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Should Voltaire be a Prophet in his Own Country?
- *An analysis of the media's treatment of the cartoon crisis in France*

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Introduction

In France, the cartoon crisis had little media coverage before February 1st, 2006. Until then, the French media had treated the international reactions to the Danish cartoons as a diplomatic event, unrelated to the national context or to journalism as a trade in France. It was only when daily newspaper *France Soir* printed the Danish cartoons along with one of their own cartoons that the crisis “was brought home”, and that certain opinion pieces appeared in the French press, along with reactions from public intellectuals, politicians and Muslim organizations in France. The process of public dialogue was particularly revealing as regards the structure of the political field and the ways in which various religious or ethnic minorities are staged in France, and the discourses underlying the opinion pieces published during the debate related the crisis to specific historical and contemporary issues, or themes such as the Republic or *laïcité*¹.

The following analysis of the French media’s treatment of the cartoon crisis is based on an extensive analysis of a sample of six newspapers that we believe to be representative of the French media landscape, from a political point of view. Several factors were taken into consideration as we created our sample. Along with *France Soir*, we chose *Libération* and *Le Monde*, that published a selection of the cartoons; and *Le Figaro*, *La Croix*, *La Dépêche du Midi*, that chose not to publish them. We read all articles published in the aforementioned six newspapers between January 15th and March 15th. Among the many editorials, comments, columns, letters to the editor, and articles, we selected a large number of particularly interesting texts, to which we would pay special attention as French public intellectuals, editors, and journalists would reflect more specifically on the freedom of expression debate or on the state of journalists’ and the media’s roles. Furthermore, we read all news materials in two newspapers, covering the period from January 15th to February 15th, choosing *Libération* and *Le Figaro*, for this sample, as the first is left-wing and the other right-wing and thus very close to the current government.

Table 1. Opinion stories in the sample

	Libération	Le Figaro	La Croix	Dépêche du Midi	Le Monde	France Soir
Copies sold, daily	140,200	332,000	96,550	193,800	352,800	52,450
Editorial	2	3	2	1	2	10
Column by public intellectual	13	15	3	17	6	8
Column by journalist	7	36	3	7	3	15
Total	22	55	8	25	11	33

In part one, we will give a brief account of the French historical, legal, political, cultural, and media landscapes, in order to offer an understanding of the specific context in which certain French newspapers chose to publish part of or all Danish cartoons – or chose not to, as well as the background for mainstream journalism and public reactions to the cartoon controversy. In part two, we will account for the way the crisis was “brought home”, the evolutions of the debates related to the cartoon crisis and the specific dynamics of the French media field.

¹ No English word seems to capture the meaning of “Laïcité”, which is sometimes translated to “laicity”, or to secularism. “Laïcité” covers a separation between the Church and the State, which implies the absence of interference by religion in government affairs, and that the State refrains from taking position on religious doctrine, as long as it is not contrary to the Law.

In part three, we will present three different types of discourse and their different variations that we identified as constitutive of the debates surrounding reflections on the role of journalists, the media, and the law, as the cartoon crisis revealed them in France.

1. The French Context

1.1. The Media in France

The press in France really took off during the French Revolution in 1789, as more than 200 different newspapers were founded within a few months only (Charon 2003). With the progressive elimination of illiteracy during the 19th Century, the number of readers of newspapers increased. The Dreyfus affair is very symbolic of the development of the public debate and the empowerment of the written press by the end of the century.

Before the development of journalism as a distinct occupation, public persons who were not only commentators but also actors of the political life of the time would write in the newspapers. Only by the end of the 19th century, a series of bills were passed that were to set a legal frame for journalism and guarantee the freedom of the press². By the beginning of the 20th century, a trade union for journalists was founded, and the press card was introduced in 1936.

As in other European countries, the media landscape was profoundly altered by the introduction of the radio in the twenties and by the television in the forties. In the sixties and seventies, the success of magazines also contributed in changing the press, to a certain degree, as around one hundred new magazines have been created every year for the last twenty years.

Today, there are ten national daily newspapers in France³, mostly bought by readers in Paris and Ile-de-France, the region of the capital. In other regions of France, the main regional newspaper often has a monopoly position. The most dynamic sector of the French press is the nine weekly news magazines⁴ that offer severe competition to the national daily press. As in other countries, the daily national press faces another – fairly recent – challenge, with the arrival of free daily newspapers⁵.

Great industrial groups, that have built their empires on public bids in areas such as construction and the weapon industry⁶, own the great majority of the national media, whether the written press or radio and television. The regional press, however, is primarily owned by

² Law of July 29th, 1881.

³ *Aujourd'hui / Le Parisien, La Croix, L'Humanité, Le Figaro, France Soir, Libération, Le Monde, Présent, Les Échos, and La Tribune.*

⁴ *L'Express, Le Point, Le Nouvel Observateur, Valeurs Actuelles, Courrier international, Marianne, Paris Match, and VSD.*

⁵ *Métro and 20 Minutes.*

⁶ For instance, Dassault, a major weapon construction firm owns the national newspaper *Le Figaro*. Lagardère - a major group in the aviation and weapon industry – owns a major national radio station, Europe 1, as well as Hachette Filipacchi Média, the biggest international group in the magazine sector, that also owns several newspapers in the south of France. Bouygues, a major construction firm owns TF1, the most popular national television channel. Canal +, a private and very influential television channel that also subsidises French cinema, is owned by Vivendi Universal.

groups that traditionally belong to the sector of the written press, and several influential television channels and radio stations are State-owned.

1.2. Freedom of Expression and Control of the Media

In France, freedom of expression is guaranteed by Article 11 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen from 1789, of constitutional value⁷. The right to freedom of expression is also guaranteed under international law through numerous human rights instruments. French law also prohibits public speech or writings that incite to hatred or violence against people on the basis of their sexual orientation, to racial or religious hatred, or to the denial of the Holocaust. For instance, Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the far right-wing National Front, and presidential candidate in 2002, has been brought to trial for violating these laws.

The media is submitted to other forms of control, as the authorizations of broadcasting by radio and television channels are granted by an administrative authority, the *Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel*. The *CSA's* independence has been subjected to criticism, as it is the French President, the President of the Senate, and the President of the National Assembly who designate the *CSA's* nine counsellors, including its leader.

The written press, more specifically, is also submitted to various forms of control, with supplemental obligations concerning publications directed towards the youth and foreign publications⁸. For instance, politicians as well as the administration have restricted the freedom of the press during certain events such as the war in Algeria, or May 1968. To name another example, when President Charles de Gaulle died in 1970, weekly newspaper *Hara Kiri* (affiliated to today's *Charlie Hebdo*) was banned after having published the news of his death under a very sarcastic heading.

1.3. Political Culture: the role of *laïcité* in France

As a contrast to other European countries, no political parties and few politicians in France openly define themselves as belonging to and representing a specific minority group. With the exception of a few right-wing politicians, French politicians do not discuss their religious affiliation, and do not use religious arguments in public debates.

The French state has a strong commitment to the principle of *laïcité*, or maintaining a totally secular public sector. Indeed, a separation of Church and State was instituted soon after the revolution, in the year 1795, followed by more than a century of changes of political regimes that successively abolished and re-established this separation. The freedom of worship is guaranteed by the constitution, and since 1905, a law definitively instituted the separation between Church and State and, at least officially, the State takes no part in the organization of religious communities, as long as the Law is respected. Since the passing of the law, public

⁷ "The free communication of thoughts and of opinions is one of the most precious rights of man: any citizen thus may speak, write, print freely, save to respond to the abuse of this liberty, in the cases determined by the law."

⁸ For instance, a book criticizing President Mobutu was forbidden by the Minister of Interior in 1980, as he feared that its publication would trouble diplomatic relations between France and Zaïre.

debates on the separation of Church and State tend to revolve systematically around issues related to the school system, such as, for instance, whether private schools ought to receive public subsidies (1984 and 1986), or the frequent debates on the Islamic veil worn in state schools (1989, 1993, 1995).

The last of such debates took place before the passing of the law of “conspicuous religious symbols in schools”, voted in 2004⁹. The law does not mention any particular religious symbol, but the public debate that occurred before the passing of the law quickly concentrated on the issue of Muslim schoolgirls wearing a headscarf to state schools. During the debate, some voices would support the bill with arguments in favour of supporting the equality of the sexes by preventing young girls from being forced to be the “markers” of a certain religion or the necessity of integrating Muslims. Other voices, however, would put forward the right of individuals to dress as their religion requires or saw the mobilisation of the notion of *laïcité* in the public debate as being a way of stigmatising the Muslim minority.

1.4 Islam in France

While the question of Islam was already an important issue in France’s colonial empire, it really only became an issue in the French national public sphere with the decolonisation process and the change of the legal status of the Empire’s former colonial subjects, who acquired a legal status as “immigrants” in Metropolitan France. In the years following decolonisation, citizens from the new independent states and other countries continued to migrate to France, and today, Islam is the second most important religion of the country, after Roman Catholicism, and on an estimated five million Muslims in France, three millions are believed to be French citizens (Gruson 2000:21).

The immigration of labour consisted primarily of single men (or men who had temporarily left their families in their country of origin) that would seek work in France, and most of them had no intention of settling permanently in the country. During this period of time, the French state considered that questions related to their faith were the responsibility of the migrants’ states and their consulates. With the passing of the law of October 9th, 1981, it became possible for non-Citizens to participate in the development of organizations. More and more Muslim organizations were created and many individuals took part in French public life as leaders and spokespersons for the Muslim minority. (Cesari 1994; Kepel 1991). Interestingly, because Islam in France is historically linked to immigration, these spokespersons are often expected to represent not only the religious minority that they belong to, but also produce discourse on immigration and integration, more largely.

Several Muslim organizations pressed charges against French newspapers for having published the Danish cartoons, among them the FNMF, the UOIF, the World Islamic League, and the mosques of Paris and Lyon. Also, on February 11th, members of Muslim council CFCM called for a rally in order to “give the French Muslim a nice image” in the name of the “respect of religions and of journalistic ethics”. Anti-racist organization MRAP¹⁰ also argued that the cartoon showing Mohamed with a bomb-shaped turban on his head had been published with the specific intention to “provoke, hurt, humiliate, stigmatize, and that it contributes to a racist confusion between Muslims and terrorists”. In spite of the fact that these two kinds of organizations, anti-racist and Muslim, have different ideological backgrounds, this was not the first time that they joined in a common denunciation of

⁹ Law n° 2004-228 of March 15th 2004

¹⁰ MRAP, French Movement Against Racism and for Friendship Among Peoples

“islamophobia” (Gardesse 2006), in an effort to have it recognized as a specific form of racism, and penalized on the same premises as anti-Semitism is.

2. Bringing the Cartoon Crisis Home

2.1 The Cartoon Crisis as a foreign affair

In France, in this particular context, the very first news coverage of the cartoon crisis did not start off with a debate on freedom of speech, but reproduced the French government’s official discourse that which presented the event solely as a diplomatic crisis. An analysis of all articles published on this event in newspapers during the first two weeks of the crisis show how this discursive framework represented the violent reactions of various groups in the Middle East as being the result of various Middle Eastern governments’ manipulation of their own citizens or indeed of citizens in other countries. Thus, the cartoon crisis was analyzed as a means of directing unsatisfied groups’ attention away from profound domestic problems in their own countries or as conscious strategies to take or reaffirm a specific role in an international context.

Furthermore, a most interesting fact is that journalists described these events in a perfectly neutral manner, as if totally exterior to these issues, and not as events that could concern them, as journalists, in any way. This does not mean, however, that these articles do not have an implicit standpoint, which is, denouncing the “disproportion” of violent reactions to the cartoons without ever questioning the reasons underlying the initial publishing of the cartoons. This is true for all newspapers. The conditions under which the cartoons were initially published - several months earlier and by a right-wing newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, in a specific political context in Denmark – were only explained later in such papers as *Le Monde* and *Libération*.

Libération published most of the articles concerning the cartoon crisis in a “Current Events” section, under the heading “Religion”, while *Le Monde* chose to publish them in a “Society” section. However, newspapers *Dépêche du Midi*, *Le Figaro*, and *La Croix* that chose not to publish the cartoons published all articles related to the crisis – even after it had been “brought home” - in the “International” section.

2.2 To Publish or Not to Publish?

It was only on February 1st, when *France Soir*¹¹ published all the cartoons alongside with a cartoon of its own - thus “bringing the cartoon crisis home” – that the public debate in France evolved into a discursive framework based on freedom of speech – but also on the notion of *laïcité* and to some extent on the freedom of the Press as we will see later.

The fact that *France Soir* was the first to publish the cartoons created a lot of stir within the newspaper itself, and among journalists from other newspapers, and proved to be an

¹¹ *France Soir* (52,540) was founded in 1944, prospered during the fifties and became the top-selling newspaper in France in 1961 with a peak circulation figure in excess of one million. Since then, sales have dropped steadily to 50,000 copies per day. The newspaper has become increasingly sensationalist in content in an attempt to revive sales.

important premise for the other newspapers' reactions to the event. Indeed, as *France Soir* occupies a specific place in France's media landscape (more commercial, less intellectual, more right-wing), journalists from other newspapers (as well as from *France Soir* itself) could only assume specific positions within a certain range of possible reactions to the cartoon crisis. Many pointed out that *France Soir* was facing major financial problems when it chose to publish the cartoons, and that the publication might have been motivated by commercial reasons. When the owner of *France Soir*, Raymond Lakah, chose to dismiss the newspapers' director of publishing Jacques Lefranc for having published Jyllands-Posten's cartoons several journalists from *Libération* speculated on the business strategies that they thought underlay Lakah's motivations.

On February 3rd, daily newspapers *Libération*¹² and *Le Monde*¹³ also chose to publish a selection of the cartoons. *Libération* explained that this choice had been made in spite of the cartoons being of very poor taste, and that the journalists had decided not to publish the one of Mohamed wearing a bomb as a turban, as they found it offensive.

President Chirac made a statement on February 2nd, followed by another on the 6th, saying that Freedom of Speech "comes with responsibilities", and arguing against the publication of the cartoons.

On February 8th, *Charlie Hebdo* (more intellectual, more left-wing, known for publishing cartoons of the Pope and for being very critical of Catholicism) chose to publish the cartoons, in a special issue¹⁴. In addition to publishing the Danish cartoons, *Charlie Hebdo's* special edition also featured new cartoons and texts drawn or written by cartoonists and by the magazine's editor. On the cover, cartoonist Cabu had drawn a cartoon of the prophet crying, saying "It's hard to be loved by fools".

Charlie Hebdo's editor Philippe Val stated that the paper's choice had been made "in sympathy, and on principle". "The question is not whether these cartoons were good or not but whether we have the right to publish them"¹⁵. The newspaper also published a long article stating that it is not racist, and giving Muslim representatives who were favourable to the publication express themselves, in an attempt to protect itself against allegations of racism.

Charlie Hebdo's publication of the cartoons again contributed to altering the field and the possibilities of journalists from other newspapers. Journalists from left wing *Libération* and *Le Monde* responded to *Charlie Hebdo's* choice by publishing articles in which they put forward that they too had published a selection of the cartoons, a fact that they had understated in the days after *France Soir* published them. To newspapers such as *Libération* and *Le Monde*, *France Soir* represents sensationalism, and is not to be taken too seriously, whereas *Charlie Hebdo* is regarded as a left wing newspaper defending *laïcité* and freedom of speech. The fact that *Charlie Hebdo's* special issue was to become the best selling issue of the paper's history was not dwelled upon. Where *Charlie Hebdo* is usually published in 140,000 copies, it was published in 160,000 copies on February 4th, and these were quickly sold out,

¹²*Libération* (140,200) was founded in 1970, and is a left-wing newspaper. *Libération's* opinion pages, *Rebonds*, however publish views from very varied political standpoints.

¹³ *Le Monde* (352,800) was founded in the aftermath of the *Libération* in 1944 with the strong support of De Gaulle. Its readers own half of the newspaper. Politically, *Le Monde* is centre-left to centre-right, depending on the parties in power of the moment. It is an elitist newspaper that publishes many articles on international subjects, and which represents itself as a defender of Human Rights.

¹⁴ Weekly newspapers *L'Express* published a photograph of one of the twelve cartoons, *Le Nouvel Observateur* published two of the drawings, and *Courrier International* published a selection of them.

¹⁵ Interviewed on Radio France Inter, February 7th, 2006

before being reprinted and sold in additional 400,000 additional copies. Thus, the cartoon controversy brought forward the fact that journalists and media professionals' judgement of other newspapers' strategic choices are very much based upon these newspapers' positioning in the media field, and their relations to one another.

Jacques Chirac condemned the publishing of the cartoons on several occasions and responded to *Charlie Hebdo's* publication of the cartoons and what he called "manifest provocations towards Muslims"¹⁶.

*Le Figaro*¹⁷, a right wing daily national newspaper, thus close to the current government and the president, chose not to publish the cartoons and never justified this choice by making any official statements, neither through an editorial nor an interview. Even though the newspaper regularly publishes articles that are very critical of various collective public manifestations of Islam, *Le Figaro* chose a position of neutrality when covering the crisis. In *Le Figaro*, the notion of freedom of the press is totally absent, and we do not believe that the use of the term "freedom of speech" instead of "freedom of the press" is neutral. Indeed, it is yet another way of distancing oneself and one's profession from the debates taking place. When the notion of freedom of the press is used in papers such as *Le Monde* or *Libération*, this again is not neutral, but is always used to emphasize the link between the cartoon controversy and journalism as a profession.

Another example of the connexions between the political field and the media in France is that during the riots in October and November 2005, journalists stopped publishing the number of cars that had been burnt the night before on a daily basis, because politicians believed that this actually contributed to an increase of the number of cars being burnt on the following night (Mauger 2006).

2.3 Echoes from the Debates on "the Veil"

Another important aspect of the French media landscape, as revealed by the cartoon crisis was the fact that it echoed the debates that took place in 2004, before the passing of the law on "secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in schools".

First of all, in contrast to many other countries, journalists in France can rely on an already existing network of public persons who present themselves as being (or are believed to be) able to speak for or about France's Muslim minority. Whenever a journalist wishes to get an opinion on issues related to Islam, these actors can be staged as representatives of Islam and can be expected to express their points of view on "the veil", "slaughtering sheep", "forced marriage", etc., or, as in our case, "drawing cartoons of the prophet". As an example of the latter, it is very common that journalists interview representatives of Islam after anti-Semitic acts of violence, expecting that they should condemn them, whereas representatives from Protestant churches are seldom asked to react in these cases.

Furthermore, such newspapers as *La Croix*¹⁸ and *Dépêche du Midi*¹⁹ had been very active - each in their own way - in shaping the public debates in 2004. In a state where the notion of

¹⁶ February 8th, 2006

¹⁷ *Le Figaro* (332,000 copies) founded in 1846 and the oldest French newspaper published today

¹⁸ *La Croix* (96,550copies), founded in 1880, is a Catholic newspaper.

laïcité is put forward as a key value to be protected, it is hardly surprising that Catholic newspaper *La Croix* tends to defend the cause of believers and religious minorities, in general. This was the case, for instance, when it defended a point of view close to that of various Muslim organisations concerning the wearing of the *Hijab*, or Islamic veil, in schools, and it is not surprising that during the cartoon crisis, *La Croix* published many letters to the editor critical of the publishing of the cartoons and speaking in favour of tolerance towards religious minorities and their religious feeling. *La Dépêche du Midi* is famous for its position as an ardent defender of *laïcité*. Thus, during the public debates that took place before the passing of the law on “secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in schools”, in 2004, the paper firmly condemned the notion that Muslim schoolgirls should be allowed to wear a headscarf in school. The editor explained that the paper had chosen not to publish the cartoons, because they were “of bad taste”, and then went on to argue for a conciliation between freedom of worship, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press.

3. Three discursive frameworks

We have distinguished three discursive frameworks underlying opinion pieces in the French media coverage of the cartoon crisis: Discourse 1. “Defending Freedom of Speech and Our Civilization”; Discourse 2. “Freedom of Speech comes with responsibilities”; and Discourse 3. “Freedom of Speech and the Hidden Agenda”. An overview of these discourses’ main characteristics and the newspapers they appear in, is presented in table 2. Before presenting a more detailed analysis of these three discourses, with quotes from some of the many opinion pieces, it should be noted that there were several underlying premises to the debate, and the following key issues of the crisis were presented as “facts” by the French media:

First of all, all French newspapers explicitly agreed to say that Jyllands-Posten’s cartoons were not in the best of taste. Some journalists and newspapers would pay more attention than others to the fact that many French Muslims were hurt by the publication of the cartoons.

Secondly, several journalists invested the debate on whether it is permitted to draw the Prophet or not, according to the Quran, interviewing Muslim intellectuals and other specialists of Islam.

Thirdly, while protests in the Middle East were represented as violent and strategically manipulated by totalitarian regimes, it was often put forward that there were no violent reactions from French Muslims to the publishing of the cartoons. A framework based on the notion of a “clash of civilizations” in France was very seldom brought forward by journalists, who staged Muslims and their reactions - whether readers and public intellectuals in letters to the editor, demonstrators or the legalist responses from Muslim representatives - as calm, moderate, and “democratic”.

¹⁹ *La Dépêche du Midi* (193,800) is one of the country’s leading regional newspapers, rooted in the Midi Pyrénées region, and is traditionally close to the *Parti Radical Socialiste*.

Table 2. Opinion stories (by editors, journalists, and readers) in the sample

France	FACTS	DISTINCTIONS	ACTORS	TIME/SPACE
1 “Defending Freedom of Speech and Our Civilization” <i>France Soir, Dépêche du Midi Charlie Hebdo Le Monde Libération</i>	<p>The act of publishing in Denmark and in France was solely based on promoting FoS OR The act of publishing in Denmark and in France had nothing to do with promoting FoS, however, now that it is done, we have to defend and show solidarity towards colleagues at Jyllands-Posten</p> <p>Protests in the Middle East have been violent and strategically manipulated by totalitarian regimes</p> <p>1a In spite of being hurt by the cartoons, Muslims in France did not express themselves through violence but through democratic means (letters to the editors, pressing charges) This shows that they have embraced democratic values <i>Figaro, le Monde</i> OR 1b Muslims in France did not take part in violence but they should have publicly condemned their fellow believer in the East’s violent reactions <i>France Soir, Dépêche du Midi</i></p>	<p>Western democratic States rational, educated, calm populations where there is a legal right to publish, if somebody gets hurt they can press charges Vs Despotic totalitarian Middle Eastern regimes where populations are vs. irrational, violent, uneducated, frustrated populations that can be easily manipulated</p> <p>Secularity: Religion is a private matter Vs. Religion is a public matter</p> <p>Those for whom FoS is a value above all Vs. Those who are ready to use violence for their religious convictions AND Vs. Those who do not stay firm against violence & criticism thus betraying FoS</p> <p><i>France Soir, Dépêche du Midi, Figaro</i></p>	<p>Enraged violent Muslims abroad 1a sensible, democratic modern Muslims in France, who have been educated to democracy 1b Muslims in France who have not embraced democratic values entirely, because of Islam</p> <p>Believers who know their own religion vs. believers who don’t (simple minds who can be manipulated)</p> <p>Criticism of politicians who do not defend FoS, thereby making it a moral duty for journalists to do so & stay firm as they face potentially violent reactions Criticism of journalists who give in and stop defending FoS</p> <p><i>France Soir, Dépêche du Midi</i></p>	<p>A linear conception of time: Modernity as an evolutionary process: FoS is a universal value that stems from the French Revolution</p> <p>However, there can be setbacks: the fatwas against Taslima Nasreen & Salman Rushdie, the murder of Theo van Gogh, etc. Historical references to the French revolution, Enlightenment philosophy, Voltaire : « I do not agree with what you have to say, but I’ll defend to the death your right to say it. »</p> <p>FoS is achieved through education and modernization . <i>Le Monde, Libération</i></p> <p>1a: Us democratic, rational, modern Vs. Them, undemocratic, violent, archaic</p> <p>1b Us democratic, rational, modern WESTERNERS Vs. Them, undemocratic, violent, archaic MUSLIMS, IN THE EAST OR IN THE WEST</p> <p>Us, defenders of FoS and FoP showing solidarity with fellow journalists, Vs. Them, compromising democracy and freedom in the face of violence <i>France Soir, Dépêche du Midi</i></p>
2 Freedom of Speech comes with Responsibilities <i>Libération, La Croix, Le Figaro</i>	<p>The act of publishing was disinterested or a political move but was (theoretically) professionally defensible <i>Libération</i> Protests have been diverse, both violent and irrational but also democratic and rational <i>Libération, La Croix, Le Figaro</i></p>	<p>See above, but stressing the importance of the media’s professional judgement and the respect of other people’s feelings / putting European citizen’s lives at risk Finding a balance between the Freedom of Speech, of the Press and of Religion and Beliefs</p>	<p>See above, BUT understanding of politicians who call for dialogue</p>	<p>Contradictory present</p> <p>Us rational, responsible, respectful vs. Them, disrespectful, irresponsible</p>
3 Freedom of Speech and the Hidden Agenda FoS as a discourse one can conveniently put forward when one’s hidden agenda is elsewhere <i>Readers, not journalists</i>	<p>3a the act of publishing was a deliberate choice from newspapers media professionals to sell more newspapers, money runs the show in the media <i>Libération, La Croix</i> 3b The act of publishing was racist and directly aimed at provoking Muslims in France and abroad, to further stigmatize them <i>Readers in Libération</i> 3a, b, c Protests have been diverse, both violent and irrational but also democratic and rational <i>Readers in Libération, La Croix</i></p>	<p>3a, b, c Stressing the importance of the media’s professional judgement <i>Readers in La Croix, Libération, Le Monde</i> 3b There is a professional judgement from the media when Catholics or Jews are involved, but not when Muslims are involved <i>Readers in Libération</i> 3c All societies, people and group need religion and morals. Call for respect, for a dialogue and for non-violence, which is a universal of good people, believers and non-believers alike. <i>La Croix</i></p>	<p>3a, b, c Extremists on both sides, in the West and in the East who play populations up against each other <i>Readers in Libération Le Monde, La Croix</i> 3b The press defends Catholics and Jews but not Muslims who are – once more- provoked have to take action <i>Readers in Libération</i> 3b Religious people - non-religious people <i>Readers in La Croix</i> 3c People with moral standards/people without moral standards</p>	<p>3a, 3b, 3c Stereotypical “them” and “Us” are being produced 3b Cultural relativism, the world as a mosaic of cultures/religions</p> <p>3b Cyclical conception of time, with historical references to colonialism and imperialism 3b References to the past: Dieudonné case <i>Readers in Libération, Le Monde</i></p> <p>3c There are any ways to speak Truth and good, tolerance, respect, non-violence Vs Many forms of extremism</p>

3.1. “Defending Freedom of Speech and Our Civilization”

Discourse 1 is the dominant discourse in our sample, and is found in opinion pieces by journalists and public intellectuals in *France Soir, Dépêche du Midi, Le Monde, Libération*, and, to a lesser extent, in *Figaro*, and *La Croix*. In this discourse, the motivations behind the publishing of the cartoons in Denmark and in France has little importance, the central

argument is that now that the cartoons have been published, freedom of speech should be defended by showing solidarity towards *Jyllands-Posten*, *France Soir*, or *Charlie Hebdo*.

Several media professionals argue that only the law can restrict freedom of speech, using arguments similar to those of Reporters Without Borders:

“So, are there no limits to the freedom of journalists? Well, yes of course there are. Journalists have responsibilities towards their readers, their listeners, their viewers. They owe them news coverage that is independent – and therefore sometimes disrespectful – and as complete and as honest as possible. And democracies have laws that are enforced by the justice system. These laws apply to journalists as to everybody else.” Pierre Veilletet and Robert Ménard, president and secretary-general of Reporters Without Borders in *Libération*, February 13th, 2006.

François Cavanna, founder of *Charlie Hebdo* and who is an ardent defender of *laïcité*, also speaks in favour of an absolute freedom of speech, with no exceptions:

“One can laugh at anything except for one single thing, the image of a certain prophet, founder of a certain religion. “One can laugh at anything except for...”, in this sentence, “except for” is more important than “anything”. When there is an “except for”, there is nothing. Freedom must be total, or it’s not freedom. And one must recall that if one forbids oneself to publish the infamous Danish cartoons, forbids oneself to defend them, if one censors oneself (what a despicable thing to do!), then one abandons *laïcité* and betrays the hard battles that were fought in the beginning of the 20th Century”, in *Charlie Hebdo*, February 8th, 2006, quoted in *Libération* February 15th, 2006

Freedom of speech is represented as a value above all others, along with the notion of *laïcité*. Religion is considered as being an entirely private matter, and this Republican ideal is opposed to other societies today (or to other periods in French history) where religion is a public, even a State matter.

In discourse 1, distinctions are made between supposedly violent Muslims abroad, and sensible, democratic, modern Muslims in France, who have been educated to democracy (1a). In spite of being hurt by the cartoons, Muslims in France did not express themselves through violence but through democratic means (letters to the editors, court trials). In the following editorial from *France Soir*, this is seen as a proof of the superiority of the French model of *laïcité*:

“It is, however, reassuring to see that the majority of Muslims in France stay calm in spite of being outraged or shocked. It is a sign of Reason gaining ground (...). This is *France Soir*’s battle.” Serge Faubert, in *France Soir*, February 4th, 2006.

Dépêche du Midi’s editor invents a new category, “the Muslims of Europe”, to which he applies the obligation to integrate, in a discourse that is usually used when speaking about French Muslims. This may be a way to speak about French Muslims in an indirect way, and represents the French model of separation between Church and State as a value that is, supposedly, characteristic of all of Europe, and not only specific of France:

“The Muslims of Europe should learn to reconcile their religion that embraces the public sphere with our freedom of conscience, our freedom of speech, our freedom of the press, with our personal freedom, which is also theirs”. Jean-Claude Souléry, in *La Dépêche du Midi*, February 2nd, 2006.

Sometimes, this discourse is stated even more violently, implying that if “they”, that is, “Muslims” who have chosen to come to “our” country, are not ready to respect “our” ways, they should just leave.

“If they [Muslims living in France] are that horrified by Western values of freedom and *laïcité*, why doesn’t it occur to them that they could move to Saudi Arabia?” Renaud Girard²⁰, in *Figaro* February 7th, 2006.

²⁰ Reporter at *Le Figaro* since 1984. In 1999, he was awarded the Mumm (French equivalent to the Pulitzer) for an investigation on Ben Laden’s network in Albania

Another distinction is made between believers who do not know their own religion (simple minds who can be manipulated) and believers who have a less emotional but more intellectual approach to Islam and who do know that drawings can be made of the Prophet. Indeed, all French newspapers feature interviews with intellectuals and “experts” on Islam who confirm that one can draw the Prophet in “real”, that is intellectual, Islamic culture.

Furthermore, in order to justify their points of view, they use references to history, such as the crusades, the French Revolution, and, more generally, an imagined, rational, enlightened, evolved West. In this evolutionist representation, some of “Them” wish to become like “Us”, and are ready to undergo the necessary revolution that “We”, supposedly, underwent 200 years ago:

“Islam has yet to accomplish that revolution. Millions and millions of Muslims have already accepted it in their hearts. And this is just another reason not to surrender to the new inquisitors (...) God should not suffer from the foolishness of priests”. Serge Faubert journalist, in *France Soir*, February 1st, 2006.

Thus, in a variation of discourse 1, another “Us” emerges. Ayaan Hirsi Ali²¹, in a column published by *Le Monde* claims that there is a wall that separates « Us » from « Them », based on a distinction between those who adhere to or who reject the notion of a Clash of Civilizations, involving a “Them”, represented as undemocratic, violent, archaic vs. an “Us”, represented as democratic, rational, modern. These may for all that matter, live in the East or among “Us” in the West.

Some even go as far as saying that it is not a clash of civilizations that we are witnessing but “a war against Civilization”. (Alain-Gérard Slama²², in *Figaro*, February 6th, 2006).

The Worldview of discourse 1 is based on a linear conception of time. Modernity is perceived as an evolutionary process and freedom of speech as a fundamental value achieved through education and modernization. However, danger looms in a World opposed between Western democratic States on one side with rational, educated, calm populations, where there is a legal right to publish, and where a person who gets hurt can press charges. And on the other side, despotic totalitarian Middle Eastern regimes where populations are uneducated, unsatisfied, frustrated and easily manipulated into irrational and violent actions.

Another “Us” appears as a defender of freedom of speech and freedom of the press showing solidarity with fellow journalists, also defined against a “Them”, that compromise democracy and freedom in the face of violence by giving up on universal values. This discourse implies a rejection of cultural relativism.

“Hurt? Well, do take the liberty to look (at the cartoons). You do have that liberty. It is an inalienable right. It is easy to do. And please, let those who wish to do so, have the freedom to see what the newspapers publish.” Daniel Schneidermann, Journalist, in *Libération* February 3rd, 2006.

The necessity of “constituting a common front of democracies against totalitarianism and nazislamism” is called for:

“In order to survive in a World where they are not in the majority, democracies should be persuaded by the superiority of their own system, and impose it at home without any compromise, ready for anything to prevent that an assault from the outside may endanger them”. Stéphane Denis, journalist from *Figaro*, in the “letter to the editors” section, February 6th, 2006.

²¹ Dutch congresswoman of Somali origin, member of liberal People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). She wrote the script for *Submission*, directed by Theo Van Gogh who was assassinated in November 2004.

²² Professor at the Paris Institute of Political Studies, frequent leader writer at *Le Figaro*

The comparisons between the rise of German Nazism and the political developments of today are very frequent, as several voices warn against the idea that history is repeating itself. These comparisons are not only stated in opinion pieces in the press. On March 1st, 2006, *Charlie Hebdo* printed the manifesto “Together facing the new totalitarianism”, that was signed by 12 personalities, among them the paper’s editor, Philippe Val, and French and foreign public intellectuals who are known to be very critical of Islam, such as Bernard-Henri Lévy, Caroline Fourest, Irshad Manji, Salman Rushdie, and Taslima Nasreen. The Manifesto defines Islamism as a totalitarianism that endangers democracy, comparing it to Fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism.

Politicians who do not defend freedom of speech are criticized, making it a moral duty for journalists to defend these values and not give in when they face potentially violent reactions.

“How can one count on a democracy that declares itself as being attached to human rights but that gives in every time freedom is threatened by a minority that uses violence as blackmail?” Alain Gérard Slama, journalist from Figaro in the “letter to the editors” section, February 6th, 2006.

Paraphrasing Churchill’s famous word to Chamberlain when he came back from Munich in 1938, we should not chose “dishonour and war”:

“Let’s know how to defend our values in our homes (...) let’s not chose dishonour and compromise in an attempt to prevent war. Because, in the end, we shall have both dishonour and war.” Renaud Girard²³, journalist, in Figaro February 7th, 2006.

3.2. “Freedom of Speech Comes with Responsibilities”

In discourse 2, freedom of speech is represented as a universal right that comes along with moral responsibilities. But it is a fundamental freedom only limited by the freedom of worship. The act of publishing can be represented as disinterested or as a political or commercial move, however, it is considered as a (theoretically) professionally defendable act. The importance of the medias’ professional judgement is stressed as well as the respect of other people’s beliefs and sacred. It is often argued that the cartoons were “not funny”, “not intelligent”, or “of poor taste”, and that if one wishes to draw cartoons about other people’s religious feelings one should do it in a constructive way.

Discourse 2 is the one, among the three we identified, that is closest to that of the French government’s, thus, the consequences on diplomatic relations or putting European citizen’s lives at risk are also warned against. An article in *Le Figaro* thus recalls that “self-censorship may be necessary”, for instance in cases of journalists who chose not to publish information that could prove to be dangerous for hostages. A *France Soir* reader states that Hitler came to power in the name of freedom of speech. It should be noted that even though discourse 2 can be found in opinion pieces in every newspaper of our sample, it is most common in Catholic newspaper *La Croix*.

The world is represented as a mosaic of cultures, and cultural misunderstandings should be avoided by showing respect to other people’s religious feelings, thus respecting both the Freedom of speech and of worship, values that are not recognized by all the people of the World, according to the editor of *La Croix*.

²³ Reporter at *Le Figaro* since 1984. In 1999, he was awarded the Mumm (French equivalent to the Pulitzer for an investigation on Ben Laden’s network in Albania

“On one hand in order to have both one AND the other freedom respected, that is, Freedom of Speech and of Worship, that it is so difficult, yet so fundamental, to combine, among which nobody should be asked to choose. And, on the other hand, fully comprehend how convictions that have been decreed to be universal by the most prestigious international organization are, in fact, still far from being recognized by all the peoples of our planet – for reasons that go way beyond religion” Michel Kubler, editorial, *La Croix* February 17th, 2006.

Another representative of Discourse 2, a journalist, blames Western intellectuals who argue against a policy of appeasement and apologizing for publishing the cartoons:

“Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor, great poet and bard of the mixing of cultures, pleaded for “a civilization of the universal”, that would draw on the best in everybody’s values. How far we are from it! Very far, when the most media-friendly Western intellectuals parade on television in order to explain that apologizing in order to calm people down would be equal to prove fundamentalists right.” Jean-Baptiste Placca²⁴, in *La Croix* March 3rd, 2006.

In order to counter Discourse 1 and its references to the Law and international conventions, the editor of *la Croix* argues that according to the Universal declaration of Human Rights, freedom of speech goes hand in hand with the freedom of worship, not only in private, but also in public.

“Rare were those who remembered the article before the one that declares the right of everyone “to freedom of opinion and expression” (article 19 of the Declaration of Human Rights), an article that implies “the freedom to manifest his religion or belief, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, in teaching, practice, worship and observance » (article 18). Such a declaration is not easy to reconcile with a restrictive conception of *laïcité*. Our collective unconscious prefers to repress this. Michel Kubler, editorial, *La Croix* February 17th, 2006.

Most other representatives of Discourse 2 argue against following the law for its own sake only, and call for everybody to think of the possible consequences of their legal actions:

“Instead of being obsessed by the Law – up to a point where it is transformed into a dictatorship of expressing anything – wouldn’t it be time to encourage citizens to use their freedom of expression in a responsible manner, one that takes the sensitivities of our contemporary societies into account? It is not about making new laws or restraining free speech: no, it is only about encouraging everybody to use these rights in a reasonable fashion.” Tariq Ramadan²⁵, in *Libération*, February 8th, 2006.

Journalists and editors who argue against publishing the cartoons recall the context in which the cartoons were published:

“They have a moral and political responsibility that goes beyond the legal, democratic frame. Being responsible is not only a question of respecting the law. Being responsible is also a question of being able to show understanding and political awareness”. Frédéric Lenoir, editor of *Le Monde des Religions*, in *Le Figaro*, February 8th, 2006.

Finally, the “Freedom of Speech comes with responsibilities” discourse is perfectly summarized by the following. Globalization, cultural differences, the major importance of religion for a great part of the inhabitants of our planet should lead us to be “more aware” of the possible consequences of our actions:

“The media ought to reflect upon the nature of freedom of speech in a globalized world. Because we do not share the same symbolic fields in different cultural realms, we do not share the same symbolic field, we do not share the same semantic references, nor the same language, but we are, however, all exposed to the same images. We are not equal in front of the image, because we do not share the same history at all.” Rachid Benzine²⁶, in *Libération*, February 13th, 2006.

²⁴ Journalist and founder of Magazine *L’Autre Afrique*.

²⁵ Muslim intellectual and academic, of Swiss nationality

²⁶ Muslim intellectual

3.3 Freedom of Speech and the Hidden Agenda

The underlying premise of the “Hidden Agenda” discourse is that freedom of speech and the Law are arguments that one can conveniently mobilize when one has a hidden agenda. One can distinguish three versions, and all three call for the importance of the responsibility of the press, but in a different way from Discourse 2. All three are pessimistic about the way the press deals with its responsibility. The French press is represented as taking part in playing populations up against each other, whether deliberately or not. This discourse is not present in any writings by newspaper editors or journalists, but is very frequent in letters to the editor, except in the Figaro.

The first version of the “Hidden Agenda” discourse, 3a, representing the act of publishing, was a deliberate choice made by newspapers media professionals with the purpose of selling more newspapers, and the cartoon crisis is simply yet another example of how money runs the show in the media. This standpoint is expressed in *Libération’s* coverage of *France Soir’s* owner’s business strategies and warns against the consequences that a non-separation between money and the press can have. Other public intellectual use the same argument, such as here, in *La Croix*:

“Daily newspaper *France Soir* decided to reproduce all of the Mohamed cartoons that were initially published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, in the name of the defence of *laïcité*. It is no doubt the last battle of a newspaper in trouble”. Philippe Garabiol²⁷ in *La Croix*, February 17th, 2006.

The second version of the “Hidden Agenda” discourse, 3b, argues that there are double standards in the media’s professional judgement, stating that a professional judgement from the media exists only when journalists write about Catholics or Jews, and does not apply to articles about Muslims in France or abroad. Thus, the readers who adhere to discourse 3 argue that the act of publishing was racist. To them, legal arguments and references to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are used only to cover an action directly aimed at manipulating the public into believing that stereotypical “Them” and “Us” exist. The media are seen as part of a conspiracy that voluntarily provokes Muslims in France and abroad, deliberately wanting to stigmatize them – again.

Several times, the example of Dieudonné, a comedian who made a sketch during prime time television comparing Israel with Nazi Germany in 2003, is brought up in letters to the editor. The fact that many famous people publicly distanced themselves from Dieudonné is mobilized as proof of a supposed consensus according to which it is considered to be all right to make fun of Muslims but not of Jews or of Christians.

“December 1st, 2003, Dieudonné makes a sketch about extremist Jews. Dieudonné is cried out to be Anti-Semitic! February 1st, 2006, the press sketches Mohamed as a terrorist Muslim. Freedom of Speech!” Letter to the editor, *Le Monde*, February 13th, 2006.

This discourse operates with a cyclical conception of time, stating that the history of oppression and racism repeats itself, and draws on historical references to colonialism and imperialism, or the Dreyfus case, in order to recall that all religious minorities in France share the same problems.

Finally, the third version of the “Hidden Agenda” discourse (3c) shares the “facts” of the two first versions, but has a more religious vein to it, and is rarely found in other papers than Catholic *La Croix*. This version call for respect, for dialogue and for non-violence, which is seen as a universal shared by all good people, no matter what their religion is.

²⁷ Professor at the Paris Institute of Political Studies

This discourse operates with a notion of cultural relativism in the sense that there are many ways to speak Truth and good, tolerance, respect, and non-violence that are opposed to many different forms of extremism. It calls for respect, for a dialogue and for non-violence, which it sees as a universal of good people, among believers and non-believers alike.

Conclusion

This study is based on discourse analysis, and would have been richer if we had had the possibility to carry out interviews with various journalists, editors, or owners of newspapers, in order to collect information on the important debates that took place within newspapers on whether to publish the cartoons or not.

The three discursive frameworks that lay the ground for the cartoon crisis as it was treated by the French media seem to bear very close resemblance to the ones that were shaping the French public debates on conspicuous religious symbols in public spaces.

As was mentioned before, a network of “experts” and “representatives” of various communities or standpoints related to Islam seem to have emerged in France, which is not the case in other countries. These actors speak from distinct points of view, just as newspapers and specific journalists which all participated in the debates on “the veil” do, and as soon as the cartoon crisis was “brought home”, it was possible for them to (re-) create a field in which the public debate on the cartoons could take place.

Also, the cartoon crisis shows that one cannot analyze the French media field without taking into consideration that there are already existing relations of opposition and of solidarity among politicians, journalists, editors, public intellectuals and representatives of various minorities. A newspaper will publish an opinion while bearing in mind, strategically, how other newspapers are already positioned in the particular field. As *France Soir* was the first paper to publish all the cartoons, a newspaper such as *Libération* had no other choice but to take its distance from the act of publishing and question the motivations behind it, accusing *France Soir* of having published the cartoons for commercial reasons. When *Charlie Hebdo* published the cartoons, however, *Libération* needed to remind its readers that they too had published them.

Finally, while we write these lines (January 2007), the French media await *Charlie Hebdo*'s forthcoming trial, set in February. Whether Justice rules in favour of the Muslim and anti-racist organizations that have pressed charges against *Charlie Hebdo*, or not, it is most likely that the judgement and its media coverage will bring forward a new debate – especially if it leads to a shift in jurisprudence concerning freedom of expression.

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