

# When Cultures Collide

Observers around the world tell *TIME* how they view the cartoons--and the controversy they've sparked

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**FLEMMING ROSE** Culture editor of Denmark's Jyllands-Posten, who commissioned the drawings

In mid-September a Danish author went on the record as saying he had problems finding illustrators for a book about the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The [eventual] illustrator insisted on anonymity. Translators of a book by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Somali Dutch politician who has been critical of Islam, also insisted on anonymity. Then the Tate Britain in London removed an installation called God Is Great, which shows the Talmud, the Koran and the Bible embedded in a piece of glass. To me, all those spoke to the problems of self-censorship and freedom of speech, and that's why I wrote to 40 Danish cartoonists asking them to depict Muhammad as they see him.

Some of the cartoons turned out to be caricatures because this is just in the Danish tradition. We make fun of the Queen, we make fun of politicians, we make fun of more or less everything. Of course, we didn't expect this kind of reaction, but I am sorry if some Muslims feel insulted. This was not directed at Muslims. I wanted to put this issue of self-censorship on the agenda and have a debate about it.

**SAMIA AL-DUAIJ** Kuwaiti oil executive living in Belgium after two years in Denmark

These pictures aren't blasphemous, they're racist. I'm a very liberal Kuwaiti woman who cracks the odd joke about Islam, but I was extremely offended by these cartoons because I know what kind of society produced them. I am well educated and had a high-paying corporate job in Denmark, but I was still subjected to derogatory comments all the time because I look Middle Eastern. Every single second-generation Muslim Dane I met wanted to get the hell out. Why? They say, "We grew up here, but we feel unwelcome. We can't get jobs." Perhaps it's the same feeling that Jews felt at the time of the Nazis or black people in the U.S. in the '50s. It's just not funny. And I'm not even remotely religious.

But I have one question for the thousands of outraged Muslims. America kills thousands of Muslims, and you lose your head and withdraw ambassadors over a bunch of cartoons printed in a second-rate paper in a Nordic country with a population of 5 million? That's the true outrage.

**ALAN DERSHOWITZ** Harvard law professor

The U.S. news media, by refusing to run these cartoons, are giving in to intellectual and religious terrorism. A separate standard is being applied here out of fear of physical

retaliation. Whatever is fair to say about one group must be fair to say about another. The European papers are doing the right thing. They're being courageous. It is in the public's interest to see these cartoons that are causing so much outrage. When you see them, you see the extent of the overreaction. They are not nearly as bad as cartoons that routinely run in the Muslim media against Jews, Christians, the U.S. and Israel.

**HABIB DRIOUCH** Network engineer and second-generation French citizen of Moroccan origin

I consider myself 100% French. I believe in freedom of speech. The newspapers had the right to do what they did, but that does not mean they were right to do it. I would never go into a church or synagogue and start blasting music or yelling. It would be an insult. This is the same thing. The cartoons are dangerous in that they portray all Muslims as terrorists. One bad apple does not ruin the bunch. Extremists from both sides are going to use this to push their own agendas. With all the tension in the world right now, I really don't see why these journalists had to behave this way. What have they gained from this? Nothing.

**JACK SHAFER** Media critic, Slate

I've seen evangelical comics in the U.S. that make the minor blasphemy of the cartoon in Denmark seem like nothing. They ridicule the Prophet and all Muslim beliefs. But I defend the rights of the cartoonist. I think that if there's a free press, there's a right to commit blasphemy. If you cannot criticize or express an opinion about a religion in the modern era, we're in serious trouble.

**ABOUBAKR JAMAI** Editor of the Moroccan weeklies Assahifa al-Ousbouia and Le Journal Hebdomadaire

People are really hurt. You cannot analyze what is unfolding without putting the cartoons in the context of Iraq and Palestine. The cartoons are adding insult to injury. Not only are you invading and robbing our lands, you are insulting our faith. But let me say this and repeat it again and again: I am completely against banning these newspapers. People have the right not to read the newspapers. We don't need to shut them down, and we certainly don't need to kill people. Some people are reacting as if the way to protect Islam is to ban these things--like if you are exposed to too many cartoons, you'll become a Christian or an atheist. But faith is something you renew every day. You are exposed to things you do not like and keep your faith.

**YASMIN ALIBHAI-BROWN** Ugandan-born liberal Muslim columnist based in London

If they wanted to provoke a reaction, that reaction has been provoked. But when you're free, you have to live with the consequences of your words. The other European papers that reprinted the cartoons have the right to do so, but it's adolescent, like picking a fight in a pub.

I am deeply affronted by the link made between Muslims' faith and violence. If the cartoonists had shown a real terrorist with a bomb on his head, I wouldn't care less, but why should my faith be portrayed in this way? More Muslims' deaths are caused by the violence of Western politics than Muslims are responsible for causing. Using the freedom-of-expression argument, Europe has found yet another way of telling us we are not wanted, we do not belong. And I hate it.

**ANDREI SIMANTJUNTAK** Member of Indonesia's centrist Islamic Prosperous Justice Party

Why do you have to insult somebody to assert freedom of the press? Even if the Prophet were portrayed in a glorious light, it would still be insulting. Reprinting the cartoons is even more reprehensible. This is pushing moderate Muslims to the fringes and is like pouring alcohol on a wound. It shows there is some serious resentment out there toward Muslims.

**TARIQ RAMADAN** Swiss Muslim scholar and visiting fellow at Oxford University

Both sides are exaggerating. While it's true that the picture of the Prophet is strictly forbidden, Muslims have to understand that there is an old tradition in secular Western society to make fun of everything. To react emotionally is excessive. It is no longer a debate; it is a power struggle. We have to calm down. We don't want laws preventing people from being free to speak. But we should also not forget wisdom and decency when we are dealing with people. Democracy isn't just a legal framework. It is about respecting one another.