

Of Danish Cartoons, Muslim Rage and the Bedouin State of Mind

by Salim Mansur

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The furor in the winter of 2006 over cartoon drawings of Muhammad that appeared in Denmark was a repeat of the fury unleashed by Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses* first published in 1988. Now, as then, Muslims, or a great many of them worldwide, expressed outrage over the irreverent drawings of the prophet of Islam published in the Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, as they did with the fictional depiction of the prophet in Rushdie's novel. Now, as then, Muslim outrage was part spontaneous and part organized, and in varying measures seized upon by religious leaders, dictators, political opportunists, demagogues and rascals of all stripes, turned into a witch's brew and released into public space to go rampaging as demonstration of Muslim rage against those who profane what Muslims revere as sacred. Then, in February 1989, the dying Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran's Islamic Republic declared in a *fatwa*, non-binding religious ruling, the offending author of *The Satanic Verses* and those associated with its publication and distribution should be killed. Governments were intimidated as was the government of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in India, a non-Muslim majority state, and fearing public unrest Gandhi banned publication and distribution of the novel in the country of the author's birth. During this period a mob attacked the USIS office in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, and huge public demonstrations with ritualistic burning of Rushdie's novel were orchestrated from the streets of Dhaka, Bangladesh, to the streets of Bradford, England. Similarly now, mobs raged across the streets of Cairo, Tehran, Kabul and other such cities, and the mob in Damascus torched the Danish and Norwegian embassies and set fire to the Danish consulate in Beirut.

How should we explain such furor over cartoons, or works of fiction, that so readily seize Muslim sensitivities, and then spill over into the streets with appalling consequences? What is to be made of the cartoon controversy, and the earlier controversy surrounding Rushdie's novel? And what is the implication, if any, of such conduct on the part of Muslims for the West?

Before proceeding any further I need to clear a definitional problem that persists in confounding discussions of issues relating to the Muslim world. Here is how Bernard Lewis described the problem pertaining to the word *Islam*:

...the word itself is commonly used with two related but distinct meanings, as the equivalents both of Christianity and of Christendom. In the one sense it denotes a religion, a system of belief and worship; in the other, the civilization that grew up and flourished under the aegis of that religion.¹

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Marshall Hodgson of the University of Chicago suggested in his study of Arab-Muslim history, *The Venture of Islam*, the use of the word “Islamdom”, analogous to Christendom, to avoid the confusion which results from conflating religion and civilization in the singular usage of the word “Islam.” Hodgson’s suggestion has not been followed, and confusion remains perhaps because “Islamdom” does not sound right, or the traditional use of “Islam” with its ambiguity prevails as a matter of long standing habit, or the deference shown to the insistence of Muslim traditionalists and fundamentalists alike that Islam allows for no separation of religion and politics. I will restrict the use of Islam to mean civilization, as Lewis indicated, that emerged first among the Arabs and spread to other lands and peoples following the success of Muhammad in converting pagan Arabs from idolatry to monotheism in the first third of the seventh century in the Christian era.

In explaining events of such magnitude as the Danish cartoon controversy one needs to account for both proximate and underlying causes. The proximate cause was the cartoons published in a not well-known newspaper were shown by Muslim activists residing in Denmark to Arab leaders and among them was the religious leader Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian linked to the Muslim Brotherhood residing in Qatar with his own television program on al-Jazeera broadcast across the Middle East. This media savvy religious leader issued a *fatwa* demanding retraction and public apology by *Jyllands-Posten* that was echoed in the demand of the member states of the Organization of Islamic Countries during a December 2005 meeting of Muslim leaders in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The cartoons were published on September 30, 2005; some twelve weeks later, by early January 2006 the issue had stirred Muslim opinion and Muslim rage became a concern in capitals around the world. On January 30, 2006 *Jyllands-Posten* posted on its website an apology to Muslims for causing them pain, but the matter by then was no longer a local affair as Muslim countries initiated boycott of Danish products, and non-Muslims wondered where to draw the line between religious-cultural sensitivities and protecting values of an open secular-liberal democracy.

The reason for Muslim outrage was explained by Tariq Ramadan, grandson of Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Ramadan is based in Geneva, Switzerland and has been an adviser to the British home secretary on matters relating to Islam and Muslims. He wrote in the English newspaper *The Guardian*,

In Islam, representations of all prophets are strictly forbidden. It is both a matter of the fundamental respect due to them and a principle of faith requiring that, in order to avoid any idolatrous temptations, God and the prophets never be represented. Hence, to represent a prophet is a grave transgression.²

What Ramadan did not, and could not, provide was scriptural authority for his position. This is because there is no injunction against images or representation in the Quran for supporting such prohibition. Ramadan’s view and that of the religious leaders mostly belonging to the dominant-majority Sunni sect in Islam represented a traditional consensus on the matter.

This consensus was reached in the early years of the post-Prophetic period when Islam became an empire and Arabs came in contact with Jews and Christians in the Levant and, as Islam acknowledges Moses's Decalogue, the early theologians and jurists of the expanding empire adopted Jewish prohibition against graven image as part of their heritage. The only prohibition as an absolute principle of Islam, which makes it most strictly monotheistic, is not to join anything as equal to God or ascribe to Him any partner (Quran 6:152).

In the first recorded biography of the prophet, compiled and narrated by Ibn Ishaq (704-767) and available in English translation by Alfred Guillaume as *The Life of Muhammad*, there is the following anecdote from the incidents surrounding the conquest of Mecca in the year 630, or on the 8th year of the Islamic calendar:

When the apostle prayed the noon prayer on the day of the conquest he ordered that all the idols which were round the Ka`ba should be collected and burned with fire and broken up... Quraysh had put pictures in the Ka`ba including two of Jesus son of Mary and Mary (on both of whom be peace!)... The apostle ordered that the pictures should be erased except those of Jesus and Mary.³

Ibn Ishaq was born 75 years after the death of the prophet in Medina, the city where the prophet lived the last ten years of his life and is buried. He acquired his knowledge about the prophet from the second generation of traditionists who either witnessed the prophet themselves or learned about him from those who were with him. All subsequent historians of Islam, the most famous from the classical period being Abu Ja`far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (839-923), were indebted to Ibn Ishaq even as partisan hacks in the context of widening schisms and fratricidal warfare among Arabs sullied his name. But Ibn Ishaq's authority given his proximity to the prophet is greater than that of any Tariq Ramadan or Sheikh al-Qaradawi and their likes in the Muslim world, and his anecdote provides us with a deeper understanding of Islam's prohibition than the politics of those who unleash mobs in quest of their own ambitions. We find preserved in museums within the Muslim world, in Topkapi, Istanbul and in Bukhara and Samarkand, Uzbekistan, portraiture paintings done during the middle age depicting Muhammad in various situations, while depictions of other Biblical prophets were common, and portraits of Ali ibn Abi Talib (cousin and son-in-law of the prophet, fourth caliph of Islam and the first Imam of the Shiites) including his sons Hasan and Husayn (the second and third Shiite Imams) are readily found in present day Iran.

Flemming Rose, the culture editor of *Jyllands-Posten*, following the official apology of his newspaper explained to his readers his views on the matter of the cartoons he had published in a column as follows:

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 nonbeliever, 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.⁴

Respect or submission – the former may not be demanded and the latter can only be a result of compulsion – are the two polar elements involved in the furor unleashed by Muslims over the Danish cartoons. Ramadan’s view was the more polished expression of Muslim position that has elicited empathy among non-Muslim multiculturalists in the West. It spoke to that segment of educated opinion which has come to believe that though secular-democracy must maintain a clear line of separation between religion and politics, especially when that religion happens to be Christianity, it should accommodate in public sphere the prohibitions and sacred symbols belonging to non-Christian traditions, while making allowance for religious-based personal laws within immigrant communities. It sought submission in the guise of respect without showing any deference to the fact that secular-democracy has also evolved over time on a foundation of principles that is near-absolute to the extent permissible within the bounds of a written constitution as, for instance, in Canada, France and the United States.

The counter-position to Ramadan was framed by Ibn Warraq, a pseudonym of the author of *Why I Am Not A Muslim*, born in India, raised in Pakistan and settled in the United States. Ibn Warraq reminded the West of John Stuart Mill’s essay *On Liberty*. Mill wrote as if anticipating the West’s dilemma over Danish cartoons: “Strange it is that men should admit the validity of the arguments for free discussion, but object to their being ‘pushed to an extreme’, not seeing that unless the reasons are good for an extreme case, they are not good for any case. Strange that they should imagine that they are not assuming infallibility when they acknowledge that there should be free discussion on all subjects which can possibly be *doubtful*, but think that some particular principle or doctrine should be forbidden to be questioned because it is so *certain*, that is, because *they are certain* that it is certain.”⁵ Firmly staking his position on Mill and the enlightenment tradition that gave birth to secular-liberal democracy, Ibn Warraq observed,

The cartoons in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* raise the most important question of our times: freedom of expression. Are we in the west going to cave into pressure from societies with a medieval mindset, or are we going to defend our most precious freedom – freedom of expression, a freedom for which thousands of people sacrificed their lives?⁶

Danish cartoons, as did Salman Rushdie’s novel, unwittingly placed on edge two contrasting views held by two contrary civilizations, one modern and the other pre-modern, in collision. The irony in this situation is the view of the adherents of pre-modern civilization, demanding submission to its taboos by adherents of the modern civilization, emanates as much from within the boundaries of the modern civilization as it rages across its own pre-modern terrain. This is why there exists a degree of uncertainty in any answer to the question posed by Ibn Warraq.

The underlying causes in understanding the controversy surrounding Danish cartoons, or Rushdie affair, are more complex than explaining the proximate cause, since Muslim rage is symptomatic of a terrible malady within Islam. It reflects the irreparable breakdown of the civilization's centre that held together its constituent parts which at one time in history was co-equal, if not briefly superior, to Christendom. The question why did Islam, once dynamic and creative, stall, retreat, and then collapse from the pressures brought about by an expansive and far more creative West, has fascinated for sometime historians and philosophers both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. A recent speculation is to be found in Bernard Lewis's *What Went Wrong?* Among Muslim thinkers there have been many of as diverse background as Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938) born in India, Malik Bennabi (1903-73) from Algeria, or Fatima Mernissi (b. 1940) from Morocco, who have reflected upon the causes of Islam's decline. But there is none among Muslims who meditated about the apparent cycle of civilization's rise and fall as did Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406). He wrote with a keen sense of Islam's disintegration as Arab-Muslim power around the Mediterranean crumbled and Christendom in Europe, seen from the perspective of its advance in Spain at the expense of Arabs, began to edge ahead of Islam. In his book *Al-Muqaddimah* he proposed a pattern might be discerned from the study of history revealing the character of a people and the nature of society they construct or bring to ruin.

The causes for the decline of civilization are primarily internal. And when the collapse occurs, recalling W.B. Yeats's 'The Second Coming', "anarchy is loosed upon the world." Yeats meant by anarchy more than mere disorder, as did Ibn Khaldun some seven centuries earlier. In Yeats's poem when things fall apart the centre can no longer hold the caged beast which preys upon civilization, and when this beast is let loosed, as Ibn Khaldun witnessed, night descends on common humanity until some other power can slay the beast or return it to its cage.

The beast within Islam has been prowling for a very long time. Islam as religion was also a civilizing force in Arabia as it brought for a while some discipline to its native population, the Bedouins of the desert. But the Bedouins are, Ibn Khaldun wrote, "a savage nation, fully accustomed to savagery and the things that cause it... Such a natural disposition is the negation and antithesis of civilization. All the customary activities of the Bedouins lead to wandering and movement. This is the antithesis and negation of stationariness, which produces civilization."⁷ Ibn Khaldun unconstrained by political correctness observed how the Bedouins, if they were not caged by superior civilizing power, got loosed and preyed upon civilization to its ruins. He wrote:

It is noteworthy how civilization always collapsed in places the Bedouins took over and conquered, and how such settlements were depopulated and laid in ruin. The Yemen where Bedouins live is in ruins, except for a few cities. Persian civilization in the Arab Iraq is likewise completely ruined. The same applies to contemporary Syria.⁸

Bedouin is a state of mind, a psychology of a people, if we abstract from Ibn Khaldun's sociology, and not merely a description of an ethnic group. This state of mind thrives on anarchy, seeks anarchy where it is non-existent, and celebrates anarchy for the feast it is in preying upon the decaying corpse of civilization. This state of mind cannot build for it has not

the capacity to be stationery, as Ibn Khaldun observed, and make investment in energy and resources required for sedentary living as prerequisite for the making of civilization. Hence, this state of mind relishes in bringing ruin where order prevails. History, Ibn Khaldun concluded, is driven by the tension between the forces of civilization and the forces of its ruin, and this for him constituted the cycle of history.

But what is most remarkable about Ibn Khaldun's writings is that he conceived the idea of civilization in the singular. On reflection, however, this is not surprising. Ibn Khaldun was a Muslim, and he plumbed deeply into the message of the Quran even as he read Greek philosophers. The central message of Islam is the concept of unity, *tauhid*, that all of creation bears the stamp of a single author, of God being unique and supreme. From this axiom Ibn Khaldun did not require a philosophical leap to see that behind and beyond diversity and plurality of cultures is to be found the essence of human enterprise in history, its self-discovery of its common origin and its singular destiny. Thus in Ibn Khaldun's majestic speculation history of mankind is a movement from ignorance to knowledge, and knowledge in its most elevated sense is a common, shared resource of humanity. In civilization knowledge is of the higher sort, of knowledge organized, progressively cultivated and transmitted among people who commonly appreciate arts and sciences.

Islam before its decline began possessed plasticity to adapt what it borrowed from others – Persians, Hindus, Jews, Chinese, Greeks and Romans – and innovate as it improved upon the borrowings before transmitting them to others. By the time Napoleon made his entrance into the Middle East arriving in Egypt in 1798, or some decades earlier Robert Clive set in motion the conquest of India by defeating the massed army of Nawab Siraj-ud-Dowla of Bengal at the battle of Plassey in 1757, Islam's plasticity had hardened and Muslims as a people were ready to be colonized and ruled by Europeans. Ibn Khaldun had seen the beginning phase of Islam's cycle of decay, and he understood, as Yeats would under somewhat similar circumstances several centuries later, that the decline of civilization meant the caged beast would be let loosed unless held in check by the power of the rising new civilization. And, indeed, this is what occurred.

As Europe's star rose in civilization's firmament, European power expanded into Asia and Africa and kept the beast caged within Islam's boundaries. But when Europe reached its peak as civilizing order in the early decade of the last century exporting its enlightenment values and new political arrangements based on ideas of nationalism and democracy, the cycle of decline set in. Europe emasculated itself in two world wars, and with the civilization's ebb tide gaining momentum it began to retreat from Asia and Africa, more particularly from the lands of Islam, with unseemly haste. The post-colonial order Europe left behind among Muslims in the second-half of the twentieth century was mostly a pathetic caricature of European culture. Nowhere this caricature was more evident than in the post-Ottoman Turkey of Mustafa Kemal. Ottoman rulers of Islam once terrified Europeans, then when decay set their realm was dismissively referred to as the "sick man of Europe." Following the defeat of 1918 a truncated country of Turks emerged on the Anatolian peninsula with a tiny grasp of Europe remaining in its fist, and it has displayed ever since a divided identity of being neither any more Ottoman nor

sufficiently European to be recognized by other Muslims as a model of a reformed and democratic Muslim country.

Elsewhere the beast within Islam grew bolder and more invigorated as the artificial façade of a mongrel European order resting on decrepit foundations of pre-modern culture began to peel off. The effort to keep the beast in Islam caged, as I noted from Ibn Khaldun's writings, is part of a long history of civil war among Muslims. This civil war remained mostly unknown and distant to non-Muslims; occasionally Europeans, and then Americans, heard far away rumblings of battles that made little sense to them. In more recent times news about hanging of an elected prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan, or the tumultuous revolt of a people overthrowing a monarch, Mohammed Shah Pahlavi of Iran, or the public assassination of a military-president, Anwar Sadat of Egypt, raised concerns in the West and intellectuals or worldly-wise journalists got together to make sense of such events in London, Paris, and New York. But still these events and the civil war within Islam, despite infrequent attention, remained remote to the Western public. The West during these years was preoccupied with the Cold War against its Bolshevik-Communist nemesis in the Soviet Union. When reversals as in Vietnam or the shock of oil-price quadrupling resulting from the Middle East conflict occurred, these were explained away as peripheral costs of the Cold War. Then the Cold War ended luckily without a nuclear Armageddon, and the West, particularly the United States with the restoration of Democrats in the White House, took holiday from history after the mighty Cold War exertions of the previous four decades. As Bill Clinton and his party-goers, like the French Bourbons of whom was said they never learned much nor forgot much, indulged themselves during the final decade of the last century in frivolous escapades, the beast within Islam smashed through its retaining walls and went on rampage beyond Islam's domain. The attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001 brought the long simmering Islam's civil war into America's heartland, and into Europe. This civil war whose primary victims have been Muslims is no longer merely a matter of local or regional interest for it is the first global war – some might call it the first post-modern war, whatever that means – of the 21st century.

The origin of the civil war in Islam is located in the conflicting claims over authority in the immediate years following the demise of the prophet in the year 632. Usurped power, and the demand placed on religion with acquiescing religious leaders in the service of power, shaped the characteristics of Islam as civilization. Bedouin disposition of raging against civilization was also instrumental in the shaping of Islam. The modern faces of this disposition, or the beast set loose, are those of Osama Bin Laden and his coterie of terrorists in the al Qaeda network; the mob in the streets of the Muslim world serves the beast as retainers; and Muslim intellectuals and religious leaders such as Tariq Ramadan and Sheikh al-Qaradawi serve the beast as apologists and propagandists.

Ibn Khaldun did not indulge in romanticism, unlike Jean-Jacques Rousseau's depiction of the savage as noble, when describing Bedouins and their culture as anti-civilization. Bedouins are crafty as they must be to survive in the hostile environment of the desert. In modern times

the founding ruler of the Saudi dynasty, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud (1880-1953), displayed amply the craftiness of Bedouin chiefs to acquire and maintain power in Arabia that is constantly prone to challenge by competing Bedouin tribes. The intriguing aspect of modern-day Bedouins, exemplified by the House of Saud, has been their capacity to straddle the increasing tension between the modern world of science and democracy and their own disposition against modernity which defines contemporary civilization.

Osama Bin Laden being true to his Bedouin heritage has over-ridden this tension by seizing products of the modern world and turning them into his weapons against civilization. But the al Qaeda chief could have been captured or slain, as the Ottoman rulers did with the marauding bands of Bedouins, if the rulers of the Muslim world were committed in destroying the beast that has brought ruin to Islam. The bewildering fact is, however, that so many of Muslim rulers and their people sympathize with the beast and share its rage against the modern world and its dominant powers, particularly the United States. In delving into this rage for explanation the curious fact surfaces – in retrospect not surprising – the extent to which Muslim sympathy for the beast draws support from the internal opposition within the West to secular-liberal democracy and the West's economic success in terms of capitalism.

A civilization that loses its inner plasticity, the Algerian writer Malek Bennabi noted, has lost "its aptitude to progress and to renew itself," and hence, "little by little the Muslim world came to a stop like a motor that had consumed its last litre of petrol."⁹ The place of creative thinking in such society, which requires openness and tolerance for criticism, gets substituted by politics of resentment and grievances. In a seminal essay published by the *Atlantic Monthly* in September 1990, Bernard Lewis explained 'The Roots of Muslim Rage' resulting from a mood of hostility and rejection "due to a feeling of humiliation – a growing awareness, among the heirs of an old, proud, and long dominant civilization, of having been overtaken, overborne, and overwhelmed by those whom they regarded as their inferiors."

This mood is infectious, addictive and, ultimately, provides a crutch for a people unable and unwilling to be creative and taking responsibility for their history instead of blaming others. In a long list of intellectuals and writers who fed this mood, even as the beast roamed and plotted among sympathetic crowds, there were two Palestinian-Americans, Edward Said (1935-2003) and Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1921-1986) who proved to be specially gifted in packaging the politics of resentment.

Edward Said was a professor of contemporary literature at Columbia University in New York, and he devoted his talents to give respectability to this mood with his polemics against the West and its perfidy at the expense of Islam by indulging Jews, supporting Zionism and defending Israel. His book *Orientalism*, much celebrated among third world students and intellectuals with their Western sympathizers, is a polemic masquerading as scholarship providing Arabs and Muslims a stick with which to beat the imperialist West for the impoverishment of the Orient, particularly the Middle East, and the systematic exploitation of its resources. Said blamed Western scholars, in particular those of Anglo-American background, specializing in the study of the Orient of enclosing and representing the Orient and its people,

Arabs and Muslims specifically, in an essentialist manner by dehumanizing them and in depicting them as the “other” of the civilized Europeans. In such representation Said found, “On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things.”¹⁰ The study of the Orient, of acquiring knowledge about it and representing it amounted to a “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”¹¹ The relationship between the Occident and Orient, Said theorized, is “a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.”¹² He then concluded, “It is therefore correct that every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.”¹³ In a reverse reductionism Said explained the West to Arabs and Muslims, representing the tremendously diverse Occident with its writers, historians, painters variously involved in learning and knowing other cultures in an essentialist manner, no different than what he accused the West in portraying the Orient negatively. Danish cartoons simply confirmed to Arabs and Muslims across the vast realm of Islam, from Morocco to Indonesia, the inherent racism of Europe as Said had shown by deconstructing the Orientalist discourse as racist.

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi was a professor of Islamic Studies at Temple University in Philadelphia, and he devoted his considerable energy to popularizing his idea of “Islamization” as cure-all for Muslims and Islam. In 1982 al-Faruqi published his manifesto called *Islamization of Knowledge*. He began as follows:

The world-*ummah* of Islam stands presently at the lowest rung of the ladder of nations. In this century, no other nation has been subjected to comparable defeat or humiliation. Muslims were defeated, massacred, robbed of their land and wealth, of their life and hope. They were double-crossed, colonized and exploited; proselytized and forcefully or bribefully converted to other faiths. And they were secularized, westernized and de-Islamized by internal and external agents of their enemies. All this happened in practically every country and corner of the Muslim world. Victims of injustice and aggression on every count, the Muslims were nonetheless vilified and denigrated in the representations of all nations. They enjoy the worst possible ‘image’ in the world today. In the mass media of the world, the ‘Muslim’ is stereotyped as aggressive, destructive, lawless, terrorist, uncivilized, fanatic, fundamentalist, archaic and anachronistic. He is the object of hatred and contempt on the part of all non-Muslims, whether developed or underdeveloped, capitalist or Marxist, Eastern or Western, civilized or savage. The Muslim world itself is known only for its inner strife and division, its turbulence and self-contradictions, its wars and threat to world peace, its excessive wealth and excessive poverty, its famine and cholera epidemics. In the minds of people everywhere the Muslim world is the ‘sick man’ of the world; and the whole world is led to think that at the root of all these evils stands the religion of Islam. The fact that the *ummah* counts over a billion, that its territories are the vastest and the richest, that its potential in human, material and geo-political resources is the greatest, and finally that its faith – Islam – is an integral, beneficial, world-affirming and realistic religion, makes the defeat, the humiliation and the misrepresentation of Muslims all the more intolerable.¹⁴

Such thinking over-flowing with self-pity found a captive audience in the streets and capitals of the Muslim world, for Said and al-Faruqi had taken Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* – which Jean-Paul Sartre celebrated by noting “the Third World finds *itself* and speaks to *itself* through his voice”¹⁵ – and Islamized its sentiment. Fanon's heated polemics excused the violence and its excesses of the colonized against the colonizers, for his wretched of the earth could do no wrong in righting all the wrongs done by the Europeans to him and his people. In Iran Muslim intellectuals turned radical, such as Ali Shariati (1933-1977), were greatly influenced by Fanon. This mood found its fulsome expression when Ayatollah Khomeini as the father of the Islamic Republic of Iran approved the storming of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and taking American diplomats as hostages, and thereby repudiated all accepted norms and protocols of international politics and diplomacy. It is the same mood of repudiation that exults in burning flags and effigies of Western countries and their leaders, or torching their embassies. The beast within Islam, the Bedouin psychology that once found thrill in bringing ruin to Muslim civilization, now set loose finds itself invigorated by this mood among a large segment of Muslims and is encouraged to strike with impunity countries most representative of contemporary global civilization that so many Muslims find unbearable.

This mood brimming with humiliation, suffused with resentment and burdened with grievances, should be recognized for what it is, a symptom of Islam broken down. It is not a mood that is inherent in Muslims as a people, or a mood that is an attribute in some manner to the religion of Islam. On the contrary, Muslims like any people of any other faith-traditions have a great sense of hilarity in their literature, art, poetry and music. Amir Taheri, the Iranian political writer and columnist, notes,

The truth is that Islam has always had a sense of humor and has never called for chopping heads as the answer to satirists... Both Arabic and Persian literature, the two great literatures of Islam, are full of examples of “laughing at religion,” at times to the point of irreverence... those familiar with Islam's literature know of Ubaid Zakani's “Mush va Gorbeh” (Mouse and Cat), a match for Rabelais when it comes to mocking religion. Sa'adi's eloquent soliloquy on behalf of Satan mocks the “dry pious ones.” And Attar portrays a hypocritical sheikh who, having fallen into the Tigris, is choked by his enormous beard. Islamic satire reaches its heights in Rumi, where a shepherd conspires with God to pull a stunt on Moses; all three end up having a good laugh.¹⁶

It is true, however, that this self-pitying mood has had a dampening effect within the Muslim world, and Muslim fundamentalists have succeeded through violence and support from unelected leaders, for example military dictators in Pakistan, in intimidating Muslims to comply with their literal-minded, bigoted and witless interpretations of the Quran and the *sharia*, the legal norms constructed by religious scholars in the first two centuries of Islam.

In his *Atlantic Monthly* essay Bernard Lewis introduced the phrase “a clash of civilizations” in explaining the quarrels of Muslims against the West. Samuel Huntington

borrowed Lewis's phrase and used it as a title and theme for his 1993 *foreign Affairs* essay, and later his book. Lewis wrote,

It should now be clear that we are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations – the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both. It is crucially important that we on our side should not be provoked into an equally historic but also equally irrational reaction against that rival.¹⁷

Lewis cautioned the West against being provoked, but the beast set out to deliberately provoke. Then the provocations of September 11, 2001 amounting to acts of war required response adequate to the challenge the beast had mounted. It is in the context of the war on terror or, more appropriately, Islamist terror, we need to assess the implication of the Danish cartoon controversy. The war on Islamist terror is not a clash of civilizations, rather it is a war against a mood striving for some ideological coherence that needs to be purged, and the beast exploiting this mood killed or caged.

Islam as civilization crashed a long time ago as Malek Bennabi noted, the fuel driving it exhausted. The question for Muslims is how they will reconcile themselves with civilization based on secular-liberal democratic values and modern science in the 21st century recognizing, as they must, mixing religion and politics means remaining confined within authoritarian politics tending towards totalitarianism and a corrupted religion. For the West, the question is how to prevent the detritus of Islam still extant and its rampaging beast still breathing fire from undermining the values of freedom and democracy at the centre of its history.

Through the Cold War decades we heard from a body of opinion in the West that shared in the goals of its communist adversary in the Soviet Union. This body of opinion is skeptical of democracy, and opposes freedom as the fundamental liberal value. Jean-Francois Revel, the French public intellectual and author of *The Totalitarian Temptation*, explained, "The totalitarian phenomenon is not to be understood without making allowance for the thesis that some important part of every society consists of people who actively want tyranny: either to exercise it themselves or – much more mysteriously – to submit to it. Democracy will therefore always remain at risk."¹⁸ This body of opinion takes refuge in the ideology of multiculturalism, romanticizes culture and history of the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, seeks support for its anti-capitalist ideology in the politics of resentment and grievances, and readily denigrates the culture which served as the cradle for enlightenment, modern science and democracy. The Danish cartoon controversy showed this body of opinion being in sympathy with the Muslim outrage arguing for abridgement of the freedom of expression in open society, a right protected by constitution in liberal-democracies, as a demonstration of solidarity with people at odds with modern civilization. This body of opinion ironically has a greater capacity to do harm to liberal-democracy and the open society than any outrage of Muslims orchestrated to extract concessions from non-Muslims. It has an enervating effect on those in Europe and America on whose conviction and strength rests the defense of modern civilization. It feeds upon an excess of white

guilt about past sins and, as Shelby Steele recently observed, “this guilt makes our Third World enemies into colored victims, people whose problems – even the tyrannies they live under – were created by the historical disruptions and injustices of the White West.”¹⁹ This is the paradox of our time, and for liberals the perennial dilemma to contend with while remaining true to liberal ideals.

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- ¹ B. Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 3.
- ² Tariq Ramadan, "Cartoon conflicts," in *The Guardian* (UK), Monday 6 February 2006.
- ³ A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*. A translation of Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 552.
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