

## The Danish Cartoon Controversy: Globalized Spaces and Universalizing Impulses

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This paper is occasioned by a conversation that I had with my (Anglo) American neighbor during the Danish cartoon crisis. As an Arab American, I am for him both an encyclopedia and a sounding board for all things Middle Eastern and Muslim. “Wanna see some drawings of the prophet Muhammed?” he quipped. After I politely demurred he asked, “what are you people doing over there rioting over a stupid cartoon?” What bothered me was not so much his argument that “Muslims are behaving like children” as the unexamined idea that it was only Muslims that were *acting*. Europeans (and by cultural extension Americans) by this measure simply *are*, their perceptions, identities, meanings, and actions are fixed and thus should be held universally.

At the time of his question, the cartoon crisis, in which derogatory cartoons commissioned by a Danish newspaper editor and were reprinted across Europe, had begun taking on quite serious dimensions. Riots were springing up across many Muslim countries and American and European intellectuals were debating the crisis in terms of free speech and secularism. Open hostility had already broken out between the ‘two’ sides. Muslims questioned why the Europeans were persisting in what they perceived not as free speech but as hate speech and Europeans and other nations that consider themselves Western were taken aback by the vociferousness, immediacy and geographical breadth of Muslim responses.

In what follows I outline the cartoon crisis and explain why I think it’s particularly relevant to reflections on globalized moments and spaces, discuss Castells’ (2004) ideas on spaces of place and flows, and offer examples of European/Western discursive of identity by recourse to the conflation (and demonization) of all Muslims into improper, radical, dangerous Muslims.

This argument is in a way an academic response to his question. However, I want to address it by inverting it. Instead of asking (the admittedly important) question of why Muslims reacted they way they did, I ask the more subtle question of: what does the cartoon crisis tell us about how Western cultures are reacting to manifestations of a different kind of space, a space that can be at once local and global?

I argue that reactions to the cartoon crisis can be seen as reactions to a new kind of globalized space that disturbingly blurs older concepts of space based on physical proximity. These reactions, both from West and East, unfolded in new global electronic places (the television, the Internet, telephones) that, together with the political, cultural, and economic narratives that play out on and through them, threaten long-understood conceptions of Western identity. This is particularly traumatic to those who consider

themselves Westerners as the construction of a superior and universalizing Western identity had long been girded by a spatial differentiation between East and West. I argue that the primary way that Europeans and other Westerners reacted to challenge of this new space was to try and articulate essentialized definitions of Western and Eastern civilizations in an effort to emphasize the universality of Western conceptions of the globalized world.

This global space is different than prior conceptualizations of globality. It is more than a continuation of global patterns of trade, communication, and hegemonic domination that have been affecting people and culture throughout history. Instead, it is a space in which the binary between self and other is complicated by the fact that the imagined other is no longer on the other side of the planet but more present in discussion. It is complicated by the fact that the other can talk back more immediately, if not directly through the physical presence brought about by global economic and political migration, then through mediated communication. New communication technologies, especially the Internet, mobile telephones and satellite television, significantly redefine the sense of space in which a person, a nation, a society, or a culture can imagine themselves. The local and the distant are not merely abstractly brought together, they're *really* brought together in the domestic space on television, or at work on the Internet, or on the telephone at a cafe.

This has the potential to be quite disturbing as most of us, regardless of our physical location on the globe, are increasingly experiencing a life in which the power that governs us is separate in space from the place that we live. This inability to actively affect our spatial environment can be terrifying in light of global warming, the wars in the Muslim and European lands, massacres, civil wars, and all of the other horrors of the contemporary world.

Broadly speaking, it seems likely that the sense of separation of power and agency from physical place characteristic of global flows of capital, labor, and people is more immediately terrifying to Europeans and Westerners than it is to Muslims. This is not because it affects them more but because it's new to them. Muslim people, most living in formerly colonized countries or in the countries that formerly colonized them, are too familiar with the modern separation of political power from place. The social and cultural and political institutions of most formerly colonized people have long been used to the rupture brought by distance in place from power and they have become accustomed, though of course never comfortable, to the inability to effect, in their own places, the power that structures so much of their lives. In the colonized world, power has always come from far away cities, countries, companies, armies. There has long been a recognition that politics in distant places brings violence in local places. Be that the hard violence of Palestine/Israel, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan, or the "soft" violence of economic prescriptions and their devastating effect on social formations.

But for Europeans, the separation of space from power, in the form of global flows of capital, the images and material vestiges of violence from other parts of the world, and increasing inability of national political systems to protect their citizens seems to be a new feeling for the majority of people. Alienation from power is of course not new for European people. It has long existed and has spawned various liberatory

and reactionary (sometimes simultaneously so) philosophical, political, and military movements including nationalism, socialism, humanism, and rationalism. But what's new, as highlighted by the cartoon controversy, is that the "other" of European civilization, which is actually multiple others, is here and not only in an imagined way. The licentious Arab who served as a counterpoint to Victorian sexuality, the emotional African who gave voice to French rationality, the devout Muslim who showed the worth of hard fought European secularism, all are suddenly on European and other Western street corners instead of confining themselves to novels, movies, and cartoons. Suddenly the space of contact with the other has to be reevaluated. And, if Manuel Castells (2004) is right that society *is* space, reevaluating this space means necessarily reevaluating the self, be that a personal, national, or cultural self.

Instead of unquestioningly accepting the assumption that Europe's formerly colonial others would naturally change in reaction to Europe's presence, Europeans are jarringly being asked to accept the same thing in reverse. Instead of assuming this other would accept, for example, the presence of European colonials in their 'home' countries, or later the fundamental premises of modernity, or the universality of Europe's humanist ideas, Europeans are being asked to 'naturally' change in reaction to the 'others' presence. European immigrant and global Muslims' reactions to the cartoon crisis is indicative of how Europeans are being asked to reevaluate the place of religion, of different ethnic and cultural groups, of different languages brought about by the presence of the other in their own midst. The space of confrontation with the other, which used to be more clearly an imagined space, the imagined empty space of 'over there,' is actually right here.

But this right here isn't simply in terms of the millions of formerly colonial immigrants that are demanding political and cultural space in Europe, Australia, the United States and Canada. The other is also right here in terms of global forms of communication. The Internet, satellite television, and global telecommunication systems obliterate the binary between time and space that used to obtain. It no longer takes two weeks of ship travel through time and space for information, images, or news about the colonial subject to reach the European or Western hearth, it takes milliseconds.

Inevitably, painfully, and with resistance, the realization will and is taking hold in the thoughts of Europeans: Europe is just another place on the globe. So instead of seeing the Danish cartoon crisis simply as an example of how Muslims could not deal with the modern, rational world of secular tolerance, I also want to see it as how Europe is struggling with the self-same concepts, of how Europeans are struggling to redefine their place in light of the "provincialization" of their cultures (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 4). Cultural change is never easy, never smooth, and never complete. And it is even more difficult when, as in Europe's case, centuries of technological and military supremacy have worked to convince a people of their cultural supremacy and seem to offer proof of their closer proximity to universal versions of truth than the "weaker" cultures to which they have long compared themselves. The reactions to the cartoon crisis were an example of Western discursive explications of the universality of their truth systems in the face of a frightening new global space. And, unfortunately, the most common recourse to "proof" of this

universal truth, the truth of secularism and Western plurality, came at the expense of reductive and essentializing articulations of a threatening Muslim other.

I do not, however, want to give the impression that Europeans were “incorrect” in their actions in contrast to the “correctness” of Muslim reactions, or that Muslims are somehow more knowledgeable of history or of “themselves” than Europeans. In contrast to what my neighbor was arguing, I view the Danish cartoon controversy, in which derogatory drawings of the prophet Muhammed were circulated throughout Europe and the parts of the Muslim world, as an instance of a shared (and contentious) global moment and a shared global *space* in which *both* Europeans and Muslims were attempting to fix and define their identity. Both were acting and both were reacting. Both were calling on an imagined past in order to construct, negotiate and come to terms with an ambiguous present and a (hopefully) glorious future.

To this purpose, I want to put Manuel Castells’ (2004) useful arguments on changing conceptions of space into play with the Danish cartoon controversy. While Castells’ conception of a new space, the space of flows, interestingly asks us to rethink identity, his descriptions of the exercise of power in a networked society can be enhanced by a move away from the notion that these reconceptualizations are globally similar across cultures. There are still crucially significant power imbalances in the way people interact with and understand this new sense of a global space of flows.

I want to use the Danish cartoon controversy to highlight changing spatial concepts because it serves as a moment in which cultural reactions to a globalized incident were used to create and reify particular versions of identity. Homi Bhabha (1994) reminds us to look in the margins for meaning, that performative utterances in the definition of a nation, or a culture, are not “true expressions” of an underlying essence but an attempt to define and fix cultural categories. He believes that it is “theoretically innovative, and politically crucial ... to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (Bhaba, 1994, p. 2). The cartoon crisis was just such an instance of the articulation of cultural differences which Europeans and other Westerners used as a moment to reflect on “traditional” European values of secularism and its tolerances. In the cartoon crisis, Europeans weren’t simply reminding themselves of their own pre-existing values, but instead in the process of articulating Western/Islamic difference they were attempting to create and reify these values. Looking at these constructions of Europeanness or Westernness in the context of the cartoon crisis, as opposed to the “narratives of originary and initial subjectivities” shows that Western “originary” notions of free speech and tolerance are ambivalently wrapped in reductive, ethnocentric and intolerant constructions of the Eastern other.<sup>1</sup>

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1 I must add, that although I am talking not only about constructions of European culture, but also about Western, there is a difference when US culture is added to the equation. The American situation is clearly different from Europe politically and ideologically in terms of the role of religion and the secular state. The current iteration of the US political constellation yields an ironic similarity between the Christian right and

Of course, constructions of this Western self are not without their ambivalences. The construction of Western senses of self, as evidenced by the cartoon crisis, is a highly complex and fraught process that by its very recourse to the humanist achievements of Western culture draws attention to the ambivalences and half-truths of its past and current injustices. In constructing a present Western self out of an Enlightenment past, Europe has to forget its past in order to remember it. What I mean by this is that Europe had to “forget” the many injustices of its colonial enterprises, its treatment of immigrant populations, and its violent place in the contemporary world in order to “remember” what Enlightenment tolerance was. Europe had to forget its history of fascism, intolerance, and social engineering in order to “remember” its liberal democratic history. Muslim rioters and intellectuals alike, however, have not forgotten the injustices of previous and contemporary forms of the European/Western/American exertions of identity and power and use the very iterations Europe employs about itself as further examples of European hypocrisy. Within Europe, the very need to reiterate a Western identity that is based on secular, humanist ideals serves to remind Europeans of the countless examples of the violation of those ideals or the excesses those ideals have wrought.

For their part, Muslims also had to “forget” their past in order to “remember” their present in that by exhortations to an imagined pure Islamic past, Muslim intellectuals and political figures had necessarily to pick and choose elements of the past in order to recreate it in the present. This jamming together of elements of the past with elements of the present creates a particularly modern disjuncture in which

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the Islamic right in that the proper role of the state should be to recognize and ideally prioritize religion.

American conservatives often believe that if the state must be secular that means it's to stay out of the affairs of religion as opposed to the European ideal of the religion staying out of the affairs of the state.

And yet to the extent that Americans participated in the crisis, it was also along the broadly drawn lines between Western and Islamic or Eastern. Despite the ambiguous role of religion in contemporary

American discourses, the binary between East and West still hovered around the concept of Islamic difference and the perceived exceptionalism that Muslims seemed to be demanding. This, though, comes in the context of American military occupation of important parts of the Islamic world. In this context, the general fear that Americans have of Muslims stems, ironically, from the reactionary circumstances that arise from the US's military occupation and its unquestioned support for Israel. Nonetheless, though different in scope and with different instrumental uses, US culture perceives itself as based on European ideals and the US materially contributes to wider discussions in the Western world about what it means to be Western.

Muslims are asking themselves to actively individuate a supposedly collective and whole past but to do so in present conditions that are vastly different than the imagined past. In terms of the vagaries of the concepts of space, place, and power, however, Muslims did (and do) not have the same recourse to place that Europeans do. Europe is an idea *and* a potentially bounded geographic place, Islam is an idea but never a place. Power and place cannot come together in Muslim thought not only because the most material forms of economic and military power are conceived and implemented from Europe and America, but also because there is no Islamic place to revert to.

However, I will leave the analysis of various Muslim constructions of new identities to another work. Not because it is not important, but instead to leave more time to interrogate and hopefully challenge Western ideas that it was only Muslims who were acting in their present by exclusionary recourse to the past, in other words as fundamentalists. I hope (perhaps vainly) by this that I can contribute to an awareness that we are all just people in the world and that while we have some incommensurable cultural differences, we are all simultaneously reacting to painful changes in our cultural landscapes. It is incumbent upon Europeans and Westerners to remember that there are gross power imbalances in the world which will only grow and continue to frustrate people into violent acts. Refusal to recognize that Muslims have legitimate historical and contemporary claims to economic, political, social and military abuse at the hands of Westerners only exacerbates the problem. For their part, Muslims' refusal to recognize nuances in Western discursive constructions of politics and identity, refusal to accept that there are differences *within* the West can only push the civilizations further apart.

I focus on the ways in which Europeans were, as much as Muslims, engaged in discursive constructions of their imagined past in order to discipline a changing present. I argue that the most common form this discursive construction took was a hearkening "back" to the Enlightenment ideology of secularism and tolerance in service of universalizing visions of how new global spaces should be experienced.

#### *Cartoon Contexts*

One of the main problems with most Western discussion of the drawing debacle was its thorough lack of contextualization. This is unfortunately common in coverage of Islam and Muslims. With this in mind, I contextualize and describe the cartoon crisis.

In September of 2005, Flemming Rose, editor of the Danish right-of-center daily newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, put out a call for cartoonists to create drawings critical of Islam. Specifically, Rose wanted drawings of the prophet Muhammed (BBC, 2006b). What had spurred Rose to put out this call, he claimed, was the situation of Danish writer Kare Bluitgen. Bluitgen had wanted to create a children's book about the prophet Muhammed but found that no cartoonists were willing to participate. The reason Bluitgen was having trouble finding cartoonists was most likely that depiction of the prophets is explicitly forbidden in majority Sunni Islamic tradition. The illustrators Bluitgen was in contact with seem to have not had the desire to cross this line either for personal reasons or for fear that they would be subject to attack by extremist Muslims. Rose, feeling that this kind of self-censorship was not in line with European principles, saw himself as stepping in to save day by aiming at the very heart of this perceived self-

ensorship. More than this, however, Rose felt himself very much defending (and also defining) what it meant to be European. "It's part of the Enlightenment tradition in the history of Europe and Western civilization to mock religious symbols," (Harding, 1996) he wrote after the controversy had boiled over.

In Denmark, the commissioned cartoons did not enter an empty space. Instead, they entered into a context of growing tension between mainstream Danish society and minority Muslims; a tension which seemed to insure that the cartoons were going to be seen as more than simply cartoons. Incidents of racially motivated hate crimes had more than doubled from 36 in 2004 to 81 in 2005 (DACORD, 2006). Incidents of racially motivated hate speech and other racial attacks had also doubled in the same period. In explaining why incidents of racially motivated hate crimes increased in 2001 and 2005, a Danish Human Rights organization writes: "both years were election years in Denmark (both local election and general election), and as the political discourse in Denmark is rather harsh when it comes to immigration and integration issues, which are always a topic during election campaigns in Denmark, the debates may influence the tension in society" (DACORD, 2006). The cartoons came out in the same year that a Danish member of parliament had controversially written on her website that "misled Muslim men" believed they had the right to rape Danish women and that Muslims were like a cancer that could either be cured by laser or by discarding operations (Rights, 2006). In the same year, research on political representation concluded that minorities were underrepresented by a ratio of 3:1 in Danish politics (Rights, 2006). It seems fair to say that if the cartoons might have come out in an amorphous, ambiguous space for the majority of the world's population, they came from a specific and familiar, if fearful, place for Muslims living in Denmark: a Europe increasingly conflicted about its immigrant population.

On September 30<sup>th</sup> 2005, the cartoons were published in *Jyllands-Posten* to little initial discussion. Included among them were some particularly provocative drawings including one of the prophet Muhammed with a bomb under his turban, an image that most Muslims perceived as an equation of the foundations of their faith with terrorism and violence. Accompanying the cartoons was the following text by Flemming (2006)

The modern, secular society is rejected by some Muslims. They demand a special position, insisting on special consideration of their own religious feelings. It is incompatible with contemporary democracy and freedom of speech, where you must be ready to put up with insults, mockery and ridicule. It is certainly not always attractive and nice to look at, and it does not mean that religious feelings should be made fun of at any price, but that is of minor importance in the present context. [...] we are on our way to a slippery slope where no-one can tell how the self-censorship will end. That is why *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten* has invited members of the Danish editorial cartoonists union to draw Muhammad as they see him.<sup>2</sup>

For the newspaper editor, this was a case of secularism, democracy and freedom of speech. In other words, it was about the defence of core Western values in the face of Muslim demands for exceptionalism. In order to defend core Western values, then, an example must be made of Muslims. It is

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<sup>2</sup> Translated text from Wikipedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyllands-Posten\\_Muhammad\\_cartoons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyllands-Posten_Muhammad_cartoons).

worthy of note that in 2003 the same newspaper had refused to print cartoons lampooning Jesus Christ (Fouche, 2006). In rejecting them the editor wrote the cartoonist, "I don't think *Jyllands-Posten's* readers will enjoy the drawings. As a matter of fact, I think that they will provoke an outcry. Therefore, I will not use them" (Fouche, 2006). In light of this the original publication of the cartoons, at least, becomes less about Muslim exceptionalism, less even about secularism, and more about ever shifting borders of what constitutes the Western.

Fifteen days after the initial publication of the cartoons the reaction began to materialize. A non-violent demonstration protested the newspaper outside its Copenhagen offices. (BBC 2006c) Two days later, the private (as opposed to state owned) Egyptian newspaper *Al Fagr* (the Dawn) became the first newspaper to reprint the cartoons. Though for Europeans the act of reprinting the cartoons was justified as encouraging free speech in the face of Muslim intolerance to the concept, we can assume that *El Fagr's* publication of the cartoons was not in fact to stifle free speech. It was published perhaps to (ironically) highlight the intolerance of "tolerant" Europe and play upon the feelings of victimization that many Muslims have in regards to the West, and, of course, to garner readers and advertising profit.

On October 19, a group of diplomats from 10 Muslim-majority countries sought a meeting with Danish Prime Minister Anders Rasmussen in order to persuade him to publicly distance himself from the cartoons. (Al-Jazeera, 2006) The conservative politician who carved strict cuts in immigration into the central plank of his political platform refused, citing support for free expression. He reportedly lectured the diplomats, "That is not how our democracy works" (Al-Jazeera, 2006). In this way the Danish state, in the form of its leader, clearly identified the issue as not a matter of discrimination or of bigotry towards a minority group but instead as an example in which to reassert one of the foundational principles of modern European identity, democracy and (ironically) tolerance for different viewpoints.

Ten days later a coalition of Muslim groups in Denmark officially submitted a complaint to Danish police under Section 266b of the Danish Criminal Code which "prohibits the dissemination of statements or other information by which a group of people is threatened, insulted or degraded on account of their race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, or sexual orientation" (United-Nations, 2006). A few months later, their case was dropped by the state prosecution. Their rationale was that "the text section of the article does not refer to Muslims in general, but mentions expressly "some" Muslims, i.e. Muslims who reject the modern, secular society and demand a special position in relation to their own religious feelings" (Rights, 2006). Although by the time the ruling was arrived at in January, public debate in Europe had already begun to conflate radical, anti-modern Muslims with Islam in general, the ruling, at least, insisted on a distinction. Only certain kinds of Muslims were being insulted, perhaps we may term them the *improper* kind for their perceived refusal to accept European categories of truth.

Throughout November other European newspapers began to republish the cartoons ostensibly in support of freedom of expression as anger began to grow in the Muslim world and throughout Muslim Europe. The United Nations sent their Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to investigate the Danish situation. The Rapporteur, Nourredine Amir, later concluded that Denmark was at the forefront of

countries in support of freedom of expression but that they had unjustly dismissed the case against the paper. Further, according to Amir, this was not, in fact, a case of freedom of expression. (United-Nations, 2006).

By December, Danish Muslims were sending delegations to Islamic countries asking for recognition and help or, from another perspective, fanning the flames. Death threats against some cartoonists were made, posted on the globalized billboard of the Internet. However, criticism against the Danish government also began to mount. A number of former Danish ambassadors banded together to publicly criticize the Danish Prime Minister for his initial refusal to meet the Muslim ambassadors. The Council of Europe harshly criticized Denmark for invoking freedom of the press in its inaction and noted a “seam of intolerance” in certain Danish media (Belian, 2005).

By the end of January, the crisis had become full blown. Muslim countries were began to consider pulling their embassies from Denmark.. In February, there was violence and rioting in many Muslim countries. The story rapidly became global as accusations and counter accusations floated amongst Europeans, European Muslims, Non-European Muslims and, seemingly, the entire world. According to newspaper reports, more than 50 people died globally in the wake of the cartoon crisis and its protests (BBC, 2006a). However, the response was not solely, or even (statistically) mostly, violent. For most Muslims, the response was one of anger without a corresponding place to address or direct this anger. Despite many opinions to the contrary, the vast majority of Muslims weren't so simple as to forget that the cause of their anger lay in a far away place and that destroying their own streets was self-defeating. For those less prone to violence, then, and especially for those most integrated into the global flows of capital, a boycott of Danish products was the most direct way to express protest. Sales of Danish products, especially dairy products, to the Middle East dipped by nearly 18% (Harding, 2006).

Meanwhile, in the non-cartoon world, the war in Iraq raged on, the siege of the Palestinian occupied territories continued, the bloody conflict in Afghanistan went about its business and global capital continued its silent penetration of much of the globe.

Although most often portrayed as a simplistic binary between “us” and “them” (leaving out the vast and significant number of Muslims in Europe and Modernists in the Muslim world for whom that binary is disingenuous) in which the secular modern vision of society pitted freedom of speech against an inarticulate mob of raging Muslims, the story was clearly more complicated. In fact, the cartoons came to stand for a whole range of positions that were not as easy to demarcate as us/them or West/Islam or modern/primitive, a range of significations that were not tied to the geographical boundaries of West and non-West. The cartoons and what they came to stand in for signaled the confusion and ambivalence in which Westerners and non-Westerners have come to see each other. For the deeply conservative voices on either side of the East/West, or Christianity/Islam, or secularism/religiosity binary in fact, the cartoons shed their materiality as reprinted lines on newsprint and became examples of the need to utterly reject the other. It is for the conservative voices on all sides that such binaries are most useful and meaningful. For liberal Europeans the cartoons became symbolic of the “Islamic world's” continued refusal to adopt

secularism and modernity in place of their primitive traditionalism. For some Western leftists, the cartoons were symbolic of European's failure to integrate Muslim populations into their societies and the continued legacy of colonial failings. For some secular Muslims the cartoons and the accompanying European reaction were symbolic of Europe's utter ignorance of the practical conditions and culture of Muslim majority countries and spoke to them the impossibility of ever being accepted as equals by the Europeans, adopted versions of modernity and secularism be damned. For some globalized, capitalist Muslims, the European insistence on reprinting the cartoons as an issue of free speech made integrating and doing business with the Western global capital, already difficult in the growing environment of intolerance, nearly impossible.

Most striking about the debate in Western societies over the cartoons was the shock of the Europeans at the vociferous and sometimes violent reactions in Islamic countries. Many Westerners, including my neighbor and some writers cited in this paper (see Dalrymple, 2006, Marlette, 2006, and Amiel, 2006 below), displayed a mixture of incredulity and disgust at the "Islamic response" and used it to further their point that Muslims are not yet ready for the globalized, modern world in which the Europeans live. Many Muslims, both in the West and in Muslim majority countries, displayed a mixture of incredulity and disgust at repeated European attempts to portray this as a simple matter of free speech. Islamic intellectuals rhetorically asked how could all the Europeans be so ignorant as to deny the deep insult and bigotry involved in such representations of the Prophet? Meanwhile European intellectuals rhetorically asked how could all the Muslims not understand that this was about free speech and tolerance? Tariq Modood (2006) helps to describes the Muslim reaction,

But the cartoons themselves are a trigger rather than the main issue, for everyone – Muslims and non-Muslims – "views" them (whether literally or imaginatively) in a wider domestic and international context that is already deeply contested. From the Muslim side, the underlying causes of their current anger are a deep sense that they are not respected, that they and their most cherished feelings are "fair game." Inferior protective legislation, socio-economic marginality, cultural disdain, draconian security surveillance, the occupation of Palestine, the international "war on terror" all converge on this point. The cartoons cannot be compared to some of these situations, but they do distil the experience of inferiority and of being bossed around. A handful of humiliating images become a focal point for something much bigger than themselves.

Clearly, the different sides were having different arguments with imaginary foes. For most Muslims the issue had nothing to do with free speech. In most Muslim countries the sanctity of the notion of free speech does not exist and thus exhortations to this principle had little effect on them. This is not to say that Muslims as a group of people don't value freely expressed speech or that Muslims have been living within authoritarian nation-states for so long that they've "lost" the ability or desire to speak freely. It is to say that, unsurprisingly, the Europeans were setting up the rules of the game based on their own historical inputs and finding themselves utterly bewildered that, once again, Muslims weren't playing by those rules.

Instead, then, of trying to convince “the other side” of their point of view, I read the cartoon crisis as an example of people on all sides constructing and speaking to their ‘own’ cultural constituents. This is not to deny that there were larger cultural conversations happening between Europe and The Islamic World, for communication between ‘the two’ was surely happening. However, the individual instances of reaction, the exhortations to rise up and defend the faith, be that a faith in secularism and free speech or faith in God, were utterances not to the other but to the self. The cartoon crisis was a jarring example to both Europeans and Muslims of how the global space has become a local space. What began as a series of cartoons in a far corner of Europe became local to Muslims. Muslim violent reactions became local to Europeans.

This is not a crisis that could have happened 50 years ago when methods of communication were as closely bound to time as they were to space. Without an Internet, a Sky News, or an Al Jazeera to pick up on each thread of the crisis and obliterate time as they simultaneously cast it across space, the cartoons would likely have generated no response or at the very least a quite muted response. The question then becomes, what has changed, in terms of conceptions of space, to make this issue simultaneously local and global? To address that question, we can turn to Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells (Castells, 2004) and his conceptions of “space of places” and “spaces of flows.”

#### *Castells and Space*

In the first book of his mammoth three volume project on the information society, Manuel Castells (2004) asks us to consider social forms of time and place that are not reducible to our past perceptions. He argues that time and space are being transformed under the effects of both the information technology paradigm and of historical social forms and processes. Castells notes a simultaneous spatial dispersion and concentration of places of work and information production because of information technology. At the heart of Castells theory is that the emphasis on interactivity between places breaks up spatial patterns of behavior into a fluid network of exchanges. This allows for the emergence of a new kind of space: the space of flows.

For Castells, this is quite significant in that space is not merely reflective of society but is in fact its expression. “Spatial forms and processes are formed by the dynamics of the overall social structure. This includes contradictory trends derived from conflicts and strategies between social actors playing out their opposing interests and values. Furthermore, social processes influence space by acting on the built environment inherited from previous socio-spatial structures. Indeed, space is crystallized time” (2004, p. 411).

He argues that “space is the material support of time-sharing social practices” (2004, p. 411) by which he means that space brings together those kinds of practices that are simultaneous in time. While in the past, it wasn’t possible to imagine space without notions of physical contiguity, Castells believes we’re in a different world now. “It is fundamental that we separate the basic concept of material support of simultaneous practices from the notion of contiguity, in order to account for the possible existence of

material supports of simultaneity that do not rely on physical contiguity, since this is precisely the case of the dominant social practices of the information age” (2004, p. 411).

Castells extends this argument by noting that our contemporary society is constructed around *flows* of capital, information, technology, organizational interaction, images, sounds, and symbols. These flows aren't simply an element of social organization but the expression of processes dominating our economic, political, and symbolic life. This means that the “material support” of the dominant processes in our societies will be the ‘ensemble of elements’ supporting such flows and making materially possible their articulations in simultaneous time.

This leads Castells to propose “the idea that there is a new spatial form characteristic of social practices that dominate and shape the network society: the space of flows. The space of flows is the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows” (2004, p. 412).

He describes this “space of flows” as being constituted by three layers of material supports; electronic networks; nodes and hubs, or global cities and their hinterlands that connect to global networks; and the “spatial organization of the dominant, managerial elites that exercise directional functions around which such space is articulated.” (2004, p. 12) In other words, Castells’ space of flows is composed of electronic networks, places that gather people and resources to hook up to that network, and the dominant global elite who control the networks and places.

Castells does not at all mean to suggest that the space of flows manifests itself in the same way to all who are affected by it. Social domination works, he believes, by articulating elites while simultaneously segmenting and disorganizing masses. Further, space plays a fundamental role in this domination. Our situation is increasingly one in which “the space of power and wealth is projected throughout the world, while people’s life and experience is rooted in places, in their culture, in their history. Thus, the more a social organization is based upon ahistorical flows, superceding the logic of any specific place, the more the logic of global power escapes the socio-political control of historically specific local/national societies” (2004, p. 416).

For Castells (2004, p. 248), the implications of this redefinition of space are potentially grim. While people still live in places, power does not (necessarily) live in those same places thus causing a rupture.

Because function and power in our societies are organized in the space of flows, the structural domination of its logic essentially alters the meaning and dynamic of places. Experience, by being related to places, becomes abstracted from power, and meaning is increasingly separated from knowledge. It follows a structural schizophrenia between two spatial logics that threatens to break down communication channels in society. The dominant tendency is toward a horizon of networked, ahistorical space of flows, aimed at imposing its logic over scattered, segmented places, increasingly unrelated to each other, less and less able to share cultural codes. Unless cultural *and physical* bridges are deliberately built between these two forms of space, we may be heading toward life in parallel universes whose times cannot meet because they are warped into different dimensions of a social hyperspace.

Castells is offering a very compelling description about how changing spaces are reinscribing meanings of place, power, agency and how they could potentially deeply effect conceptions of self. However, his redefinition of the relationships between space/place and power are hinged on Western perceptions of change. They thus offer a redefinition of a global world that is still Western in conception and not, unless the Western experience is to stand in for the universal experience, global. In other words, while Castells and many others might correctly argue that the network society is separating place from power, I argue that the formerly colonized world has long been living through various forms of that separation so that a “reconceptualization” of space is in fact not a global one but a Western coming to terms with a displacement that colonized people already know.

I instead want to interpret Castells’ ideas more provincially. In my reading, taken together with Castells’ (2004) ideas on the shifting nature of space and the separation of place from power, the cartoon crisis is an example of Europeans realizing that they, too, are being colonized by globalizing economic forces and that the most dominant European response to this crisis was and is to seek solace in an imagined past European identity in order to imagine a new European and Western identity. In order to do, traditionally used binaries between West and East were activated and instrumentally used to create a global Western identity. But calls to this identity come at the expense of unduly alienating, demonizing and essentializing large swaths of the world’s Muslim population. Not only this, but this essentializing of the Muslim other has the unwanted correlate of falsely reassuring Westerners that their perceptions of the world are universal, thus provoking and prolonging the crisis that currently obtains between the West and the Rest. I now turn to specific examples of that interpellation to Western and European identities through calls to secularism and free speech. The most common of responses, at least of the ones I’m focusing on, contained the Western message that if you’re not like us, if you don’t think like us, you may not participate in either Europe or the global system.

*Secularism As Tolerance, Tolerance As Western, Western As Global*

At the purported heart of the Danish drawing debacle from the Western perspective was the notion of secularism, as made clear in the previously quoted original text accompanying the publication of the cartoons. What is often forgotten, especially by the global left, is that discourses of secularism are discourses of power.

Talal Asad (2003) makes a distinction between the secular and secularism with the first referring to a state of being and the second to a state ideology used for purposes of power. Asad is meticulous in pointing out that the notion of the secular developed in response to a specific historical situation with specific needs. The term was introduced in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to “direct an emerging mass politics of social reform in a rapidly industrializing society” (2003, p. 25). This separation of the ‘religious’ from the non-religious happened in the context of a rearticulation that was taking place between state law and personal morality. However, this conscious separation is not meant to imply that the secular is either continuous with the religion that preceded it nor a simple break from it but instead “A concept that brings together certain behaviors, knowledges and sensibilities in modern life” (2003, p. 25).

In other words, it's important to dislodge the secular, as a way of ordering life that came out of specific historical conditions in Europe, from universalizing concepts as to how life *should* be ordered. This seems to have been forgotten by most European and Western writers who opined on the cartoon conflict. Many of these writings cited secularism, tolerance, and rationality as the *universal* way that life in a new global space must be lived. An example of this is provided by writer Theodore Dalrymple (2006, p. 36)

The deliberate dissemination of the now-infamous Danish cartoons in the Muslim world by a small group of hypocritical and treacherous Muslims living in Denmark has done the cause of religious tolerance throughout the world a great deal of harm. It has turned the willing suspension of the expression of religious and philosophical disagreement for the sake of harmonious social relations into an act of cowardice rather than of good manners. It has made even more difficult and unlikely the transformation of Islam into a private religious confession among many others that is the precondition of the successful integration of Muslims into Western societies... Whenever I write of Islam in the Western world, I have in the back of my mind the distress that my views, which under normal circumstances I would not express, might cause the Muslims whom I know and esteem.

As Dalrymple demonstrates, secularism is not simply associated with tolerance in the West but is a precondition of it. The argument goes that it is only by accepting the seemingly inherently pluralistic nature of human experiences and by granting all systems of thought 'equal' footing can a basis for peaceful discussion be established. Dalrymple here makes the clear argument that the only way for Muslims to join Western society is to replace the foundation of their truth system, Islam and the truth of God, with the foundation of a European truth system, rationalism and the truth of man. After they make this fundamental break, they may then go back to being Muslims. This is, of course, disingenuous, as pointed out by America magazine (America, 2006) in its discussion of the drawing debacle.

The media have depicted the conflict as a struggle of the enlightened West with fundamentalist Islam. But if fundamentalism consists in adhering to a doctrine without any nuance or qualification, then the West practices a fundamentalism of its own. For according to the enlightened view, freedom of expression, no matter how trivial, degraded or provocative, is treated as an absolute right that trumps every other value. Characteristic of many reactions to the cartoon crisis, Dalrymple is equating global, universal tolerance with Western tolerance. It is not simply religious tolerance in the West that Dalrymple feels is under pressure, but throughout the whole world. It is only through the adoption of (Western) secular habits that the world community can come together as one.

Put simply, the irony of Western calls for a secularized tolerance aimed at Muslims is their very lack of tolerance. The assumption that there is only one sort of tolerance, that developing out of a Western, "enlightened" subjectivity ignores the many kinds of non-secular tolerance that have marked the world before modernity. To argue that Islam is intolerant simply because it is not secular is to misrepresent the various histories of the religion throughout the world. Muslims and non-Muslims have lived with variously easy and difficult expressions of tolerance throughout the world and throughout time. The various sacred texts of Islam, like those of Christianity or Hinduism, can all be used to argue multiple and opposing

points of view including both tolerance and intolerance. To argue that only one point of view, that of intolerance, may be gleaned out of Islam is to conflate the arguments of contemporary (and quite possibly modern) Islamic political extremists with the entire and varied sets of beliefs and practices that form the Islamic communities.

And yet, unfortunately, reductions and conflations of Islam are what most often dominate discussions of the religion and its various forms of practice in the modern West. Within the enlightenment framework of thought, time is progress. In order to name Europe as being of its time and marked by progress, Islam must be named as stuck in time, barbaric, anarchic. Says one writer, "To not publish these images because of misguided sensitivity, we allow nihilistic street mobs from London to Jakarta to define the debate" (Marlette, 2006). It is not, of course, nihilistic Muslim street mobs that are allowed to guide Western debates on the conflict between West and East. Most often it is Western governmental or corporate interests (or intellectuals which take their power from these) which have defined the terms, language, context, and parameters of global discussion. When debate is defined in Muslim countries it is likewise defined by interested political and economic and intellectual agents, not street mobs.

And yet the rapidity with which the conflation occurred between Muslims as a whole, street mobs, and fundamentalist terrorists was a hallmark of the Western debate on the cartoons was striking. "One of the easiest things to start off is a Muslim mob," says Barbara Amiel (Amiel, 2006, n.p.) in the introductory sentence to her *Maclean's* article.

Followers of radical Islam seem prone to attacks of "the must." Most of the time they work quietly at their jobs, running their shops or doing whatever it is they do. Then, one day, like the Indian bull elephant in George Orwell's essay, they go berserk. Perhaps the madness was jump-started by the urging of the Saudi imams, but suddenly much of the Muslim world spun out of control.

With a rhetorical flourish, the argument becomes not between millions of Muslims that felt personally offended by the cartoons and the European newspaper who published them, but a battle between the tolerant, controlled, measured West and fundamentalist, terrorist, out of control Islam doing "whatever it is they do." In order to focus attention on the Enlightenment of her own, Western point of view, to demonstrate that this is not really even a discussion but a farce, Amiel (2006) reduces Muslims to the state of animals, to raging bull elephants.

She goes on to say,

In the West, one discovers different moral ceilings," editorialized the pan-Arab daily Asharq al-Awsat, claiming that a *Danish* cartoon about a rabbi would never have been published. Probably not. But it's hard to attribute this to some nefarious view of Islam. It is not followers of radical rabbis blowing up trains in Europe, but the followers of radical imams. To be surprised by resentment against beliefs that breed people who blow you up on the way to work is unrealistic.

The conflation here, as it was in many descriptions of Muslims during the controversy, is complete. The reader is asked to accept the implicit argument that those who would protest the cartoons are those who

would blow up a train in Europe. The globe must not be subject to this radical, violent Eastern perspective. Ironically, the Arabic newspaper that the author mentions is known for its secular, Western way of reporting.

The Danish drawing debacle served as a convenient foil for Westerners, both from the left and right of the political spectrum, to highlight the universal truth of their own advanced civilization as they castigated the Muslims for their civilizational backwardness. More liberal perspectives than Amiel's tried to generously include Muslims in saving their civilization from backwardness.

The Danish cartoonists were not only exploring issues of self-censorship and intimidation but also depicting the hijacking of Islam by fanatics like the tormenters of Salman Rushdie and the murderers of filmmaker Theo van Gogh. I'd further argue that publishing those cartoons was an act of democratic inclusiveness. By engaging satirically with Islam, these brave artists included Muslims as peers in the tradition of satiric self-examination and irreverence that until recently we've taken for granted in the West. Denmark's Muslims might have simply expressed their displeasure through the accepted democratic avenues of their adopted country if their unscrupulous imams and the corrupt Arab governments whose tyranny they serve hadn't manipulated the cartoons. (Marlette, 2006)

The varied reactions by Muslims indicate that they likely did not appreciate the democratic inclusiveness on offer and, if asked, many might have pointed out that the West is not the only source of 'satiric self-examination' that the world has ever produced.

The kinds of arguments which mix professed tolerance and blame at the Muslims for not being secular or democratic enough fall under the rubric of what Ann Pellegrini (2000) calls "progress tales" (p. 3). The presumptions on display in these arguments, shared by progressives and conservatives alike, is that the West has already arrived at what the East will someday arrive at. This is because, as Pellegrini points out, the secularization narrative is at its heart a story of time. And not just empty time, but a time filled with moral judgments. Relying on basic assumptions about the development of nations, secularism places European thought at the center of evolution and provides itself the moral high ground.

The morality of progress connects the passage of time to social relations and implicates secularization in the basic problematics of modernity. Modernity, after all, is not simply the name of a time period. It names a set of social relations and their legitimation: Enlightenment. Secularization is at the heart of the intertwined Enlightenment narratives of modernization, rationalization, and progress, all of which depend on the overcoming of religious dogma by reason. Thus, secularization has proven difficult to separate from these other narratives. (2000, p. 4)

In short, criticizing Muslims for their lack of secular tolerance is another way of criticizing them for their backwardness at not yet fully embracing modernity. This is not perceived per se a racist or bigoted attack because the inclusive presumption is that some day they'll arrive at where the Europeans have been.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued that reactions to the cartoon crisis came out of European fears of a new globalized world. Attempts to essentialize both their “own” civilizations and the Islamic East were attempts to universalize Western experience and attempt to map it onto the new global spaces.

However, I don’t argue that Europeans should ignore the possibility of militant groups espousing Islamist solutions within the European Union, the state has a duty to its citizens to protect them from violence. Nor do I argue that the idea of free speech is somehow in itself restricting or that secularism is necessarily incorrect. The genie of free and open societies is, at least ideologically, out of the bottle and, thankfully, can’t be put back. Instead, I am criticizing the unthinking equation of all Muslims with militant Muslims in the rush to contrast into existence a new European or Western identity.

The point in choosing to focus, in a sea of multiple discourses, on only the pervasive reductions of Islamic experience in constructions of American and European discourses of identity is not to criticize the West as corrupt. This is a mistake many Muslims make in their own totalizing arguments. It is instead to call attention to the universalizing impulses of Western culture. From the unquestioned assumptions of universality of human experiences and futures that accompanied Western modernizing missions in the 1950s and 1960s ‘3<sup>rd</sup> world,’ to contemporary forms of cultural plurality whose secular and rational ground rules for cultural conversations prejudice the conversation’s outcome and limit true dialog, the myopic focus on Western universality has made it difficult for Americans and Europeans to accurately appraise their place in the world. Put simply, it’s intellectually impossible and culturally quite detrimental to continue to imagine an essentialized European/Western culture as the only way forward for the entire planet. Cultures are not fixed but create and recreate themselves, effect, and are affected by other cultures. The colonial societies found themselves irrevocably changed in their encounter with the colonialists. Perhaps what is necessary now is for American and European thinkers, writers, politicians and people to recognize that in reconstructing their identities in a way that tries to make sense out of the changing space of the world, they are sharing that space with many others. And while their experience might be unique, might be beautiful, might even offer some guidance to other cultures, it is not a universal experience.

If conservatives and liberals alike continue to use reductive visions of Islam in service of political or ideological power, continue to use Islam as the primary category of difference in discursively constructing European identities, or to use fears of Islam as an interpellation to white, Christian, or secular Europeans, danger follows. The more a sizeable population of Europe is asked to consider themselves as separate the more they will create separate realities. This has repercussions far beyond the physical boundaries of Europe. The careless conflation of the multiplicities of Muslim experiences in time and space into an essentialized, reductive other in the definition of a Western self is not lost on Muslims worldwide who are already frustrated at having long to accept European definitions of global reality.

Instead, then, of insisting, in the face of lived experience (which takes the form of immigrants, transnational communication and communities, mixed culture populations), that there is a binary between East and West or religious and secular, those interested in stemming the tide of violence and enmity might begin looking for other ways of describing and accepting difference. Or, as Talal Asad asks, “What

practical options are opened up or closed by the notion that the world has *no* significant binary features, that it is, on the contrary, divided into overlapping, fragmented cultures, hybrid selves, continuously dissolving and emerging social states?" (Asad, 2003, p. 16)

Scholars and public figures on both sides of the East/West cultural divide who are interested in a less violent future need to be at the forefront of trying to understand the self without the dishonest recourse to polarizing binaries of the other. Shanti Kumar (2003), in a discussion on global television that is different in subject but relevant in approach to this discussion, points out that the desire for cultural comparison remains alluring because of the universalizing characteristics of Western culture. Instead of comparison which in its presuppositions creates a binary opposition of us/them that inevitably involves value judgments, referencing Panikkar Kumar suggests we try and learn from an "imparitive" approach in which dialog is engaged with "an open philosophical attitude ready to learn from whatever philosophical corner of the world" (2003, p. 147). Without making a value judgment.

Kumar (2003) argues for this dialogic as opposed to dialectic approach because those "engaged in East-West discourse open themselves up to a dialogue with others, and in the process undergo changes. Thus the goal of dialogical studies ... is not to *teach* but to *learn*, not to rescue the 'other' but to understand the 'self' through the incommensurability of irreducible differences one encounters in the dialogue" (p.147).

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