JOURNALISM FOR INTEGRATION
THE MUHAMMAD CARTOONS

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Abstract

In September 2005 the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published 12 cartoons that poked fun at Islam. In January 2006 this resulted in an explosion of angry mass protest in Muslim countries. This was part of a political-cultural confrontation in which the press became involved when they decided to publish the cartoons in defence of freedom of speech. This case study throws some light on the elements which gave rise to the controversy and have inspired similar incidents. The global dimension of the media action together with the growth of cultural co-existence means that this study may be of some help in understanding journalistic practice.

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Reasons for the Study

The publication in September 2005 by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* of a set of cartoons that made fun of Mohammed sparked off a series of diplomatic protests in Arab countries at the beginning of 2006. These were followed by a boycott of Danish products, and violent protests which resulted in many deaths. The trigger for this violence was the decision to publish the cartoons as a strategy to challenge moderate European Muslims to speak out on the social consequences of some radical Islamist standpoints.

An in-depth analysis shows that this was a political and cultural conflict, the excuse for which was the publication of the cartoons. Several prestigious European newspapers also published the cartoons in order to defend freedom of expression.

The social confusion caused by the publication demonstrates the need for reflection on the human dimension of the public communication processes within a new context in which the forms of communication have a global dimension. Moreover, we must consider the proper means of harmonising different human values: in this case with reference to freedom of speech in the media, and respect for the beliefs of a community. In short, what we would like to discuss here is whether the publication of the cartoons is an exercise in free speech, in other words, true communication.

Extreme situations generally show the underlying elements of a problem more clearly, thus this case-analysis should give some key reasons to explain why this situation arose and give some guidance as to how the media should behave in similar circumstances.

In order to simplify the study, we will, firstly, detail when and why the cartoons were published, together with their content and the range of political, social and editorial reactions they caused. This will be followed by an explanation of the basis elements of the situation and the highly political nature of the demonstrations. To continue, we will analyse the reasons why Fleming Rose, the culture editor of the *Jyllands-Posten*, decided to commission and publish the cartoons, and the suitability of using satire as the basis for a constructive debate on Islam in the West. We will also discuss how freedom of speech and respect for religious diversity are dealt with in a democratic society. Then we will study the media coverage as an essential part of the controversy, as determining the frame and the degree of knowledge of diversity lay down the terms for the debate. Finally, the indispensable role of the public in the improvement of communication will be developed, as it allows for mutual understanding between different cultures.

The Case of the "Faces of Muhammad"

On 17th September 2005, the Danish newspaper *Politiken* wrote of the problems the popular children's writer Kare Bluitgen had to find an illustrator for a book based on the life of Muhammad. The article brought to mind the case of Dutch film-maker Theo Van Gogh who was shot dead because of a film he made on the use of the veil by Muslim women. It also proved how fearful artists were of dealing with Islamic matters.

Flemming Rose, the culture editor of the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, which belongs to the same editorial company, decided to find out how far this fear of re-

prisal went among Danish artists. "Our goal," he later stated, "was simply to push back self-imposed limits on expression that seemed to be closing in tighter" (Rose 2006, B01). And to do so, he chose the journalistic principle: "Show, don't tell." Rose asked members of the Danish association of cartoonists "to draw Muhammad as you see him." Twelve out of 25 active members responded. On 30th September, the *Jyllands-Posten*, one of the newspapers with the highest circulation in the country, published the 12 cartoons under the title "Faces of Muhammad."

The cartoons differ greatly. In one the Prophet is shown in the desert with a stick and a mule at sunset. In another, a cartoonist is looking fearfully over his shoulder while he nervously sketches Muhammad. Another suggests that the children's writer who could not find an illustrator for his book went public just to get publicity. Yet another shows the leader of the Danish Popular Party, an anti-immigration party, in a line-up, as if she is a suspected criminal. Another one even made fun of the *Jyllands-Posten*, showing its cultural directors as reactionary provocateurs. However, three of the cartoons were particularly controversial: the one where we see Muhammad wearing a turban in the shape of a bomb with a lighted fuse; one where the Prophet is recriminating suicide bombers who have just arrived in Paradise because they have run out of virgins; and another, where we see Muhammad with a dagger in his hand and his eyes covered by a censuring black rectangle, with two women wearing burqas standing behind him.

These cartoons are offensive for three reasons. Islam prohibits any depiction of the Prophet; the Sunnis, in fact, do not permit any depiction of human beings. The second is that they are mocking and satirical. And finally, they link Islam and terrorism.

The Muslim community reacted heterogeneously to the publication of the cartoons. If, on the one hand, there was a reaction that fitted in with a democratic political system, there were also reactions which belong to a totalitarian regime.

Within the first group, and consistent with democracy, seven Islamic organisations accused the newspaper and appealed to Article 140 of the Danish Penal Code which sanctions "Anybody who publicly mocks or derides the dogma of any religious community."[1] Many Muslims wrote to the editor of the *Jyllands-Posten* complaining about the cartoons, and also wrote in opinion columns in other newspapers. They also took part in radio and television chat shows. There was diplomatic reaction, and in October eleven ambassadors from Islamic countries and the Palestinian representative protested about what they considered an insult to Islam, and demanded an urgent meeting with the Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen. The first peaceful protests began in Denmark and the Egyptian newspaper *Al Fagr* published the cartoons without controversy or consequences.[2]

According to *The New York Times* (9th February 2006), the flashpoint occurred when the imams Akkari and Abu Laban, in representation of the so-called "Committee for the Defence of the Honour of the Prophet," travelled to different Arab countries, to find support for their protests. In December 2005, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, with 57 member states, met in Mecca and urged the organisation of mass protests. Then, on 20th January 2006, the Norwegian weekly magazine *Magazinet* republished the drawings in solidarity with the *Jyllands-Posten*, which became the fuse for the upsurge in Muslim protests and the demand for boycotting of Danish and Norwegian products. The violence of the demonstrations

and the political consequences drew the attention of the international media. Saudi Arabia withdrew its ambassador to Denmark and both Libya and Kuwait closed their embassies there.

On 31st January, the editorial office of the *Jyllands-Posten* in Copenhagen had to be evacuated because of a bomb scare.[3] The editor of the paper, Carsten Juste, in an attempt to calm things down, apologised to those who may have felt insulted by the publication of the cartoons, but the conflict had already gone beyond diplomatic channels. Meanwhile, the Danish government stated that it had no reason to apologise, as it was a free and independent newspaper that had published the cartoons. In contrast, the US State Department spokesman Justin Higgins said, "These cartoons are indeed offensive to the beliefs of Muslims," and the British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said, "The republication of these cartoons has been unnecessary, it has been insensitive, it has been disrespectful." Finally, the Danish government apologised, and the Deputy Norwegian Foreign Minister Raymond Johanassen, deplored the incident.

As European editors were giving information on the controversy, they were, more or less consciously, becoming part of it. Thus, on 31st January, *France Soir* and *Die Welt* published the cartoons in defence of freedom of the press. Moreover, under the headline: "Yes, we have the right to draw caricatures of God," the French paper placed a cartoon on the front page of the *deities* of the four main religions sitting on a cloud, and the following caption: "Don't worry Muhammad, we've all been caricatured here."[4] Below the cartoon, *France Soir* explained the reasoning behind its decision to re-publish the cartoons: "Because no religious dogma can impose itself on a democratic, secular society," and the editor wrote: "We have had enough of intolerant reactionary lessons." *France Soir* claimed it was a "world-wide controversy" that challenged "the balance and mutual limits within democracy between respect for religious beliefs and freedom of expression". The following day, the owner of *France Soir*, Raymond Lakah, a French citizen of Egyptian origin, fired the editor, Jacques Lefranc. Then many European newspapers decided to re-publish the cartoons following the lead of *France Soir* and *Die Welt*.[5]

The Political Nature of the Conflict

What made this situation so controversial was not so much the publication of the cartoons in Denmark, 150,000 copies, as their re-publishing and coverage. They were published within a pre-existing conflictive politico-cultural situation, as in Denmark, according to Jens Lenler, in 2005 many politicians had already publicly condemned Muslims: "The leader of the Danish Popular party, the main right-wing (xenophobic) party in the country, had written that large areas of Copenhagen were inhabited by 'individuals from a lesser civilization'" (Ballesteros 2006, 11). But in January 2006, the controversy had spread beyond Denmark and become an international affair.

Violence increased in many Muslim countries. The Danish and Norwegian embassies in Damascus were set alight. Two days later, thousands of demonstrators set fire to the Danish consulate in Beirut, and the Lebanese Minister of the Interior resigned because of the riots. The offices of Western companies in Iran, Libya, Indonesia, Somalia and Pakistan were attacked; churches were burned in Nigeria; a Turkish teenager murdered the Italian priest Andrea Santoro and

confessed that the publication of the cartoons had motivated him; there was more and more coercion and threats to Western individuals and institutions all over the world. The tragic end-result was of over 40 deaths in February 2006. The protests and boycotts lessened little by little, although the Italian Minister for Institutional Reform, Roberto Calderoli, resigned after appearing on the RAI wearing one of the cartoons on a t-shirt.

The publication of the cartoons and its consequences have legal, political, cultural, social and religious implications, which can be analysed at different levels.[6] However, although the Muslim world is not constant and unvarying, on analysing the time-frame of the crisis, the locations and types of demonstration, it can be seen that the rioting occurred in countries which lack freedom or where Islamism makes its political presence felt[7].

For instance, in Palestine the many protests because of the cartoons cleverly connected the Hamas electoral victory with the growth of Islamism fundamentalism. Egypt was heading for elections under pressure from the Muslim Brotherhood. When, following the elections, Cairo became conciliatory, it was too late. In Iran, the revolts coincided with the government's decision to begin the uranium enrichment program. In Syria, where nothing is done without government permission, the crowds burned embassies precisely at the time when the country was being internationally cut off as suspect of organising the assassination of the Libyan Prime Minister, and of connections with the Jihadists who were fighting in Iraq. Lebanon faced internal difficulties because of the UN investigation into the murder of Rafic Hariri and the growing influence of Hamas. In Pakistan, the rioting echoes the struggle of the Islamists to weaken the government. The Taliban organised important conflicts in Afghanistan, and of, course, Iraq was still at war.

Consequently, the Iranian regime, Palestinian groups, the governments of Muslim states, and even groups involved in terrorism – a case in point is the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan –, or even al-Qaeda – who, in a communiqué demanded major confrontation due to the offence to the Prophet –, found it easy to manipulate a legitimate Muslim feeling of affront to favour their political aims. Fundamentalist Islamism, which in some countries is supported by the state, and in others is critical of the establishment and is frequently destabilising, placed the root of the problems in the West. The cartoons have acted as a catalyser, excuse or even a smokescreen for internal or external politics depending on the case, and strengthen one of the methods of Islamist coercion: the fear felt by Western society. And at the same time, the controversy was used to intensify control over the few independent publications.[8]

While the press was giving information on the protests about the cartoons, it also began an internal debate of a professional nature, to discuss the meaning of freedom of expression in a democracy. It is interesting to note how the government and media postures during the crisis go from a defence of freedom of expression, which led to the publishing of the cartoons, to the sacking of the editor of *France Soir* who had authorised it, the initial non-intervention of the Danish government and the condemnation of publication by the UK and US. However, professional journalists did not approve the publishing unanimously. The case has brought about an important debate on the meaning and limits of freedom of expression.[9]

Flemming Rose's Reasons

The Culture Editor of the *Jyllands-Posten*, Flemming Rose, explained why he commissioned and published the cartoons. It was in response to a paralysing situation of fear and intended to pose a question to the moderate Islamists: "I commissioned the cartoons in response to several incidents of self-censorship in Europe caused by widening fears and feelings of intimidation in dealing with issues related to Islam. And I still believe that this is a topic that we Europeans must confront, challenging moderate Muslims to speak out" (Rose 2006).

Rose described the characteristics of this *self-censorship*: a Danish comedian told the *Jyllands-Posten*, "that he had no problem urinating on the Bible in front of a camera, but he dared not do the same thing with the Koran"; in addition, three people turned down the job of illustrating a book on the life of Muhammad, and the person who finally accepted the commission "insisted on anonymity, which in my book is a form of self-censorship"; the European translators of a book that was critical of Islam "also did not want their names to appear on the book cover"; after the 7th July bombings the Tate Gallery in London "withdrew an installation by the avant-garde artist John Latham depicting the Koran, Bible and Talmud torn to pieces"; earlier "a museum in Goteborg, Sweden, had removed a painting with a sexual motif and a quotation from the Koran"; and in Denmark an imam urged the prime minister "to interfere with the press in order to get more positive coverage of Islam."

An in-depth analysis shows that if these facts given by Rose have anything in common, they are, however, also different. What they have in common is the paralysis caused by the fear of a violent reaction by those who believe in radical Islam. The difference can be seen by judging the diverse nature of the facts.

That a stand-up comedian can "urinate on the Bible" implies a basis freedom of expression, it is not coactive, that is there is no coercive impediment, it is a level of freedom which comes from outside the individual. Yet it is likely that whoever urinates on the Bible is using freedom for unjust debasement, and does not mean that he finds greater freedom. In this case also, we must take the nature of what is represented into account: the Holy Book is a symbol of the belief in faith, in a sense, a symbol of God Himself, or perhaps, of His revelation or word.

Then again, the problem caused by the hanging and later withdrawal of works of art at the Tate Gallery and a museum in Goteborg, can be dealt with in a wide-ranging debate on the limits of art. Respect or prudence may recommend the withdrawal of a painting or work at times of particular social tension.

However, the journalist at the *Jyllands-Posten* believes these gestures are proof of a situation of renunciation of freedom of expression, which it was legitimate to mention. With this in mind he refers to the Danish tradition of satire:

> *The cartoonists treated Islam the same way they treat Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions. And by treating Muslims in Denmark as equals they made a point: We are integrating you into the Danish tradition of satire because you are part of our society, not strangers. The cartoons are including, rather than excluding, Muslims* (Rose 2006).

Still, irony has its role in public life whenever it is used ethically.

The Muhammad cartoon with a bomb in his turban is the most hard-hitting,

as "Angry voices claim the cartoon is saying that the prophet is a terrorist or that every Muslim is a terrorist." According to Rose,

> *Some individuals have taken the religion of Islam hostage by committing terrorist acts in the name of the prophet. They are the ones who have given the religion a bad name. The cartoon also plays into the fairy tale about Aladdin and the orange that fell into his turban and made his fortune. This suggests that the bomb comes from the outside world and is not an inherent characteristic of the prophet.*

However, the cartoon presents an annoying stereotype; for the violent, it is a provocation and for those who are not violent, an insult and a mutilation of their beliefs.

The key to Flemming Rose's position is clear when he asks:

> *Has Jyllands-Posten insulted and disrespected Islam? It certainly didn't intend to. But what does respect mean? When I visit a mosque, I show my respect by taking off my shoes. I follow the customs, just as I do in a church, synagogue or other holy place. But if a believer demands that I, as a non-believer, observe his taboos in the public domain, he is not asking for my respect, but for my submission. And that is incompatible with a secular democracy.*

This is the basis for one of the misunderstandings that gave rise to this controversy: the concept of the secular character of democracy that confines religion to the private realm, and dares to ridicule what is sacred in the public realm, excludes its normality and ridicules it in its warped or extreme expression. This posture is consistent with a lack of understanding of religious fact and of religions, which are reduced to "a set of taboos" which get in the way of human freedom, and thus, should not affect the configuration of the public area.

Rose's argument continues:

> *Karl Popper, in his seminal work The Open Society and Its Enemies, insisted that one should not be tolerant with the intolerant. Nowhere do so many religions coexist peacefully as in a democracy where freedom of expression is a fundamental right. In Saudi Arabia, you can get arrested for wearing a cross or having a Bible in your suitcase, while Muslims in secular Denmark can have their own mosques, cemeteries, schools, TV and radio stations.*

Flemming Rose intermingles areas of argument, as there are at least two levels in his line of reasoning: a) considering each individual, respect for religious conscience is demanded and due to everyone; b) at a political level, reciprocity of respect may be open to discussion. Attention must be paid at both levels, as belonging to a religious faith cannot, strictly speaking, be legislated for, but respected. However, it must be insisted that its public signs and symbols do no damage to either individuals or institutions. Nevertheless, when different cultural and religious communities come into contact, reciprocity as a framework for coexistence can be negotiated. In this second area, we cannot forget that the organisation and principles of a democratic society are not the same as those of other societies, which further complicates the process of understanding and mutual respect.[10]

While it is true that violent action in the name of religion is senseless, unreasonable, it is also unreasonable to formally identify all religion with a system that forces the individual by coercion or elimination of freedom. This view of what

religion means causes rejection, and may be responsible for a total lack of feeling towards the reality of religion.

Rose's summing-up is positive:

> *Since the Sept. 30 publication of the cartoons, we have had a constructive debate in Denmark and Europe about freedom of expression, freedom of religion and respect for immigrants and people's beliefs. Never before have so many Danish Muslims participated in a public dialogue … Did we achieve our purpose? Yes and no. Some of the spirited defences of our freedom of expression have been inspiring. But tragic demonstrations throughout the Middle East and Asia were not what we anticipated, much less desired. … Still, I think the cartoons now have a place in two separate narratives, one in Europe and one in the Middle East. In the words of the Somali-born Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the integration of Muslims into European societies has been sped up by 300 years due to the cartoons; perhaps we do not need to fight the battle for the Enlightenment all over again in Europe. The narrative in the Middle East is more complex, but that has very little to do with the cartoons.*

Tolerance for Denigration?

Jyllands-Posten wanted to denounce and debate the situation of alarm felt in Denmark on account of possible violent reactions of some Islamists. The choice of irony as an action of communication which was repeated after the first violent reactions appears to have been mistaken. Dialogue and intercultural understanding are more easily begun when moderate individuals represent both parties. Accordingly, although it was intelligent to invite some moderate representatives of Islam to take part in the debate, provoking controversy was less so.

If a religion is reasonable, one should be able to discuss it, but rational discussion cannot be compared with ridicule. Behind Rose's argument lies an equality that allows for denigration, but it would make more sense to exercise freedom in search of respect.

The cartoons were not the only cause of the violent demonstrations, but there seems to be little point in repeating an action which is clearly confrontational. This insistent defence of the publishing of the cartoons is based explicitly and consciously on the right to freedom of expression as understood in Western culture. But the strong defence of this right also expresses one of the main injuries in our society. The ever-growing lack of religious feeling allows Western society to legitimate, or, at least, to underestimate the damage done by ridiculing religion. European culture has not yet discovered the role of religion in the life of each individual and of society in particular. In contrast, within Islam the Koran is an inseparable part of the socio-political system.

Klausen Jens Lenler has said:

> *As a citizen and a journalist, I believe that it is important to present intelligent satire and good journalism on religion and the religious authorities, just as we would with any other authority. And, if a newspaper had published funny, clever cartoons, which dealt with controversial aspects of Islam in a serious context, and had got into trouble, I would have defended the Jyllands-Posten with all my strength. But I personally believe that the cartoons do not deliver*

> *this message and I cannot bring myself to justify the conflict. They can only be seen as a means of provoking a minority group, and have no real message. I cannot really defend them as journalism, but I do defend the right of the newspaper to publish them* (Ballesteros 2006, 18).

There is an interesting point of logic in his way of thinking, which fits in with the present-day Western reasoning. Law protects what is good – the freedom of expression of thinking – and in order to do so, leaves a wide margin for error. The lawmaker does not wish to restrict the right to human good, but, in order to protect what is good, must trust in the proper use of language. This principle is of great importance as it shows the need for law as a guarantor of protection and its insufficiency in the proceedings of the specific rights it protects, which obliges the ethical dimension of the individual to come into play.

This debate on the publication of the cartoons means there is a need to consider what freedom of conscience, faith and expression of thought means in a democratic context. In the 19th century, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote: "Whoever seeks for anything from freedom but itself is made for slavery." The author of *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835) thus emphasises one of the inherent limits of the human reality of freedom. Freedom can only reach its highest potential or aperture when its content permits it to be so, it is not a reality *a se*, but a human quality, and as such, belongs to the social order. This potentially unlimited freedom, however, is fulfilled within the limits of the human condition, and so the organisation of societies must coordinate the expression of a multiplicity of freedoms.

When, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights defended freedom of opinion and expression, it was protecting a social and personal right, the key to freedom itself, which is the expression of an earlier right, stated in the previous article: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."[11] The defence of the freedom to manifest thought protects a more important right, freedom of conscience, a right that belongs to the ethical dimension of the individual, which for this very reason demands respect. Because, without ethics, the protection of this right could become a form of pragmatic totalitarianism, even within a democracy.

The Problem of News Coverage

The media coverage of the controversy took on an international dimension. On the whole, the editorial line of the written media was clear and in agreement on the essentials. An example can be found in the editorial of the Spanish newspaper *El País* which stated: "The publication of the controversial cartoons may have been a mistake, but criminalising an error breaks with the social contract we have with democratic society. Freedom cannot be given and withdrawn. And both Christianity and Islam have their place in it if respect for personal dignity prevails. We must not insult others, but neither can we allow the others to decide what must or must not be punished. Fatwas are unnecessary."[12] However, in this case, those responsible for the press were not taking sides on an external matter, they themselves were part of the controversy, as can be seen in the decision to publish the cartoons in their papers.

When there is news, the *frames* used by the media set the limits and outlines of public debate on this news (Sádaba 2001). In the newspaper coverage on the publication of the cartoons and the later reactions, the dominant focus was of conflict (as suggested by Neuman, Just & Crigler 1992 and Iyengar & Simon 1993), although there were some differences between the press and the television.

Actually, during the first weeks of January 2006, the dominant focal point was the presentation of a conflict. The violent demonstrations and threats were mentioned, or the coercion and boycott suffered by the Danish government were highlighted. But in February, in-depth analyses were presented, the political implications were studied, a greater number of sources were used, interviews were included, opinion articles from different viewpoints were published and the news was contextualised. It went from quite a reductionist view to a much wider panorama. In short, the press gave enough data, context and interpretations to understand the crisis.

The television coverage was more linear. The controversy was of great importance in news bulletins. In general, the TV channels emphasised the violent aspects, and gave little explanation of the keys of the confrontation. To mention but a couple of significant lapses, the documentary narrative structure used and the dominant approach to the conflict did nothing to shed light on the causes of the crisis or on the weak politico-diplomatic relations between the Islam and the Western world. The information over-used violent images, and had note-worthy shortcomings in three areas: contextualisation, use of sources and the absolute lack of specialists to interpret the situation properly (Quesada 2006).

The media coverage presented a misleading quandary: freedom of expression versus respect for religious faith. The right to freedom of expression, guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, does not imply the right to offend the religious sentiments of believers. This principle, which is clearly valid for all religions, is included in the legislation of almost all democratic states.[13] In the same way as freedom of the press does not protect libel or calumny, nor does it protect those who, consciously and gratuitously, attack the religious beliefs of any part of society, as these are part of the very nucleus of human dignity.

This crisis may help us to a greater understanding of what freedom of expression signifies and how it can be properly defended, as it is a right that is at the heart of democratic life. Democracy is not only a matter of procedures, but stems from basic principles in recognition of inalienable human rights, which must be defended. In this sense, respect for the individual dignity and freedom of expression are fundamental in democratic societies. All rights imply responsibilities and respect for peaceful co-existence where truth and justice must prevail.

Society and the media must assume this principle, freely and deliberately. Fear or coercion can never force a change in attitude towards others. For if insult to religion is not acceptable, even less so is violent mass reaction. The reaction of the Islamist groups was out of proportion to the subject of the offence. Violence, from any source, as action or reaction, will always be a serious threat to peace. It is indispensable to reject violence, to reassert democratic principles and make a great effort so that journalists can work responsibly without restraint.

This crisis has reminded media professionals that their actions are of importance and require responsibility. More than ever, they must be mindful of the dangers of manipulation of the media. As the Secretary General of the International Federa-

tion of Journalists has said: "Journalists can become casual victims of prejudice and political manipulation. Too often, ignorance and a lack of appreciation of different cultures, traditions and beliefs lead to media stereotypes that reinforce racist attitudes and strengthen the appeal of political extremists" (White 2006, 5).

Understanding Diversity

Western society needs to learn about Islam, its territory, civilisation, culture and religion. And for this to happen, journalists must comprehend the religious content of Islam, the culture it inspires, its customs and the socio-political consequences. Only with this information can the circumstances and the postures of the parties be critically analysed. The crisis has again demonstrated the journalists' lack of knowledge of the basis fundaments of Islam. A journalist, apart from not jumping to conclusions, must reflect on and understand Islam critically, and use a sense of criticism as the antithesis of the passive acceptance of the ideas or prejudices of the interested parties. Globalisation and ever-growing immigration mean that the need to know about Islam is not simply the responsibility of experts in international politics. Indeed, it is not a question of knowing Christianity, the roots of Western culture, or of knowing Islam, but of understanding the fact of religion in itself.

Journalists should be warned if they do not wish to become simple conveyor belts, voices for those who instrumentalise violence. They must, therefore, avoid falling, because of intolerable ignorance, into the trap of manipulation; a trap of which they are the first victims and also accomplices. Global journalism must offer the necessary analysis, interpretation and context to understand an ever-more complex reality. And the current dynamics do not simplify this option. For example, the dominant "CNN effect" on television (Livingston 1997), which calls for immediate, compelling images, makes the study of the roots of conflict and its consequences more difficult to explore, and frequently strengthens the stereotypes of the societies about which it is supposedly informing.

The worst interpretation of Islam is becoming the most popular in the world (Said 2005). Disinformation and trivialisation of violence are not problems that are exclusively Islamic. But the stereotypes of the Arab world as transmitted by the European media seem, at present, to be greater and more dangerous than they had been for decades. Radical, massive, spectacular Islam feeds on the media over-simplification that is wreaking havoc on the editorial offices of the Western media. In the words of an Arab scholar: "The main problem with Islam is not terrorist Islamism, as this can be identified and hunted down, but rather vague fundamentalism."[14]

A journalist has no greater enemy than generalisation. It is just as foolish to deny the evidence of Islamist terrorism, as it is to generalise on the identity of the aggressor. We must discriminate and flee from the imprecise, unjust equation of Muslim equals Islamist, equals terrorist. The causes must be explored and differentiated from the excuses. We must be aware that investigating the causes of hate never implies its justification.

If journalism is to be effective, it must be inclusive and responsible.[15] This does not mean offering a greater amount of information, because, as according to Robert Entman, and as has been seen in the television coverage, never has so much news turned out to be so insignificant in showing the true diversity of what is happening

or might be happening (Entman 1989). Attitudes of knowledge, understanding and cultural encounter must be encouraged. Islam is not that over-simplification that is sometimes presented by the media, nor is its essence defined in its worst versions, as found in Wahhabism. An endeavour to improve the quality of information will mean communication that will contribute to understanding and peace.

Accountable Journalism for an Accountable Society

Frequently the media are accused of offering a biased and unbalanced perspective of what is happening in Islamic countries. The accusation is supported by the reality of a form of journalism which is more interested in finding spectacular news than in broadcasting a balanced report of the truth. But the press does not stand alone as a creator of public opinion; it is more like a sponge that soaks up the facts as interpreted by sources, experts, governments, all of whom contribute to the ideologies and ideas at a point in time (Infante 1994, 239). Thus we could also speculate on whether the free people of the West do not also have a certain amount of responsibility for the general ignorance on the subject of Islam.

Now is the moment to appeal to the active social liberty of the people and remind them of their responsibility to learn about Islam as a religion and a culture. This means that the effort to give better information must go hand-in-hand with an effort to be better informed. We have no desire to debate whether it is a myth that the general public is knowledgeable.[16] Rather, in line with the civic humanism advocated by Alejandro Llano,[17] we insist that, together with the labour of training good journalists, there is another equally vital job if society is to be knowledgeable: the job of educating the public so that they will develop a critical, participative, active passion for truth and freedom. And such teaching can only be given within a humanistic democratic context.

With this in mind, education in the use of the media is fundamental. There are times when the media is asked for things they cannot offer. Therefore, the more the public know the rules and limitations of the media (time and space), and the symbiotic relationship between the media and violence-terrorism, the more just they will be in their demands (see Nacos 2006). For example, the coverage of the cartoon controversy in the Spanish press was comprehensive, but for those who did not go beyond the first levels of reading (front pages, images, headlines), it might have seemed as superficial as the television coverage. Improvement in communications is the responsibility of all those who take part in the process, both the media and the public. Let us not forget, as Martín Algarra (2003, 168) said, that the aim of communication is "knowledge of the world that produces mutual understanding, communion, social integration of the co-participants."

Globalisation means that all the peoples of the world are in permanent contact. This situation requires awareness and an enormous effort for responsibility and communication. The rejection, in this case, of the Muslims, is often the result of misinformation, which leads to ignorance. True respect comes from knowledge of the other, because, in the same way as we cannot appreciate what we are not familiar with, we cannot be tolerant of something we do not understand. With the growth in Muslim immigration this need to know becomes clearer; as members of the same political community, both groups must draw closer with respect and a willingness to learn from each other.

In conflictive situations, the role of communication is more important, but also more difficult. Communication or integration will occur if its goal is comprehension, and to a greater or lesser extent, it achieves this goal. Thus, the media professionals carry out a continuous labour of social mediation, which cannot abandon the legitimate defence of freedom, and for the same reason, must contribute efficiently to the creation of areas of peaceful co-existence. They can propose the terms for a public debate in search of knowledge, as a proper presentation of the situation allows for positive attitudes and actions that lead to the understanding of a problem.

Within the framework of Western societies, particularly in Europe, it appears to be urgent to develop sensitivity to religious reality, so that it can find space for a proper social and cultural expression. As a result, the journalist is facing the challenge of understanding and helping others to understand the content of different faiths and the diversity of their expressions, whether they are artistic, cultural or of representation.

It must also be said that, together with the unavoidable responsibility of journalists and of the general public in the West, the Muslims themselves are also responsible for this mutual ignorance. As it is correct to ask that a journalist who is writing about the Muslim world should not use stereotypes, should question his own pre-established ideas, and search for the truth, this must also hold true for journalism in the Islamic world. Pluralism, freedom of expression and the search for truth are values that transcend political borders; sharing them would be one of the best ways to banish the false images we have of each other (Drago 1994). According to Amin, "Arab journalists have the potential to promote change and influence public reaction to change, but they still face many problems and challenges, among them the political, cultural and economic environment and which the Arab media function and perform" (Amin 2002, 127).

The media are at the heart of events, they can hide, understate or exaggerate the consequences, but except in extraordinary cases, they do not create news. A Jordanian journalist wrote: "What really injures Islam is a terrorist who blows himself up during a wedding at a hotel in Amman in the name of Allah." We could ask ourselves what was more damaging to Islam: the cartoons or the violent reactions and the deaths of innocents. If Muslims were to reflect on the image they project as a community to the outside world, it would contribute to understanding between people of different cultures.

Islamic society is going through an interior conflict, a kind of under-cover civil war between the different interpretations of what Islam means. Moreover, many of these countries are at a crux in their political modernisation, which adds even greater significance to make this confrontation. Growing Islamist fundamentalism is the worst scourge of Muslim societies: it keeps the people united against the common enemy, but the price is the fostering of hate and violence. In all wars, the propaganda battle is crucial and, as we have seen, is being won by Islamist extremists, who set themselves up as representatives of the whole community. Overcoming the conflict is in the hands of the Muslims themselves, although the attitude of some, ignorance, laxity, the absence of firmness towards terrorism, as much as unjust generalisations, may exacerbate the situation. We need to find those who, because of their position or education, can become opinion-formers; those whose attitude of dialogue and moderation can represent a form of public mediation. It is a group effort that must be maintained over a period of time.

The struggle against ignorance and non-communication is a priority if we do not desire to build societies that are isolated from each other, societies that at any given moment could enter into conflict. Dialogue demands analysis, search for truth and revision of arguments. In short, accountable journalism is necessary in an accountable society.

Notes:

1. The Danish Tribunal at Aarhus declared in October 2006 that it did not find the drawings of Muhammad published in the *Jyllands-Posten* to be a cause of personal offence to the plaintiffs. The sentence stated: "It cannot be ruled out that the drawings may have offended the honour of Muslims, but that is not enough to assume that they were conceived as offensive or that their aim was to bring Muslims into discredit" ("Absueltos los responsables del diario danés que publicó las caricaturas de Mahoma," *El Mundo*, 26 November 2006).

2. Cf. "Egyptian newspaper published the cartoons in October," *Afrol News*, News Agency, 10 February 2006. *Le Monde* also published the story in October 2005 with no reaction from the Muslim world. In Indonesia, Teguh Santosa published a copy of the cartoons on a news web twice – 13 and 22 October – and there was no reaction (cf. Anthony Shadid and Kevin Sullivan, "Anatomy of the Cartoon Protest Movement. Opposing Certainties Widen Gap Between West and Muslim World," *Washington Post*, February 16, 2006).

3. The *Jyllands-Posten* received 104 threats up to February 2006, and the cartoonists are still under police protection.

4. *France Soir*, 1 February 2006. The German paper said: "In the West there is no law against satire" (*Die Welt*, 1 February 2006).

5. According to a study by the Danish School of Journalism, up to February 2006, the images had been published in 56 countries by different 143 media (70 in Europe, 14 in the US, three in Canada, two in Australia, three in New Zealand and one in Japan, and eight in Muslim countries; Ballesteros 2006, 11).

6. This is an extremely sensitive matter as in Islam the difference between politics and religion is not as clear and well defined as in the West. Muslims do not separate what is secular from what is spiritual, as their society is founded on faith and because the law has the same value for the individual as for political society.

7. Islamism is taken to mean the expression of a contemporary political ideology, which believes in the establishment of a State based on the values and principles of Islam as the only means of creating a perfect society (see Roy 1995).

8. Torreblanca (2006) lists the publications in Muslim countries that were fined, prosecuted, closed provisionally or permanently for publishing the cartoons.

9. For example, it was one of the subjects discussed at the 59th World Newspaper Congress and at the 13th Annual World Editors Forum in Moscow.

10. The demand for reciprocity was a constant in the newspaper controversy: those who do not respect other religions in their media and force Christians and Jews to emigrate have no right to complain. For years, Arab newspapers have published caricatures which are offensive to Jews. For example, one of the main Iraqi dailies *Hamchahri* held a competition for caricatures on the Holocaust.

11. But these rights are limited by Article 29.2: In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

12. "De blasfemia a crimen," editorial, *El País*, 5 February 2006.

13. Examples are the Danish penal code which penalises those who "ridicule the dogma or beliefs of a religious community," and in Spanish law, freedom of expression – recognised in Article 20 of

the Constitution – is compatible with Article 525 of the penal code which penalises those who offend "the sentiments of the members of a religious community by publicly, in speech, writing or by any other form of document, making mockery of their dogma, beliefs, rites or ceremonies, or publicly humiliate those who profess or practice it."

14. Meddeb, Abdelwahab, interview in *La Razón*, 1 October 2006, 6-7.

15. On this matter, in the US, there has been a strong revival of the conscience of accountable journalism, based on the Social Responsibility Theory (Overholser 2005; Ayish 2005).

16. For more on the knowledgeable public, see López-Escobar 2001, 35-36.

17. Civic humanism is the attitude that fosters the responsibility of individuals and public communities in directing and developing political life; a posture that implies strengthening the social virtues as a radical reference point for all qualitative growth in public dynamics (Llano 1999).

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