



MUSLIMS AND THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN EUROPE: A CASE STUDY OF POST-9/11 MAJOR CONTROVERSIES

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Abstract

This article discusses the rising anti-Muslim sentiment in the European media after 9/11 with special reference to the Dutch cartoon and film controversies. The article examines the circumstances emerged after 9/11 that affected Islam-West relations and their impact on the Western and particularly European media. Viewpoint of the filmmaker and publishers of cartoons are given space with historical and chronological account of publications. Brief analysis of Muslim reaction and its response from the media outlets concerned is also done the outcome of which is also shared in the conclusion.

Keywords: Freedom of Expression, Muslims in Europe, Islam and West, Phalanx, Intransigent

Introduction

Europe adapted a new concept of freedom after renaissance. Liberty, equality and fraternity were the notions given by the French Revolution to the continent. Since then, freedom of expression, in any form, is the core of those freedoms which have been strongly advocated for not only in Europe but across the whole Western world. This concept of freedom, however, did not go uncontested. Other parts of the world were not influenced by European notions rather alternative versions of the same arose within different societies. Muslim world, having its own set of rules regarding freedom of men given by Quran and Sunnah,¹ drew a parallel with the West.

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¹ Teachings, sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad.

Moreover, the 9/11 attacks did not only start a West-led war against terrorism but also fueled intellectual and practical debates like clash of civilizations and end of history across the globe. Reasons could be many, but Islam and the West were the main contenders. Misunderstandings on conceptual level proved to be more fatal as political violence was instigated by those. Anger was shown by both sides irrespective of the means used. This ultimately resulted in Western media portraying Islam and Muslims according to their own understanding which was not relevant to the true Islamic teaching.

The 9/11 and Aftermath

The Western phalanx blames Al-Qaeda for the 9/11 attacks and media across the world largely relies, besides other evidences, on a statement of Osama bin Laden called Al-Qaeda's Second decree to prove this claim. The most circulated video, Osama bin Laden can be seen saying that according to him, the Islamic scholars have maintained a consensus throughout Islamic history that if Muslim states are under attack by enemies, jihad becomes an individual duty rather than a state declaration.² In response, the then US President George W. Bush declared 'crusade' after the attacks while using the words "this crusade, this war on terrorism." He also declared that this war on terror "is going to take a while."³

This declaration led many people especially Muslims around the globe to the immediate conclusion that the US-led war on terror is against Muslims. Even the American media perceived the same.⁴ Europe, on the other hand, got alarmed by this declaration and immediate perception as appeared in the media was that this 'crusade' could lead the world to a 'clash of civilizations.'⁵ The fears and outrage were not baseless. Within a week after

² Rahim Kanani, "Al Qaeda's Religious Justification of Nuclear Weapons", *Huffington Post*, May 25, 2011, at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/al-qaedas-religious-justi_b_786332 (accessed on April 1, 2020).

³ "Remarks by the President Upon Arrival, the South Lawn", The White House, September 16, 2001, at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html> (accessed on April 1, 2020).

⁴ Peter Waldman and Hugh Pope, "'Crusade' Reference Reinforces Fears War on Terrorism is against Muslims", *Wall Street Journal*, September 21, 2001, at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB1001020294332922160> (accessed on April 1, 2020).

⁵ Peter Ford, "Europe Cringes at Bush 'Crusade' Against Terrorists", *Christian Science Monitor*, September 19, 2001, at <https://www.csmonitor.com/2001/0919/p12s2-woeu.html> (accessed on April 1, 2020).

the 9/11, the American media started reporting hate crimes against Muslims, South Asians and Middle Easterners living in America.⁶ This was amid the fact that the American Muslims unanimously condemned the attacks, offered condolences and expressed solidarity with the American people and norms, and showed respect for the law of the land.⁷ Attacks were condemned by Muslim leaders, groups, scholars and media throughout the world too.⁸ Aside from Europe also followed the American course in targeting Muslims in particular and media started highlighting hate cases within days after the 9/11.⁹

These circumstances exacerbated the debate on Islam-West tensions and the term 'Islamophobia' was widely used. Even the secretary General of the United Nations had to say that this terminology was necessary to be used to notice and address the "increasingly widespread bigotry".¹⁰ Throughout the Europe and North America, Islam was seen as sole powerful resistance against freedom, democratic values and the Judaeo-Christian heritage. Scholars noted that "Islamophobia is a 'phobia' of multiculturalism" and the unsettled multicultural effect that Islam by using its "transcultural processes" can have in Europe and the West.¹¹

Western scholars also compared the Islamophobia to Anti-Semitism and said it has same effect on Muslims as Anti-Semitism affects Jews. They termed it

⁶ "Hate Crime Reports up in Wake of Terrorist Attacks", September 17, 2001, at <https://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/16/gen.hate.crimes/> (accessed on April 1, 2020).

⁷ "Muslim Americans Condemn Attack", September 11, 2001, at <http://www.islamicity.com/articles/Articles.asp?ref=AM0109-335> (accessed on April 1, 2020); "Muslim Groups Decry Attacks", *Washington Times*, September 12, 2001, at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2001/sep/12/20010912-025341-2460r/> (accessed on April 1, 2020); Joyce M. Davis, "Muslims Condemn Attacks, Insist Islam Not Violent Against Innocents", *Knight Ridder*, September 12, 2001.

⁸ "Muslims Condemn Terrorist Attacks", Islamic Society of Greater Lansing, at <https://www.lansingislam.com/muslims-condemn-terrorist-attacks.html> (accessed on April 2, 2020).

⁹ "Muslim Community Targets Racial Tension, September 19, 2001", *BBC News*, September 19, 2001, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/1551868.stm (accessed on April 2, 2020).

¹⁰ Kofi Annan, "Confronting Islamophobia: Education for Tolerance and Understanding", United Nations, December 7, 2004, at <http://www.un.org/press/en/2004/sgsm9637.doc.htm> (accessed on April 2, 2020).

¹¹ Gabriele Marranci, "Multiculturalism, Islam and the Clash of Civilizations Theory: Rethinking Islamophobia", *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 5, no. 1 (2004): 105-17.

“a new social cancer” and called it a sort of discrimination having the basis in religion and/or race also accompanying hate speech.¹² It was also widely regarded that rising Islamophobia was violation of human rights as one author termed it while calling it a “threat to social cohesion” no matter if it comes in the form of routine discrimination on the basis of racism or takes more violent turns outside daily life.¹³

Dutch Film and Cartoon Controversies

The first major controversy regarding freedom of expression and Muslims emerged when a Dutch journalist and filmmaker Theodoor (Theo) van Gogh released a film titled “Submission: Part 1” on 29 August 2004. But this was not the beginning as Dutch nation was already polarized on the issue of Muslim immigrants and several right-wing politicians were asking for tougher immigration laws while blaming Muslims of being failed to integrate into Dutch society.¹⁴

On 6 May 2002, Dutch politician Wilhelmus Simon Petrus (Pim) Fortuyn was assassinated in Hilversum by an environmental rights activist called “the Green Robin Hood” by a newspaper.¹⁵ Volkert van der Graaf said that he killed Fortuyn to protect “Dutch Muslims from persecution” while confessing to first political assassination in Netherlands in 400 years.¹⁶ Fortuyn had become a symbol of anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim politics in Netherlands after 9/11. Fortuyn’s killer got 18 years in prison but his death changed the socio-political landscape of the country towards more anti-immigrant and anti-Muslims subsequently giving rise to the politicians like Geert Wilders.¹⁷

A supporter of Fortuyn, van Gogh has been described as “enfant terrible,” “a clearly ambiguous figure” and well known to pass “derogatory statements

¹² John L. Esposito, interview by Marija Marović, November 3, 2011, at <http://pescanik.net/interview-with-john-l-esposito/> (accessed on April 2, 2020).

¹³ Ingrid Ramberg, “Islamophobia and its Consequences on Young People” (published as seminar report by European Youth Centre, Budapest, June 6, 2004), 6, at <https://book.coe.int/eur/en/youth-other-publications/3203-islamophobia-and-its-consequences-on-young-people.html> (accessed on April 2, 2020).

¹⁴ “Controversial Filmmaker Shot Dead”, *Independent*, November 2, 2004.

¹⁵ “Profile: Fortuyn Killer”, *BBC News*, April 15, 2003, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1974572.stm> (accessed on April 4, 2020).

¹⁶ Ambrose Evans-Pritchard and Joan Clements, “Fortuyn Killed ‘to Protect Muslims’”, *Telegraph*, March 28, 2003.

¹⁷ “Dutch Free Killer of Anti-Islam Politician Pim Fortuyn”, *BBC News*, May 2, 2014, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27261291> (accessed on April 4, 2020).

against Muslims and Jews.” He also used to call himself an “intellectual terrorist.”¹⁸ He wrote his last book titled *Allah Weet Het Beter* (Allah Knows Best) in 2003 which has been described as mockingly critical to Islam.¹⁹ Shortly before his assassination, van Gogh was said to have completed a film on the deceased politician Pim Fortuyn.²⁰

On 29 August 2004, Theo van Gogh released his 11-minute film titled *Submission: Part 1* written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali women critic of Islam living in The Netherlands and got elected to the parliament. The subject matter of film dealt with treatment and perception of women in Islam and the film was criticized for its “laziness as both art and protest” being a “morsel of glib effrontery.”²¹ On the other hand, some critics termed the questions raised in film worthy to be asked about Islam.²² The Index on Censorship wrote that the film was “furiously provocative,” van Gogh abused “his right to free speech” and silenced even moderate critical views by Muslims with “obscenities.”²³ However, this piece was widely criticized by media and neutrality of the Index was also questioned. Hirsi Ali and van Gogh both were also accused of plagiarism with accusation of not mentioning their source of inspiration in the film.²⁴ After the release of film, van Gogh received death threats but refused to accept any protection saying that “nobody kills the village idiot.”²⁵

On 2 November 2004 Mohammed Bouyeri, a 26-year old Moroccan-Dutch man shot van Gogh in Amsterdam, cut his throat and stabbed a letter into

¹⁸ Ron Eyerman, *The Assassination of Theo van Gogh: From Social Drama to Cultural Trauma* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 8-9.

¹⁹ Paul Weller, *A Mirror for Our Times: 'The Rushdie Affair' and the Future of Multiculturalism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 158.

²⁰ Marlise Simons, “Dutch Filmmaker, an Islam Critic, is Killed”, *New York Times*, November 3, 2004.

²¹ Lim, “The Day I Became a Martyr”.

²² “The Bootleg Files: Submission”, *Film Threat*, October 27, 2006, at <https://filmthreat.com/uncategorized/the-bootleg-files-submission> (accessed on April 5, 2020).

²³ “Free Speech Fundamentalist on a Martyrdom Operation”, *Index on Censorship*, November 11, 2004, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20041122074958/http://www.indexonline.org/news/vangogh.shtml> (accessed on April 5, 2020).

²⁴ Janny Groen, “Hirsi Ali and van Gogh Accused of Plagiarism”, September 1, 2004, at https://web.archive.org/web/20071017012506/http://www.volkskrant.nl/binnenland/article184995.ece/Hirsi_Ali_en_Van_Gogh_van_plagiaat_beticht (accessed on April 5, 2020).

²⁵ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 314.

his chest with knife. The letter was addressed to Ayan Hirsi Ali claiming that the Islam will be victorious and her “intellectual terrorism” would fail. Following the incident Police arrested him.²⁶ He was later sentenced to life in prison on 26 July 2005 by a Dutch court as he took no defense.²⁷ The chain reaction after the release of the film culminated into a lethal outcome across Dutch society. It polarized the polity and gave the right-wingers much strength. Tolerance for immigrants, especially Muslims dipped sharply as it was deemed “cowardice”.²⁸ The murder of van Gogh also resulted in attacks on Mosques and counter-attacks on Churches in the Netherlands.²⁹

Killing of van Gogh escalated the right-wing politics in the Netherlands and politicians like Geert Wilders rose to prominence. Often dubbed as ‘Dutch Donald Trump’,³⁰ Wilders left Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) in September 2004 when European Union started negotiation to include Turkey as a member country³¹ and founded his own party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*) in 2006. His extreme views against Islam were quite obvious.³²

The release of the film titled *Fitna* in 2008 indicated the deep hatred against Islam and Muslims. Dutch Prime Minister termed this an offense rejected the interpretation of equating Islam with violence.³³ Muslims across Europe including the Netherlands reacted sharply calling it blasphemous. In this heated environment Al Qaeda again issued a decree to kill Wilders a month

²⁶ Sasha Polakow-Suransky, *Go Back to Where You Came From* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 2017), 34.

²⁷ “Killer of Dutch Filmmaker Gets Life in Prison”, *NBC News*, July 26, 2005, at http://www.nbcnews.com/id/8708535/ns/world_news-europe/t/killer-dutch-filmmaker-gets-life-prison/#.Xomn0OozbIU (accessed on April 5, 2020).

²⁸ Rachel Donadio, “Provocateur’s Death Haunts the Dutch”, *New York Times*, October 30, 2014.

²⁹ John Hooper, “Italian TV to Screen Dutch Film Despite Muslim Protests Over”, *Guardian*, May 11, 2005.

³⁰ Tara John, “What to Know About Geert Wilders, the ‘Dutch Trump’”, *The Time Magazine*, March 10, 2017.

³¹ James Taranto, “‘Our Culture is Better’ Champion of Freedom or Anti-Islamic Provocateur? Both”, *Wall Street Journal*, November 29, 2008.

³² Ian Traynor, “‘I Don’t Hate Muslims, I Hate Islam’, Says Holland’s Rising Political Star”, *Guardian*, February 17, 2008.

³³ Gregory Crouch, “Dutch Film Against Islam is Released on Internet”, *New York Times*, March 28, 2008.

prior to release of the film.³⁴ UN secretary General Ban Ki-Moon labeled the film "offensively anti-Islamic". Wilders had to remove one of the controversial cartoons of Jyllands-Posten from the film after Dutch Union of Journalists announced a legal action on behalf of cartoonist Kurt Westergaard whose permission was not taken to use cartoon.³⁵

In 2010 elections, his party reached 24 seats after winning only 9 in previous elections and vowed to "ban Koran" and put "tax on headscarves."³⁶ The simmering situation of hatred and anti-Muslim sentiments in 2010/2011 led to a filing of case against the film by a group of Muslims in Dutch court, where according to an estimate one million Muslims were in the Netherland, but Wilders was acquitted of all the charges on 23 June 2011.³⁷

In 2018, again Wilders announced to hold a cartoon contest to draw Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) but cancelled amid protests in the Muslim world and arrest of a man threatening him to death.³⁸ Later that year, another longstanding right-hand aide of Wilders converted to Islam while writing a book against it. Joram van Klaveren revealed this in February 2019 and his book eventually converted into a book favoring Islam with the title *Apostate: From Christianity to Islam in the Time of Secular Terror*. Klaveren called it a "religious homecoming" and parted ways with Wilders. Islam also continues to grow in The Netherlands despite Wilders' campaign against it.³⁹ At the end of 2019, Wilders announced to revive his controversial drawing contest tweeting that "freedom of speech must prevail."⁴⁰

³⁴ Robert Spencer, "Al Qaeda Fatwa Against MP Wilders", *Jihad Watch*, February 29, 2008, at <https://www.jihadwatch.org/2008/02/al-qaeda-fatwa-against-mp-wilders> (accessed on April 5, 2020).

³⁵ "Controversial Cartoon Cut from Dutch MP's Film on Islam", *Guardian*, April 1, 2008.

³⁶ "Surge for Dutch Anti-Islam Freedom Party", *BBC News*, June 10, 2010, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/10271153> (accessed on April 5, 2020).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Samuel Osbourne, "Dutch Anti-Islam Politician Geert Wilders Cancels Prophet Muhammad Cartoon Competition", *The Independent*, August 31, 2018, at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/muhammad-cartoon-competition-cancelled-geert-wilders-netherlands-a8515801.html> (accessed on April 5, 2020).

³⁹ "Former Far-Right Dutch Politician Converts to Islam", February 2, 2019, at <https://www.dw.com/en/former-far-right-dutch-politician-converts-to-islam/a-47368823>.

⁴⁰ "Dutch Anti-Islam Lawmaker Revives Plan for Mohammad Cartoon Contest", *Reuters*, December 29, 2019, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-netherlands-cartoon->

The Jyllands-Posten Publication

This is very important to understand that the cartoons depicting Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not appear suddenly in a Danish newspaper without having any historical, political or cultural context. There had been a debate on the status of immigrants and particularly Muslims and their ideologies in Danish society, politics and media before Jyllands-Posten attempted such publication. Unfortunately, this debate was having a bias against immigrants and especially Muslims.

In 2005, the year Jyllands-Posten published cartoons, Muslims constituted 5% of the total population of 5.4 million with a number of 270,000. At that time, Muslims were already in trouble to get housing and jobs in Denmark and only few of them had citizenship. Danish society was experiencing racial tensions when cartoons appeared in press, back in 1997, a survey conducted by Jyllands-Posten revealed that Muslims were seen as a threat by half of the Danish population. By 2002, far-right anti-immigrant Danish People's Party was already present in national parliament as a third largest group. DPP already had a very hard stance against Muslims terming them "at a lower stage of civilization." It was also observed that there was a "we" feeling of native Danes against Muslims residing in their country and they were told to leave Denmark in response to any argument they used to give in their favor. Several analyses showed that Islam and Muslims were being presented negatively in Danish media before the publication of such cartoons and this was an ultimate result of what had been going on.

The religious bigotry was on the rise in Danish society when *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten* (*The Morning Newspaper*) "*The Jutland Post*" Danish newspaper describes itself as 'Denmark's International Newspaper' and claims to be country's largest newspaper both in its printed version and on the Internet with a readership of more than 355,000 people on weekdays and 483,000 on Sundays,⁴¹ published 12 cartoons related to Islam while most of those were depicting Prophet Muhammad. The Culture Editor Flemming Rose wrote that it was between "Islam and the secular" while mentioning "Western societies rooted in Christianity."⁴² He argued that some Muslims

wilters/dutch-anti-islam-lawmaker-revives-plan-for-mohammad-cartoon-contesbt-idUSKBN1YW0H2.

⁴¹ "Denmark's International Newspaper", Jyllands-Posten, at <http://jyllands-posten.org/in-english.php> (accessed on May 2, 2015).

⁴² Ibid.

“demand a special position and consideration” while their religious feelings are “incompatible with secular democracy and freedom of speech.”⁴³

Immediately, after the publication of cartoons, Muslims rose up in protests. Eleven ambassadors of Muslim countries from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Libya, Morocco, and the Head of the Palestinian General Delegation in Denmark wrote a letter to Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, demanding a meeting with him and urging him “to take all those responsible to task.”⁴⁴ The Organization of Islamic Conference also wrote to the Danish Prime Minister showing concern over the situation.⁴⁵ In response to Muslim ambassadors’ letter, on 21 October the Danish Prime Minister acted intransigently and refused to meet the diplomats, declined the request to act against the paper saying that those who are offended may go to the court against such acts or expressions.⁴⁶

The wave of persuasion started afterwards when Muslim countries tried to resolve the issue diplomatically having Turkey and Egypt on the front. In November, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan arrived in Copenhagen and Egyptian foreign minister along with the secretary-generals of OIC and Arab League sent letters to the OSCE, OECD, and to the EU foreign policy coordinator,⁴⁷ a coalition of Danish Muslims tried to gather the support of religious and political leaders of Middle East while visiting the region with their dossier which was also circulated during a meeting of the Organization of Islamic Conference in Mecca. On 06 December, the OIC showed concern at “rising hatred against Islam and Muslims” and using the freedom of expression as a “pretext for defaming religions.”⁴⁸

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “Letter from 11 Ambassadors”, October 12, 2005, at <http://freedomforegyptians.blogspot.com/2006/02/muslim-diplomats-letter-to-danish-pm.html> (accessed on June 9, 2017).

⁴⁵ Peter Hervik, “Chronology of Main Events”, in *The Danish Muhammad Cartoon Conflict*, Current Themes in Imer Research 13 (Malmö, Sweden: Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM), 2012), 107.

⁴⁶ “Official Response to Ambassadors from A. F. Rasmussen”, October 21, 2005, at http://www.academia.edu/7856433/The_Negative_and_Positive_Freedom_of_Speech (accessed on June 9, 2017).

⁴⁷ Klausen, *The Cartoons That Shook the World*, 63-83.

⁴⁸ Daniel Howden, David Hardaker, and Stephen Castle, “How a Meeting of Leaders in Mecca Set Off the Cartoon Wars Around the World”, *Independent*, February 10, 2006.

On January 1, 2006, the Danish Prime Minister condemned any “expression, action or indication” that “attempt to demonize groups of people” saying that no one can be hurt on the basis of their “religion or ethnic background” but also reiterated Denmark’s commitment to freedom of speech. Norwegian Christian newspaper ‘Magazinet’ reprinted the cartoons on 10 January and subsequently on 26 January, culminated into a closure of Libyan embassy in Copenhagen while Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador from Denmark demanded an apology and punishment for the Jyllands-Posten.⁴⁹ On 29 January, the OIC and Arab League demanded a UN resolution condemning the publication of cartoons.⁵⁰

After the failure of diplomatic efforts, protests erupted across the Middle East and Muslim-majority countries in late January joined by religious and political leaders. The Gaza offices of European Union on 30 January barged with a demand apology from Jyllands-Posten which was tendered the next day followed by a welcome note by Rasmussen. But cartoons were reprinted by French, German, Italian and Spanish newspapers the very next day added to the Muslim anger,⁵¹ across Muslim countries with heavy toll on lives and properties.

On 29 January 2006, Jyllands-Posten published an open letter to the “honored citizens of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia” in which he “regretted” without tendering an apology.⁵² Next day on 30 January 2006, Jyllands-Posten issued an apology to the “honorable citizens of the Muslim world” for offending people, but not for publishing the cartoons.⁵³

France and interfaith harmony

France is having largest Muslim population in Western Europe with 5-6 million adherents that would constitute 8-9.6% of 62.3 million French citizens. In 2006, France was not only accommodating considerable number of Muslims but also having a good model of interfaith harmony. But religious

⁴⁹ Isolin Jorgensen, “Timeline: How the Cartoon Crisis Unfolded”, *Financial Times*, March 21, 2006.

⁵⁰ “Muslims Seek UN Resolution over Danish Cartoons”, *Islam Online*, January 30, 2006, at <http://web.archive.org/web/20060323080322/http://www.islam-online.net/English/News/2006-01/30/article01.sht ml> (accessed on June 1, 2015).

⁵¹ “Muslim Cartoon Row Timeline”, *BBC News*, February 19, 2006, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4688602.stm (accessed on June 2, 2015).

⁵² “Cartoon Paper Justifies Itself to Saudis”, *Brussels Journal*, January 29, 2006.

⁵³ “Danish Paper Apologizes, Dutch Cartoon on its Way”, *Brussels Journal*, January 31, 2006.

sensitivity motivated riots erupted in Paris in 2005, many French believed that Muslim immigrants were behind that eruption.

In October 2012, French newspaper *Le Figaro* shared results of a survey that was about image of Islam being “sharply deteriorated” in France with an irreversible “negative coverage.” The Independent in UK reported that France was having a “proud secularist tradition” which is “hijacked” by right wing media and this media is now attacking Muslims. The Independent cited an example of French magazine *Le Point* that published picture of veiled woman with headline “Brazen Islam.” On this, the then French Interior Minister said that “it expresses a reality” he rather stated that he is always shocked to see a fully veiled woman instead. The Independent observed that to stigmatize Islam and Muslims was “now fine for the whole political class” in France.

In retrospect Charlie Hebdo was first published in 1969 by workers of a monthly magazine entitled *Hara-Kiri* which was banned after mocking the death of former French President Charles de Gaulle as: “Tragic dance at Colombey [de Gaulle's home] - one dead” in headline.⁵⁴

There was a rage of insensitive religious sentiments across Europe in the mid of 2000, Charlie Hebdo printed a front-page cartoon of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) while inside, 12 of the controversial Jyllands-Posten cartoons were reproduced with some more of its own design. Triggered the anti-Muslim sentiment with the exception of French President Jacques Chirac, who said that one should avoid everything that can hurt someone else, “in particular religious convictions”.⁵⁵

In February 2007, the French Islamic groups in France filed a case and took Charlie Hebdo to court for “racial insults” but editor was cleared of accusations by court stating that he was having right to “satire Islamic extremism.”⁵⁶ In August 2008, a satirical column by Maurice Siné, who was writing for Charlie Hebdo for two decades was termed anti-Semitic by the magazine and Siné was fired after he refused to tender an apology.

⁵⁴ Oliver Duggan, “The History of Charlie Hebdo, Bastion of French Satire”, *Telegraph*, January 7, 2015; “Charlie Hebdo and its Place in French Journalism”, *BBC News*, January 08, 2015, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-15551998> (accessed on July 12, 2015).

⁵⁵ Duggan, *Telegraph*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The Guardian criticized the Charlie Hebdo editor Val stating that while defending freedom of expression, he “took the controversial decision to re-publish” Jyllands-Posten cartoons and now asks Siné to apologize for his “offensive” piece.⁵⁷

On 01 November 2011, Charlie Hebdo again published a caricature of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the following day, magazine office was attacked.⁵⁸ Within a year on 19 September 2012, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was again depicted in a manner that prompted French government which had urged magazine not to publish cartoons to close its embassies and schools in 20 countries fearing Muslim backlash.⁵⁹

The timing of publication was criticized by French politicians and the French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault who called for the “sense of responsibility of everybody.”⁶⁰ French Foreign Minister said that it was not intelligent “to pour fuel on the fire.”⁶¹ But however, the French government banned any protests against Charlie Hebdo publication.

The outrage against the cartoon controversy took an ugly turn at the offices of Charlie Hebdo when it was attacked resulting in the killing of the editor Stephane Charbonnier and an editorial staff of the newspaper.⁶²

In other fatal incident, Kouachi brothers robbed a fuel station and took refuge in a building 35km from Paris. On 09 January, the two brothers came out of the building, fired at police, and were killed. Soon after this, Coulibaly was shot dead by police, 15 hostages were freed and 4 bodies were found.⁶³ On 08 January, the investigating police commissioner Helric Fredou

⁵⁷ Jason Burke, “‘Anti-Semitic’ Satire Divides Liberal Paris Maurice Siné”, *Guardian*, August 3, 2008.

⁵⁸ Gibson, *Time*.

⁵⁹ “Magazine’s Nude Mohammad Cartoons Prompt France to Shut Embassies, Schools in 20 Countries,” *National Post (Toronto)*, September 19, 2012.

⁶⁰ Bastien Inzaurrealde, “Charlie Hebdo’s Muhammad Cartoons: A Headache for Hollande?”, *Christian Science Monitor*, September 19, 2012.

⁶¹ Don Murray, “France Even More Fractured after the Charlie Hebdo Rampage”, *CBC News*, January 8, 2015, at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/france-even-more-fractured-after-the-charlie-hebdo-rampage-1.2893262> (accessed on July 13, 2015).

⁶² “Charlie Hebdo Attack: Three Days of Terror”, *BBC News*, January 14, 2015, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30708237> (accessed on July 17, 2015).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

committed suicide in his office while preparing report after meeting with a victim's family.⁶⁴

The rampage in France and released of hostages by Kouachi brothers attracted condemnation by governments including France. French President François Hollande visited the shooting site and addressed his nation on television saying that "the attack was an attack on all of France and on the ideal of freedom of expression." Tens of thousands of people protested across France and in same numbers condemned the attack with #JeSuisCharlie hashtag on social media.

US, UK, Germany, Russia, and European Union along with the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed solidarity with the victims while condemning the attack.⁶⁵ Around 1.6 million people chanting "I'm Charlie and Muslim" and "Not in the name of Allah" gathered on 11 January in Paris along with leaders of 40 Muslim and non-Muslim countries. In a couple of days after the attack, an estimated 3.7 million demonstrated across France.⁶⁶

Attack on Charlie Hebdo exacerbated Islamophobia in France, far-right politicians took full advantage of that while left remained silence or somewhat helpless. There was a debate on whether anyone was 'Charlie or not' policing was demanded for the people who were "not Charlie." Immediately after the Charlie Hebdo attack, that Muslims were thought to be "incompatible" with French values by majority citizens and France was not paying heed to the problems faced by Muslim immigrants.

Conclusion

Freedom of expression is needed to explain one's point of view and understand what others have to say. The boundaries of it are wide but not limitless. Right to say something comes with the responsibility to hear something too. Both West and the Muslim world has faced lack of ability to listen what other has to say. Repeating one's own self does not necessarily

⁶⁴ "Charlie Hebdo Attack Investigator Commits Suicide: Reports", *Sputnik News*, January 11, 2015, at <http://sputniknews.com/europe/20150111/1016754353.html#ixzz3gvoVoxxy> (accessed on July 25, 2015).

⁶⁵ "French, World Leaders Condemn Attack at Charlie Hebdo", *France24*.

⁶⁶ Liz Alderman and Dan Bilefsky, "Huge Show of Solidarity in Paris against Terrorism", *New York Times*, January 11, 2015.

reach the standard of freedom of expression, and this is what happened in the West and Muslim world after 9/11.

An environment based on hatred against Muslims is also prevalent in the West and particularly in Europe which has deepened its roots in the European multiculturalism after 9/11. Ignorance about Islam, Muslims and their Prophet adds much fuel to the useless fiery debates and depictions in European media. This sort of freedom of expression does not provide any society, Western or Islamic, to take fresh breath of independence, peace and harmony. If the West understands and analyzes the outcomes of such freedom, reaching to a sensible conclusion would be easier.

Muslim reaction on the other hand, is no doubt based on the love and affection to their Prophet but lacks sensibility too. Destroying one's own property and killing each other shall not pave the way of compelling the West to bow down. Violence can never be part of solution it being the biggest problem itself. Resorting to peaceful and knowledge-based teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) instead of violence and hatred is the best way for Muslims to deal with the Islamophobia in the West.