

# Globalized Islam in Europe: The Cartoon Crisis as Transnational Politics

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## Abstract

The beginning of the 21st century has witnessed distinctive examples of a global politicized Islam: Islamic controversies originating in the actions of non-Muslims. The most important of these has been the 'cartoon crisis', originating in the cartoons of Mohammad published by the Danish *Jyllands-Posten*. The article describes and analyzes the reactions of Muslims as they developed in the context of the cartoon crisis. The significance of the Islamic public sphere in understanding the crisis is discussed in theoretical terms. It is argued that the crisis demonstrated the significance of a mass effect as a producer of global Islam, of the struggle for control of public sphere, and of the creation of counter-publics. The analysis deals with the nature of the political activity connected to the crisis. Themes discussed in the article include the politics of recognition, community victimization, the principle of collective responsibility, and processual politics.

Keywords: *cartoon crisis, Islam, public sphere, politics, transnationalism*

Recent worldwide discourses on Islam have effectively been occupied with Islamic terrorism. But other forms of the global politicization of Islam have also occurred during the current century: specifically, Islamic controversies originating in the actions of non-Muslims. The most important of these so far has been the chain of events during 2005–2006, which had its beginning in the cartoons of Mohammad published by the Danish *Jyllands-Posten*. In 2006, another international dispute was caused by a speech given by Pope Benedict XVI in Regensburg, Germany. There have also been other, smaller-scale events, many of them emerging in Europe.

These incidents are interesting in a number of ways. They have not originally resulted from any purely political activity, and have involved no significant threats to security. They are globalized controversies related to Islam, triggered by the actions of non-Muslims: reactions to them arise in activities outside the Islamic world. They represent counter-reactions to the undertakings of other actors, and therefore are not a matter of proactive political measures. These incidents constitute unexpectedly emerging

separate chains of events, not directly linked to such events as the war in Iraq or the Palestinian crisis.

The starting point of an international crisis is often a question of security. In these cases, however, security is overshadowed by collective indignation and other similar reactions. The incidents aptly depict the nature of contemporary international politics: rather than security, they are often based on reactions related to the self-respect of communities, aimed at maintaining community cohesion and power-political positions in relation to other actors.

The present article does not attempt to determine whether for example the content of the cartoons has been right or wrong, true or false; in other words, its purpose is not a normative one. Nor does it attempt to consider the incidents as a conflict of principle, between freedom of speech and religious sensitivity: not only because answering such questions is impossible due to different normative grounds, but also because such a perspective would prevent examining the political dimensions of the crises. The focus is not on theological disagreements, such as might be resolved by theologians or religious actors (cf. O'Collins 2007), but on how certain issues related to religion are politicized.

In the article, I outline the development of Muslim reactions specifically in the context of the cartoon crisis. I discuss the significance of the Islamic public sphere in understanding the crises. I argue that the crises also define the content of transnational and global<sup>1</sup> publics, in which case they are a matter of political power struggles between different cultural world-views. This, however, does not mean applying a theme of the theme of conflict between civilizations', but rather examining contextualized phenomena which exploit different political opportunity structures.

### **The Cartoon Crisis as a Part of Transnational Islam**

The cartoon crisis began when a Danish author was writing a book for Danish children about the Prophet Mohammad, but could not find anyone to draw pictures of the Prophet. This was interpreted in Denmark as a form of self-censorship; in response to this contention, Flemming Rose, the cultural editor of *Jyllands-Posten* (published in Copenhagen), then ordered

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1 The term 'transnational' refers to structures, processes and institutions that transcend national boundaries and do not pertain to any particular state. It thus differs from the terms 'international' and 'multinational', where national and state structures are still determining factors. The term 'global' is used to refer to situations in which the universal nature of a particular phenomenon is highlighted.

twelve cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad, which were published in the paper on September 30th 2005. The drawings were also published in the Egyptian paper *Al-Agar* on October 17th. The actions of neither paper caused any immediate or dramatic reactions. *Jyllands-Posten* received some letters concerning the matter, but the discussion remained local or at most national in character.

Then Danish Muslim organizations and actors began to enter the controversy as active participants. At the end of October 2005 a group of ambassadors from Muslim countries sought unsuccessfully to open up a dialogue with the Danish government. The ambassadors also turned to their own governments, in an attempt to bring the issue to the fore. Imams living in Denmark were active in the situation as well: groups of Danish imams visited certain Middle-Eastern countries, where they displayed the pictures published by *Jyllands-Posten*. It has been claimed that they also displayed certain offensive pictures that the paper had not actually published. In addition to ambassadors and imams, other official and semi-official communities and individual persons also began to comment on the matter.

The crisis deepened at the beginning of year 2006. The Norwegian Christian weekly magazine *Magazinet* published the cartoons on January 10th 2006, giving rise to new protests. In Saudi Arabia religious leaders advised people to boycott Danish products, and at the end of January 2006 the country closed its Danish embassy in protest. During January expressions of protest rapidly began to expand and intensify, sometimes escalating into violent incidents especially in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Libya and Nigeria. Over a hundred people were killed in this violence. In Damascus in Syria the Danish and Norwegian embassies were set on fire, and some buildings owned by Europeans were attacked.

A number of Islamic groups, in both Western and Muslim countries, expressed their resentment. Danish Muslim organizations reacted by organizing demonstrations, aimed at calling attention to the publication of the cartoons. The pictures were seen as racist, islamophobic and sacrilegious; their purpose was assumed to be to humiliate Muslims living in Denmark. Some Muslim leaders around the world asked the protestors to remain calm, but others called for revenge against Denmark and the 'West': as one example of such reactions, a consumer boycott was announced against Danish products.

By the end of February 2006 the cartoons had been published in more than 140 publications appearing in over fifty countries, as well as on numerous Internet websites. *Jyllands-Posten* justified publication by the wish to par-

ticipate in the debate over Islam and self-censorship. Others defending the publication of the cartoons justified their opinion in terms of the principle of freedom of speech and the repudiation of self-censorship. According to these supporters, the purpose of the cartoons was to initiate a debate over Muslim terrorism. It was also argued that images of the Prophet had previously been published, in various form, by Muslims themselves. Those opposing publication of the cartoons saw the crisis as caused not so much by the depiction of the Prophet as by the inclusion of images connecting Mohammad directly to acts of violence and terrorism. It was also argued that the problem was not freedom of speech as such but a deliberate attempt to insult and humiliate a particular group. Freedom of speech was not seen as a principle that allows anything and everything, but as a concept involving a certain responsibility. (See Linjakumpu 2009, 101–39.)

All in all, the cartoon crisis constitutes the most significant series of conflicts related to Islam arising in recent years out of the actions of non-Muslims. For Denmark it was the most serious international conflict since the Second World War. Both during the crisis and since then, there has been disagreement as to what, in the end, it was really all about. The views of the participants were diametrically opposed, and genuine dialogue was almost impossible. The front line did not run unambiguously between ‘Muslims’ and ‘the West’; rather, there was a broad range of opinions, even within Western countries, as to the cartoons, their content and the wisdom of their publication. Similarly, Muslims too held varying opinions, especially as to the justification of the reactions. (For more on these events and interpretations, see e.g. Klausen 2009a; Klausen 2009b; Rothstein 2007; Olesen 2007.)

### **Transnational Public Spheres**

The cartoon crisis began with the reactions of diaspora Muslims. In particular Muslims living in European countries played a central role. The networks of those in diaspora span both the diaspora region and their countries of origin; thus issues are not seen in simple terms as either local or national alone, but in a wider context (see e.g. Mandaville 2007, 292–8). It is interesting to consider what is included in these processes of globalization and networking, and how this is perceived by the different actors.<sup>2</sup> During the

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<sup>2</sup> The concepts of networks and network politics are further discussed in Linjakumpu 2009, 37–57, Linjakumpu & Valkonen 2006. See also Castells 1999; Latour 1996; Keck & Sikkink 1998; McNeill & McNeill 2003; Kegley & Raymond 2002; Messner 1997. See about Islamic networks Mandaville 2007, 275–301.

cartoon crisis the different coalitions attempted to define the transnational public sphere from their own perspectives (for transnational public spheres, see Olesen 2005; Olesen 2007), and these definitions can be seen as the very foundation of political struggles and contentions.

The emergence of Islamic public spheres has been influenced by developments both within and outside the Islamic world. The ground for an transnational Islamic public sphere is formed by existing socio-political movements and networks, which ensure the presence of the necessary intelligentsia and of a critical mass. According to the sociologist Armando Salvatore, Islamic thinking is based on a local but at the same time transnational idea of community, which includes demands for justice, for participation, and to an increasing extent also for democracy. Traditional Islamic thinking does not adhere to the borders of national states. In a historical sense too, the Western model of the state has not taken strong root in the Islamic world due to the burden of colonialism and postcolonialism. These factors form the foundation for the construction of a transnational Islamic public sphere. (Salvatore 2007b, 50–1; see also Salvatore 2007a.)

On the other hand the formation of a transnational media and the spread of the Internet within the Muslim world has contributed to the construction of a commonly shared consciousness and ways of speaking; within these, shared problems and potential solutions have been defined (see Lynch 2003, 61–2; Mandaville 2007, 312–7, 322–7). Until the 1990s the media were strongly monitored by the Arabic governments, and their possibilities of creating a public space, with multiple voices, have been limited. In addition to the diversification of the Muslim world's own media content, the formation of a public space has also been affected by the strong position of the Western media in the Muslim world. The strength of global, Western-oriented communication has also altered the content of the Muslim media, and Muslims have become more and more closely integrated into the globalized sphere of communication. Transnational public spheres deterritorialize the Muslim realm of experience; issues connected with Islam do not remain within the borders of national states. (See Lynch 2003, 65–6.)

Media such as *Al-Jazeera* are commenting on international political questions in an increasingly distinct and diverse manner (see e.g. Mandaville 2007, 326). Ordinary people too have become transnationally active actors, reflecting the impact of public opinion (see Lynch 2003, 77–83). Muslims are increasingly taking on the role of active citizens, while at the same time they are becoming accustomed to expressing the views of their own group. They are increasingly discovering their own voice and identity in the public

sphere. The cartoon crisis and similar incidents do not exemplify the power of 'the West', but rather demonstrate the empowerment of the Muslim world and the formation of counter-publics (for more on counter-publics see Olesen 2005, 422–4, 429).

The cartoon crisis and other similar incidents have been conflicts over definition, aimed at either gaining control of the transnational public sphere or creating one's own space by defining situations and events. These crises are not independent phenomena but are connected for example to the attacks of September 2001, to the war against terrorism, to counter-reactions against globalization and to the history of the Islamic world generally. In particular the current international political context has had clear implications. As Mikael Rothstein (2007, 132) has argued: 'No matter how provocative the cartoons were, people's reactions were very much nurtured by the prevailing conflicts.' In globalized networks of meanings, individual local events easily become linked to worldwide structures and actions. (See also Olesen 2006, 7–10; Mandaville 2007, 312–315; Bauman 2001, 138; Kegley & Raymond 2002, 157.)

Individuals are mentally connected to these networks, even if they do not have direct contact with the issue in question (cf. Latour 1996, 371–2). Commonly shared experiences and a sense of belonging to a global community form the basis for political activities. In a situation where the threat comes from outside the Muslim realm, the internal differences of the Muslim community may temporarily be diminished.<sup>3</sup> The imagined community (see Anderson 1991, 6) is also a community of power: even a small group of actors can have the experience of forming a significant authority, because potentially they are supported by all the Muslims in the world (Linjakumpu 2009, 79–83). The significance of diaspora Muslims and Muslim organizations in this struggle over definition is essential; they contribute to the public discourse of their country of residence, and are able to adopt influences from the Muslim world and their own native country. Because of the presence of diaspora groups, the Western media too has to take a stand on Islam: the diaspora brings foreign cultures into 'close range', and ignoring them is thus no longer possible.

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3 This does not mean the disappearance of various power struggles or disputes within or between Muslim communities; on the contrary, there is a constant battle over who is to be heard and who is allowed to represent Muslim communities. It is evident that the turbulent disputes connected with Islam are increasingly internal, and that these differences within Islam are becoming increasingly visible in the transnational public sphere as well (cf. Mandaville 2004, 179; Mandaville 2007, 299).

## Networks of Disputes

The cartoon crisis, counter-reactions to the Pope's speech in Regensburg and similar crises are signs of the formation of such alternative publics, where existing hegemonic transnational public spheres are politicized. In the following, I explore such topics as the politics of recognition, the victimization of communities, the principle of collective responsibility, and processual politics. My purpose is to describe the nature of the political activity connected with the crises.

### *The Demand for Recognition*

The crises related to Islam are examples of how the dimensions of politics and counter-power can be seen in an alternative manner. This type of politics is not connected in the traditional way to economic equality, but concerns the recognition of human existence. The 'politics of recognition' is an idea originally presented by Charles Taylor in his essay by the same title, published in 1992, in which the central concept is the principle of equal treatment of different cultures. According to Taylor, groups that have not traditionally exercised political power are now demanding for themselves the right to participate on their own terms. Participation should reflect a group's identity and concept of self; it should not mean having to assimilate their own characteristics into a dominant culture. (Taylor 1997; see also Abbey 2003, 119; Kaya 2007, 708.)

The politics of recognition drew inspiration in particular from multicultural countries such as Great Britain and Canada, where the presence of a growing foreign population has required consideration as to attitudes towards people with foreign backgrounds coming from different cultures. The question of recognition was originally linked especially to the domestic policies of liberal and democratic national states. The scarf disputes taking place in France, or the Islamization of the public sphere which occurred in earlier decades in national states with Muslims majorities, can also be seen as battles for recognition.

The politics of recognition is often connected to identities and recognition through them. However, according to Nancy Fraser 'what requires recognition is not group-specific identity but rather the status of group members as full partners in social interaction' (Fraser 2001, 24). The politics of recognition thus cannot be reduced simply to a matter of identity, but opens up a perspective upon wider social, political and economic relations within the society. Demands for recognition are connected to the manner

in which societies are to be organized and how the identity which forms the grounds for recognition is taken into consideration. (See Staeheli 2008, 562, 567.)

Today recognition has shifted from the level of the state to a transnational one. It links together actors in different countries, who form a mental or physical community. The demand for recognition for its part expresses the current confrontation between Islamic and non-Islamic actors. At a transnational level, this means resisting global hegemonies and the aim of becoming an explicitly recognized actor. In addition to the specific, individual issues involved, the cartoon crisis and other transnational crises currently related to Islam are also a struggle for a wider political and cultural setting.

In these struggles, what is being expressed through recognition is the group's own special quality by linking it as part of global publics and activities. The first stage is the identification of this special quality, and its recognition by others. Without this recognition it is impossible to express political demands based on the source of self-recognition, in this case the Islamic religious, cultural and social worldview. The aim is not so much merely to become *part* of the public sphere, but rather to redefine it entirely so as to reflect Islam as a religion and Muslims as a socio-political group. (Cf. Staeheli 2008, 563.)

Recognition also means that non-Muslims cannot ignore the identity claims and the existence of Muslims. The demand for recognition is addressed to the 'opposing' side, in the cartoon crisis to the various actors representing the 'West'. As noted by Jean-Philippe Deranty and Emmanuel Renault (2007, 100), the struggles for recognition are targeting not only institutions but sometimes also macro-level social structures, such as feudalism and capitalism. The current crises related to Islam are specifically struggles for recognition against the hegemonic, Western order, despite the fact that for example in the cartoon crisis the central actor was one particular Danish newspaper.

The politics of recognition should be understood as a tool for dissolving existing power settings. According to Zygmunt Bauman, seekers of recognition may use any 'formula' that is consistent with the prevailing atmosphere and thus best serves their own agenda (Bauman 2001, 144). Bauman suggests that the recognition sought in this way is not as 'one of many', or equal to others; it is not a quality that is valuable on its own terms but has a unique – possibly superior – value, which other life forms do not possess. (Bauman 2001, 144–5; see also Fraser 2001, 24–5.) In practice, Bauman's criticism means

that the crises related to Islam form a very extensive complex of problems, under which it is questionable whether a multicultural and simultaneously peaceful global space is possible.

*Victimization of a Community and the Policy of Blaming*

Transnational public spheres or counter-publics are not only matters connected with information and socio-political activities. They are also to a great extent experiential and emotional networks, which mediate people's experience of their own position in relation to others. One primary reaction in these chains of events has been the experience of being *offended*: presenting the Prophet Mohammad in an unfavorable manner has caused both individual Muslims and communities to feel offended.

In cultures that emphasize honor<sup>4</sup> it is a central factor defining the existence and value of a community, and an offence targeted at an individual member of a community thus means an offence against the whole community. In earlier times this was connected with the honor of families, tribes and local communities, and with its defense. According to Walid Phares (2007, 97), an offence against religion was in ancient times grounds for declaring a just war between states and empires. In the Middle East, according to Phares, offending a person's religion has been even more serious than offences targeted at race, culture, nationality or family.

It can be argued that in the crises discussed here honor and integrity have become matters of transnational discourses and political divisions. The globalization of honor in particular is a recent development, whereby specifically Arabo-Islamic cultural features have found a transnational form. According to Akbar Ahmed (2007, 217), offences directed against the Prophet target both Islam as a religion and the person of the Prophet, who mediates the sacred word of God, the Qur'an. In addition, according to Ahmed, the Prophet is known and loved as a father, a husband and a leader, and the images Muslims have of him are thus highly personal. In Ahmed's opinion, this personalization also explains the emotional reactions against *assumed* attacks against the Prophet; it is a matter of honor and pride. (See also Rothstein 2007, 120–32.)

While the idea of a communal experience of being offended also touches other communities or cultural areas, it has in recent years become particu-

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<sup>4</sup> Islamic cultures are often called 'honor cultures', as opposed to cultures based on law. The latter emphasize an order based on codified laws, which everyone is required to follow; adherence to these laws is based on the existence of legally defined penalties.

larly visible in the Muslim world. The formation of Muslim transnational reactions is based on a 'cultural toolbox' of the possibilities that arise from the religious basis and the – at least theoretically – global nature of the Muslim community. A sense of offense is proof that you have been attacked by an outside force, and that you may therefore think of yourself as a *victim*. Settling into the position of a victim, or becoming victimized, includes the concept of blame: the position of victim is caused by someone other than oneself. In this context, 'victimization' does not refer to victimization experienced by an individual alone, which is common for example in the context of crime. The incidents observed here are examples of collective victimization, which takes place through communities and communal feelings on a transnational level.<sup>5</sup>

The narrative of the victimization of the Muslim world is long: beginning with the crusades, it continues into the colonial era and further to the foundation of the state of Israel in an area inhabited by Palestinians. In recent decades especially American intervention in the Kuwait crisis, the wars against Iraq and the 21st-century war against terrorism, including the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, are seen as a continuous neocolonial crusade against Muslims and countries inhabited by them. In this context, the significance of Al-Qaeda cannot be ignored. It is not significant because people join the movement or are willing to act (see Gerges 2005, 233), but because they are increasingly willing to raise their voices to 'defend Islam'. Reacting to the actions of the West is becoming increasingly active, and is supported by the discourse of victimization produced by al-Qaeda.

Victimization takes place through communal identification: 'there has been an attack against the group, and because I belong to this group, the attack is also directed against me.' Victimization includes a way of thinking according to which the community or the entire religion is *under threat*. According to Akbar Ahmed, such experience of threat is very common today. For Muslims, according to Ahmed, the events of September 2001 meant that their expressions of identity might now lead to their being identified with terrorism. This in turn led Muslims to experience

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<sup>5</sup> Emotional reactions related to the Prophet may also be linked to more personal experience. As Mikael Rothstein argues, 'the cartoons managed to affect the self-esteem of so many people on a very personal level. The reactions throughout the Muslim world were of course expressions of a collective anger, but this was also an anger felt by each individual in a more personal or private way because the cartoons directly affected the individual's self-perception. The focal point is human individual and humanity itself, although it is the character of Muhammad that is the actual topic of discussion.' (Rothstein 2007, 132.)

that they and their religion were under threat. (Ahmed 2004, 24; see also Phares 2007, 64–5.)<sup>6</sup>

Understanding the experiences of a community is connected to a network-like way of action: issues are related to each other and gain strength from the doings of others (cf. Latour 1996, 371–2). The actions of Muslims also need to be observed against those of non-Muslims. The actions of the United States in the Middle East have been a central factor, causing strong emotional reactions among Muslims, and affecting the existence of European Islam as well. One Muslim cited by Akbar Ahmed mentions that the U.S. President George W. Bush has ‘awakened’ the whole Islamic world, which is good for the revival of Islam (Ahmed 2007, 70). The strong presence of the United States and other Western countries in the Muslim world gives Muslims an opportunity for counter-reactions and for explaining their own activities to others. Mutual dependence advances the emergence of political coalitions and actions. This can be seen as a reactive politics, in which a group’s own political goals are formed in counter-reaction to the actions of others. On the other hand, it is also a matter of taking advantage of political opportunities: the actions of other parties open up a ‘window of opportunity’, allowing the strengthening of a group’s own political goals.

Meghnad Desai (2007, 55) describes these networks of blame and victimization. According to Desai, suddenly there were conflicts in Europe, and close to Europe, with Muslims as both victims and combatants. These conflicts have created networks of meanings through which the position of victim has been shaped. These networks include for example Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Victimization has become part of a collective understanding, which combines different political situations and crises under a common heading. Diaspora Muslims in the West have also been able to deal with the battles of their brothers in Europe and the Middle East with empathy.

It can be claimed that the politization of victimization in the cases referred to here was partly promoted by Western cultural relativism, which has found a place in the Western world in counterbalance to racist practices. Relativism includes tolerance towards different cultural and social practices (cf. Bauman 2001, 144), even when they are contradictory to one’s own social and cultural existence. Political correctness and the avoidance of prejudice

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<sup>6</sup> Victimization is also linked to conspiracy theories (see Gerges 2005, 204–5). Gerges refers to the Islamist Nageh Abdullah Ibrahim, according to whom those who believe in conspiracy theories hold the West responsible for all the tragedies in the Islamic world. The culprit is always someone outside one’s own group.

(cf. Desai 2007, 21–2) are circumstances where the West easily places itself in these situations. According to Desai, however, they merely make dialogue more difficult, due to the effort to avoid topics that are potentially offensive. Because of this, some Muslims may start to take political advantage of the situation, since open debate concerning them is difficult. Phares (2007, 186–8) believes that Western sensitivity and international ethics are exploited in these situations: for example the sense of guilt due to historical errors made by people who lived at an earlier time is exploited in producing a group's own political program.

Victimization, and the blame rising from it, should be seen as important from the point of view of political activity. Victimization is connected to power, and prepares the ground for the experience of empowerment. It is a matter of how a community that on a global scale is a *defendant*, but that has at the same time developed a certain *confidence*, transforms the role of defendant into political activism. The subordination is not targeted at a person or a local community, but is formed mentally: the individual is part of the global *umma*, to which he attaches himself. Offences targeted against the *umma* are thus also targeted against the individual. It is a matter of activism based on moral evaluations (see Mandaville 2007, 346), in which moral indignation and a sense of injustice is turned into political power (see Deranty & Renault 2007, 98).

#### *The Disproportion of the Reactions and the Principle of Collective Responsibility*

The crises have caused extensive debate over the interpretation of Islam: how can the events be interpreted through Islamic teachings? Views for example on the significance of the Islamic ban on images have been contradictory and ahistorical: social and political events are seen in isolation from their contexts. Selected historical events become forces promoting contemporary actions; history is 'revived' for contemporary situations. (See Phares 2007, 63–4.)

The crises have often had their beginning in dogmatic and absolute views of Islamic law, in which Islam has been interpreted in a confrontational and simplistic manner. As interpretations – and interpreters – have become more diverse and superficial, they have at the same time become more prone to conflict, since communal restraints no longer operate. Anyone can interpret anything, opening the door to adversarial and possibly incompetent interpretations of Islamic law. Olivier Roy (2004, 168–9) criticizes the level of scholarship on which the interpretation of Islamic law is often based, claiming that Islamic scholarship is today less and less a process of gradual

learning: young, born-again Muslims are unwilling to undertake years of study, but want the truth immediately. This truth is often experiential and combines different teachings and influences, especially in diaspora. The conception of Islamic teachings is acquired from sources that may be mutually contradictory or arise from different traditions.

This superficial and selective nature of interpretations has contributed to the frequent *disproportionality* of reactions: potentially the entire Muslim world becomes involved in a local situation, and counter-attacks are targeted widely against the enemies of Islam. According to Phares, any political opinion that does not fit in with the 'Islamist agenda' is automatically connected to the concept of a 'war on Islam' (Phares 2007, 220). Controversial situations are thus extended to Islam and to the entire Muslim world, even if the situation in question is essentially local and specific. Interpreted in this way, the radical actions of Muslims are acceptable because their purpose is to defend a religion and indeed an entire civilization.<sup>7</sup>

Various protests also contribute to community cohesion: the provocation of violence acts as a reminder to other Muslims of their membership in a community of believers. Demonstrations, flag-burning, boycotts and other reactions are rituals of truth, which find their form through otherness. They take a stand on what is the correct interpretation of Islam and how to relate to those who resist the correct dogma. This also includes denying any criticism of the religion. According to Phares, the denial of criticism fundamentally has less to do with the content of the religious system than with control over the community (Phares 2007, 95). Criticism is a threat to unity, while common resistance builds a closer communality.

These incidents aim at realizing *the principle of collective responsibility*: if one Western individual offends the feelings of Muslims, the responsibility falls upon Western countries in general. This responsibility also works the other way around: if one Muslim is offended, the whole Islamic world is offended. Thus the burden of responsibility is without limits (Alweiss 2003, 311). The Danish cartoons and similar examples can easily be seen as reflecting an all-inclusive hostility towards the Muslim world, which also needs to be responded to collectively. Individual incidents have been raised to the level of entire civilizations: they apply to all of Islam, and Western countries and Western civilization are responsible for them.

In these crises, the collective responsibility of Western people is complex. On the one hand, it is possible for example for Finns to identify with the

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<sup>7</sup> In this context it is also possible to consider the war on terrorism led by the United States, which works in much the same way.

Danes and the values they represent, in which case a common sense of guilt and responsibility are in part justified. On the other hand, the right-wing paper *Jyllands-Posten* which is at the center of the crisis, the forces behind it and the values they represent reflect a political ideology many Finns find questionable as well. Identification with the forces behind the cartoons may thus be difficult; however, this has not prevented Muslims active in the crisis from speaking of the collective guilt of the 'West'. (Cf. Clark 2008, 675, 678.)

Some Muslims believe that the Muslim world, which is seen as unified, is threatened in such situations by a similarly unified, massive enemy, which systematically aims at attacking Islam. At the same time, the Other of the Muslim world – the 'West' – is also generalized and fused. This concept of common guilt has often been associated with Nazi Germany and the German people (see e.g. Clark 2008, 668, 686). The idea of a collective responsibility is difficult even at a national level, not to mention wider political domains. In crises related to Islam, 'holding someone responsible' takes a transnational form; this opens up a complex realm of political activity, difficult to control or justify.<sup>8</sup>

#### *The Process-like Nature and Unpredictability of Network Politics*

The transnational public sphere is an interesting territory in terms of the formation of political activity. Islam-related crises show that highly local politics can still be tightly connected to various transnational discourses, meanings and groups of actors. The transnational public sphere as a political domain is very different from a politics founded on institutions or clearly recognizable actors.

The crises discussed here are good examples of network political activity, which is typically transitory and unpredictable: politics is *process-like* in nature (Linjakumpu 2009, 41–6). This processual character not only adds to the pace and intensity of politics, but also contributes to the *emergence* of political incidents; in other words, it affects which particular issues are politicized and in what context. The examples discussed in this article naturally do not constitute a comprehensive picture of political relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Which issues become part of a more general discourse or even enter the transnational public sphere depends on the possibilities created by the situation, and on the aims and resources of the actors. The disputes presented here take their strength from the op-

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8 This naturally also applies the other way around: for example blaming all Muslims for the actions of Muslim terrorists is equally problematic (cf. Abdel-Nour 2003, 700).

position between Muslims and non-Muslims, which potentially concerns vast groups of people.

From the Muslim point of view, the original events giving rise to the crises may be highly offensive and serious; but which particular issues become the subject of public debate, and why, is apparently quite random. Attacks within the Muslim world may receive considerably less transnational interest. Walid Phares notes critically that similar acts by Muslims do not cause a counter-reaction or even receive attention. In 2006, for example, Sunnite rebels destroyed the Golden Mosque of Samarra, one of the most important and sacred Shia mosques in Iraq (see Ahmed 2007, 194). Phares refers to a Muslim saying that 'the radicals are concerned about one unconfirmed report about a copy of the Holy book, while thousands of Qur'ans have been destroyed and desecrated [by Muslims themselves] in Pakistan, Iraq, and Darfur with entire mosques burned to the ground' (Phares 2007, 226).

Randomness also characterizes the process whereby particular individuals or groups become actors in the global and network-like Islamic politics. It cannot be predicted with any great accuracy who will participate in an intervention or conflict. Network-like mutually dependent activity can take place in a variety of ways; there are a number of channels through which actors participate politically (Rogerson 2000, 421). Since the structure lacks the slowness of a hierarchy, which at the same time would control the implementation of measures, events take place more rapidly and randomly. Network-like political activity does not have regional or historical stability, which is based on established political conventions or actors. Network politics more closely resembles a project whose settings are relatively unpredictable as to time and place. The actors move in a flexible manner, so that political continuums cannot be predicted in the same way as in the bipolar world order or in conventional national politics. (Cf. Schubert & Jordan 1992, 13.)

In such project-like political situations, the actors, targets and spaces increasingly vary within a global, virtual space, independent of geography. When national states were still in a dominant position in international politics, the lines of politics could be predicted and regulated better than today. States were usually connected, one way or the other, to either the capitalist or the communist system and were dominated by the great powers. Even those that were not part of this international system behaved in a relatively controlled manner, and attempted to ensure that their conflicts did not spread beyond regional borders. (See e.g. Primakov 2004, 14.)

The transnational public sphere is not stable but constitutes a transitory political arrangement of matters, temporarily linking different actors together. The setting is usually not one of permanent friends and enemies, although the risk of generalization is apparent: a setting may appear permanent and static, and the basis of a hostile relationship is not always visible in its full diversity either. Islamic communities may be global in nature, but nevertheless they do not bind all Muslims: the Muslim world as a whole does not constitute a global unified community. These are 'situational' communities, which are activated at certain times and find supporters around the world. The community formed by the cartoon crisis is a good example: the politicization of the community was momentary but very intensive and widespread. It cannot be claimed, however, that a politicized situation will continue the same way for very long. The effects of the cartoon crisis will continue to be visible several years after the events, but the duration of active politicization and transnational actions has been limited. (Linjakumpu 2009, 41–9, 130–2.)

In the contemporary world, interaction among different actors is so varied that there is no longer any unambiguous or permanent opposition among them. Due to the openness of the networks, different conflicts can emerge within them rapidly. The influence of these is swift and powerful, but not necessarily long-lived. Thus the formation of identities should also be viewed more flexibly than before: the concepts of networks and processes allow for the dismantling of rigid confrontations which may not necessarily be realistic. Networks may also include actors who in another context might be enemies. In this context, a conflicting and layered concept of the actorness may help to explain the fact that political coalitions are increasingly flexible and unpredictable. (Linjakumpu 2009, 46–9.)

### **The Global *Umma* and Opportunity to Political Activity**

Muslims and Muslim states have in many respects ended up at the margin of international politics. Nationally political Islam is in most cases a form of opposition politics or is prohibited. The globalization development has also not necessarily been favorable to Islamically articulated political spaces. Muslims living in different parts of the world have not been the primary beneficiaries of globalization; rather, Muslim countries have been further marginalized by economic and cultural globalization in particular.

Islamically articulated politics often takes the role of defendant, in which a reactive and defensive position is assumed. However, it is misleading to

think that the politics conducted by Muslims consists merely of reactions to the actions of others, or that it lacks particular impact. The cartoon crisis is proof of the possibilities of political influence. It shook the existing political order; Muslim groups made use of direct political measures, threats and boycotts in an effort to influence Danish and thereby European and Western politics more generally. The international dispute had a significant impact in various countries: ministers resigned or were removed, diplomatic relations between states were severed or temporarily re-evaluated, political leaders commented on the issue and attempted to act as mediators.

The cartoon crisis, and the terrorism represented by Al-Qaeda, have been indications of a new kind of Islamic politics. This politics has broken loose from the context of the national state, assuming that it has ever been tied to it. It makes political activity possible for those Muslim actors who are otherwise excluded from politics. Contemporary forms of politicized Islam have successfully and significantly brought together Muslims representing different nationalities to act together. Even if the goals and struggles of local actors are different, a global awareness ties these struggles and communities together. Many Muslims cannot be political actors in the name of Islam in their home countries, because it would be against national interest. At a global level, the situation is different: globalized forms of Islam are mostly – though not exclusively – opposed to non-Muslim states, and can therefore function as a means of releasing tension for many Muslims in their home countries. In the same way, Muslims living in Europe can find a suitable way of expressing their Muslim identities in a global context.

Islamically articulated global activity does not unite the entire cultural-religious area; participation in it is as selective as participation in any other political community. The global *umma* is not a permanent form of political actorhood but more of a project-like political potential. Accordingly, we should keep in mind that the struggle for the Islamic public sphere does not exist only between the 'Islamic' and 'non-Islamic' worlds, but also between different Muslim actors. The current understanding of Islam and the global *umma* is influenced by Saudi-Arabian Wahhabism and Salafism, i.e. by highly conservative streams of Islamic thought (see e.g. Delong-Bas 2004, 305–11). Transnational Islamic politics represents the politics of the 'post-international' era: it is tied to questions of identity and ethnicity, separates itself from regional politics, and relies on support on the one hand from individual actors, on the other from a vast community (see Ferguson & Mansbach 2004).

All in all, this kind of activity does not necessarily modify major political structures or dominant power settings; there is no evidence of major political changes after 9/11. However, globalized forms of Islam are part of a shift in political discourse, in which individual conflicts create and shape the international political order and the transnational public sphere. The cartoon crisis demonstrated the significance of a *mass effect* as a producer of global Islam, of a struggle for the control of public sphere, and of the creation of counter-publics. It effectively connected earlier Islamic issues of dispute into a global narrative and a discursive struggle for existence.

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