

**The case of Danish cartoons: politics shaping
the news agenda**

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Originally published in a Danish newspaper on September 30, 2005, the infamous caricatures of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) did not produce strong reaction on the international scene until later that year. The Islamic Society of Denmark demanded an apology and withdrawal of the cartoons on October 9, and 5,000 people held a peaceful protest at the Copenhagen offices of the offending newspaper Jyllands-Posten (*JP*) on October 14. The issue picked up pace after ambassadors of 11 Muslim countries requested a meeting with the Danish Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Rasmussen refused, ironically on the basis of his unwillingness to influence editorial opinion, ironic because *JP* is known to have close ties with his government, the far-right Danish People's Party (DPP).

The mass media worldwide began to pick up on what later became 'the cartoon controversy', resulting in protests throughout the Muslim world and appeals to boycott Danish products.

For the Danish media, such obvious provocation was not newsworthy. *JP* along with a number of other right-wing newspapers had frequently published confrontational anti-Islamic material before. Mixed sentiments of freedom of speech and expression, religious intolerance and hints of Islamophobia were reflected in editorials of newspapers. Media pundits, scholars and researchers sought to draw the line of what constitutes curbing free speech and expression giving rise to important issues like the role and responsibility of mass media.

While it is essential to draw distinctions and analyse audience reception of the cartoons in question, it is equally pertinent to take an anthropological look at the issue. More importantly, a detailed study of the Danish media along with the political environment in the country is important to understand why the cartoons were published in the first place.

The purpose of this study is to examine the genesis of the 'cartoon controversy' and demonstrate how the 'emergence of neo-nationalism and neo-racism in Denmark since the early 1990s, particularly with the rise of the anti-immigrant Danish People's Party (DPP)' (Hervik 2006), led to the decision to publish the cartoons that outraged Muslim sensitivities worldwide.

Building on research carried out in this particular area (Hervik¹), the present study will involve an in-depth analysis of both historical and contemporary data

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on Danish print media, the political environment in Denmark and its influential role in shaping the news agenda.

A growing debate and dialogue has arisen over the last quarter of the century in Denmark with regard to the immigration policy and its roots embedded in the European Union Treaty of Maastricht, which has left the Danes asking questions such as the following:

- What would become of their language and culture in a new Europe where borders disappeared and integration increased?
- Would language and cultural identity disappear?
- What should the Danes do to preserve their unique heritage?
- Who would 'we the Danes' be in such a large entity? (Hervik 2006²)

This paper will argue that the cartoons were not an issue of freedom of speech to begin with, but were part of an asymmetrical debate which requires an in-depth analysis of recent changes in Danish political party manifestoes, rise of anti-immigration sentiments particularly anti-Muslim sentiments, since most refugees and immigrants were from Bosnia and Somalia, and the tone of the media in this context.

Specifically, the dissertation will focus on three critical questions:

- 1) What is the genesis of anti-Islamic sentiments in Denmark?
- 2) What role has Danish politics played to address this issue?
- 3) How has the Danish media been used/ allowed to be used as a political tool when addressing these issues?

The emergence of neo-nationalism in Denmark went on to become entrenched in the political parties' agendas and manifestoes, later taking the shape of anti-immigration and anti-Islamic sentiments in the country to influence electoral patterns.

Hervik³ demonstrates how anti-Islamic sentiments played a key role as part of the 2001 election campaign by giving examples of comments made by politicians to the press and other media content:

- *'Muslims are just waiting for the right moment to kill us.'* (Mogens Camre, MP, The Progress Party.)
- *'Certain people pose a security risk solely because of their religion, which means that they have to be placed in internment camps.'* (Inge Dahl Sorensen, MP, Denmark's Liberal Party.)
- *'If you try to legislate your way out of these problems (Muslim organizations), it is a historical rule that rats always find new holes if you cover up the old ones.'* (Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, MP, The Social Democrats.)

- *After nine years with Nyrup (Former Prime Minister) refugee and immigrant problems are bigger than ever. More than every second immigrant is without work. The number of people under the 'Family Reunification Law' is increasing and increasing. Danish values have come under pressure from fundamentalist groups...Second generation immigrants are responsible for a disproportionate share of crime and violence in Danish society.'* (Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Denmark's Liberal Party.)⁴
- Images of six immigrant children charged with gang rape and a veiled woman making an obscene gesture to bystanders in two popular Danish magazines.

These examples indicate how immigration and related issues were played up at the time of the 2001 election. The role of the media was particularly relevant:

The Misrecognition of Muslims in Danish Television News: A Case Study of Bad Practice in Denmark:

The case study demonstrates how Danish television and newspapers dealt with the appearance of Muslim politicians in a small but influential political party. It examines the story's approach, use of sources, images and documentation, and includes the alleged connection between the DR1⁵ and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The coverage of both television news and newspapers on the death penalty issue demonstrates poor quality documentation and interviewing. Still, they had a huge impact and are consistently referred to by other reporters, as documentation of the relationship between the Taliban and an ambivalent opinion on the death penalty issue'. (Hervik 2006 b)

Other literature relevant to the given research is Yilmaz's⁶ study of the political discourse on immigration in Denmark and how individuals in Denmark negotiate the issue of immigration.⁷

However, the hypothesis here is that the sacrilegious cartoons were never an issue of freedom of speech to begin with but were later used as such to avoid a much wider debate surrounding neo-nationalistic sentiments in Denmark and the role of Danish politicians to exploit it to their electoral benefit. The media in Denmark was used as a 'political tool' in this unfolding debate.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Denmark has been considered a tolerant and anti-racist society in the past, touted as an example of Northern European Progressivism (Yilmaz 2006⁸). As the title of an article published in the *New York Times* suggests, 'Denmark is unlikely front in Islam-West cultural war (January 8, 2006),' Denmark is generally perceived as an 'icon of European welfare, state progressivism and the erstwhile poster child of liberal immigration policy.' Yilmaz argues that it was

this self-perception that contributed to the success of anti-immigrant campaigns that influenced Denmark's election at the turn of the millennium.

Neo-nationalism and the Immigration Factor:

In November 2001, Denmark went through an election campaign for Folketinget (the Danish parliament) and local government. The key theme of the campaign leading up to the election on November 20 was immigrants and refugees.

Hervik argues that the images in question are best understood as an expression of emerging neo-nationalism in Denmark in the course of the 1990s rather than simply representing 'exotic' illustrations within a debate on the themes of immigration and refugees which peaked during the election campaign. Central to this nationalism is the redefinition of a Danish nation consisting of people who defend themselves against people from non-Western countries, particularly Muslims.

Neo-nationalism captured much attention, diverting it from other issues of importance during the election. This affected voters' preferences, who suspended their traditional choices and voted for the right-wing parties with their nationalist agendas. The voters' prime focus was on the relationship between the positively-defined 'we the Danes' and the negatively-defined 'others' (primarily Muslim immigrants). The nationalist politics and rhetoric was the decisive factor in the outcome of the election, and the right won with an overwhelming majority. This allowed the Liberals and the Conservatives, Venstre and Det Konservative Folkeparti (Danish People's Party), which had split from Fremskridtspartiet (The Progress Party) in 1995, choosing opposition of immigrants, immigration policy and the European Union as the core defining features of its political identity.

The Gradual Emergence of Neo-nationalism

Hervik is concerned with specific events which formed the trajectory of the Danish version of neo-nationalism. He argues, based on the Danish case, that the emergence of neo-nationalism as a response to the restructuring of Europe since 1989, as well as global processes may have started out as a right-wing phenomenon but moved on to become one that dominates the entire political spectrum and the large majority of the population today (Hervik 2006).

'Neo' in this context is employed to indicate a revitalization of nationalism post-1989. This nationalism occurs within an established nation state and thus differs from the nation building that took place in Denmark in the eighteenth century. Grundloven (the constitution) was passed in 1849, ending absolute monarchical rule. Denmark's defeat in the 1864 war with Germany left 170,000 Danish speakers outside its territory and resulted in a loss of all its former power. (Hervik 2006⁹)

‘A nation can be seen as an imagery of a community of people, real or construed, who consider themselves culturally homogenous, depending on the constant ideological innovation and reproduction of its existence. Nationalism consists of those actions and arguments based on the claim that this community of people should be given certain and special rights with the state. People who are not part of this community do not have the same rights. Accordingly, the idea that some people are included and others are excluded and that those who hold this idea in common, decide matters. Those who belong are identified as having particular origins, often with certain racial features as well, and are part of a certain horizontal comradeship. Since the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy tends to fall along cultural and/or racial lines, we can claim that neo-nationalism and neo-racism are two sides of the same phenomenon (Anderson 1983; Hervik 2002; Miles 1993).’

Hervik traces the events leading up to the national elections which led to the emergence of neo-nationalism and neo-racism in Denmark. The referendum in 1992, when Denmark voted on the Maastricht Treaty of the European Union, is the first event where signs of emerging nationalism can be identified.

Events Leading to the Emergence of Neo-nationalism

The 1960s witnessed an influx of unskilled labourers from outside Europe, invited to work in the growing European industry. Although this process was formally halted in 1973, the number of immigrants kept growing in Denmark over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, as families of these workers joined them under the Family Reunification Act. These immigrants brought with them ‘cultural differences’, and up to late 1980s, were represented in a positive light by the media. Jensen’s overview of media coverage of immigrants since the 1870s demonstrates that the debate on immigration throughout history shows similarities and differences.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the debate was about Swedish workers and was characterized by themes such as criminality, cultural differences, economic burden and social problems. For the working class, immigration was not problematic as long as immigrants were organized in labour unions and were hired on the basis of labour agreements. For the right-wing political organizations, immigrants were just another source for increasing production and profit. Yilmaz argues that if a positivist interpretation of history is taken, objection may be made that Swedish workers were not culturally different from Danish workers.

But Jensen’s overview of the immigrants from Muslim countries in the 1960s and 1970s shows similar patterns. Immigrants were mainly discussed in terms of their contribution and burden on the welfare system. This is in sharp contrast with the contemporary debate on immigration which focuses entirely on immigrant’s culture. The genesis behind this shift can be traced back to the early

1980s, which started with a focus on the ‘respectful integration of immigrants’ and ‘immigrant right’, but polls showed that by 1985, 23 per cent Danes believed that immigrants constituted a threat to Danes national character, rising to 40 per cent after 1987. (Yilmaz 2006)

Denmark was the first country to hold a referendum on the Maastricht Treaty. A clear outcome was expected since 130 of the 179 members of parliament recommended ‘yes’ to further integration. However, the result of the referendum came as a major surprise, and the nation plunged into an economic and political crisis. The ‘no’ side won with a narrow victory: 51 per cent opposed and 49 per cent were in favour. The result came as a shock to the EU politicians throughout Europe. With extensive media coverage on the issue, some said that the Danes had defended democracy for all of Europe, leaving Danes in a euphoric state of national pride. If that was not enough to boost national pride, Denmark stunned Europe by winning the European football championship as well (Hervik 2006¹⁰).

The two Maastricht referendums had signalled that the distance between representatives in public office and the voters was enormous. Politicians had recommended a ‘yes’ vote, but the voters had not followed their political parties. Fremskridtspartiet (The Progress Party) and the Socialistisk Folkeparti (The Socialist People’s Party) had been the political winners of the first Maastricht referendum, since both parties opposed further European integration.

In preparation for the second round, the Socialists proposed four exemptions from the treaty that could be used for a new referendum that the party would support. These exemptions were: common defence, common currency, EU citizenship and certain aspects of legal cooperation, including law enforcement. It was Fremskridtspartiet, however, that argued that the ‘no’ to the foreigners in Europe was a ‘no’ to the foreigners in Denmark. The party had always attacked the presence of Muslims in Denmark and campaigned to play the nationalist card, but they were not able to capitalize on their win until the party’s leader, Pia Kjaersgaard, broke ranks with Fremskridtspartiet to form the Dansk Folkeparti in 1995 (Hervik 2006).

Islam versus Danish Culture: The Muslim Immigrant

The nationalistic agenda became further entrenched in public discourse after debates concerning these newcomers became categorized as the ‘Muslim immigrant’, who was seen as irrational, prejudiced, emotional, intolerant, criminal, alien, one-sided, ineffective, backward, culturally- and traditionally-bound and despotic; whereas *Donnishness* was connoted with rationality, freedom, individualism, progress and efficiency with the capacity to negotiate and reach consensus – the nation-state democracy and Christianity as well as secularism (Yilmaz 2006).

Prior to the mid-1980s, social struggle was defined in different categories such as a struggle between the working class and the capitalists, feminism and male dominance or even gays and homophobic social attitudes, but the topic of immigration now replaced this discourse and moved to the centre as the defining source of social identifications.

Between 1992 and 1995, Denmark received 17,000 refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Anticipation of more refugees heading from the Balkans to Western Europe and Denmark became a major topic of discussion in the media. The debate went through different phases. At first it revolved around the preparation of the legislation that granted refugees from the Balkans a collective, temporary asylum for two years. Several politicians stressed the importance of helping refugees in situ, i.e., in the Balkans, and they made only one exception: flying the seriously injured to Denmark for treatment. Others stressed that people who fled for 'their own convenience' should not be helped. During the debate, the plan of distributing refugee camps around the country rested on the idea that Denmark could accept the refugees, but did not wish to be influenced by their cultural and religious differences (Larsen 1997:28).

The legislation, passed in 1992, was based on the conviction that the war would be over soon and the refugees could go home. According to the law, Bosnian refugees were granted two years of temporary asylum, implying that after two years that they would either have to return home or could officially seek political asylum in Denmark. In the second phase of the debate, media coverage focused on clashes between Bosnian refugees distributed around the country and the local communities. The third phase occurred before the passing of another law in 1995 that would finally give the Bosnians normal rights for refugees, implying that they would go through a three-year programme of integration. At this time, it was obvious that the war had not stopped within the two-year limit set by the law on temporary asylum.

Media Coverage

During the three years of media coverage of the Balkan war and the Bosnian refugees in Denmark, the dichotomization of the Danes and the refugees evolved further. On the political front, the aforementioned law allowing the Bosnians to seek asylum in Denmark was passed on January 12, 1995. A debate on the issue had taken place on December 15, 1994 (as part of the third phase mentioned above) that has been called 'the day of hatred', referring to the sharp division between the right, who did not want to turn the Bosnian refugees into immigrants since the Danish population did not want that, and the left, including the governing Socialdemokratiet and Det Radikale Venstre (The Radical Liberals), using humanistic language. Pia Kjaersgaard (Fremskridtspartiet) tried (unsuccessfully) during the debate to convince other right-wing parties to call for a referendum on the future of Bosnian refugees, arguing that more money for refugees would mean less money for the elderly, homeless and other poor people

in Denmark (Larsen 1997: 85-95). After the law was passed, Bosnians were integrated into Danish society and their situation became normal.

Later, the Somalis would take the place of the Bosnians as the group dominating political discourse and media coverage. That was the result of the second of the two campaigns against immigration and immigration policy conducted by the tabloid paper, *Ekstra Bladet (EB)*, and of the establishment of a new political party, Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People's Party). For the newspaper and the party, the political situation and the emergence of neo-nationalism were an opportunity to gain more readers and voters, respectively (Hervik 2006¹¹).

Hervik's¹² study of *EB*'s campaign (1997) on the issue of immigrants and refugees in Denmark analyzes the media agenda at the time. Hervik refers to this 'transformation of Denmark from a peaceful society to a multi-ethnic one, as a crime committed by the politicians against the Danish people.' 'When the results of the debate were published as a special issue, few people in Denmark had doubts about what the paper's vote would be in this hypothetical referendum, thus indicating that the campaign was directed against the presence of ethnic minorities.

References to the unwanted presence of culturally diverse others were present everywhere in the campaign. One example was the consistent use of the category *fremmede* (literally, foreigner or alien) in writing about people of ethnic minority background, thus suggesting they did not belong to Denmark. Contrasting those who belonged were those who did not serve the purpose of constructing the world in an uncomplicated fashion. However, the second generation immigrants with Danish citizenship are also called 'foreigners' and contested. The choice of category is attuned to the rationale of the tabloid paper: to create public stir and to sell papers (Hervik 2006).

'The paper was successful in maintaining and even expanding the gap between a public discourse of tolerance and the private world of frustrations and common-sense understandings that cultural differences are disturbing. The discrepancy between public and private exists regardless of *EB*'s campaign, but the campaign rested upon the discrepancy and exposed it. Once the gap was exposed and marketed, organized collective political action could capitalize on it and use it as a unique opportunity for political reunification (Hervik 2006).'

The Role of Politics: A Political Party Against 'Foreigners'

In 1995, the leader of Fremskridtspartiet, Pia Kjaersgaard, and other central members broke away from the party to form Dansk Folkeparti. The new party was formed on the basis of two major political issues: opposition to the European Union and opposition to ethnic minorities and refugees in Denmark. A Protestant, fundamentalist minister, Soren Krarup, who later became a member of parliament, was writing regularly for *EB*, along with Kjaersgaard, to the point

where it became difficult to distinguish the debate regarding immigrants between the paper and politicians. Letters to the editor of *EB*, predominantly from people overly hostile towards ethnic minorities, played an important role in the campaign. *EB*, wishing to let ‘ordinary’ people speak, tracked down the letter writers for interviews. Full-blown articles voiced their indiscreet opinions on politicians and ethnic minorities, while the reporter refrained from asking critical questions. Several of these articles turned out to be with DPP members or sympathizers. On their part, party secretaries also wrote letters to writers inviting them to join the party. The relationship between the paper and the party was, in all respects, symbiotic.

The ‘natural’ hostility between ‘cultures’ that do not belong in the same place would cause confrontations and had to be resolved. Two examples from letters to the editor illustrate this belief:

Muslims are reasonable people, so are Germans south of the border. Only when different religions or nationalities have to live together will problems arise.

We (the Danes) will become a minority. The culture will disappear and we will have a civil war... I am not a racist, but my culture is coming to an end (Hervik 2006).

EB was not the only newspaper behind the discourse of culturalism and the emerging neo-nationalist division between the ‘Danes’ and ‘foreigners’. In November 1996, a provincial paper, *Aarhus Stiftstidende*, published five articles on Somali refugees within one week (Fadel, Hervik and Vestergaard 1999). The purpose of the series was not made explicit, but the common denominator of each article was, why should Aarhus, the second largest city in Denmark, be burdened with Somali refugees? The idea of a series of articles on the topic of Somali refugees, the number of refugees and the degree of cultural differences, was taken up by several other newspapers as well. These papers were not explicit about the idea behind their series, but the common theme in all the newspapers presented the refugees as problematic and very different from the Danes.

In March 1997, a few weeks before *EB* started its campaign, the same story had been repeated in different but collaborating newspapers in four larger cities: Odense, Esbjerg, Aalborg and Aarhus. The story dealt with approximately 1,000 Somali refugees in each place. The message was that there were too many Somali refugees and that they were so different that the local authorities were unable to fulfil their responsibility towards them. Towards the end of the campaign, *EB* featured a story of a Somali man, Ali; responsible for nine children, his wife and ex-wife with whom, according to the paper, he was still having children. Only later was he proven to have received six per cent more money than he was entitled to but because of the moral panic in the public sphere at the time Ali’s case was taken to parliament, where legislators discussed the idea of ‘Ali-loft’ ; a limit to how much money can be received in welfare benefits (Hervik 2006).

The transformation of the Liberal Party is particularly interesting as it displays how potent the debate about immigration (particularly Muslim) became in creating future visions of Denmark. In an interview with the *Weekendavisen* (January 17, 2003), Prime Minister Rasmussen declared that ‘It is the result of the cultural struggle that determines Denmark’s future, not the economic policy. If you want to steer a society in a different direction, you have to take on the debate on values.’ In his speech in parliament on February 24, 2005, he articulated his vision for the future as ‘a Danish society with a strong competitive ability and with a strong cohesive force – a society without great social and economic inequalities.’ The obstacle to this vision was ‘an aggressive practice of Islam; the greatest challenge to the cohesive force in Danish society.’ The core of the problem is ‘some isolated groups of immigrants who challenge the democratic values’ (Jyllands-Posten, November 28, 2005).

The Danish Muslim as a Topic in Interaction

For the present research, twenty qualitative interviews have been analysed which have been conducted with Danish Muslims between the ages of 18-25. Respondents were questioned about their voting preferences; take on the media in relation to Muslims and immigrants, the avenues used by them to communicate issues of importance across, namely, the recent publication of the caricatures. Three key themes emerged from these conversations: (1) foreign issues have little or no impact on voter preferences, (2) the tone of the media in Denmark has become increasingly hostile towards Muslims in the recent years, (3) and politicians play a negative role in this equation.

Respondents felt that foreign issues had little or no meaning with regard to voting preferences: two of the twenty interviewees aged eighteen and twenty-one, respectively, felt that a party’s foreign policy may affect their voting preferences. Individuals in the same house may choose to vote for separate political parties as one respondent said: ‘both I and my husband vote for parties based on separate issues. He might consider a party’s economic plan or their tax policies, whereas I usually take into account their stance on human rights, elderly people, etc.’

Respondents were of the view that the tone of the media had changed dramatically in the past few years. It is not the message itself but the way it is displayed or addressed. Their response indicates that media had adopted a hostile stance towards Muslims and immigrants in the past ten to fifteen years but was more so the case since 9/11. Previous coverage of immigrants did not specify race (in cases of violence) but now a story started with ‘second generation foreigners’, a term coined by media and politicians when addressing immigrants and minorities in Denmark.

The two main TV networks in Denmark, DR 1 and DR2, are funded by the government. These two channels along with TV 2 (run commercially) have the

highest number of viewers. Respondents identified a striking difference between the coverage of these two networks: DR 1 and 2 adopted a hostile stance towards immigrants and Muslims, while TV 2 had of late adopted a more objective approach, refraining from using terms like foreigner or second generation immigrants. When projecting immigrants and Muslims in their advertisements, DR 1 chooses clips which subtly but surely poison the average Dane's mind. An example of this is an elderly white woman, deprived of benefits, with a contrasting image of Somali children not attending school, instead choosing to sit at home and claim benefits. The message is clear: they have come to steal *our* benefits, *our* rights and are depriving *us* Danes of them. *JP* regularly displayed two-fold pictures in its newspaper. An example of the illustrations is of a white elderly man sitting in a wheel chair with a contrasting image of a young and healthy but unemployed 'foreigner'. One respondent noted that : *JP* is so obviously anti-foreigners, they don't even make an effort to hide it. Just by looking at their opinions or letters to editor section, you'll regularly find comments such as these Muslims should go back to their countries, or ones applauding DPP. They are a blatant mouthpiece for DPP and their voters.

Sixteen respondents quoted the example of media's negative coverage of Asma Abdul Hamid, a 26-year-old veiled Muslim politician and a member of the liberal-left Enhedslisten Party which gained four seats in parliament (Folketing) in the November 2007 election. Female members of the party of Iranian descent associated her wearing Hijab with not being democratic and suppressing women's rights. The media then went on to link her with organizations like the Minhaj-ul-Quran. DR 2 cross-questioned her views on homo sexuals, gay marriages and abortion, issues which later set the agenda for print media. The media was bent on establishing a hidden agenda and other motives behind her joining politics. The Enhedslisten is not nationalist by nature, in fact it is very pluralist in its approach and maintains a pro-globalization agenda otherwise. The party took a stand eventually and defended her since she epitomised a strong woman wearing hijab; a mouth piece for unheard voices; the basis of their campaign.

Respondents felt that politics was an avenue to get views across since there were 'foreign' politicians in some parties. The respondent's choice of words is interesting, calling these politicians 'foreign' as against 'different ethnicity' since they are obviously Danish. One respondent noted that 'if Muslims want to be heard in Denmark, they should say they are a 'minority' instead of saying they are Muslim.'

The publication of the blasphemous cartoons came as no surprise to the respondents. 'The cartoon issue was just an extension of what had already been going on for a long time.' They were of the view that 'when Muslims in Denmark protested, no one really listened to them, which is why they felt the need to contact Imams in other countries to be taken seriously.'

The Danes' view of the cartoon controversy was united: 95 per cent of the Danes believed that in the context of free speech, the decision to print the cartoons was the right one, but they should not have been published. Most Danes questioned whether it was useful or not, whether it helped the debate or not. Others were of the view that freedom of speech must exist but it was also important to apply common sense. Most Danes were concerned about the economic repercussions: Danish dairy products suffered heavy losses, as did several mobile service providers with major exports to the Middle East.

The respondents held a unanimous view that Danes did not *understand* the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) because they did not have a close relationship with religion. Danes take pride in the fact that they are a country with no taboos. Religion is practiced minimally, which is why there has been a call in recent years to close down churches in Denmark. The respondents did not find the Danish reaction to the cartoons offensive, because even when it came to (for example) depictions of Christ, they felt that Danes found humour in all issues, whether it be religious or social.

Even where issues like abortion were concerned, respondents felt that every issue for them was tongue in cheek. This observation is interesting as Yilmaz notes that Danes are not overly religious and, according to one Danish respondent: 'I think our religion has been watered down very much, maybe this is why we are doing well; we have achieved so much equality, whereas immigrants or those with an Islamic culture are so deeply rooted in it. They don't understand that you have free will, that you can break loose from it (Yilmaz 2006).'

One respondent was of the view that Muslims have brought this on themselves, since there have been instances of honour killings, which she argued is a Muslim phenomenon. Other respondents argued that there had only been two incidents of honour killing in Danish history, one in the early 90's and the recent one by a Ghazala family, which was known for its ill conduct even otherwise. They felt that the issue was highlighted and stereo-typed as a Muslim phenomenon.

The European Council on Integration and Race Issues has for several years been documenting critical reports on Danish media. Amnesty International has repeatedly been critical of Danish media practices, but it is dismissed as propaganda by both the media and the politicians.

Although Dansk Folkeparti is not a major party, the Venstre and Conservative party, even in coalition, require their support for majority in parliament. That benefits both parties since it helps *DPP* get the support they need to pass legislation which they might not be able to otherwise. For example, the recent law on immigration proposes that if an immigrant wants to marry someone outside of the EU, they cannot bring them to Denmark unless they are: above the age of 28, have a flat (certain square meters in size) and have a certain

amount of income. Individually, the *DPP* is unable to pass such a legislation, but by supporting the Venstre and Conservative party on their agendas, they manage to implement their own.

The government has also enacted laws by which no funding is provided for individuals who want to go to schools teaching in another language. It has implemented policies regarding the *percentage* of children allowed in a classroom from the same ethnic group, which means even if someone is living ten steps away from the school, they will have to go to another one because the 15 per cent quota of that ethnic group has been filled up.

Surveys are published annually on employment levels in the country, and statistics show that the highest number of unemployment is within foreigners: statistically, this may be correct, but responses from interviews suggest that the results are far from the reality. Almost all of the second generation immigrants are employed, but figures take into account women above the age of fifty, who did not learn to speak Danish as it was not a requirement when they first came but was now. Respondents' view of the media in this regard was that journalists hardly questioned statistics, which is why the common perception has become that foreigners who come to Denmark are only looking for benefits.

Two of the respondents felt that immigrants did try to claim benefits without having to or trying to find work, which is why it was right to implement stricter immigration laws. Eighteen other respondents argued that this was again due to the fact that elderly women, not being able to speak the language, were included in these unemployment figures and most immigrants were working. They argued that there were many unemployed Danes but the focus was always on foreigners.

The respondents thought that due to the constant negative projection of Muslims, young educated boys from minorities felt that they were not part of society. Four of the respondents, between the age of 18-21, said they felt alienated and often infuriated by the coverage of Muslims on television and in newspapers. The coverage, they felt, had been worse over time, but had been around for some time. The respondents were of the view that this was the primary reason organizations like the Hizbol Tehrir were easily able to brainwash these boys, who despite being educated felt socially isolated.

The Imam Factor: In Conversation with Mostafa Chendid¹³

Chendid was of the view that most of the problems faced by Danish Muslims were partly due to ignorance on their part. In response to how he had used his influential role to bridge the gap between religion and culture, he said: 'Although we as a society are trusted by the government and are doing our best to bridge the gap between culture and religion, there are several politicians who do not like for us to coexist peacefully.'

In response to voter preferences, Chendid viewed voting as a crucial aspect in a democracy and one most Danish Muslims failed to avail. He did not state his party preference, but encouraged Muslims to utilise their vote: 'Most of these people chose not to vote, since many like the ones from Iraq do not have much faith in political systems and do not realise how important their vote is.'

As for his role during the cartoons controversy, he wrote to the prime minister, who did not respond the first time. He later met with the integration affairs minister, who was helpful but 'unable to do anything as the issue was one pertaining to free speech and not to integration problems.'

Community leaders like Chendid felt that not only is there no platform for Muslims to address issues of importance in the Danish press but the media continues to quote them out of context. Chendid was splashed on several newspaper front pages after he was quoted saying Muslim and non-Muslim women alike should wear a veil for their own protection, 'as he claims that 5-10 per cent of all men cannot control themselves confronting unveiled women.' (Weekendavisen, April 16, 2007). What he said (and misquoted) was that statistics demonstrated that every thirty seconds the crime of rape is committed in the United States. The only purpose the Islamic veil serves is to protect women. 'I said I was tired of hearing that women were oppressed in Islam, and if a nun wears a headscarf, no one calls it oppression, whereas when Muslim women do, it becomes problematic.'

'We are very open about our activities, we have a website where we publish the text from all speeches made in the mosque in both Danish and Arabic and we post all press releases on our website. It is then up to the media to project it the way they want to.'

The Press Response

The media response to anything to do with immigrants and Muslims was varied. What is interesting is that the same methods were used to contact *Jyllands Posten*, *Ekstra Bladet* and *Politiken*, all owned by the JP/Politikens Hus, Denmark's leading media corporation. *Politiken* was the only newspaper which responded. What is more intriguing is that a study of *Politiken's* editorials and news coverage reveals that it opposes almost everything *JP* publishes. It was one of the few newspapers in Denmark which opposed the publishing of caricatures, the coalition government of the DPP and the government's major restrictions on immigration.

In qualitative interviews conducted with four journalists from the *Politiken*, results reveal that *JP's* and *Politiken's* editorial policies are completely different. *Politiken* journalists took pride in the fact that their stance towards political parties was respectful yet critical and denied having affiliations with any party. *Politiken* in the past has been associated with the Det Radikale Venstre (Social

Liberal Party) but a shift in its editorial policy was witnessed after the liberal-conservative coalition in 2001. It has since taken a critical approach towards all parties.

On their coverage of immigrants, journalists felt that they 'did want to cover immigrant issues with an open-minded attitude and tried their level best to represent the voice of minorities, not only for immigrants but for all minorities in the society.' When asked whether they thought immigrants had a fair say in the media, the journalists unanimously responded in the negative. They were of the view that the media holistically covered immigrants only when there was political debate or crime situations involved. No measures are taken by the media to integrate immigrants in public discourse, but they added that *Politken* was supporting initiatives that could bring immigrants into the media job market. Contribution of minorities to opinion columns, letters to the editor, etc., was also minimal.

Journalists from *Politken* acknowledged the need for reform of media policy when representing immigrants. One journalist's response was that it was one thing to cover immigrants as ordinary citizens, another to use them as a source in ordinary issues.

Politken journalists were of the view that their newspaper had played a positive role in recent years to bridge the gap between culture and religion. The editor-in-chief had a strong role and the newspaper editorial was becoming an avenue to communicate with the public and address the gap.

The response of the journalists reinforces the argument that the media in Denmark has been playing a negative role in the public sphere and in the coverage of immigrants.

Conclusion

We have tried to develop the argument that the decision to publish the cartoons was not an 'editorial judgment' or one pertaining to freedom of speech for that matter but stems from the much complicated emergence of neo-nationalism and racism in Denmark. Tracing major events that helped shape this phenomenon and by taking both historical and contemporary account of facts, provide grounds to determine how politics shaped the news agenda.

The first half of the 1990s witnessed growing anti-immigrant sentiments as well as collective anxiety stemming from redefined borders. The seeds were sown for neo-nationalism and neo-racism to evolve. In the last ten years, the fruit they bore is witnessed in the treatment and stance taken with regards to immigrants by both the politicians and the media. A striking example of this shift is illustrated in the Queen of Denmark's involvement in the debate. In a December 1985 speech, she promoted tolerance towards the new 'guests' and

asked the Danes to refrain from negative attitudes towards immigrants, calling their utterances ‘dumb smart’. Two decades later, the Queen stated that she had been ‘crazily naïve’ when she had called Danes ‘dumb smart’ for she now realized that Islam constitutes a great challenge for Danes. It is worth noting that her earlier comments were about tolerance towards immigrants in general and not Islam or Muslims.

The upsurge in neo-nationalism was witnessed in full swing after the establishment of the Dansk Folkeparti (DPP) in October 1995. In 1997, with the help of *Ekstra Bladet*, DPP was able to exploit the emerging dissatisfaction with ethnic minorities and refugees and the gap between politicians and voters by playing the nationalist card. That worked out favourably for them, as membership of the Dansk Folkeparti quadrupled during the campaign. Furthermore, media coverage of the presence of Somali refugees demonstrates that both newspapers and politicians from the right (and many from the left) took part in contesting their presence.

The political agenda continued to thrive in the midst of the antagonism created in this public discourse on immigration. In 2001, the anti-immigrant DPP published its controversial book *Denmark's future: Your country- Your choice*. It had on its cover the picture of a fierce looking bearded Muslim immigrant holding a gun in a demonstration in Copenhagen. The first part of the book talked about immigrants, the problems and ‘crime’ they brought with them, with one chapter titled ‘The Impossible Combination of Islam and Democracy’, whilst the second part ‘Denmark’s future’, created the image of an ideal Denmark that would be restored to its original state with *DPP*’s help.

The choice of images is once again overt, with the first part containing a combination of images of the Danish flag, women in head scarves, relaying an image of a Denmark that is being invaded by aliens: in sharp contrast to the second part containing images of beautiful green meadows, clear blue skies and beautiful white children.

The party’s agenda became further entrenched in the public sphere as media continued to provide one-sided support to *DPP*’s policies. As politicians’ comments on immigrants became more and more hostile, so did the media. That became the *only* agenda of political parties in the course of the 2001 election campaign. The Liberal Party adopted a similar stance as the *DPP*; its campaign primarily focused around the ‘Muslim threat’ accompanied by the slogan ‘Time for change’. The election posters carried a well-known photo of Muslim immigrants leaving the court after being convicted of the gang rape of a white Danish girl. Immigration has since been at the centre of policies within the Liberal-Conservative coalition, and the reason for its repeated success in the February 2005 elections.

An analysis and findings of media's coverage over the last two decades shows the use of highly debatable sources and documentation. Furthermore, the media continues to maintain a hostile stance. Media's coverage of Asma Abdul Hamid is one example of this hostility. Respondants' views of the state-run DR 1 and DR 2 further emphasizes the use of political commercials to project immigrants in a negative light where they are seen as a burden on Danish society, whose presence means only one thing: they are here to steal our benefits, depriving us Danes. The Danish Muslim participants found media coverage of ethnic issues and religion so appalling that almost all of them no longer watched DR 1 and DR 2 or read Danish newspapers.

The 'obvious' alliance of *JP* with the DPP in turn is so blatant 'that they no longer feel the need to hide it.' The Muslims in Denmark are represented as backward and traditional societies. The dominant view, as witnessed in the coverage of *JP* and *Ekstra Bladet*, is that they have claimed their rights to exert traditional 'Middle Age' values in Danish society. An analysis of the media and Danish Muslims' response shows that Danish society can be characterized by a tendency of not wanting to accept a persons' identity to be Danish, if that person also has ethnic or Muslim background.

One of the implications of the right, uncompromising division of 'us and them', Danes and Muslims, Westerners and Islam, is that there is little room for ethnic diversity and anti-discriminatory measures. The polarized debate does not seem to allow people to claim a Danish, ethnic and Muslim identity as a basis for being treated like other Danes. The gap between community leaders and the media is further evidence that dialogue is not welcome, but is distorted and approached from a single angle: an enemy image of Islam. Furthermore, Danish journalists reinforce the argument that immigrants are 'used' in public discourse, not as a part of it and covered only in times of heated political debate or criminal situations. An example of this is seen in the respondents' take on the use of 'colour' to define a criminal in recent years.

Analysis of comments made by politicians to the press and in parliament, and the coverage of the 2001 election shows the persistent use of neo-nationalist and anti-Muslim sentiments throughout the campaign. The media with its one-sided role presented the votes on a plate to these politicians. While the world was surprised at DPP's landslide victory, it came as no surprise to the Danes. The political atmosphere in Denmark, in relation to immigrants, is more charged than ever, but even more so since the 2001 elections.

When the cartoon controversy became a global issue, when it was in fact a local one, it was only too easy to insist that the issue was one of free speech; and because of the 'impossible combination between Islam and democracy', Muslims, backward and traditional as they were, had been only too predictable in their response to the caricatures.

The need to integrate Muslims and immigrants in Danish society is crucial. It is the role of the media, as part of any democratic system, to ensure reliability and refrain from bias. Although such reaction may be predictable on the part of politicians, what is not fathomable is that Danish media continues to be used as a negative political tool in this polarised debate.

Notes

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- ¹ Hervik, P., (2002), *Muslims of the Media: An Anthropological investigation of the media's coverage of religions in Denmark*, Board for Ethnic Equality.
 - ² Hervik, P.,(2006), 'The misrecognition of Muslims in Danish News', *International Migration and Ethnic Relations, Peace and Conflict Studies and Political Anthropology*, Malmo University.
 - ³ Hervik, P., (2006) 'The Predictable Responses to the Danish Cartoons', *Commentary, Global Media and Communication*, Vol. 2:225-230.
 - ⁴ Hervik, P. (2006), 'The Emergence of Neo-nationalism in Denmark, 1992-2001', in *Neo-Nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspectives from Social Anthropology*, Gingrich, Andre and Marcus Banks, (eds.). pp. 136-161. Berghan Books: Oxford.
 - ⁵ Danmarks Radio (1).
 - ⁶ Yilmaz, F. (2006), 'Religion as a Rhetorical Resource' in *Religion, Media and the Marketplace*, (eds) Clark, L.S, (2007) Rutgers University Press.
 - ⁷ Yilmaz, F. (2006), 'Religion as a Rhetorical Resource' in *Religion, Media and the Marketplace*, (eds) Clark, L.S,(2007) Rutgers University Press.
 - ⁸ Yilmaz, F. (2006), 'Religion as a Rhetorical Resource' in *Religion, Media and the Marketplace*, (eds) Clark, L.S,(2007) Rutgers University Press
 - ⁹ Hervik, P. (2006). 'The Emergence of Neo-nationalism in Denmark, 1992-2001', in *Neo-Nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspectives from Social Anthropology*, Gingrich, Andre and Marcus Banks, (eds.). pp. 136-161. Berghan Books: Oxford.
 - ¹⁰ Hervik, P., (2006) 'The Predictable Responses to the Danish Cartoons', *Commentary, Global Media and Communication*, Vol. 2:225-230.
 - ¹¹ Hervik, P.,(2006), 'The misrecognition of Muslims in Danish News', *International Migration and Ethnic Relations, Peace and Conflict Studies and Political Anthropology*, Malmo University.
 - ¹² Hervik, P., (2002), *Muslims of the Media: An Anthropological investigation of the media's coverage of religions in Denmark*, Board for Ethnic Equality.
 - ¹³ Imam Mostafa Chendid, Islamic Society of Denmark.