

take a principled stand for free speech but also played into the hands of those who accuse Islam of being a monolithic force against freedom. And, as Ayaan Hirsi Ali has pointed out many times, such self-censorship only tightens the grips of intimidation and fear.

Leon Wieseltier recently observed in a *New Republic* essay on the Cordoba House mosque controversy in New York that Islam—like Christianity and Judaism have been—“is a religion of peace and a religion of war.” We need to be open and honest about both sides of this equation and to build bridges to the former in a manner that is consistent with our principles. Free and honest speech is an indispensable means to this end.

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Jytte Klausen’s book is an outstanding exemplar of a rare genre in the discipline: a book on an event—short of a war, peace agreement, or other interstate crisis—that benefits from the knowledge and sophistication of a political scientist with the drive to follow the trails that a good journalist should not ignore. This is not a book of generalizing social science and does not aim to be one. It does, however, dig deeply into one of those events that have become and will remain powerfully symbolic in defining relationships among Western states, their publics, and their Muslim minorities. As an expert in the field, Klausen provides contextual analysis and a balanced and reasonable interpretation of events. Her analysis effectively challenges the increasingly dominant and essentializing discourse on Islam and Muslims in the context of this crisis and in general.

New narratives on Muslim minorities and Islam more broadly are being woven in most Western countries. These narratives threaten to supplant the previously hegemonic humanistic ones that do not consider faith, ethnicity, or culture as proxies for an individual’s worth, abilities, political views, or potential for violence. The building blocks of these new narratives are myths of Muslim cunning, cohesiveness and unity of purpose, danger to the country’s security, propensity for crime, cultural threat and inferiority, misogyny, homophobia, desire for political and legal subversion, anger, hatred, organized abuse of the country’s services and institutions, and cultural implacability. The new narratives are produced by some politicians who hope to shore up their share of the vote, religious leaders who see in Islam a vital rival religion, racists who find a religion-based narrative of discrimination to be more widely acceptable than race-based ones, media barons with markets and ideology on their minds, right-wing pro-Israel activists who view the integration of Western Muslim minorities as a threat to their interests, governments that want to appear tough on security matters, and conservatives who fear change.

The new narratives are fanciful. They negatively affect the lives and livelihood of some 20 million Western Muslims but depend on fallacious generalizations from rare acts—the words of the fanatical imam, the outrages committed by the odd criminal gang, the story of a woman who decided to abandon her Islamic faith, jealousy and honor crimes, and attacks by terrorist organizations with limited support. There is no mention in these narratives of what many European Muslims (and those who simply appear to be Muslim) endure: extreme discrimination in

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the job market, hate crimes, bullying in the media and by politicians, scapegoating, derogatory treatment in person and collectively in the public sphere, mistreatment by law enforcement, poor provision of services that are more readily available for the dominant ethnicity, and manipulation by state institutions and poor representation within them.

The new narratives are dangerous. They provide the foundations for new policies that restrict the legal, religious, human, civil, economic, and political rights of those who are associated with Islam or with Muslim backgrounds. In some cities, they are producing segregated communities where the “Muslim” has access to lesser education, services, opportunities, protection from crime, employment, and respect. They are hindering integration in a way that would allow their advocates to perversely claim that their narratives have always been true. They are used to bully and marginalize “Muslims” in the public sphere, the media, the political arena, the school, the workplace and the street. They are helping produce a counter-discourse of resistance, implacable “Western” hatred of “Islam,” and violence among populations that were largely indifferent to them in the past.

Those who do weave these Islamophobic narratives both imbue tragedies, crises, events, or affairs that involve Muslims (the Park 51 mosque, the murder of Theo Van Gogh, the attacks in London and Madrid, the Rushdie affair, etc.) with specific and simplistic meanings and then use them to reinforce the broader narrative. The project by a Muslim American group to build a Muslim community center two blocks away from the site of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 to serve tens of thousands of Muslims who live and work in Manhattan, for example, becomes the Muslims’ attempt to build a victory mosque at Ground Zero. It matters little to those who produce these narratives that the leader of the group behind the proposed Islamic center is a Sufi (mystical) Muslim who officially served both the Bush and Obama administrations in promoting the image of the United States abroad and that his understanding of Islam could cost him his life if he were within the reach of those who perpetuated the terrorist attacks. In the worldview of the new narratives’ weavers, Muslims are united in their hatred of the West and their desire to impose Islamic law within it.

To research in depth and without prejudice such iconic events deprives the anti-Muslim narratives of reinforcing rhetorical pillars. This is indeed what Klausen’s balanced analysis does. Her analysis substantiates a reasonable, logical, and compelling discourse: The crisis was driven by the calculations, objectives, and strategies of manipulative politicians, media figures, and religious leaders. Publics, both Western and Muslim, were manipulated by scheming elites, including some extremist European imams, a cunning and ideologically motivated Danish prime minister, and some devious Middle Eastern leaders. Such an

analysis and the reasonable narrative it supports leave little room for a Manichean discourse of a conflict between the West and Islam, as Klausen herself mentions. As one would expect, nonacademic reviewers with an ideological bent have criticized Klausen’s argument precisely because it challenges their narrative on Muslims’ unity of purpose in Islamizing the West and obliterating its cultures.¹ For partisan critics, her attempt at rigor and open inquiry, and her efforts to understand the range of reactions and motivations among Muslims, are discomfiting.

Groupthink is very dangerous. It could lead to harmful policies and extreme societal behavior. It is neither in the interest of non-Muslim Western publics nor their substantial Muslim minorities to foster the development of ghettoized, ostracized, and bitter minorities. And yet, this is exactly what many politicians, media figures, and activists are doing. They engage in a deeply offensive discourse and promote discriminatory policies (forbidding the wearing of scarves in French schools or by Belgian lawyers or professors, for example) without even considering how their Muslim compatriots would feel or be affected. Theirs is a model of integration by coercion and belittlement, not by conviction. They also seem oblivious to the perception by Muslims elsewhere in this interconnected world of their words and actions. The prospects for the future could be particularly dim in Europe in particular if the political cultures of countries such as Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium do not begin to tilt toward the active promotion of equality and social advancement for all minorities. Groupthink must therefore be challenged for the long-term benefit of all, but who could do it?

Scholars are in a rare position to provide society with this necessary service, particularly when the targeted group does not have the organizational capacity or enough educated thinkers among its members to provide a compelling counterdiscourse, as is the case among European Muslims on the Continent in particular. European Muslim intellectuals are too few and have too little access to the media (except perhaps for Tariq Ramadan). Their organizations are weak, fragmented, and often manipulated by their countries’ governments and the regimes of their countries of origin (particularly Turkey, Morocco, and Algeria). And political and academic institutions in Europe tend to recruit and promote those who have a harsh view of their own cultural and religious heritage, particularly among Muslims. I find in my own research, for example, that an overwhelming majority of elected officials of Muslim background on the Continent tend to be secular and to rarely advocate on behalf of causes that affect people of a similar demographic background. Some are even anti-Islam activists. This leaves very few groups and individuals capable of countering the increasingly strident and increasingly dominant anti-Muslim narrative or willing to do so—human rights groups such as SOS Racisme

in France, some non-Muslim religious organizations, a few leftist and some “green” organizations and parties, some student or youth organizations, and of course, academics.

An academic who takes responsibility for researching a contested event such as those involving Western Muslims takes serious risks. They include professional risks because such topics do not lend themselves to the kind of cutting-edge social scientific work that helps advance academic careers. The work, if it receives enough attention, will necessarily be perceived as controversial, no matter how impartial it truly is, because its findings could be used to substantiate one narrative over another. This may lead to criticism within the academy by colleagues and administrators on matters both essential and tangential to the analysis. The rigor of the study may get lost in public and raucous debates that have little to do with the substance of the author’s argument. And the author may be subjected to unpleasant attacks by aggressive activists who prefer intimidation to engagement. These are some reasons why it is rare to find books written by political scientists that analyze contested events that are short of a war, a diplomatic near-catastrophe, or a major peace treaty. Jytte Klausen had the courage to write such a book and did face some of the adverse effects, including the distracting debate on Yale University Press’s decision not to include the cartoons and an academic reviewer’s protests against her comparison of some cartoons with anti-Jewish ones.²

The public debate over Yale University Press’s decision brought considerable attention to *The Cartoons That Shook the World*, and attention is very valuable, but it also distracted from the book’s important thesis. The proponents of the anti-Muslim narrative found in this decision proof that “Muslims” have successfully intimidated Western institutions into submitting to their norms—the exact opposite of the thrust of Klausen’s own argument. The proponents of the anti-Muslim narrative were spared from having to address the author’s arguments head-on and were offered yet another symbolic event to frame in a way that would serve to reinforce their worldview.

Today’s contested events, such as the cartoons crisis, sit at the intersection of very complex and far-flung political processes. They require expertise in more areas than most members of the general public, politicians, journalists, or even academics can muster. This is why they are so easy to caricature (the cartoon crisis is about Muslims’ intolerance of free speech or the West’s hate for Islam). But there often is an academic with the suitable breadth of knowledge to acquire and spread a better understanding of an event. Jytte Klausen was particularly well placed to research this crisis: She is an expert on Islam in Europe, a Danish citizen who is very familiar with the country’s language and political culture, and removed enough from the emotional turmoil by virtue of being an academic in the United States. Even she, however, did not have the full set of skills

needed to cover all dimensions and causes of this crisis—she is not an expert on the politics of Muslim countries whose publics, governments, and oppositions played a role in the events. Indeed, her analyses of the politics of Muslim countries are probably the only relatively weak section of an otherwise terrific book.

Klausen’s book provides a fascinating and revealing account of the ways in which manipulation by elites produces political dynamics that could simplistically be reduced to a clash of civilizations or religions. It was not hard to understand why European “Muslims” in general, both religious and not, were offended by the caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad—all one had to do was ask. However, the little space Western Muslims are given in the public sphere (particularly by the mainstream media) and their limited representation in academic and political institutions allowed the powerful actors arrayed against them to interpret and portray discontent and the aggressive behavior of a few as a clash of civilizations and cultures. In fact, most Danish Muslims were not displeased with the caricatures, and with *Jyllands-Posten*’s so-called experiment in free speech, because they hate free speech and Western values but because they understood this “experiment” to be yet another attempt to collectively belittle them, humiliate them, bully them, marginalize them and make an argument about the inferiority of their cultures if not their ethnicities.

Those who observe other “crises” involving European Muslims can easily identify a pattern. Most Dutch Muslims had such feelings but moved on with their lives when Theo Van Gogh and Ayaan Hirsi-Ali released their video mocking Islam. Swiss Muslims did the same when minarets, which hardly existed in the country, were banned in a 2009 referendum. Invariably, however, an extremist organization or manipulative government finds an opportunity to use the event to appear as the champion of Muslims for reasons that have little to do with the event itself: The assassin of Van Gogh belonged to an extremist group (Takfir wal-hujra) wanting to shore up its own support, and Libyan President Muammar al-Qaddafi declared a “jihad” on Switzerland to get even for the arrest of one of his sons on criminal charges. Western elites who propel the narrative of civilizational and religious clashes then use these political reactions as evidence of the unity of Muslims and of their destructive intent. Manipulative Western and Muslim elites benefit from each other’s polarizing strategies. They may detest each other, but their strategies are often mutually beneficial—they help both to mobilize domestic support and divert attention from poor governance.

The brilliance of Klausen’s book is in its straightforward way of tracing the sequence of events, identifying agendas, deconstructing motives and strategies, and explaining outcomes. The author shuns jargon and speaks to a wider audience. She uses simple and accessible logic and ignores general theories, except to disprove their relevance

(the clash of civilizations approach). She clearly realized that such a book requires the academic to change her language, simplify her methods, and replace the scholar's research design with the journalist's following of leads. This is in clear contrast with her previous book (*The Islamic Challenge*, 2005), which was impressive in its methodological social-scientific rigor but could not, by itself, have affected public opinion or discourses on Islam in the West. The way Klausen manages the shift is impressive and provides a model for academics who want to impact policy, public perceptions, and societal discourse on important matters.

Crises involving Western Muslims like the one centered on the Danish cartoons, and the patterns of polarization by elites that they produce, are likely to get repeated. Each time they are repeated, the anti-Muslim narratives in Europe and North America and the anti-Western narratives among Muslims become more accepted. The attention that Klausen's book received makes it harder for the proponents of the anti-Muslim narrative to use this specific crisis to bolster their claims. If only for this reason, the book should be a model for analyzing other such crises, past and present. Too much is at stake for Western countries and their Muslim minorities to leave the interpretation of the meaning of powerful events solely to those with narrow self-serving agendas. Narratives of threat and danger can be very destructive, as Europe's past history attests, and they need to be debunked before it becomes too late.

Notes

- 1 See notably Ezra Levant's review in Canada's *Globe and Mail* (24 December 2010, F13). The review itself contains statements of the type used in weaving the anti-Muslim narrative, such as "If 9/11 was the hard jihad using suicide bombers, the cartoon controversy was the soft jihad of 'lawfare,' using diplomats and lawyers."
- 2 Eddy Portnoy, "The Cartoons That Disappeared," *Jewish Daily Forward*, 12 February 2010.

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Religion and freedom of speech have never had an easy history, as events surrounding publication of what became known as "the Danish cartoons" have illustrated only too well. On September 30, 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a set of 12 cartoons in its culture section. These were accompanied by an editorial questioning the commitment of Muslims in Denmark to Danish values, especially that of free speech. What seemed to some readers as merely an exercise in bad taste or cultural insensitivity turned into an international crisis, one that still reverberates today. Largely thanks to the furor over the cartoons, in spring 2009, the United Nations Human Rights Council approved a nonbinding resolution banning what the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), an intergovernmental association of 57 predominantly Islamic states, calls "defamation of religion."¹

Given the consequences of the newspaper's decision to publish the cartoons, one can ask, "What were the editors thinking?" Jytte Klausen's book does an excellent job of telling us (the short answer is that they wanted to test a claim that free expression in Denmark had become a casualty of sensitivity to religious beliefs). But the book goes beyond explaining the editors' motives; it explains why and how the 12 caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad and of Islam published in a newspaper with a circulation of about 120,000 in a small country sparked violent riots in Africa and the Middle East, death threats, attempted assaults against some of the artists, diplomatic crises, and a potentially successful effort by the OIC to have the UN add defamation of religion to its list of human rights violations. This is not a theory-generating or hypothesis-testing book. Klausen mentions social movement theory and occasionally asks if it applies to a situation, but she is not developing or testing arguments in standard social-scientific fashion. The book's strength is its reporting of her interviews with many of the protagonists of the controversy. It becomes apparent that the cartoons "shook the world" not just because they became fodder for political conflicts, as Klausen argues, but because they fed upon and exacerbated cultural misunderstandings and became a crucible for opponents and proponents of the unfettered right to free speech.

In what follows, I want to address three aspects of Klausen's work: 1) the tension between free speech and respect for religion evident in the book and in real-world events, 2) the level of cultural misunderstanding and its spread via modern media and technology, and 3) the book's own problematic organization.

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