly different terms. While the Danes advocate freedom of expression, Muslims argue for a restrained freedom that respects their religious traditions. More importantly, the same coverage neither dwelled on nor engaged in demonizing Denmark and the West. At the latter stage of the coverage, we witnessed a shift from the “official” frame to a wider ‘popular protest’ that enveloped Muslim streets and often times wrought havoc on both properties and lives. Blame has squarely been placed on Denmark in this meta-narrative frame for failing to restrain and punish its press for the said “transgression.”

It should, however, be noted that “transgression” as a meta-narrative frame has endlessly sought to “justify” and legitimize Muslim outrage, especially in al Jazeera’s coverage. Political overtones dominated this network’s stories, frequently bordering on editorializing rather than succinct, terse and impartial analysis. The “transgression” meta-narrative portrayed a massive *Umma* (Islamic community) united by its outrage. It potentially empowered a “helpless” community that perceives itself to be under attack and siege. As an important segment of Muslims’ response to the perceived “transgression,” popular protests might function as a counter weight to the dominance and the “official” take over of the crisis.

“Transgression” could conceivably be indicative of the dynamics of local or domestic politics in Muslim states. Support for the latter assumption would be found in how the most violent incidents erupted in Iran and Syria, both of which understandably seemed to have an axe to grind against the West. Finally, “transgression” as a meta-narrative frame sympathetically reinvents the debate of the place of the sacred in a modern media environment.

Whither a “Clash of Civilizations” Frame?

While this study remains interested in analyzing Arabic media’s coverage of the cartoon controversy, an important component of its focus is the investigation of the “clash of civilizations” thesis in light of that controversy. Huntington’s “clash of civilization” argues for the inevitable future conflict mainly between Western and Islamic civilizations. The present incident offers a glimpse into that conflict if the “clash of civilizations” thesis is espoused and holds some truth in its predictions, as I have argued earlier. I also postulate that if these civilizations were keen on colliding, or at least on a conflict course, with each other, it would be very reasonable to witness the media fanning the flames of conflict. In looking at Arab media’s six weeks coverage, however, such a conclusion is hardly in sight. Scouring 49 stories, the “clash of civilizations” as a potential frame has no good standing in the sample examined in this study (see also Table II). As a marginal frame, the clash of civilizations represents 2.7% and 4.3% in the total coverage of

al Arabiya and al Jazeera respectively. Although I noted the existence of a “conflict” frame in both Arab news outlets, their coverage did not elevate the “conflict” to the pedestal of a clash of civilizations. Rather, it remained moored and grounded in the conventions of “conflict” reporting that news media constantly feast on.

Interestingly, both news outlets appear to be aware of the “clash of civilizations” frame and do not totally refrain from mentioning it. That is why this researcher included it as a supplementary frame in Arabic media coverage. On those rare opportunities, the loaded phrase, “clash of civilizations,” is actually conjoined with an emphasis on averting such a clash. In such instances, an emphasis on a “dialogue of civilizations” replaces the “clash” thesis. That is evidently symptomatic of a conscious effort on the part of those speakers to circumvent the “clash” argument and find a common ground to bring two worlds together, at least in respect of each other’s mores. The “clash of civilizations” frame in Arabic media actually subverts Huntington’s original thesis. In comparison to the powerful and dominant “transgression” meta-narrative identified above, the “clash of civilizations” frame remains abeyant and dormant.

Despite the abeyance of the “clash of civilizations” as a news frame in Arabic media, a media researcher should find it difficult but not to remark the eerie similarities between this recent controversy and the Salman Rushdie affair following the publication of his *Satanic Verses* in 1989. While Rushdie’s satirical novel is undeniably a work of fiction, it caused the same gauntlet of hostility and outrage in the Muslim world, culminating a death *fatwa* from Iranian *Mullahs*. Most studies of Rushdie’s predicament and its media coverage concluded that Western media failed to grasp the importance of “religious integrity” raised by Muslims’ protests around the world (Hafez, 1996; Chehhar, 1994). In the German press, for instance, the Rushdie affair was mostly perceived through the prism of a “cultural conflict” between the West and Islam, the first valuing human rights and free expression whereas the second evinces scarce regard for those values (Hafez, 1996). In avoiding a looming frame of “cultural clash,” I argue, the Arab media, through this case study, provides a sophisticated coverage and framing of the cartoons that might have escaped European coverage of the Rushdie affair.

CONCLUSIONS

Of course, this analysis neither denies the subtle agendas involved in the Arab media framing of the cartoon incident, nor homogenizes the differences between the various media outlets of the region. It instead argues that the immediate coverage has not clearly subscribed to the prejudicial treatment, or the anti-Western tenor, propagated about Arab media. Significantly, the cartoon incident lends itself to such a “prejudicial” and jaundiced framing since the heart of the fight is about cultural values and identity (similar to the “Rushdie affair”), or even the “clash of civilizations” paradigm. But the immediate coverage forwent those stereotypical clichés to present a meta-narrative frame of “transgression,” a distant cry from a “war

of the worlds” scenario. In different ways, the “transgression” meta-narrative sought to legitimize both Muslim anger and, albeit infrequently, the official framing of the cartoon uproar. More importantly, I argue, it revealed the intricate interplay among political leaders who exploit the incident to assuage domestic public opinion, religious leaders who seek to gain or promulgate their legitimacy in the reconstructions of the Islamic *Umma*, as well as the people whose outrage is deeply felt but remain unaware of the diverse machinations going on beneath.

This paper intends to be an initial investigation of the cultural and civilizational “clash” paradigms in media coverage. At a later stage of the research, it hopes to expand its enquiry into a comparative analysis of European and American media’s coverage of the cartoon controversy. With that said, subsequent research will seek to integrate a qualitative assessment with expanded quantitative analyses of the frames permeating media coverage. While extensive textual analysis represents both the strength and the limitations of this project, future research aims at triangulating the analysis even further to gain better understanding and insights into media’s coverage of (cultural) conflict. The quantification of frames and textual analysis have been instrumental to identifying these co-existing news frames; nonetheless, pictures and photos accompanying news coverage are admittedly effective in frame construction and should thus be addressed in future research as well. The “popular protest” or “conflict” frame in the news text benefits from powerful images of Muslims protests in the street. The “economic” frame that focused on the economic boycott of Danish products and its impact on Danish economy is poignantly enforced with a picture portraying how Arab supermarkets are throwing out Danish products. The role of visuals in reinforcing the news frames in the text, albeit short of spelling out the full impact live images have on audiences, deserves elaborate explication in future research. Future research also hopes to exploit further the profuse analogies the cartoon controversy has with the Rushdie Affair’s media coverage both in Western and Islamic media. These follow-up reflections constitute legitimate and fruitful directions for the next phase of a research agenda.

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