MUHAMMAD AS REPRESENTATIVE FORM:
A VISUAL RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DANISH CARTOON CONTROVERSY

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ABSTRACT

The Danish cartoon controversy poses a useful case for communication scholars to examine how political speech acts and social debate flourish in a world with globalized media. Working from Edwards and Winkler’s theory of the representative form, I argue that the central Muhammad character in the cartoons functions ideographically, creating an ideological interpretation of Islam that invites public debate over its tenets. Using Olson and Goodnight’s work on social controversy, I track how this debate evolves from the initial publication of the cartoons to become an international conflict, organized around two main *topoi*—freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Given the diversity of reactions seen across the globe, I conclude that the Muhammad cartoons highlight how culturally specific rhetorical performances can have important effects on public discourse outside of their original contexts. The event gives us the chance to study how social conflicts will play out between the West and the rest of the world, which will no doubt continue with increasing frequency given our current trajectory.
INTRODUCTION

In late 2005, a Scandinavian newspaper with a small domestic circulation of 150,000 published twelve political cartoons that triggered the largest cartoon controversy of recent times. The “Danish cartoon controversy,” as it has come to be known, has quickly become a site for the cultural negotiation of racial conflict in Western Europe revolving around the tensions between the concepts of freedom of speech and freedom of religion. The culture section of Jyllands-Posten, the Danish largest newspaper in circulation, solicited the Danish cartoonist union to “draw Mohammed as they see him,” and on September 30th, 2005, published a series of controversial political cartoons depicting images of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and satirizing various Muslim beliefs.¹ The section editor Flemming Rose stated that he commissioned the cartoons to comment on what he saw as a growing tendency in the Danish media towards “self-censorship… when it came to ‘accommodating Muslim sensitivities.’”²

What began as a localized expression of political criticism towards media censorship quickly became an international controversy for journalists, governments, and publics around the world. The event sent many academics scrambling within their disciplines to find a suitable explanation for the cartoon controversy. Political scientists and international relations scholars moved to identify the hot-button political arguments

at play—the what of the message of the cartoons. The images themselves were clearly very potent in their ability to incite international debate over various cultural interpretations of the freedom of speech and religion. Many writers however stopped short of investigating how the cartoons create meaning and debate, that is, how the various elements of the cartoons work together to make such controversial ideological arguments, and how those arguments come together to incite global controversy. The seriousness of this recent cartoon controversy demands a return to the theoretical work regarding political cartoons. This thesis will first review the rhetorical theories about political cartoons to identify a framework that could explain how the cartoons create their arguments. I will then turn to analyze how the cartoons became an international controversy.

Specifically, I will argue that Janis Edwards and Carol Winkler’s theory of the representative form of the image best explains how the Danish Muhammad cartoons are able to condense complex cultural debates into only a few images. The Muhammad character serves as a common repeated element throughout each of the cartoons, establishing a central motif for the political commentary expressed by the collection. Muhammad functions as a representative form by “transcend[ing] the specifics of its immediate visual references and, through a cumulative process of visual and symbolic meaning, rhetorically identify[ing] and delineat[ing] the ideals of the body politic.”

the immediate context for which they were created. In this, the images did much more than just comment on perceived self-censorship in the Danish media. They ultimately fomented a much larger public debate on the conflict between differing cultural interpretations of the freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Here, I will use Kathryn Olson and Thomas Goodnight’s theory on social controversy to trace how the Danish cartoon controversy developed from a localized political speech act to a continent-wide issue of government censorship to a violent global conflict. Their work provides a framework for investigating how large social debates grow from their initial political speech acts. I will argue that social controversy theory builds upon Edwards and Winkler’s theory of the representative form to explain how the choice of twelve Danish cartoonists to depict the Islamic Prophet Muhammad eventually sparked global conflict between divergent cultural interpretations of the freedom of speech and religion.
CHAPTER ONE:

POLITICAL CARTOONS, THE *REPRESENTATIVE FORM* OF THE VISUAL IDEOGRAPH, AND RHETORIC AS SOCIAL CONTROVERSY
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As a genre, the political cartoon is a hybrid of visual and political rhetorical elements, and as such, cartoon scholarship draws from a wide assortment of rhetorical theories. I will first explore the general theories of political and visual rhetoric that inform the two main theories used here (the “representative form” and “social controversy” theory), from Michael McGee’s theory of the rhetorical ideograph, to Robert Hariman and John Lucaites’s work on visual rhetoric, to the work of E. H. Gombrich and others on the workings of political cartoons. Next, I will present Edwards and Winkler’s assessment of these previous cartoon theories and introduce their application of McGee’s ideograph to visual rhetoric. I will then outline their theory of the representative form of the political cartoon to establish the actual lens of visual analysis that I will apply to the Muhammad cartoons. Finally, I will explore Kathryn Olson and Thomas Goodnight’s theory of the rhetorical manifestations of social controversy. Their work offers an explanation as to how social controversies evolve from a nascent political expression to become grand social debates and they suggest a method for plotting these phenomena, which I will use to examine the Danish cartoon controversy as an event.

Rhetoric as Political Argument

Michael McGee’s theory of the ideograph, foundational for political rhetorical theory, illuminates how rhetoric functions to communicate particular ideological arguments. Ideographs, at their most fundamental level, are the rhetorical manifestations of a particular community’s ideology. They are the vocabulary used to express abstract community values like ‘equality’ and ‘peace,’ and they are the political slogans by which
ideological arguments are communicated. Ideographs are the “recognizable ‘ideologies’ [that] exist in any specific culture at one ‘moment.’”\textsuperscript{4} These cultural manifestations link together to express the overarching ideological tenets held by a community. McGee argues that ideographs “are meant to be taken together, as a working unity... each term [is] a connector, modifier, specifier, or contrary for ... fundamental historical commitments, giving them a meaning and a unity easily mistake for logic.”\textsuperscript{5} That is, ideographs function together with other ideographs to form ideological—and political—language. Because language is the driving force behind socialization, politics ultimately relies on the propagation of “common beliefs” through rhetoric to establish its system of beliefs and codes.\textsuperscript{6} Ideographs then form the currency for ideological argument by “do[ing] work in explaining, justifying, or guiding policy in specific situations.”\textsuperscript{7} Not only do ideographs represent political ideas, but they legitimize actions in the name of their ideology. This explanation illuminates the rhetorical aspect of the ideograph; they embody the call for communicative and political action.

McGee’s ideograph thus provides the basic theory for understanding how rhetoric functions to create and communicate a shared ideology. Though McGee’s treatment of political rhetoric did not originally address the potential for images to also function ideographically, the account of visual rhetoric that follows here builds evidence for this argument, which is later made explicit by Edwards and Winkler. Communication scholars now widely see visual rhetoric as a form of political rhetoric, a connection I will

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.: 13.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.: 15.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
now more thoroughly explore to support the case for considering the Muhammad
 cartoons as expressions of a particular ideological argument about Islam.

Theories of Visual Rhetoric

Visual rhetoric at its core starts from proposition that images, not just words, have
discursive power. Responding to what she perceived as a lack of attention given by
rhetorical critics to visual artifacts, Sonja Foss writes that communication scholars have
several important works on visual imagery available to them to form a base of knowledge
on the genre. She first suggests that Carl Hausman’s work in *Metaphor & Art* helps
explain how visual artifacts create rhetorical arguments. Hausman, as cited by Foss,
writes that images create meaning through the use of metaphor, which “involves three
key features: ‘(1) tension, (2) the presence of two “subjects” or “anchoring” meaning
units, and (3) the interrelation of meaning units in an integration.”8 Foss then extrapolates
that images create new meaning through the integration of visual elements, “sustain[ing]
tensions from incongruities among antecedent meanings… and function[ing] as a
controlling focus for interpretations.”9 Hausman’s analysis on the use of metaphor helps
explain how visual elements work together to communicate meaning to the viewer. Foss
additionally comments that by asking the question of “how the arts create new insights,”
Hausman “situates his discussion within the rhetoric-as-epistemic debate,” and thus
confirms the visual realm as an object worthy of rhetorical study.10 Because visual pieces
are active creators of social meaning and knowledge, they are important artifacts for
communication scholars.

8 Sonja K. Foss, "Visual Imagery as Communication," *Text & Performance Quarterly* 12,
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.: 88.
Drawing from Edward Tufte’s book *Envisioning Information*, Foss also addresses how visual rhetoric interacts with its audience, the viewer. Tufte’s discussion of the importance of the audience is useful for rhetoricians because he starts from the notion that visual imagery has the power to effect an audience. He writes that there is an “operating moral premise” for artists and creators to assume they have “alert and caring” readers who are “intelligent and interested.”¹¹ In advising artists to be cognizant of their viewers, Tufte also argues that the reception of their message is not entirely predetermined by the work, rather, images are digested and actively interpreted by the receiver. This suggests that rhetorical critics should acknowledge and explore the audience as a potential participant in the creation of meaning for any visual artifact.

Foss’s work overall is useful for establishing the basic connection between visual artifacts and theories of political rhetoric. Like McGee’s description of the verbal ideograph, Foss suggests that images can also communicate ideological messages to their viewer. By involving the audience in their interpretation, these images thus influence the common political landscape and can argue for political action.

Where Foss’s work largely addresses visual rhetoric as a general field of study, other authors develop more narrow theories of visual rhetoric, like John Lucaites and Robert Hariman’s discussion of iconography. In their piece on photojournalism, Lucaites and Hariman isolate a particular type of visual rhetoric to analyze, iconic photographs, which they seek to situate within public culture. They begin by defining the traits of an image that mark the status of iconicity. Iconic images are those that

¹¹ Ibid.: 89.
are (1) recognized by everyone within a public culture, (2) understood to be representations of historically significant events, (3) objects of strong emotional identification or response, and (4) regularly reproduced or copied across a range of media, genres, and topics.\textsuperscript{12}

Because icons are widely recognized by the public, they provide familiar points of access to an issue for the viewer. Lucaites and Hariman also argue that these iconic images are potent visual symbols within public culture. They write that an icon can operate “as a political aesthetic that provides crucial social, emotional, and mnemonic resources for animating the collective identity and action necessary to a liberal-democratic politics.”\textsuperscript{13}

Not only do they adopt the basic position that visual rhetoric is political rhetoric, but they explicitly argue that these images can make up the currency of public deliberation.

Here, Lucaites and Harriman come closer to connecting visual rhetoric with McGee’s description of the ideograph; where Foss describes how images make political messages, they go the next step to argue that images are the very expression of common understanding and meaning. Images, like verbal ideographs, then also form the language that socializes a community. In their 2007 book on photography, Lucaites and Harriman further explore how humans are increasingly reliant on the use of images to relate to their world. They write that images have become symbolic and that people tend to “modify dominant symbols in order to negotiate their relationship to their collective environment.”\textsuperscript{14} As just one example, the Muhammad cartoons are a manifestation of

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.: 38.
people using images to negotiate cultural meaning, react to their environments, and to communicate socially.

Political Cartoons as Visual and Political Rhetoric

Other scholars turn towards specific mediums, like political cartoons. To start, Ernst Gombrich’s early work on cartoons places emphasis on the representational aspect of the image, meaning that cartoons largely communicate their message through the depiction of known referents. Roy Morris condenses his work to argue that cartoons generally involve either the process of condensation or of combination. In describing condensation as “the compression of a complex phenomenon into a single image that is purported to capture its essence graphically,” Morris, acknowledges the power of cartoons to send complex messages. He cites this power as flowing from the cartoon’s ability to condense many issues into a single image and thus places emphasis on the denotative functions of the work. Combination, meanwhile, “refers to the blending of elements and ideas from different domains into a new composite that remains completely identifiable as something that contains each of its constituents.” Here, they identify that cartoons also have the ability to communicate larger metaphors by including a combination of multiple elements, like the familiar move where a cartoonist equates politicians with various types of animals. While these two theories might be useful for describing a particular arrangement in a particular cartoon, they do not quite get to an explanation of the full ideographic potential of an image. Gombrich’s work provides only a few tools for the analyst to study political cartoons; they are useful for examining the

16 Ibid.
what of an image, but more theoretical work is needed to explore how artifacts like the Muhammad cartoons make larger ideological statements.

Morris identifies three other key processes working in political cartoons outside of his application from Gombrich: domestication, opposition, and carnivalization. Domestication is the “process by which abstract ideas and distant, unfamiliar persons or events are converted into something close, familiar, and concrete.”17 Because some cartoons seek to comment on issues like public or foreign policy that might not be familiar to the reader, artists often domesticate the issues by including visual elements that are more common. Other cartoons utilize the process of opposition to create their message. By creating juxtapositions like black-white or French-American, these cartoons are “constructed around a series of oppositions” that communicate particular values about those topics.18 Finally, Morris draws from Bakhtin’s theory of carnivalization, in which texts portray purposely stylized behavior. Cartoons invoke a sense of carnivalization by replacing the sacred with the profane, by inverting traditional roles, and by distorting bodies through caricature.19 Like Gombrich, Morris’s theories still lack a robust explanation of how political cartoons communicate new arguments. While these are no doubt several of the methods that an artist might use, they are not explanations for how cartoons function to invoke political debate.

Lester Olson writes about iconography, making several references to case studies involving political cartoons. Similar to Lucaites and Hariman, Olson defines an icon as “a visual representation…a type of image that is palpable in manifest form and denotative in

17 Ibid.: 201.
18 Ibid.
function.” For Olson, iconography then refers to how “advocates [use] visual representations in attempts to enlist the will of an audience.” Cartoons use icons to deploy politicized images in an attempt to persuade the reader by catching their attention with recognizable visual symbols. Like Gombrich’s theories and others before, iconography ultimately privileges the denotative functions of cartoons. This lens however also does not fit for analyzing the Muhammad cartoons because their images do not rely on the manipulation of a previous icon.

Other authors move to examine how cartoonists use visual techniques to activate the viewer as a key participant in creating the cartoon’s meaning. Josh Greenberg argues that political cartoons position “readers within a discursive context of ‘meaning-making’ and [offer] readers a tool for deliberating on present conditions.” Political cartoons create the context for reflection by targeting discussion towards a specific issue. One way cartoons frame issues is through an awareness of “temporality.” Greenberg writes that cartoons “provide a lens through which an implied version of the past may be examined vis-à-vis present conditions... political cartoons are thus both informative and persuasive.” Cartoons can disobey the linear rules of time to help create through-provoking situations that hook the reader. Also, drawing from Goffman’s theory of “framing,” Greenberg notes that cartoons “operate as frames for the organization of social knowledge insofar as they make use of various rhetorical devices— metaphors,

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21 Ibid.: 18.
23 Ibid.: 185.
catch phrases, depictions, etc.—that purport to capture the essence of an issue or event.”

This theory of framing builds upon prior denotative explanations of the visual elements by suggesting that the image is not a closed work, but rather a call for the reader to participate in social debate. Political cartoons provide metalanguage for discourse about the social order by constructing idealizations of the world… [they] “frame” phenomena by situating the “problem” in question within the context of everyday life and, in this way, exploit “universal values” as a means of persuading readers to identify with an image and its intended message.

Thus, cartoons not only make social arguments, but they also frame them in a way that speaks to the reader to also participate in the debate. As I will explore further in the discussion about social controversy, the Muhammad cartoons are good examples of the type of political cartoon that can invoke broad-scale debate about social values. The theory of “framing” discussed here is also similar to how ideographs function as representative forms, which is the lens I will eventually use in my visual analysis of the cartoons.

Martin Medhurst and Michael Desousa make explicit the connection between political cartoons and the traditional aspects of verbal discourse. They argue that cartoons utilize the same “neo-classical canons of invention” used to describe verbal rhetoric: “invention, disposition, style, memory, and delivery.” Like any other rhetorical act, “the cartoonist must discover or invent content, arrange that content for specific effect, and

24 Ibid.: 183.
25 Ibid.: 182.
stylize the presentation by conscious application of the artistic principles inherent to the medium.\textsuperscript{27} Where previous scholars couch their accounts of the rhetorical functions of political cartoons in unique terms, Medhurst and Desousa instead opt for a classic and familiar summarization of the rhetorical elements present. In this, they are able to theorize how cartoons become rhetorical artifacts by describing the process of argumentative creation, rather than focusing on the use of various visual and graphic techniques.

Given the general support for the idea that political cartoons form a type of visual rhetoric, other scholars move to describe why cartoons are politically subversive. Drawing from the semiotic philosophy of C. S. Peirce, Scott McCloud explains how cartoons get the viewer to think deeply about the issue at hand. He posits that cartoon images function as legisigns, or images “based on empirical appearances but… essentially abstracted from the empirical sense data.”\textsuperscript{28} That is, McCloud argues that cartoons capitalize on the human tendency towards cognitive closure, “the filling in of the blanks that a comic leaves open.”\textsuperscript{29} Cartoons thus invite the viewer to interpret the message and inject their own meaning into the reading of image. In addition, the interplay of the images and the text of the cartoon also “open[s] a complex web of understanding that is very different than the left-to-right reading of standard text.”\textsuperscript{30} This tendency for political cartoons to invite reflection serves to “create a tension that allows for cognitive freedom…. [this] creation of meaning that is implied by the inter-textual play between

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.: 238.
words and images has a fundamental role in creating a liberal-democratic society."\(^{31}\) This understanding of how cartoons invite critical reflection by the reader provides a possible explanation for how the Muhammad cartoons spoke to people across the globe.

**VISUAL RHETORIC AS IDEOGRAPHS: THE **REPRESENTATIVE FORM**

Janis Edwards and Carol Winkler, in their study of the familiar Iwo Jima image, start from the position that the previous scholarship on political cartoons is too limited in its explanation for how potent images become part of larger public discourse. Edwards and Winkler criticize the theory of iconography (similar to that previously proposed by Olson, Lucaites, and Harriman), which they argue places too much emphasis on the recognizable resemblance of the cartoon’s image, and not enough on the values invoked through the choice of using that image.\(^{32}\) First, they write that icons “establish a hierarchical relationship” where the icon calls to reference those arguments which are already associated with the known image.\(^{33}\) Iconography then can merely identify the invocation of arguments that already exist within public discourse. Second, they argue that it follows that this purely denotative function of an icon misses the “more general and abstract function” of the choice of the image.\(^{34}\) Because iconography assumes that meaning is prescribed, it cannot argue that a cartoon creates new meaning. So even though some cartoons may include the use of iconic images, the overall theory of

\(^{31}\) Ibid.


\(^{33}\) Ibid.: 304.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.: 292.
Edwards and Winkler argue that metaphor comes slightly closer to explaining how cartoons create meaning in that, as a theory, it acknowledges that particular images can create new associations. However, because the theory of metaphor assumes the presence of juxtaposition or of symbolic association between two things, it again roots its explanation in the presence of certain types of visual elements that might not be used in all cartoons. While metaphor “may operate as a presentational mechanism… it is transcended as the source of rhetorical invention” by some other, yet-to-be-named process.35

Ultimately, Edwards and Winkler move to propose a larger framework that can explain how a wide variety of visual elements work together to create potent political and social arguments. To frame their theory, they proceed by arguing that McGee’s conception of the ideograph could also apply to images, contextualizing the ideological functions of visual rhetoric within the sphere of cartoons. This connection is the first step in the evolution of their theory of the “representative form” of cartoons, which accounts for the interplay between the image and the reader’s interpretation of its ideological statement. They argue that some images are “a special type of visual presentation that, through a combination of determined visual features and symbolic attributions, constitutes a representative form.”36 That is, a conception of an image as representative form acknowledges the visual components of the work, but it also takes into account the symbolic—or ideological—associations that those visual elements invoke.

36 Ibid.: 295.
Edwards and Winkler draw from two related concepts to develop the theory of representative form: Kenneth Burke’s “representative anecdote” and S. Paige Baty’s “representative character.” They summarize Burke’s “representative anecdote” as a “filter identified by the critic in the course of reconstructing discourse.”

Edwards and Winkler argue that cartoonists, as cultural critics, use particular images because of the “perspective on the situation” that they provide. Quoting Burke, they write that because representative stories “outline strategies for human responses to situations […] they aim at collective understanding [and] they are ‘sufficiently generalized to extend far beyond the particular combination of events named by them in any one instance.’”

Representative rhetorical elements are those that frame a situation in a way to elicit a particular response, not necessarily confined to the issue at hand. Edwards and Winkler point out that though many powerful cartoons (even several of the Iwo Jima cartoons used in their study) do not actually function anecdotally by recalling a particular historical event, considering how a rhetorical message can transcend the immediate elements of a work is still useful for conceptualizing the power of cartoons.

Additionally, the construct of the “representative character” argues that “a person (character) is abstracted and elevated to the status of a cultural figure, and becomes a surface for […] embodying cultural ideals.” Quoting Baty, Edwards and Winkler argue that this character “is abstracted into a symbol… ‘reveal[ing] the nature of conversations about the present… [and the] inclusions and exclusions made in the greater construction

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37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.: 296.
of national identity." Edwards and Winkler’s theory of the “representative form” combines these concepts of representation with the ideograph to explain how “[visual] forms provide instructive perspectives on varied, multiple situations by summing up the culturally-defined essences of human motivations.” In this, cartoons transcend the denotative function of the icon, instead functioning ideographically to create a larger argument through the “appropriation and recontextualization” of visual elements. Through their strategies of satire and parody, cartoons construct “politicized contexts that… motivate differing sense of community.” The parodic nature of a cartoon’s image allows the reader to compare the artist’s interpretation of the visual form with their memory of the original form. This process invites the audience to “participate in the reinforcement of the ideograph’s categorical meaning.” In all, cartoons as visual ideographs draw their cultural and political currency from the “representative form” of the image, which acts as a site for the expression of a particular ideological take on a phenomena. These visual forms are not closed, however, and their viewing by the audience incites the interpretation and reinterpretation that leads to a multiplicity of readings of the issue.

In the context of the Danish Muhammad cartoons, the figure of Muhammad acts as a representative form, the aspect of the image that incites interpretation and reaction.

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41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.: 303.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.: 305.
45 Ibid.
Because many Muslims believe that the graphic depiction of Muhammad is forbidden, the choice to depict him as the central feature of the image makes a bold, antagonistic statement, inviting public deliberation and controversy. Muhammad acts as representative form through the cartoonist’s manipulation of the image to draw “attention to key elements of the ideology of issue.” For example, the most well-known cartoon depicts a close-up of Muhammad with a bomb in his turban. By invoking extremism as the central motif of the image, the cartoon associates Muhammad, and thus the religion as a whole, with the more extremist, violent strains of Islam. The Muhammad representational form also functions ideographically. Though the cartoons display some mild variation in their interpretation of Islam, the overarching ideological opinion of Islam expressed is extremely negative. The cartoons are also a response to a specific, culturally situated event—the apparent self-censorship of the Danish media on issues related to Islam. Muhammad ultimately acts as representative form by identifying “the times and places that warrant ideological judgment.” The cartoons use the Muhammad figure to motivate larger deliberation over ideological interpretations of the freedom of speech.

RHETORIC AND SOCIAL CONTROVERSY

Recognizing the ideographic potential of the Muhammad cartoons explains the substance (or the source) of the Danish cartoon controversy. But there is more to consider regarding the controversy as an event. In modern political society, a controversial public

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
act is often only the beginning of the story. Fortunately, communication scholars have also turned to studying how political rhetoric influences real-world social activism.

In particular, Olson and Goodnight’s work theorizes how acts of political rhetoric become social controversies. Through speech acts of oppositional arguments, they argue, “social controversy… flourishes at those sites of struggle where arguers criticize and invest alternatives to established social conventions and sanctioned norms of communication.” That is, political speech acts can trigger social controversies—debates that take issue with the substance of traditional social norms and the dominant modes of communication. Social controversies take place within the public sphere of argument, where shared notions of social understanding and of appropriate communicative practices are formed, and are thus also up for debate. Olson and Goodnight explain how it is that social controversies form in their discussion of oppositional arguments. They write,

oppositional argument functions to block enthymematic associations and so disrupt the taken-for-granted realm of the uncontested and commonplace. So, oppositional argument unsettles the appropriateness of social conventions, draws attention to the taken-for-granted means of communication, and provokes discussion.49

Social controversies are triggered by public speech acts that seek to challenge common social assumptions in favor of less-mainstream positions. These rhetorical arguments upset the common modes of public communication by undermining, rather than appealing to, dominant enthymematic assumptions. In disrupting the traditional train-of-

49 Ibid.: 250.
thought for public argument, speech acts that use oppositional arguments are thus able to spark widespread debate over the interpretation of the cultural norm at hand.

These speech acts also invite various reactions that fuel the controversy by triggering “impulse[s] to close the discursive space of argumentation, whether at a global or local level, thus evok[ing] gestures that widen and animate the nondiscursive production of argument.” This political rhetoric not only advances arguments for a particular social controversy, but it also invites nondiscursive acts “to redefine and realign the boundaries of private and public space.” Because oppositional arguments stir up responses from those in positions of power, people working for social change find success in engaging in public rhetorical argument. Even social controversies that fall short of having lofty goals to radically change society are powerful in their ability to usher into the public real aspects of life that are hidden away, habitually ignored, or routinely disconnected from public appearance. By rendering these aspects noticeable and comment-worthy, performed arguments expose specific social conventions as unreflective habits and so revalue human activities.

From Olson and Goodnight’s case study of the controversy over wearing fur, we can develop a loose method for mapping social controversies. The first step isolates the particular social conventions in dispute, revealing the objection, or the what, of the controversy. Next, understanding the social context that gives rise to the controversy helps explain why the challenge is being mounted and why it is happening in its specific context, the where. Plotting the specific arguments made by society, both the

50 Ibid.: 252.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
communicative acts and the nondiscursive reactions that follow, then reveal how the controversy develops into a grand public debate. In all, their analysis provides guidelines for tracing exactly how, why, and where social controversies arise, which will be useful for mapping the Danish cartoon controversy.

The Danish cartoons quickly spiraled out of control to an all-out social controversy. The cartoons as a political speech act sought to challenge both common social norms, those of Muslim social and religious norms, and also dominant communicative norms, those relating to media censorship over criticizing Islam. They blocked the normal enthymematic tendency to privilege the freedom of religion (here, respect for religious and social tradition) over the freedom of speech (criticism of Islam). The oppositional arguments made by the cartoons spurred debate over how to navigate this potential conflict between the freedom of speech and religion, including discussion of the responsibilities of publishers and journalists for what they print, and what role the government may ultimately have over censorship issues. In Denmark, and for most of the cultural West, both the freedom of speech and religion are held as some of the most important tenets of liberal democracy. The wave of immigration to Europe and the US from religiously diverse, non-Christian areas like the Middle East and Asia has brought these issues into tension. In the case of the Danish cartoon controversy, the artists and the newspaper decided to speak up regarding the palpable conflict between complete deferral to religious freedom and the public censorship that would be required to uphold such a value.

The cartoon controversy also exhibits several of the other developmental trends for social controversies. For example, calls from the Muslim world for the cartoons to be
censored, along with the death threats made towards the cartoonists and the *Jyllands-Posten* editor, mark the attempts to shut off the debate, and represent examples of how the controversy went global in its reach. Non-discursive reactions also followed, everything from al-Qaeda targeting Danish troops in Afghanistan, to violent riots in Muslim countries resulting in hundreds of deaths worldwide. In all, Olson and Goodnight’s work on how political speech acts evolve into all-out social conflict provides useful for exploring the Danish cartoon controversy.

METHODOLOGY

This thesis ultimately has two goals: first, performing a rhetorical analysis of the Danish Muhammad cartoons themselves, and second, an analysis of the cartoons as a global controversy. I will consider the twelve political cartoons printed together in *Jyllands-Posten* on September 30, 2005, including the most ubiquitous image, Kurt Westergaard’s cartoon depicting Muhammad with a bomb in his turban, and Jens Julius’s depiction of Muhammad saying they have run out of virgins in the Muslim afterlife. I will analyze the cartoons for the various uses of visual elements that work together to create arguments about the freedom of speech and freedom of religion and then look to the global responses to these visual arguments. To accomplish these analyses, I will use two main methodological processes: a visual analysis of the Muhammad cartoons using Edwards and Winkler’s theory of the representative form of the ideograph, followed by an attempt to chart the “Danish cartoon controversy” in light of Olson and Goodnight’s theory on the development of social controversies.
First, in regards to the textual analysis, scholars who take on political cartoons note that the plethora of visual rhetorical theories available poses a methodological challenge. It’s possible that no single theory will apply to all of the cartoons at hand, and it’s likely that multiple communicative processes are at work in an image. Edwards and Winkler’s theory of the representative form starts from this assessment of the previously available methodologies; they advocate that an additional level of analysis of the visual ideographs present is critical. The method they offer for analyzing cartoons includes both describing the visual elements present and analyzing the representative form of the image. Like the Iwo Jima cartoons they examine, the Muhammad cartoons do not neatly fit any of the previously available methodologies like iconography or metaphor. Because the Muhammad figure embodies several of the traits of the representative form of the image, I will also adopt the framework set up by Edwards and Winkler. Specifically, they suggest an initial reading of the cartoons, using theories like metaphor and iconography to form a preliminary analysis of what form the visual elements of the cartoons. From here, they turn to the primary analysis of the representative form of the image. I will seek to isolate the representative form of the cartoons and investigate how the visual forms come together to create that powerful central element. This process will include an analysis of the ideographic functions of the images.

Second, in light of the international explosiveness of the cartoons, I will supplement my visual analysis with an exploration of the controversy that ensued.

Because Olson and Goodnight’s theory on social controversy provides a method for explaining and mapping a controversy from the initial speech act to the development of a global debate, I will model their study of the social controversy over fur for my analysis of the Danish cartoon controversy. They isolate four main steps for analyzing the development of a social controversy. First, they propose defining the key social conventions at issue in the controversy. From there, they move to an analysis of the social context which gives rise to the controversy. Then, they suggest for the critic to mark the “trajectory” of the controversy. In this final step, the critic should ask several important questions: How does the controversy unfold in response to the initial speech act? Who are the social groups that become involved? What are the arguments made by each “side” of the controversy? How is the debate communicated? What is the ultimate shape of the controversy?

Given these two methodologies, this thesis will read the Danish Muhammad cartoons first as representative form and second as social controversy. Chapter 2 will perform a visual analysis of the cartoons using Edwards and Winkler’s theory to define Muhammad as a representative form. Here, I will present the actual images of the cartoons for consideration. I will first examine the visual elements of the cartoons to identify the ideographic functions of the images. I will then isolate the ways in which the Muhammad character serves as the representative form of the image, arguing that this reading of the cartoons best explains how just several images can invoke such a complex debate.

Chapter 3 will then turn to analyzing the cartoon controversy. This section will investigate the social context for the controversy to understand the specific cultural situation that gave rise to the creation of the cartoons in the first place. I will proceed by identifying the social norms in question, the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion, and attempt to unpack the arguments made by the cartoons act as oppositional arguments. After reading the cartoons in light of Olson and Goodnight’s discussion on the original speech act, I will then follow the controversy as it grew, tracing the initial reactions to the cartoons, to the debate in the media over the freedom of speech, to the governmental discussion over the appropriateness of censorship, to the global public debate over the freedom for Muslims to express themselves.

Because the Muhammad cartoons pushed so many communicative boundaries, it is important to keep adjusting our theories to account for the newest argumentative expressions. Chapter 4 will thus conclude this thesis by proposing some new suggestions for the theories of the representative form and for controversy theory.
CHAPTER TWO:

THE MUHAMMAD CHARACTER AS REPRESENTATIVE FORM AND THE
IDEOGRAPHS OF THE DANISH CARTOON CONTROVERSY
When analyzing any rhetorical artifact, attempting to assess the creator’s motivations is an inherently imprecise task. In the case of the Danish Muhammad cartoons however, we do not have to completely sidestep this uncomfortable task because the choice to create the images at all indicates a response to a rhetorical exigence, here a call for public argument on censorship. Each cartoon was submitted to Jyllands-Posten in response to the culture section editor’s request for cartoonists to draw the Prophet Muhammad and to break what he saw as a self-censorship about Islam. The visual works produced to answer this call thus make arguments that can be assessed based on their treatment of the central ideological phenomena in question—the Muhammad character. Even though we cannot assume to know every motivation behind each creation, we can attempt to read the message created through the depiction of Muhammad. Though the ultimate argument made by each cartoon differs, every cartoonist made a choice to put the character of Muhammad at the center of his or her cultural commentary. As such, this primary figure acts as the theoretical rallying point for my visual analysis of the cartoons.

Edwards and Winkler argue that political cartoons often contain a central ideographic element, or representative form, which helps “create and reaffirm the identity of the body politic through its ideographic functions.”57 They offer several characteristics for considering which cartoons could have these ideographic functions. First, they suggest that the representative form should generally fit the traits of McGee’s ideograph. I will highlight the main characteristics of the ideograph that they isolate as important. Second, they argue that cartoons often manipulate and re-appropriate images in order to make their ideographic arguments. This chapter will proceed by first examining the

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ideographic functions of the Muhammad cartoons, then finish by assessing how the cartoons re-appropriate the Muhammad character to create its representative form.

**THE MUHAMMAD CARTOONS AS VISUAL IDEOGRAPHICS**

Edwards and Winkler in their work on Iwo Jima political cartoons suggest the theory of the representative form of the ideograph to account for visual works that have strong central motifs for their arguments, but that do not necessarily lend themselves to the past visual theories that largely rely on denotative explanations, like iconography or metaphor. The central motif of the Danish political cartoons, the Muhammad character, similarly does not fit the application of these previous theories. Because both the theories of iconography and metaphor assume that cartoons draw their visual power from comparing their subject with other, more familiar images, they do not account for the work being done by the depiction of Muhammad, a decidedly non-familiar image. The Muhammad figure, however, does fit the more fluid description of the ideograph. Where icons and metaphors source their argumentative substance from *borrowing* from past associations, ideographs “*enact* their meaning by expressing an association of cultural ideas and experiences in an ever-evolving and reifying form.”\(^{58}\) Rather than exploring the denotative aspects of the image, Edwards and Winkler’s theory of the visual ideograph focuses on what the cartoonist is trying to argue, using a description of the visual elements as a mean to assess the cartoon’s ideological statement, not as an end in and of itself.

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\(^{58}\) Ibid.: 297.
Whether or not a visual artifact is an icon or ideograph of course depends on more than just the scholar’s choice of which rhetorical theory to use. As summarized by Edwards and Winkler, there are indeed “definitional and functional boundaries of the ideograph.”59 These characteristics provide general guidelines for assessing whether an image has more than just denotative power. They are the ability to: serve as a term in public discourse, to abstract collective, normative goals, to guide particular behaviors or justify a certain way of thinking, and to present a particular, culturally-bound argument. The Danish cartoons fulfill these qualities, and an assessment of their ideographic power facilitates a larger reading of the Muhammad character as a representative form.

Ordinary Terms in Political Discourse

First, as summarized by Edwards and Winkler, an ideograph is an “ordinary term in political discourse.”60 An ideograph does not necessarily have to be ubiquitous, but it should be accessible to the population at large and not just to political elites. This trait speaks to one of the goals of an ideograph; it presents its ideological worldview to the populace at large in hopes that the public finds some point of association with which to access the issue, even if they enter the discussion on the other side of the debate. The accessibility of an ideograph also contributes to its widespread power. McGee’s original article provides an illustrative example. He gives the example that if “we find forty rhetorical situations in which ‘rule of law’ has been an organizing term,” we may find forty different explanations for the concept of the “rule of law.”61 But the importance of the “rule of law” as an ideograph is not in any singular interpretation of the phrase, but

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.: 297-8.
rather its function as a construct for the cultural interpretation of what it could, has, or should mean. This ideograph provides the central call and space for the public to deliberate about its social values. Whether or not an individual holds the “rule of law” to stand for justice, or equal treatment, or stability, or anything else, ideological agreement is not the point. The concept functions ideographically by acting as a common access point for public deliberation.

The Muhammad cartoons qualify as ideographs under this consideration in several ways. At the top level, the cartoons start with the choice to caricature the Islamic religion, and more specifically, to depict or allude to the Prophet Muhammad. This opens the discussion in terms that most people can relate to, that of their interpretation of Islam. Even if the viewers are unfamiliar with nuances of the Islamic religion, or even its general tenets, they still have some cultural conception of what it is. Like the “rule of law” example above, the depiction of the Muhammad character does not rely on agreement or expertise with the issue for its power; it functions ideographically by providing a general point of reference to ground political deliberation on the subject.

For example, if the twelve cartoons were presented to a viewer as they were laid out for publication (see Figure 1), they might not understand or relate to every individual argument made in each image. But taken together, the repeated Muhammad character functions ideographically to open the debate over the various cultural interpretations of Islam to the general public. The title of the piece is “Muhammeds ansigt,” which translates to “the face of Muhammad,” indicating that the set of cartoons is meant to display a variety of interpretations of Muhammad, or more broadly, Islam. The group of
cartoons thus invites debate on the subject by providing a diverse assortment of viewpoints on the provided question.

Figure 1

Muhammad is also represented in ways that challenge the dominant interpretation of how to treat the character. Because the politically-correct treatment of Muhammad is
actually to refrain from depicting him at all, the comics’ choice to graphically present him functions ideographically by breaking free from the dominant discursive norm. Many Muslims believe that it is forbidden by God to depict the Prophet Muhammad, which is normally respected by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

At the level of the individual cartoon, the artists tend to appeal to an accessible political value as the context for their statements about Islam. The Muhammad cartoons thus function ideographically by couching their arguments in terms of ordinary political language. By alluding to familiar tropes in political discourse, the cartoons activate a large common cultural space.

For example, in his cartoon (see Figure 2), Kurt Westergaard draws on several political constructs to shape his comment on Islam. At the conceptual level, by using the Muhammad character, the cartoon associates the Islamic religion with the violent strains of Islam. The image depicts them as being one-and-the-same; it elides any distinction between the religion and violent sects. On the level of visual elements, the depiction of the bomb in the turban appeals to the political language of terrorism. Since the terrorist bombings in Madrid and London, the relationship between Islam and terrorism has been an important issue for European publics. The cartoon grounds its conversation about Islam within representations of terrorism to spur public reaction through the use of common associations.
Abstracting Collective Normative Goals

McGee also suggests that ideographs must be a “high-order abstraction representing [a] collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal.”62 The abstraction of the normative values evoked by an ideograph allows for multiple and diverse interpretations of the message. The ideograph should be ambiguous, yet familiar enough for many people to feel called upon by the artifact.

62 Ibid.: 15.
Edwards and Winkler’s study of Iwo Jima-themed political cartoons describes how images can act as ideographs in this way. They argue that the Iwo Jima image accommodates application to a wide array of political contexts [while] the precise normative goal being represented [also] defies an easy explanation. Democracy, freedom, liberty, patriotism, military preparedness, and equality of opportunity are all components of the representation, but no single language term sums up the interpretations of the image.\(^{63}\)

Images are thus ideographic because they have the potential to conjure up interpretations of various social or political norms. The Iwo Jima case study exemplifies the type of rhetoric that Lucaites and Hariman discuss in their work on iconic images. As reviewed earlier, they argue that images provide the cultural resources that “animat[e] the collective identity and action necessary” for political debate.\(^{64}\) Applied to McGee’s conception of the ideograph, images could have the power to draw large parts of the population into social debates.

The Muhammad cartoons also function ideographically in this way by evoking ill-defined, yet familiar interpretations of cultural norms. For example, Rasmus Sand Hoyer manipulates the visual elements of his cartoon to make a statement about Islam’s position on the treatment of women (see Figure 3). Here, the ideograph alludes to the abstract collective norm held by Western liberal publics that women have equal rights and social value to men. It also constructs Islam’s treatment of women as being deficient and in opposition to Western practices. While the exact political agenda of the cartoon is

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\(^{64}\) Lucaites and Hariman, "Visual Rhetoric, Photojournalism, and Democratic Public Culture," 38.
unknown, the elements of the ideograph are suggestive enough to get the audience thinking about the intersection of women’s rights and religious tradition.

The visual elements of the image themselves make up the form of the ideograph that facilitates these multiple readings. First, the image leaves some ambiguity as to whether or not the central male character is Muhammad. Aside from generic visual clues like dressing the man in Islamic garb, there is no certain marking that he is in fact the Prophet Muhammad. However, the cartoon cannot be separated from the context under which it was created, which was for the cartoonist to depict Muhammad as they see him. This uncertainty over the identity of the character, Muhammad or any Islamic male, necessarily invites the viewer to make that judgment for him or her self. Also, by making the Muhammad character sufficiently vague, the cartoonist calls for argument about whether or not there is any variation in the treatment of women by Muslim societies and that called for under Islamic religious tradition. This ambiguity invites judgment as to whether or not there is a distinction between Islamic social and religious culture.

Second, the image’s juxtaposition of the black-veiled women and the “blindfolded” male character forms the element that appeals to Western cultural interpretations of women’s rights, facilitating the audience’s application of their own ideological judgments to Islam’s treatment of women. The full body coverings worn by the women allude to the Western perception that women in Islamic societies are kept from expressing or asserting themselves as individuals. The physical position of the women behind the man also invokes the idea that women are secondary in Islamic society. The man’s outwardly extended arm however adds another level of ambiguity to the image. This element could be read as the man preventing the women from advancing
forward, or they could just as easily see it as a move on his part to protect the women from harm. Either way, the visual element is topical, yet open enough to facilitate multiple, nuanced interpretations of Islam’s treatment of women.

A final ideographic component of the image is the “blindfolding” of the man himself. Like Islam’s veiling of women, this cartoon suggests that those very same Islamic beliefs serve as a veil over the whole culture. The depiction of a physical black bar blinding the man symbolizes the metaphoric blindness that one might say comes with holding restrictive beliefs about women’s rights. Here, the cartoon functions ideographically by alluding to the “collective normative goal” held by Western societies that openness, and ultimately freedom and justice, are best served in a world where women are not oppressed.

Figure 3
Excerpted from Figure 1.
Guides Behavior and Beliefs

The next characteristic of the ideograph is that it “warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or anti-social, and guides behavior and belief into channels easily recognized by a community as acceptable and laudable.”\textsuperscript{65} Where the first two functions of the images above both describe what the ideograph contains (what political terms and cultural norms are called upon), this trait gets to what the ideograph attempts to accomplish. For example, Edwards and Winkler explain how the Iwo Jima image “is used to parody governmental actions for the purpose of highlighting whether they are acceptable or antisocial in nature,” like the cartoon critiquing the Gulf War that depicts US troops raising up a gasoline pump instead of a flag.\textsuperscript{66} Here, the ideograph works to argue for or against a particular behavior to communicate its ideological message.

Several of the Muhammad cartoons illuminate this ideographic function by creating scenes that justify the act of depicting Muhammad itself. For example, the cartoon by Arne Sørensen comments on the cartoonists’ decision to draw Muhammad (see Figure 4). The focus of this cartoon is not on any particular trait of Muhammad or of any criticism of Islam. Instead, the image serves to “excuse” the behavior of the cartoonists who have chosen to draw Muhammad, an action that certainly is perceived as “anti-social” in its pure sense (that is, against the Western cultural norm to respect religious beliefs). By representing the cartoonist at the drawing board, it directs its ideological judgment towards the censorship aspect of the prompt. In depicting the \textit{act} of

\textsuperscript{65} McGee, "The "Ideograph": A Link between Rhetoric and Ideology," 15.
\textsuperscript{66} Edwards and Winkler, "Representative Form and the Visual Ideograph: The Iwo Jima Image in Editorial Cartoons," 301.
drawing Muhammad, the cartoon suggests that the set of cartoons as a whole was not meant to be a careless insult, but rather a call for public discussion on an issue of social tension. The cartoon thus functions ideographically by attempting to positively guide the viewers’ interpretations of the set of cartoons towards one that understands the freedom of speech aspect of the collective argument. Showing the cartoonist carefully watching over his back signifies that the artists could very well have known that their work would be controversial, but that they made a calculated risk for the sake of instigating what they saw as public debate. At the very least, by depicting the artist as a self-aware journalist, the image attempts to put the event in a context that the community might be able to recognize or even find “acceptable.” Though the audience may not agree with the decision to disrupt the cultural norm of deference to religious respect, they might still be able to see that there is a viable ideological debate to be had over the arguments made regarding censorship and the freedom of speech.

Figure 4
Excerpted from Figure 1.
The cartoon by Jens Julius also guides judgment along easily identifiable and “laudable” channels for the community (see Figure 5). This image appeals to a common, Western interpretation of a particular Islamic tenet based on a passage in the Qur’an that discusses the Islamic afterlife. One reading of the passage suggests that Muslims are promised 72 virgins in the afterlife if they martyr themselves.67 Even though there is debate over whether or not this is a proper interpretation of the Qur’an, it is still widely considered to be a notable aspect of Islamic religious tradition. As such, the cartoon invites the audience to reflect on the idea that Muslim’s glorify their martyrs, often the terrorists on suicide missions against Western targets. The cartoon here functions ideographically by presenting a situation for reflection on the behaviors valorized by Islamic ideology. And by appealing to one of the most familiar facets of Islamic culture, the cartoon invites the viewer to participate in the negotiation of its ideological message.

Figure 5
Excerpted from Figure 1.

Culture Bound Arguments

McGee’s last characteristic for the ideograph is that they are ultimately “culture-bound.” That is, all of the ideograph’s work is done in the context and the language of the culture in which it was created. As potent triggers for public debate, the ideograph motivates community discussion by invoking the language of common cultural norms. The cultural specificity of the ideograph is necessary for it to be familiar enough to the audience for them to feel called into the debate.

For example, the ‘PR stunt’ cartoon illustrates the culturally specific aspects of the ideograph by centering around a parody of Kåre Bluitgen (see Figure 6), one of the inspirations for the call for the cartoons. Bluitgen, a Danish author, went to Flemming Rose at Jyllands-Posten after he could not find an illustrator for his children’s book on the life of Muhammad. Rose himself described this as part of the “series of disturbing instances of self-censorship” that prompted him to issue the call for Danish cartoons to draw Muhammad. But there is another level to the cultural specificity of the message in this cartoon besides just being in on the knowledge of the identity of the specific cartoonist. The words “PR stunt” are inscribed on an orange in the turban, which draws upon the Danish expression that an "orange in the turban" represents a "piece of luck". The punch line then revolves around the idea that Bluitgen is merely trying to get publicity for his book, part of the joke that a non-Dane would probably not understand.

THE RE-APPROPRIATION OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

In addition to the core ideographic functions as established by McGee, Edwards and Winkler argue, “appropriation and recontextualization appear to be central features of the transformation of visual images into representative forms.”70 By this, they argue that cartoonists build their ideographic arguments by choosing the “situational context” to

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deploy their arguments.\textsuperscript{71} For example, a simple reprint of the infamous Iwo Jima photo does not necessarily rise to the level of a representative form because there has not been a manipulation of the context of the photo to make a new ideological argument. A political cartoon that spoofs the Iwo Jima soldiers raising up a gas station pump instead of the American flag, however, does make an ideographic argument about US energy politics. The cartoon thus acts as a representative form by re-appropriating the familiar form of the Iwo Jima image to make a new, contextual argument.

One way that representative forms situate their arguments is by using parodied contexts to “identify the specific circumstances which inspire the ideology’s application.”\textsuperscript{72} For example, one cartoon uses the Muhammad character to communicate the negative reactions that would arise from the cartoons’ representations (see Figure 7). As previously discussed, the artists submitted their cartoons in response to a call for the Danish media to end their self-censorship on issues related to Islam. So, in this cartoon, the Muhammad character acts as a representative form to help identify the “specific circumstances” that “inspired” the choice to draw Muhammad. By foreshadowing the negative response from Muslims to the cartoons, the image affirms the connection between negative representations of Islam and backlash from Muslims. That the two Muslim men react hastily and violently to the cartoons implies that the subject is one of the utmost sensitivity. The cartoon ultimately alludes to the deference to Muslim sensibilities that is at the root of \textit{Jyllands-Posten}’s censorship argument. Here the representative form is self-reflexive—Muhammad is drawn to create an image of him reacting to being drawn. This helps make clear the context for the set of cartoons,

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
specifically, that the controversial creations arose from an environment fraught with tensions between the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion.

Figure 7
Excerpted from Figure 1.

Edwards and Winkler also argue that a cartoon’s representative form creates its ideological argument by “direct[ing] the audience’s attention by the addition, omission, substitution, and/or distortion of visual elements.” In her cartoon (see Figure 8), Annette Carlsen’s argument involves manipulating the Muhammad character from being the central, dominant form, to being part of the crowd. By making Muhammad part of the line-up, the cartoonist forces the viewer to react to the composition of the image. The Muhammad form is not front-and-center, but his depiction still makes an argument. The viewer has to interpret what it means for Muhammad to hold one of the spots in a police

73 Ibid.
line-up. The cartoon has thus “directed the audience’s attention” towards its ideological argument through its particular treatment of the representative form. The image “adds” and “omits” from the visual codes of the Muhammad character when compared to the other cartoons’ depiction of the ideograph. The presence of another religious figure (see Jesus with his halo, #3 in the line up), along with what appears to be an average citizen, adds a visual element acknowledging Danish (or Western) culture as the implied context for the cartoon’s argument. It also adds a level of interaction or association between Islamic and Danish visual elements. The image also omits the visual elements present in several of the other cartoons where Muhammad is suggested to be aggressive or violent. And though the viewer can still identify Muhammad as #6 in the line up, the cartoon does not depict him provocatively. These additions and omissions to the Muhammad character put forth a representative form that communicates the particular ideological argument being made in this cartoon.

Figure 8
Excerpted from Figure 1.
Overall, the theory of the representative form explains how these Muhammad cartoons create their ideological arguments about Islam in a way that invites political reflection. As a final consideration, I will note that McGee describes how ideographs are “structured horizontally;” when people make use of them, they clash with other ideographs which further influences their meaning.\(^7\) The next chapter, which maps the cartoons as a social controversy, investigates how the arguments within in the cartoons clashed with the dominant interpretations of the freedom of speech and religion. This idea that conflicting ideographs spur public debate will be further explored in the context of how rhetorical acts evolve into social controversies.

\(^7\) McGee, "The "Ideograph": A Link between Rhetoric and Ideology," 12.
CHAPTER 3:

FROM RHETORIC TO SOCIAL CONTROVERSY:
THE MUHAMMAD CARTOONS BECOME THE “DANISH CARTOON
CONTROVERSY”
From this discussion of representative form, we can see that the Muhammad cartoons are potent visual ideographs that captured the public’s attention. Indeed, the cartoons’ publication triggered a worldwide political and cultural debate, dubbed the “Danish cartoon controversy” by the media. The uproar surrounding the cartoons quickly became treated as an event; the images were not just twelve works of art intended for a local audience, but an intentional political performance. Rather than focusing on the content of the individual images, the public debate turned to addressing what the publication meant for larger issues social norms.

The Danish cartoon controversy follows a path similar to the case study on the social debate over wearing fur that Olson and Goodnight use to develop their position on social controversies. They define social controversy as “an extended rhetorical engagement that critiques, resituates, and develops communication practices” in order to call into question some shared “social convention.” The Danish cartoon controversy seems to fit this description; the cartoons criticize the tendency for the Danish media to defer to Muslim religious sensibilities at the expense of the freedom of speech. The cartoons exemplify the first part of their definition by making Olson and Goodnight’s arguments in a way that critique communicative practices. Flemming Rose, the *Jyllands-Posten* editor, states that he wanted to argue against the trend towards media self-censorship and thus controversially published the depictions of the Prophet Muhammad.

In this, the cartoons also function as what Olson and Goodnight call *oppositional arguments*. These types of rhetorical arguments “block enthymematic associations and so

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disrupt the taken-for-granted means of communication.”76 By provocatively displaying Muhammad, the cartoons upset the “ability and willingness” of the viewer to supply “shared knowledge, experiences, or assumptions and so complete the argument.”77 The cartoons act as oppositional arguments by taking aim at two “social conventions” dear to Western publics, freedom of religion and freedom of speech, in ways that challenge the dominant or traditional line of thinking about these values. The Muhammad cartoons thus eventually became the Danish cartoon controversy through the deployment of oppositional arguments within the context of a contentious political speech act.

Summing up Olson and Goodnight’s approach, there are several important components to consider when studying a social controversy. They include: the social and cultural context for the debate, the political speech act and its challenge to communicative norms, and finally the larger oppositional arguments made in critique of various social norms. Using these guidelines, this chapter maps the cartoon controversy, beginning with an investigation of the cultural environment that led to the publication of the cartoons, followed by an analysis of how the cartoons disrupted communicative norms. It then turns to what oppositional arguments are being made about the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion and how these debates formed as the controversy grew.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

A complete analysis of a social controversy requires an understanding of the origins of the debate, including the cultural specifics of the time and place where it

76 Ibid.: 250.
77 Ibid.
occurred. Olson and Goodnight argue that “it is important to establish… the factors that make [the artifact] a site of struggle at this historical juncture,” which involves carefully evaluating the conditions of the public sphere within which the controversy started.78 Because of its “political qualities,” the public sphere provides the space for people to “advocate and contest matters of shared concern” like the cultural norms often at the center of social controversies.79 As such, the particularities of the public sphere influence both the communicative and social norms challenged and thus also shape the social controversy.

Turning to the Muhammad cartoons, Denmark might at first seem like an odd location for the birth of the cartoon controversy, given that it is a relatively small country. Karen Wren notes that “Danish society has traditionally regarded itself as liberal and tolerant,” and, like the other Scandinavian countries, is strongly committed to social welfare.80 However, a closer look shows that Denmark has not “escaped the recent wave of racism and xenophobia that has swept over continental Europe.”81 Demographic and cultural trends in Denmark over the past few decades in fact reveal quite a tumultuous picture of Danish society. Muslims, who comprise about five percent of the Danish population of about 6 million people, began immigrating to Denmark in the 1960s.82 A European Commission survey of racist attitudes in European Union member states from 1997 captured the pervasiveness of racism in Danish society; only seventeen percent of

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78 Ibid.: 253.
79 Ibid.: 250.
81 Ibid.
82 Müller and Özcan, "Dangerous Depictions: A Visual Case Study of Contemporary Cartoon Controversies", 11.
Danes defined themselves as “non-racists,” the lowest percent of any EU country.83 Another study found that eighty-five percent of Danes had no social interaction with ethnic minorities, and that racist feelings were higher towards Muslims than other minorities.84 Sociological studies have documented this general decline in the social relations between ethnic Danes and Muslim immigrants as early as the 1980s. It was about this time that academic research on race relations in Denmark became focused on immigrant culture. The “dominant paradigm” of this research conceptualized ethnic relations in terms of the “conflict between the traditional culture of the immigrants and the more individualized and detraditionalized form of life in Danish society.”85 Hussain argues this academic discourse served to shape public argument on immigration by “implicitly support[ing] the widely popular and simplistic approach of cultural difference, accentuating [ethnic relations] as an us-them problem.”86 This epistemology explicitly defined Muslim culture in opposition to ‘Danishness’ while framing that very separateness as the root of domestic tension. This idea of Danish cultural homogeneity “provided fertile territory for cultural racism, with immigration being construed as a threat to national identity.”87 Wren argues that this “construction of immigrants as a ‘problem’ has become real in its consequences through informing generally racist practices within a variety of [Danish] institutions.”88 Every one from academics to

84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.: 98.
86 Ibid.: 99.
88 Ibid.: 158.
“policy-makers, the media, far-right anti-immigration groups and individual local politicians” use “anti-immigrant manifestos to boost their popularity.” 89

The Danish media is arguably the most important forum in the cultivation of tensions between ethnic Danes and Muslim immigrants. As early as the 1980s, the media as an institution played a large role in the propagation of racist stereotypes against Muslims. Like other Western democracies, Danish society holds the freedom of speech as a very high value, which Wren argues has actually just served as a “cloak” for “unconsciously racist logic.” 90 The Danish cultural conception of the freedom of expression also holds that extremist discourse rightfully belongs in the public sphere. 91 So absent any cultural or legal constraint, Wren notes that

the Danish media have been a very effective vehicle for the propagation of the anti-immigration views of [the far right political party] Den Danske Forening… the Danish press has consistently portrayed ethnic minorities in a negative light, and other studies have shown that the Danish media have persistently disseminated very negative and prejudiced images of Muslim immigrants in particular. 92

This unchecked anti-immigration discourse results in a Danish press that is “a vehicle for the dissemination of the ‘unconscious grammar’ of cultural racism.” 93 Given the relative silence of the political left, as these radical messages flood public discourse, they come to look more like the norm than the extreme. This discursive “vacuum” locks in a  

89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.: 155.
92 Ibid.: 156.
93 Ibid.: 158.
construction of “Muslim culture as oppressive to women, thereby constituting a ‘threat’
to a society where gender equality is regarded as an important social and political
achievement.” These representations unfortunately shape real world perceptions of
Danish immigrants. The general demonization of Muslims “has led to institutionalized
racism, rampant labour market discrimination and extremely high levels of ethnic
minority unemployment.”

_Jyllands-Posten_, which published the cartoons, is Denmark’s largest newspaper
and caters to “the religious and political sensitivities of its readership.” The paper
publishes ideologically conservative pieces and Svend White argues that it has been
“instrumental… to the rise of the far right in Denmark over the last two decades.” It
also “has long rallied anti-immigrant sentiment with dire warnings of the imminent
demise of the Danish identity.” As such, _Jyllands-Posten_ seems to fit squarely within
the account of the Danish media above, a newspaper that engages in the demonization of
Muslims in the name of free expression.

Put in historical context, that a conservative Danish newspaper would publish the
Muhammad cartoons is not surprising. What is interesting then is what prompted the
newspaper to commission the cartoons at this particular time. If the Danish media was
already generally hostile to Muslims, then what further statement was the editor trying to
make? Which part of public discourse was the target of their critique? This next section

94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Müller and Özcan, "Dangerous Depictions: A Visual Case Study of Contemporary
Cartoon Controversies", 12.
97 Svend White, "Jyllands-Posten and the Otherization of Europe’s Muslims," in The
Cartoon Debate and the Freedom of the Press. Conflicting Norms and Values in the
Global Media Culture, ed. Bernhard Debatin (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), 177.
98 Ibid.
will explore these questions, investigating the initial political speech act and its criticism of dominant communicative norms.

COMMUNICATIVE NORMS AND THE POLITICAL SPEECH ACT

After exploring the context for the debate, we can turn to the political speech act that initiated the social controversy. Olson and Goodnight refer to this initial act as the objection, a performed refutation of some shared social norm.\(^9\) Their understanding of the objection is unique in that it accounts for speech outside of the traditional types of technical or bounded political discourse like presidential or legislative debates. The objection may call for “debate within a consensual context,” but it is also “raised to challenge the legitimacy or appropriateness of communication practices.”\(^1\) By criticizing norms of public discourse, the objection invites public reaction and stirs up controversy. So when considering the objections that trigger social controversies, we also need to analyze what communicative norms are being contested by the speech act.

The objection in the case of the Danish cartoon controversy is the original publication of the twelve cartoons in *Jyllands-Posten* on September 30, 2005. Chapter 2 of this thesis performs a textual analysis of the cartoons in order to explore the visual arguments of the cartoons themselves. But as Olson and Goodnight’s conception of the objection suggests, there is more than just the substance of the cartoons to consider for understanding the cartoons as a political speech act. We have the solicitation for the

\(^1\) Ibid.
cartoons and the text accompanying the cartoons to consider, in addition to the primary examination of the objection’s critique of communicative norms.

Flemming Rose, the culture editor at *Jyllands-Posten*, is vocal in his defense of the decision to publish the cartoons, which sheds some light on the motivations behind the initial objection. Several months later, he published an editorial in *Jyllands-Posten* reacting to the uproar and attempting to explain his rationale for publishing the cartoons. He writes,

I commissioned the cartoons in response to several incidents of self-censorship in Europe caused by widening fears and feelings of intimidation in dealing with issues related to Islam… The idea wasn't to provoke gratuitously... Our goal was simply to push back self-imposed limits on expression that seemed to be closing in tighter.\textsuperscript{101}

One of the “incidents of self-censorship” that he refers to is the trouble that author Bluitgen had finding an illustrator for his children’s book about the life of Muhammad, discussed in Chapter 2. Rose was also concerned over a September incident where the Danish Prime Minister met with “a group of imams, one of whom called on the prime minister to interfere with the press in order to get more positive coverage of Islam.”\textsuperscript{102}

The final straw for Rose was a comment from a Danish comedian in a *Jyllands-Posten* interview that “he had no problem urinating on the Bible in front of a camera, but he dared not do the same thing with the Koran.”\textsuperscript{103}

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\textsuperscript{101} Rose, "Why I Published Those Cartoons."
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
In order to address what he saw as a growing wave of self-censorship on Muslim issues, Rose invited the members of an association of Danish cartoonists "to draw Muhammad as you see him."¹⁰⁴ Twelve out of more than twenty-five cartoonists responded to the call and Rose published them together as a collection. The article was published on page 3 of the culture section under the headline “The Face of Muhammad,” with the introductory heading reading “Freedom of Expression.”¹⁰⁵ Rose opens the article by recounting the examples of self-censorship that prompted him to solicit the cartoons. He puts these incidents in the context of what he saw as a greater cultural conflict between Islam and the West, writing

the cited examples give cause for concern, regardless of whether the experienced fear is founded on a false basis. The fact is that the fear does exist and that it leads to self-censorship. The public space is being intimidated. Artists, authors, illustrators, translators and people in theatre are therefore steering a wide berth around the most important meeting of cultures in our time – the meeting between Islam and the secular society of the West, which is rooted in Christianity.¹⁰⁶

From the beginning, Rose intends for the Muhammad cartoons to be controversial rhetoric in the sense that Olson and Goodnight discuss. This accompanying article invites a larger cultural debate over tensions with Islam while also critiquing communicative norms about censorship. In fact, Rose outright argues that one of the primary motivations

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
¹⁰⁵ Henning Fode, "Decision on Possible Criminal Proceedings in the Case of Jyllands-Posten's Article 'the Face of Muhammed',' ed. The Director of Public Prosecutions (2006), http://hvad-sagde-vi.dk/side327.html.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
for publishing the Muhammad cartoons, the objection, seems to be to upset the discursive
trends towards self-censorship in Danish media.

This act, as the objection, reverses the “direction” of the public discussion about
Islam towards one that accepts more negative representations. But the cartoons also did
more than just put out negative comments about Islam; Rose and the cartoonists went a
step further in their communicative critique by putting depictions of Muhammad at the
center of their speech act. Olson and Goodnight describe that in the negotiation of the
objection, the “debate over the ‘truth’ of an asserted claim is set aside…and challenges
are raised as to the acceptability of the communicative context within which the
argument” is made.107 The discussion of the cartoons has largely focused more on the
common depiction of Muhammad rather than on any smaller argument made in an
individual cartoon. The decision to depict Muhammad as the central character in the
images raised the cartoons from being a local speech act to being an objection powerful
enough to trigger international social controversy. Rose and the cartoonists not only made
a political statement about media self-censorship, but they controversially performed that
criticism at the same time.

The potency of the overall cartoon controversy was extremely high no doubt
because the initial objection was so controversial. The debate over whether or not it is
forbidden to depict Muhammad is itself a highly contentious discussion. Though there is
the general assumption in the West that the Islamic religion prohibits any image of the
Prophet, there are actually many different cultural interpretations of how Muslims should
treat Muhammad’s likeness. Philip Cass explains that the “in the majority sunni tradition

107 Olson and Goodnight, "Entanglements of Consumption, Cruelty, Privacy, and
of Islam, it is forbidden to depict any of the Prophets." It makes it haram (forbidden by Allah) to depict any living thing. However, the shia tradition of Islam practiced in places like Iran and Iraq does not completely reject depicting Muhammad. For example, medieval shia art features images of Muhammad, either showing his face and hands or “sometimes with only a blank space where his face would be.” Even now, in Iran, it is possible to buy paintings of Muhammad as a young boy “because of a fatwa (ruling) that he was not then the Prophet.” The choice to depict Muhammad is thus controversial in two ways. First, it violates the communicative norm to respect the widely held Islamic belief that forbids depicting Muhammad. Second, in associating this motif with their critique of the media’s self-censorship of Islam more generally, it assumes a universal conception of Islamic culture. This conflation of a particular sunni belief with all of Islamic culture adds another facet to the objection that has the potential to incite controversy.

Given the provocative manner in which the cartoons targeted Danish self-censorship, it is not surprising that they transcended the localized context in which they were created and published.

The cartoons eventually reached a much wider global audience in very different cultural and political contexts… those “unintended audiences” then turned into

109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
primary audiences that became influential in the upcoming phases of the cartoon-related events.\textsuperscript{112}

Though they were initially created to comment on censorship in the Danish media, the cartoons rapidly became the rallying point for a much larger audience. The objection itself was such a controversial performance that the public reaction quickly went global. The international media began treating the Danish cartoon controversy as an \textit{event}—a sudden, dramatic occurrence that attracts a significant amount of journalistic coverage. As Adam Shehata notes in his review of media literature, there is wide scholastic support for the idea that events are largely shaped by the way they are “framed” in public discourse.\textsuperscript{113} He argues that the cartoon controversy is “certainly a framing contest” with “\textit{Jyllands-Posten} and the Danish government attempt[ing] to define [the] issue in terms of the freedom of speech” while many Muslim actors “promoted an intolerance frame.”\textsuperscript{114}

This understanding of the cartoon controversy as an event then begs the question of \textit{what is being framed}. What arguments do the cartoons make that need to be interpreted? What larger cultural issues do they call into the discussion? How do these substantive arguments lend themselves to multiple interpretations, thus open for “framing”? Answering these questions however requires further analysis of the social arguments made by the cartoons. Following Olson and Goodnight’s method, this next section turns to examining the oppositional arguments made by Rose and the cartoonists.

\textsuperscript{112} Müller and Özcan, "Dangerous Depictions: A Visual Case Study of Contemporary Cartoon Controversies", 23.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.: 139.
Where the objection in a social controversy is the speech act itself, the concept of *oppositional argument* refers to the particular social critiques within the performance. Olson and Goodnight argue that “oppositional argument unsettles the appropriateness of social conventions… and provokes discussion.”\(^{115}\) It does so by breaking from using the traditional Aristotelian enthymeme, an argument that “accomplishes the end of persuasion by affiliating the claims of the speaker to the conventional knowledge or opinions of an audience.”\(^{116}\) Instead, oppositional arguments work to draw in the audience by abandoning common assumptions and by presenting new points of view for consideration. These arguments may take aim at “procedural rules” or at the “grounds” used to establish social norms.\(^{117}\) That is, the objections that trigger social controversies can have a variety of targets, from public policy and specific aspects of the law, to the less tangible (but still contestable) realm of shared social understanding that shapes cultural norms.

As the statements from Rose have previously indicated, the initial “social convention” at the root of the Danish cartoon controversy relates to what he saw as a trend in the Danish media towards self-censorship in regards to speech that criticizes Islam. This specific social practice highlights the palpable tension in many Western societies between the freedom of religion and the freedom of speech. Like much of the rest of Europe, the terrorist bombings in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 brought the

\(^{116}\) Ibid.
\(^{117}\) Ibid.: 251.
issue of Islamic terrorism close to home for Denmark. Danish society understandably had a renewed sense of fear about the potential threat from violent Islamic groups. And as Rose has noted, this fear manifested itself in a Danish public sphere unwilling to criticize Islam at all for fear of provoking hostilities. Rose’s concern over the group of imams who were pressuring the Danish prime minister to “interfere with the press in order to get more positive coverage of Islam” illustrates how complete respect for religious preference inevitably conflicts with a robust understanding of the freedom of speech. By taking issue with the dominant negotiation of the tension between these two social values, the cartoons thus act as oppositional arguments by rejecting the common logic behind them. By refuting the assumptions and the logic behind the dominant move towards self-censorship, the cartoons abandon the traditional enthymematic conclusions to their arguments. In this, they incite controversy by forcing the audience to rethink the public silence regarding any criticism of Islam. The cartoons do not argue for any hard interpretation of either the freedom of speech or the freedom of religion, rather, they direct attention to how we negotiate the intersection of the two. This use of oppositional argument explains how the Muhammad cartoons were able to instigate widespread social controversy, by contesting popular interpretations of the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion.

Identifying the main topics—freedom of speech and freedom of religion—as the *topoi* of the debate however only describes the general target of the social debate. We still need further analysis of *what* the speech act is arguing for and against. These arguments can be indentified largely by how the debate is framed by a particular “side” or agent in the debate. Here, Shehata’s work on the discursive framing of the cartoon controversy
will help structure my investigation into how the various players constructed their respective arguments; those who primarily saw the controversy as one of defending the freedom of speech, and those who saw it as a move to weaken the freedom of religion.

Risto Kunelius and Elisabeth Eide, analyzed the media coverage of the cartoons in fourteen countries and note that the freedom of speech is the primary lens for discussing the Muhammad cartoons within the West.\footnote{Kunelius, "The Mohammed Cartoons, Journalism, Free Spech, and Globalization," 11.} Based on interviews and editorials, we can explore how the editor and the cartoonists couched their arguments regarding free speech. By adding the work of Kunelius and Eide’s project, we can also investigate how the freedom of speech framing played out in several relevant contexts, such as domestically in Denmark, in another Western European country like France, and also in Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim country.

As previously mentioned, Rose’s motivation for soliciting and publishing the cartoons was also to defend the freedom of speech in the face of widespread self-censorship. In an editorial five months after the initial publication, he further explains how the cartoons relate to the Danish conception of the freedom of speech. Rose writes,

We have a tradition of satire when dealing with the royal family and other public figures, and that was reflected in the cartoons. The cartoonists treated Islam the same way they treat Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions. And by treating Muslims in Denmark as equals they made a point: We are integrating you into the Danish tradition of satire because you are part of our society, not strangers. The cartoons are including, rather than excluding, Muslims.\footnote{Rose, "Why I Published Those Cartoons."}
Here, he gives an example of how this self-censorship undermines a particular expression of free speech, the Danish tradition of political satire. Rose’s agenda is not to spell out radical changes to Danish interpretations of the freedom of speech, but rather to defend the rights and expressions they already should have. He also makes the point that the cartoons are merely attempting to treat Muslims to the same standards of speech that would be applied to any religious group. The logic then behind this defense of free speech is not to single out Muslims, but in fact the opposite, to treat them as social equals. Rose’s framing of the freedom of speech debate ultimately revolves around the need to fairly and consistently apply whatever the cultural standard is, guarding against any potential censorship in the name of over-catering to religious demands.

In terms of the domestic response to the cartoons within Denmark, both the media and the government framed the controversy in terms of the freedom of speech. Peter Hervik and Clarissa Berg conducted a framing analysis of the Danish newspaper coverage of the controversy for several months following the cartoons’ publication. Their work finds that the articles covering the event in *Jyllands-Posten* largely adopted the freedom of speech framing of the debate.\(^\text{120}\) Both *Jyllands-Posten* and the other large newspaper *Politiken* published articles painting the violence threatened towards Denmark specifically as backlashing to a liberal conception of the freedom of speech.\(^\text{121}\) By mid February, several *Jyllands-Posten* articles went as far as to say that the growing violence in reaction to the cartoons was proof that the West in fact did need to defend free speech.

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\(^\text{120}\) Peter Hervik and Clarissa Berg, "Denmark: A Political Struggle in Danish Journalism," in *Reading the Mohammed Cartoons Controversy: An International Analysis of Press Discourses on Free Speech and Political Spin*, ed. R. Kunelius (Bochum/Freiburg: Projektverlag, 2007), 26.

\(^\text{121}\) Ibid., 27.
in the face of radical Islam. The mainstream domestic newspaper coverage in the preliminary stages of the controversy for the most part defended the cartoons as a legitimate expression of free speech.

Several of the newspaper articles illustrate how using the freedom of speech was an effective _topos_ to spur controversy. For example, Hervik and Berg saw some articles frame the event as one of "freedom of speech as a Danish freedom." By discussing the freedom of speech as something that “we” need to defend in light of threats from religion “out there,” the articles associate the value of free speech with Danish culture in opposition to some external Muslim threat. This association of the freedom of speech and Danish culture invites more of Danish society to participate in the debate by making it an issue of nationalism or cultural pride.

The Danish government also treated the controversy as a debate over the freedom of speech. Rassmussen, the Prime Minister at the time, refused to meet with a group of ambassadors from Muslim countries, saying that the "freedom of expression has a wide scope and the Danish government has no means of influencing the press." He gave several interviews shortly after this decision that suggested he saw no responsibility on the part of the government to respond to the event and thus interfere with the freedom of speech. Here, Rassmussen presents a fairly extreme interpretation of the government’s role in “policing” the common interpretation of the freedom of speech. Many liberal democracies accept that there can be some justification for limiting speech if there is a compelling interest to do so, such as in cases of hate speech. The prime minister also

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122 Ibid., 28.
123 Ibid., 30.
124 Ibid., 29.
framed the controversy as an issue of re-balancing the freedom of speech and religion back towards more expression. He went as far as to say that he would “never accept that respect for people's religious affiliations [could] lead to restrictions on the press and its opportunity to be critical, humorous or satirical.” This suggests that the freedom of speech could never be eclipsed by considerations for the freedom of religion. Even compared to the arguments made by Rose and *Jyllands-Posten*, Rassmussen’s position is quite radical. Many in Denmark cited the Prime Minister’s handling of the cartoons as the reason for the global escalation of the controversy.

Kunelius and Eide argue that by February 2006, the controversy in Denmark “ceased to be exclusively a battle between the Danish and the ‘Islam world.’” After a small Norwegian newspaper reprinted the cartoon in January 2006, a slew of other European newspapers followed in February indicating that the cartoons had become an all out event. Free speech continued to be a central *topos* in the controversy as other countries sought to negotiate their own cultural interpretations of the debate. Dozens of newspapers around the world reprinted the cartoons to signal journalistic solidarity with the cartoonists. The map of countries (see Figure 9) where the cartoons were republished shows that most of the reprinting occurred in the West (here clearly illustrating the “West” as a cultural construct rather than as any neat geographical bloc). Kunelius and Eide suggest that the controversy provided the framework for the media to engage in a discussion about the freedom of speech that they desperately needed in an era

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125 Ibid.
126 Ibid., 28.
128 Ibid., 11.
129 Ibid.
of increasingly globalized media coverage. By reprinting the cartoons, these Western newspapers also took up the framing of the controversy as one about the freedom of speech.

Figure 9
Reprinted with permission.

These reprintings helped to stimulate public discussion about the controversy by domesticating the issue. For example, the debate received little attention in France until the “crisis was brought home” when the daily France Soir republished the cartoons. The controversy here was also framed largely as an issue of free speech. When several more left-wing publications followed France Soir, one editor explained that the debate was not about “whether these cartoons were good or not but whether we have the right to publish them.” This comment suggests that the potential for rights violation due to the

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130 Ibid., 9.
131 Jérôme Berthaut et al., "France: Should Voltaire Be a Prophet in His Own Country?,” in Reading the Mohammed Cartoons Controversy: An International Analysis of Press Discourses on Free Speech and Political Spin, ed. Risto Kunelius, Working Papers in International Journalism (Bochum/Freiburg: Projektverlag, 2007), 54.
132 Ibid., 56.
offensive nature of the speech should not be considered to be more important than the right to express that speech in the first place. These newspapers’ decisions to republish the cartoons signal that the freedom of speech should be paramount to any other consideration in the debate, an interpretation of expression similar to that held by Rose. Jérôme Berthaut and several colleagues analyzed the coverage of the controversy in major French newspapers, confirming that the dominant media discourse was one defending the publication of the cartoons as an issue of free speech.\textsuperscript{133} Many articles argued that limiting free speech in the name of a religion violated the French tradition of \textit{laïcité}, which sees religion as a private matter not to take precedence over public rights.\textsuperscript{134}

This vein of the debate, unique to the cultural specifics of France, demonstrates how oppositional arguments invite widespread controversy through their contestation of the very definitions of shared social values. Even though the cartoons were initially published to criticize a specific situation in Denmark, they were ultimately able to intrigue a very large audience because their arguments about free speech were sufficiently “fundamental” to apply to many more cultural contexts. The cartoons functioned as oppositional arguments by disrupting the discursive stasis regarding the tensions between freedom of religion and free speech, a strategic move that transcended the original context of the cartoons. Rose’s campaign against self-censorship resonated with other Western publics who felt they had a stake in the larger debate.

Alas, as with any social controversy, these oppositional arguments also invite the “other side” to express their interests in the debate. By taking aim at the media’s

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
censorship of commentary about Islam, the cartoons also indicted the implicit shared understanding of the freedom of religion as one that gives complete deference to religious preference by prohibiting any criticism of its practices. The depiction of Muhammad calls for public debate on how to negotiate Western cultural interpretations of the freedom of religion with those held by Muslim societies.

Arguments in the debate about the freedom of religion vary widely depending on the audience; where in the West discussion focused on free speech issue, Muslim audiences largely framed of the controversy as one of hostility towards Islam. The controversy grew quickly in Muslim public; by early October 2005, a group of ten ambassadors from Muslim countries requested to speak with Rassmussen about the general situation of Muslims in Denmark, citing the cartoons as one of several reasons for their concern.135 When the Prime Minister turned down their request, he only cited the cartoon “event” in his refusal, which gave the controversy an international dimension. As these ambassadors represented countries with over half a billion Muslims, Kunelius and Eide argue that this single rejection served to massively expand the audience and context of the controversy.136 That same day, the cartoons were picked up by Al-Jazeera, a popular Arab news outlet.137

Many Muslims were outraged by the cartoons’ depiction of Muhammad and their general hostility towards Islam. For the Muslims who believe it is forbidden to depict Muhammad, the cartoons were taken as an insult. Because many Muslims believe that Muhammad is “the most honoured figure in Islam and to insult him is to insult the

136 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
messenger of God,” the cartoons were seen as “an insult [that] brings shame upon Islam” itself.\textsuperscript{138} The presence of the Muhammad character thus ensured that many Muslims would only see the cartoons as offending their religious beliefs. When engaging the controversy, many Muslims argued that the cartoons’ offensive speech violated their freedom of religion. Though the dominant Muslim discourse did not often use the phrase “freedom of religion,” it is still a useful organizing \textit{topos} for discussing the set of arguments made by Muslims in response to the cartoons. While the Muslim reaction used varying language to describe their argument, conceptually, their call for religious respect is similar enough to the freedom of religion for it to be a useful concept of analysis.

The \textit{topoi} of freedom of religion can also be seen early in the controversy. By the end of October 2005, several Muslim organizations within Denmark filed a formal legal complaint against \textit{Jyllands-Posten} claiming that the cartoons violated the Danish Criminal Code, which protects religious groups from public scorn.\textsuperscript{139} They argued that the cartoons publically criticized Islam and were thus a violation of the freedom of religion. Their complaint was eventually denied, but their move is still important for understanding how the “other side” saw the debate.

One popular trend in the news coverage in Muslim countries was to frame the controversy as a conspiracy by the West against the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{140} This position argued that the cartoons were nothing more than an attempt to provoke violent reactions from Muslims to provide further evidence for the “clash of civilizations” theory of

\textsuperscript{138} Cass, "A Dozen Danish Cartoons and the Wrath of the Muslim World," 152.
\textsuperscript{139} Kunelius, "The Mohammed Cartoons, Journalism, Free Spech, and Globalization," 10.
international relations. Based on the concepts behind Samuel Huntington’s theory, this view argued that the controversy was meant to further drive apart the Islamic and Western world by constructing them as culturally incompatible. In theory, by forcing Muslims to stand up for their religious beliefs, the cartoons would trigger an irreconcilable conflict with Islam and religion on one hand, and the West and free speech on the other. Some responses critiqued the idea that cultural clash was, in fact, an inevitable reality and in doing so, suggested that the freedom of religion and freedom of speech could be successfully balanced by those involved.

The discourse in some countries more directly centered on the issue of the freedom of religion. For example, the concept of blasphemy dominated the debate over the cartoons in Pakistan. Many newspaper editorials stressed the idea that the cartoons showed disgust for Islam and thus violated Muslims’ right to freely express and practice their religion.\(^{141}\) This framing of the debate implies an interpretation of the freedom of religion that would not allow any criticism of religious beliefs. One of the editorials published in the Pakistani paper *Nawa-e-Waqi* demonstrates this assumption by explaining that the “freedom of expression does not imply freedom from morals, values and regulations but stands for the protection and respect of religious and social values.”\(^{142}\) In addition to having complete respect for religious practices, this comment also argues that the freedom of religion should take precedence over the freedom of speech. More specifically, the editorial suggests that this interpretation of the freedom of religion actually best preserves the goals of the freedom of speech, which is ultimately to protect the freedom of expression. The characterization of the cartoons as blasphemous thus

\(^{141}\) Ibid., 135.

\(^{142}\) Ibid.
speaks directly to the social controversy at the root of the debate; it argues that the self-censorship seen by Rose is actually the appropriate amount of public respect that should be given to Muslims.

The concept of blasphemy is also useful for understanding what the “free speech side” is saying about the freedom of religion. Because the conflict is ultimately about the intersection between the freedom of speech and religion, a major consideration is how each side defines these concepts. Where Muslims see critical speech against Islam as a violation of their religious rights, many in the West do not. Cass argues that many in Europe did not consider the cartoons offensive because they no longer hold religion to be as important socially as many Muslims. Because of the trend in Western Europe over the last century to marginalize religion, Cass suggests that Europeans “no longer [have] an intellectual framework in which religion [is] understood, much less respected.”

This culture of secularity, along with a liberal tradition of the freedom of speech, created a discursive environment where religious criticism was seen as acceptable. Those arguing for the side of free speech are accustomed to an interpretation that protects controversial speech, even when it is targeted towards a particular religion. A comment made by Rose illustrates this point—in one of his editorials, he argued that the cartoons did not discriminate against Muslims because they just treated Islam to the same level of satirical speech that would be applied to Christianity. His argument relies on an interpretation of the freedom of religion that assumes that the levels of respect defined as acceptable by Christians will satisfy other unique religions. His comment really argues for a universal,

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143 Cass, "A Dozen Danish Cartoons and the Wrath of the Muslim World," 150.
144 Rose, "Why I Published Those Cartoons."
Western conception of the freedom of religion that ultimately comes to sanction the type of speech that Muslims find blasphemous.

Overall, the diversity of interpretations within the freedom of religion frame illustrates the back-and-forth style of argumentation that characterizes political oppositional argument. Rose states that he published the cartoons primarily defend the freedom of speech, yet the choice to depict Muhammad inevitably adds another level of cultural criticism to the controversy. The cartoons performed their critique of Danish self-censorship in such a way that triggered global public debates about free speech and religious respect. Given the evolution and growth of the cartoon controversy, from a localized speech act to an international crisis in cultural relations between Islam and the West, we can see that political performance is just as relevant for social critique on a global level today as it was on the national level for Olson and Goodnight in the early nineties.
CHAPTER FOUR:

CARTOON CONTROVERSY UNCONCLUDED:

THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE AS THE CONFLICT CONTINUES
The lens of the representative form and the theory of social controversy, taken together, tie this analysis of the cartoon controversy as an event to the Muhammad cartoons as a text. After exploring how the visual elements of the cartoons function ideographically, we can make connections between the text and the framing of the political oppositional arguments in the larger controversy. The Muhammad character in particular is fundamental to the potency of the global conflict because it massively expands the scope of the cartoons’ critique. Reading Muhammad as a representative form allows us to explain how the cartoons create their provocative oppositional arguments about the freedom of speech and religion. If someone wanted to use the cartoons to argue that many Islam beliefs are patriarchal, they could point to the image of Muhammad blindfolded in front of the veiled women. Or they could point to the Muhammad character turning away new martyrs because they are out of virgins. These ideographic components of the cartoons make the ideological arguments for the oppositional arguments of the controversy. Taken together and published as a set, the cartoons became an event. Even if we cannot clearly link every stage of a social controversy back to the rhetorical artifact, the original text still serves as a general rallying point to sustain public debate. A *Jyllands-Posten* article mapping the controversy illustrates this idea,

> A number of Muslims stated in interviews that they were not especially offended by the blasphemic content of the drawings, but they felt that their culture and religion generally was not respected in Denmark and the drawings were a symbolic case which they could rally around.\(^{145}\)

And this precisely sums up the relationship between ideographic representative forms and social debate; the Muhammad cartoons were able to conjure up a global ideological debate and transcend the specifics of their initial creation by including elements that were provocative, yet ambiguous enough to spur a sustained social controversy.

Olson and Goodnight note that sustained controversy is healthy for social critique and democratic deliberation, though their work does not suggest how to weigh the sheer amount of violence committed in the aftermath of the cartoon controversy. The Danish cartoonists have the luxury of living in a society with a press liberal enough to entertain this performance, yet the death threats they received after the publication reminds us of how high the stakes can be in a global controversy. This violence however is not senseless; it is a direct manifestation of the social controversy, what Olson and Goodnight refer to as a non-discursive performed reaction. Where the discursive parts of the debate critique the status quo in order to open up discussion, non-discursive performances work within this new, uncharted ground to “radically recontextualize” public norms.  

For the performed reactions to the controversy that enacted some sort of tangible policy response, it is easy to read how they fit as non-discursive arguments within the larger event. For example, Muslim countries from Saudi Arabia to Indonesia decided to boycott Danish goods in response to the Danish government’s unwillingness to condemn the cartoons. Although the boycotts were short lived, Danish businesses were understandably concerned about their potential economic effect. These boycotts

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demonstrate how non-discursive reactions can expand the conflict even further to parts of the population who may not have desired to participate in the discursive debate.

Some parties also attempted to use the cartoons as a bargaining chip to advance their understanding of social norms. The Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference used the controversy to put pressure on the United Nations and the EU to further protect religion from blasphemous speech. They used the cartoon controversy and the opening of discussion to their advantage to push for a new interpretation of free speech that would internationalize an Islamic conception of the right. These non-discursive actions further influence the re-negotiation of social norms within the social controversy while also spilling over to affect other areas of the public sphere.

Many of the responses have in fact had lasting implications on political relations between Denmark, Europe, and many Muslim countries. Even now in 2009, the cartoon controversy pops up as a problem in international affairs. For example, at the recent April 2009 NATO summit, former Danish Prime Minister Rassmussen was set to be approved as the new secretary-general of the organization. However, when it came time for the nomination debate, Turkey strongly objected to his appointment calling the “Dane's candidacy ‘unacceptable’ because of the Danish cartoon crisis.” Turkey, the only NATO member with a predominantly Muslim population, had issue with Rasmussen’s defense of the cartoons while he was Prime Minister. NATO diplomats had to hold

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148 Hundevadt, "The Cartoon Crisis – How It Unfolded."
150 Ibid.
emergency sessions to ensure his nomination, as one noted, failure would have “huge symbolic importance.” Though he was eventually confirmed, the stakes for NATO were extremely high. In a time when the organization is struggling both to transform its strategic purpose in a post-Cold war international environment and to fight an effective campaign in Afghanistan, NATO’s relations with the Muslim world are of the utmost importance. This incident illustrates how potent social controversy can be when it escalates to a global scale.

Unfortunately, unlike the NATO conflict where the reaction was effectively negotiated through political (and international diplomatic) deliberation, not every non-discursive performance is easily mediated within the controversy’s realm of argumentation. Muslim extremists for example used the cartoon controversy to drum up support for global jihad against the West. One Saudi cleric called for Muslims worldwide to rise up, stating that the cartoons are "part of the war waged by the decadent West against the triumphant Islam." Though it is easy to understand how this reaction emerges from the cartoon controversy, it is difficult to imagine how Western publics could effectively defuse, or even respond to, the situation within the already established bounds of the social controversy. In this case, these performed reactions essentially use the cartoons as a means to an end (to rally support for holy war) for a related agenda, not to re-enter the debate with any intention of engaging the other side to resolve the conflict.

It may be difficult to calculate the risk posed by another call for jihad (given that many Western publics already live in a state of relative fear since the 9-11 attacks in the

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151 Ibid.
US or the London and Madrid bombings in Europe), but the riots and bombings committed in the name of the cartoons make it easier to calculate the collateral damage from controversy. Once the protests started escalating in early February 2006, the violence spread across the globe like wildfire. Protests in Syria finally spiraled from peaceful sit-ins to violence, marking the first of a series of attacks on Danish diplomatic installations abroad. Demonstrators stormed the Danish embassy, setting it ablaze before also turning to burn down the Norwegian embassy. The following day, protestors set fire to the Danish consulate in Beiruit, Lebanon. And the next day, the Danish mission in Tehran, Iran was attacked with fire-bombs. As the news of each incident spread, so did the escalation of the violence. The protestors also expanded their targets, threatening other Western interests based on their implicit support for Denmark.

This has implications for a wide-array of Western interests as troubles in Afghanistan illustrate. After the slew of embassy attacks, demonstrators clashed with NATO forces in several Afghan provinces, killing protestors and several Norwegian troops. The protests were problematic because they were “morphing into an opportunity for individuals… to push agendas that often [had] little or nothing to do with defending Islam.” Groups were using the cartoons as fodder in other political disputes, and the Coalition’s agenda in Afghanistan is paying the price. Because these responses became so detached from the actual substance of the cartoon debate, the West was challenged to

155 Hundevadt, "The Cartoon Crisis – How It Unfolded."
take a step back and attempt to see the conflict from an even greater perspective. The
cartoon controversy had ceased to be about freedom of speech; for many, it became a
metonym for a greater struggle against the Western world.

The map below graphically illustrates this point that a country’s reaction to the
cartoons generally corresponds to its geopolitical alignment (see Figure 10). When the
countries that experienced violent protests (shaded red to indicate intensity) are added to
the countries that reprinted the cartoons (shaded in blue), we get a sense of how the
ideological fault lines of the cartoon controversy line up with the physical boundaries
between the Islamic countries and the cultural West. Given this geographic pattern and
the seemingly irresolvable nature of the controversy, it's understandable why so many use
the cartoons to support the “clash of civilizations” worldview.

Figure 10
Reprinted with permission.

The events recounted in this conclusion could easily be read to suggest that the
cartoons do in fact demonstrate that there is an insurmountable gap between the cultural
positions of the Islamic world and the West. However, this “clash of civilizations”
framing of the cartoon controversy erases the role that public discourse plays in cultural
debate. Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism explains how discourse is actually the very
root of the “clash of civilizations.” As summarized by A. Macfie, Orientalism argues that
language “ascribes reality and reference to objects (other words) of its own making.”

“In Islam” and the “West” did not exist as homogenous and conflicting spheres of cultural
power until they were socially constructed as such. Because “language speaks the Arab,
not vice versa,” we can understand that the “Islamic world” does not exist as some static
entity set on violence against the West, it is entirely a construction born out of
representation. In the case of the cartoons, the images of Muhammad do not express
any innate characteristics of Islam, but rather project their own Western representations
onto the religion.

Heiko Henkel contextualizes this idea to the Muhammad cartoons, explaining that
they “explicitly do the work that much public commentary in Europe does implicitly:
linking dark-skinned people to the notion of irrational dogma and violence.”

The cartoon controversy was not simply an expression of the clash of civilizations, but an
active creator of the myth. The cartoons deploy the traditional construction of Islam as
fundamentalist and incompatible with Western social norms. Unfortunately, these
representations serve to also paint Muslims as incapable of fitting into democratic

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158 Ibid.
159 Heiko Henkel, “‘The Journalists of Jyllands-Posten Are a Bunch of Reactionary
Provocateurs’: The Danish Cartoon Controversy and the Self-Image of Europe,” *Radical
Philosophy*, no. 137 (2006),
society.\textsuperscript{160} All of this unfortunately suggests that the cartoons’ discourse is ultimately a self-fulfilling prophecy; by using Orientalist representations to paint Muslims as hostile to Western culture, they cause the very reactions they seek to criticize.

The cartoon controversy thus highlights the importance that discourse plays in global cultural debates. Henkel suggests that

Much would be won if rather than seeing in the encounter of Europe with Muslim communities a clash of civilizations or a confrontation with Europe’s own less enlightened past, we could see it simply as a new chapter in the European history of integrating new social projects.\textsuperscript{161}

The critical point is that we can change the tenor and direction of the “meta” conversation between Islam and the West by changing the way we frame the discussion. As long as controversies continue with the assumption that Islam is static and inherently less civilized, it will be impossible to conceptualize how Muslim and Western publics can co-exist peacefully. The West must begin refusing the Orientalist language and logic at the root of the “clash of civilizations” theory if it is ever to gain the trust of the growing number of moderate Muslims who might be willing to talk if only given some prior respect.

In conclusion, the Muhammad cartoons highlight how culturally specific rhetorical performances can have important effects on public discourse outside of their original contexts. Edwards and Winkler’s conception of the representative form explains how the central Muhammad character invites ideological debate about Islam by presenting a provocative visual ideograph. Olson and Goodnight’s work on social

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
controversy then explains that the cartoons functioned as a political speech act contentious enough to spark an international diplomatic crisis that continues to this day.

Overall, the Danish cartoon controversy presents a unique case for extending our understanding of how social controversy operates when it extends to a global audience spanning widely across the cultural spectrum. It certainly pushes the bounds of social controversy much farther than the more localized and contained debates assumed by Olson and Goodnight’s work. The event gives us the chance to study how social conflicts will play out between the West and the rest of the world, which will no doubt continue with increasing frequency given our current trajectory. Further investigation into how social debates develop in inter-cultural contexts will be necessary for understanding how cultures differ in their reading of political speech acts. The cartoon controversy shows that the Muslim and Western worlds have a long way to go before they will be able to effectively communicate with each other. And until global social debates can transcend the discourse of the “clash of civilizations,” the prospect for any sort of common communicative or cultural space seems dim.
WORKS CITED


