

DIIS REPORT

FREEDOM OF SPEECH, BATTLE OVER VALUES, AND THE POLITICAL SYMBOLISM OF THE MUHAMMAD DRAWINGS

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Abstract

When the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* commissioned and printed 12 caricatures of the prophet Muhammad on September 30, 2005, no one expected that this would ignite the worst foreign policy crisis in Denmark since World War II. What began with a private newspaper's controversial illustrated article at the end of January 2006 erupted into a massive consumer boycott against Danish products in large parts of the Moslem world and, furthermore, led to vast and angry demonstrations, flag burnings and even embassy burnings.

This article argues how the publishing of the caricatures was used as a fitting and symbolic event in other political, cultural and religious battles in Denmark and even more so internationally.

In Denmark the main topics of disagreement were 1) the unlimited freedom of expression vs. respecting religious sensitivities, 2) the liberal-conservative government's very restrictive immigration, asylum, and integration policy, and 3) the Prime Minister's decision in October 2005 not to meet and have a dialogue with a group of complaining ambassadors from 11 Moslem countries.

Although religious anger and sorrow at the caricatures was widespread in the Middle East and South and Southeast Asia, the article argues that many other factors led to the consumer boycott and violent demonstrations, and the article concludes that the frustration and anger, that surfaces in the Muhammad caricature affair, has its background in the clash of values that has long characterised the political situation in the Middle East and South Asia more than in the discourse on freedom of speech in Denmark.

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The Danish Angle

When the daily newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, on September 30, 2005, published twelve cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad, nobody expected it to develop into what some described as Denmark's worst foreign policy crisis since the Second World War. Less than six months after the calming of the storm, the dramatic events relating to the caricatures seem increasingly surreal; like a storm which accumulated slowly, then was gone all of a sudden, leaving a dazed Danish public which never quite grasped what had transpired.

When the crisis reached its peak, a somewhat shaken Danish Prime Minister described the situation as uncontrollable: "We are up against uncontrollable forces here". He was right. From late January until late February, a succession of dramatic events unfolded: tumultuous mass demonstrations which cost civilian lives, the burning of flags and effigies of Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the boycott of Danish products, and the attacks on and attempted burnings of Danish embassies and diplomatic missions in Damascus, Beirut, Jakarta and Teheran. On January 26, Saudi-Arabia recalled its ambassador to Denmark; on January 29, Libya closed down its People's Bureau (embassy) in Copenhagen, and the ambassadors of Syria and Pakistan were likewise recalled for consultations. At the high point of the crisis, Denmark closed down its embassies in Iran, Indonesia and Syria, as well as its diplomatic mission in Lebanon. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark advised Danes against travelling to most countries in the Middle East, as well as Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia. Large scale demonstrations took place in European cities, and after the assaults on the Danish embassies the matter was raised at the highest level within the EU, the UN and the United States, at which time it had already been given a high priority within the Arab League and the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference).¹

In February, the matter and the crisis seemed only to escalate even further, with threats backed by promises of rewards directed at the cartoonists, and violent events each day

¹ During and after the crisis, a number of books documenting and discussing the Muhammad affair were published: Anders Jerichow and Mille Rode (eds.): *Profet-affæren : et PEN-dossier om tolvte Muhammad-tegninger – og hvad siden hendte : dokumenter & argumenter (The Prophet Affair: a PEN dossier on twelve Muhammad Cartoons – and their aftermath: Documents and Arguments)*, (København: Dansk Pen 2006); Klaus & Michael Rothstein: *Bomben i turbanen : profeten, provokationen, protesten, pressen, perspektivet (The Bomb in the Turban: the Prophet, the Provocation, the Protest, the Press, the Perspectives)*, (København: Tiderne Skifter 2006); Lotte Folke Kaarsholm (ed.): *Muslimsk-dansk dagbog : 19 dagbøger fra Muhammad-krisen (Muslim-Danish Diary: 19 Diaries from the Muhammad Crisis)*, (København: Informations Forlag 2006); John Hansen & Kim Hundevadt: *Provoen og*

filling media headlines. According to the weekly journal *Mandag Morgen*, the matter of the drawings ('tegningesagen') – which is how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark refers to the crisis – became the one event to receive the most extensive coverage by Danish media since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and, in the case of *Jyllands-Posten*, it was even afforded more extensive coverage than al-Qaida's attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on that fateful day in Washington and New York City. In terms of Danish politics, the affair led to major displacements. The Social Democrats (Socialdemokraterne), had been well prepared for negotiations concerning a welfare policy agreement but now, by offering a 'truce' to the government on the issue of the cartoon affair, appeared vague and were snubbed. Meanwhile, more clearly value-based parties such as Det Radikale Venstre (the Danish Social-Liberal Party), SF (the Socialist People's Party) and Dansk Folkeparti (the Danish People's Party) stormed ahead. No truce prevailed; rather, a marked polarisation of Danish society emerged, represented in the media by an almost war-like standoff between the daily newspaper *Dagbladet Politiken* in the one camp and *Jyllands-Posten* in the other.

Self-Censorship and the Harsh Tone of Immigration Policy

For *Jyllands-Posten*, the matter was one of free speech and the fact that this was threatened by an increase in self-censorship, based either on consideration for Islam or on fear of retaliation from angry Muslims, who might perceive offences to their faith unless journalists, artists, politicians or scientists demonstrated proper respect for Islam. In his article motivating the newspaper's publication of the drawings of the prophet, which was printed in the same issue as the drawings, culture editor Flemming Rose referred to a number of instances of self-censorship and elaborated his point with the following observation, which was frequently quoted during the ensuing heated debate: "Modern, secular society is rejected by some Muslims. They lay claim to a special position by insisting on special consideration for their own religious feelings. This is incompatible with a secular democracy and freedom of speech, which require one to be prepared to endure insult, mockery and ridicule.

profeten : Muhammadkrisen bag kulisserne (The Provocateur and the Prophet: Behind the Scenes of the Muhammad Crisis), (Århus: Jyllands-Postens Forlag 2006); Rune Engelbreth Larsen and Tøger Seidenfaden: *Karikaturkrisen : en undersøgelse af baggrund og ansvar (The Caricature Crisis: An Examination of Background and Responsibility)*, (København: Gyldendal 2006). On its website (<http://www.dedi.org.eg/>), the Danish-Egyptian Dialogue Institute has translated a number of articles from the Arab press. I have presented the crisis within its historical context, drawing parallels to e.g. the Rushdie Affair, and analyzing the Muhammad case in its Middle Eastern context, mainly in the light of 'the war against terror', in the book *Den Tabte Uskyld: Verdensorden – Battle over values – Islamisme* (Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag 2006), published in English as *Innocence Lost. Islamism and the Battle over Values and World Order*. (Odense. University Press of Southern Denmark 2007).

This certainly does not always make a pretty or agreeable spectacle, and it does not mean that religious feelings must at any cost be ridiculed, but in this context, that is of secondary importance”² The publication of the drawings was allegedly meant to serve the purpose of raising a debate concerning free speech and self-censorship, which would establish that a real problem was emerging in Denmark. Rose might have mentioned other instances which, while not direct expressions of self-censorship, one might well fear could cause it, such as the case of the teacher at the Carsten Niebuhr Institute who, after quoting from the Koran, was beaten up by angry Muslims, or the fact that the teaching of Islam at the University of Southern Denmark had been interrupted because it was not the correct interpretation that was being taught.³ The immediate cause for *Jyllands-Posten's* campaign; the difficulties encountered by author Kåre Bluitgen in his efforts to find an artist to create illustrations of the prophet for his children's book about Muhammad and the fact that the artist he managed to persuade insisted on remaining anonymous, thus constituted but one among a considerable number of incidents.

The problem of self-censorship in relation to Islam did exist, as most people probably recognise. This was likely part of the reason why, at first, reactions to the drawings were modest, apart from some reactions within exclusive Muslim circles and the refusal of some convenience store owners to sell the newspaper.⁴ Presumably, another reason was that – although, in the light of the violent reactions which occurred some months later, this may seem a controversial statement – most Danes, including most Danes with a Muslim background, did not find that the drawings in and of themselves were particularly offensive or provocative. Notably, a month after the publications of the drawings, on October 31 – November 1, the University of Southern Denmark hosted a big conference on media in the Middle East, attended by media scholars from the Middle East, during which the drawings were never discussed; in fact they were barely mentioned at all.⁵ The conference took place at a time which had already

² *Jyllands-Posten*, September 30. The article in full is printed in John Hansen op.cit.

³ The Carsten Niebuhr Institute case, as well as other cases, are mentioned in the *Kristeligt Dagblad* article of February 23, 2005: “Når tro og videnskab karamboleres” (“When Faith and Academics Collide”).

⁴ All is, as is generally accepted, relative: in the following days and weeks, *Jyllands-Posten's* editorial team and the cartoonists were the targets of unusually crude threats. Later on, the cartoonists were forced into hiding, and the newspaper's journalists had to be evacuated due to bomb threats. I do not mean to disregard or deny the seriousness of these unpleasant events in arguing that, compared with the situation in the Middle East and Asia, reactions in Denmark were on a lesser scale.

⁵ This issue is more extensively discussed in Jakob Feldt & Peter Seeberg: “New Media in the Middle East – an Introduction” in Feldt & Seeberg: *Papers from “New Media in the Middle East”. International Conference, Centre for Middle East Studies November 2005*, Working Papers Series No. 7, September 2006, Centre for Contemporary Middle East Studies (can be downloaded from the centre website: <http://www.humaniora.sdu.dk/middle-east/>)

seen 3000 Muslim protesters in the streets of Copenhagen (October 14); the arrest of a seventeen-year-old Muslim for threatening the lives of the cartoonists (October 3); and the arrest, one week later, of another seventeen-year-old, likewise for, by way of threats, having forced two of the cartoonists to go into hiding (October 15); the un-remarked printing, in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Faqr*, of six of the drawings (October 17). Also, eleven Muslim ambassadors had approached the Prime Minister requesting an emergency meeting on the matter (October 12) that was rejected in a letter from the Prime Minister's office (October 21). Meanwhile, on October 30, the day before the conference, Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, in an interview with *Jyllands-Posten*, stated that he would never accept for "respect for people's religious stance to lead to a curtailment of the ability of the press to express criticism, humor and satire". High-profile American scholars with intimate knowledge of the region engaged representatives from e.g. *al-jazeera* and *al-arabia* in discussions on stereotyping and construal of the enemy in the coverage by Middle Eastern media of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as in the coverage of the region by Western media, without making an issue of the cartoons. A presentation by a German scholar affiliated with MEMRI (The Middle East Media Research Institute)⁶, which specialises in the translation of texts in Arabic, Persian and other Middle Eastern languages, and which has drawn particular attention to many examples of Arab caricatures of Jews depicted as executioners and war criminals, occasioned a heated debate, during which accusations against MEMRI of its being a creation of and advocate for Zionist and neoconservative forces were launched by the representatives from the Arab press, without any mention or inclusion in the debate of the matter of *Jyllands-Posten's* drawings – which would really have been quite relevant here. Scholars who were aware of the matter were present at the conference, some of whom had already made statements criticising the publication of the drawings, but the issue had yet to become an international one, and was likely viewed by the critics as mainly an expression of the Danish political right's campaign against Islam and Danish Muslims. As such, the matter of the drawings of the prophet constituted nothing new nor more remarkable than the many other crude swipes at Islam with which writers and politicians connected to so-called "Islamophobic" circles within Danish society had for a long time entertained the public, and which by its critics was termed "the harsh tone of the debate on immigration".⁷

⁶ www.memri.org

⁷ Examples of the discussion on "the harsh tone" are legion; see e.g.: *Politiken*, June 1, 2006: "OSCE: Uacceptabel tone mod Muslims" ("Unacceptable Tone Against Muslims"); *Information* May 26, 2006: "Ugens bommert. Når svinehunden glammer" ("Blunder of the Week. The Voice of the Beast Within"); *B.T.* May 24, 2006: "Pias sorte får" ("Pia's Black Sheep")

Among critics of *Jyllands-Posten's* drawings of the prophet, this became the predominant interpretation. The newspaper's stubborn insistence that it had acted with the issues of free speech and self-censorship in mind was dismissed by critics as a mere excuse for offending the beliefs of Muslims, as part of an ongoing smear campaign against Islam. According to the critics, the Islamic prohibition against depicting the prophet, which is based on the notion that this would challenge the dogma that Allah is the single and true creative source, had to be respected. It served no purpose, they claimed, to offend the religion of others, other than that of causing offence. This view was most succinctly put by former Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs from Venstre, Danmarks Liberale Parti (Denmark's Liberal Party), Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, in an article in the daily newspaper *Berlingske Tidende*, in which he described *Jyllands-Posten's* project of initiating a discussion on self-censorship as the newspaper's "puerile demonstration of its right to free speech" (October 26). Surely freedom of speech was a basic civic right within a liberal society, but it was, according to the Danish statesman, not to be seen as an obligation to speak. In other words, freedom of expression has its limits, including limits which are not only defined by the limitations established in the Danish penal code, but also limits of a *moral* nature, which concern decency, tolerance, and respect for the religious feelings of others. *Jyllands-Posten* had crossed this limit, and the newspaper's motive was, according to its critics, not to initiate a sincere debate on free speech and self-censorship, rather it was to smear Islam and Muslims, thereby adding another dimension to the already "harsh tone of the Danish debate on immigration". Rather than being about self-censorship, the discussion developed into a profound moral conflict between those who, in a purely abstract manner, championed freedom of speech as an indisputable principle, and those who insisted that freedom of speech must be limited in consideration of people's religious feelings. While, except for a group of Imams, only few disputed *Jyllands-Posten's* right to publish the drawings,⁸ the debate soon acquired a moralising tone, concerned with whether or not the paper *ought* to have done it.

Both positions were typically formulated purely in terms of abstract principles, hiding or even ignoring the fact that statements and dialogue are never made and never unfold within a power vacuum, but are always already a part of a struggle for power.⁹

⁸ On Friday, October 28, 2005, eleven Muslim organizations reported *Jyllands-Posten* to the police for blasphemy and racism. On January 7, the District Attorney in Viborg denied that there was any basis for criminal charges against *Jyllands-Posten*. The decision was appealed to be evaluated by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

⁹ The argument is developed in my feature article "Betingelser for dialog i terrorbekæmpelsens tidsalder" ("Conditions for Dialogue in the Age of Counterterrorism") in *Jyllands-Posten*, December 2, 2005

Any statement always exists within a context, and is therefore issued from a specific position within this context. One might say that a statement can never be reduced to its content of meaning, but also always carries an aspect of intent. This intent is obviously subject to interpretation, and the recipient's interpretation may surely vary widely from that of the author. The struggle is complicated by the fact that the interpretation of intent may itself carry a specific intent, which is again contingent upon the context at which it is aimed. According to the newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten's* drawings and Flemming Rose's article carried an intent which was, however, quite differently construed by their critics. From the point of view of the paper, this meant that the discussion was derailed, while critics saw the reactions of offended Muslims as confirmation of the paper's supposed hidden agenda: to carry on "the harsh tone of the debate on immigration".¹⁰ In other words, the debate on immigration soon became the focus of the discussion, rather than the issue of self-censorship, and the discussion hereby took a turn which meant that freedom of speech was no longer construed as the right to free expression unencumbered by self-censorship, but rather as the right to smear Muslims. In its position as Denmark's biggest daily, *Jyllands-Posten* had every opportunity to make itself heard. It even had the full support of the leader of the Danish government, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, as opposed to the Danish Muslims who, at least according to the Imams, had difficulties making themselves heard by the Danish public. Thus on the part of the critics, the discussion soon came to be viewed as a confrontation between the powers that be within Danish society, represented by *Jyllands-Posten* and the government, and the powerless victims, the Danish Muslims. This made it difficult for many who basically found *Jyllands-Posten's* project acceptable and justified, but who belonged to the political opposition and perhaps did not care for the political stance of the newspaper in general, to support the project, because this not only could but was in fact indirectly interpreted as support for the government and for the harsh tone of the political right wing in the debate on immigration. To be more precise, one might say that what allegedly began as an effort to thematise Islamist attempts at curtailing free speech by pressuring journalists, authors, artists and scholars into exercising self-censorship, became a heated discussion for or against the government's integration policy. To support *Jyllands-Posten's* project and defend free speech as a pillar of liberal society, which includes the right to ridicule religion in the same vein as ideology and other world views, while remaining critical of the immigration policy of the government and the political right wing's at times warped representa-

¹⁰ See John Hansen op.cit. p. 49ff.

tion of Islam, became a near-impossible stance requiring elaborate rhetorical constructions. One solution was to start comments establishing that the paper was of course well within its rights in publishing the drawings, and then proceed with an extensive moral argument explicating why it nevertheless ought not to have done so. Anders Fogh Rasmussen himself chose a version of this approach when he, on *TV2-Nyhederne* (one of the main Danish television news programmes) on January 30, 2006, in an awkward yet commendable attempt to dampen tempers, said that he personally would not make drawings which would be offensive to the religious feelings of others, but that neither would he dispute the right of others to do so. At that point, however, the matter had long ago ceased to be a national Danish issue concerned with free speech and the harsh tone in the debate on immigration, and had turned into an issue for “incontrollable forces” in the Islamic world.

It Will Pass

For a long time it looked like the matter of the drawings would remain a Danish concern; as yet another expression of the cultural struggle which the government had emphasised as a key issue, led first by the Prime Minister, and then by the Minister for Culture, Brian Mikkelsen. A Danish discussion, carried out in the media mainly by *Jyllands-Posten* in the one camp and the daily newspaper *Politiken* in the other, in which the spokesmen for the two camps both represented Venstre (Denmark’s Liberal Party), namely Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and his predecessor as chairman of the party, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen. On the sidelines stood a number of Imams who, as early as October 2, had formed a so-called action committee, as well as the eleven Muslim ambassadors. Yet in spite of the latter’s contributions to the debate, and their contacts, mainly in the Middle East, the international perspectives of the matter did not seem to significantly influence the Danish discussion, which, as previously mentioned, primarily concerned the issue of approval or disapproval of moral (religious) curtailment of free speech, revolving around the allegedly harsh tone of the debate on immigration. Admittedly, it had been noticed that, as early as October 14, ten thousand protesters had taken to the streets of Deoband in India in outrage over the drawings, just as the OIC had sent a letter of protest to the Danish Prime Minister, with a similar content to that of the letter sent by the eleven ambassadors. And indeed the Danish ambassador had been summoned for a meeting at the Egyptian Foreign Ministry in Cairo on October 25, just as the Egyptian ambassador in Lebanon had threatened to break off relations with Denmark (November 3), in addition to which the Pakistani Foreign Ministry criticised the drawings for being “Islamophobic”. These and other

measures, such as the protest made by the OIC to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, were publicly noted, mentioned and discussed in Denmark, but apart from the relevant government offices which were of course obliged to reply to the protests and the rising number of enquiries from foreign governments and international organisations, and a minor group of commentators, the matter continued to be viewed within a *Danish* perspective. Most people likely expected the overseas protests to peter out after a while. The unpleasant threats against the cartoonists were taken seriously, just as the Egyptian threats to break off the dialogue with Denmark and the OIC's calls for economic and political boycotts gave cause for concern. Both could jeopardise high-profile Danish projects: the newly established Danish – Egyptian Dialogue Institute (Dansk-Egyptiske Dialoginstitut) in Cairo,¹¹ which, as part of the government's Arab Dialogue, had been established with a mind to promoting democratic reforms in the Arab countries, risked closure as a result of a potential Egyptian break-off of relations. Another high profile project, at the price of 25 million DKK, the big culture festival *Images of the Middle East*, which was to take place in August and September of 2006, would encounter serious difficulties if OIC's calls for a boycott were heeded by artists from the Middle East.¹² In spite of these troubling developments, the Prime Minister's New Year speech, in which Anders Fogh Rasmussen condemned statements demonising sections of the population on the basis of their religious or ethnic affiliations, as well as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Per Stig Møller's, talks with the leader of the Arab League, the Egyptian Amr Moussa, were seen as signs that a reconciliation and understanding between Denmark and the Middle Eastern countries was underway. The situation was moving toward normalisation, and what remained was the Danish debate on free speech, the tone of the debate on immigration, and cultural values, although this was soon overshadowed by the coming negotiations over a welfare policy compromise. At a debate between party leaders arranged by Det Radikale Venstre (the Danish Social-Liberal Party) on January 8, 2006, on the occasion of the party's traditional New Year meet at Nyborg Strand, in which the party's own leader, Marianne Jelved, the Social Democratic leader Helle Thorning Schmidt, and the leader of Dansk Folkeparti (the Danish People's Party) Pia Kjærsgaard took part, the matter was not discussed; the main issues were taxes, education, and the war in Iraq.

¹¹ See <http://www.dedi.org/>

¹² Although the Muhammad affair certainly gave the organizers plenty of extra work and toil, the festival took place as had been planned, with all the announced participants and at the designated time, in August – September, 2006.

It Did Not Pass – But Why?

A month later, all hell broke loose in the Middle East, and Denmark was placed in a state of near-emergency. Concurrently with the escalation of the crisis in the Middle East and Asia, the nature of the debate in Denmark changed, as the focal issue now became the issue of how matters could have gone so awry. Two different explanations were available. One indicated that the action committee organised by Danish Imams, as early as the beginning of October, had organised two trips to the Middle East during which it had argued its case in a number of meetings with high-ranking Islamic leaders, Arab members of government and representatives of the Arab League and the OIC, bore the main responsibility for the violent recriminations directed at Denmark throughout the Islamic world. This explanation for the international dimension of the affair was mainly advanced by *Jyllands-Posten* itself, as well as by the forces which supported the newspaper's project, including particularly the government's parliamentary ally Dansk Folkeparti (the Danish People's Party). It was further emphasised that the Imams' campaign in the Middle East had received the active support of the eleven Muslim ambassadors, of which the Egyptian ambassador had been particularly active in her support. The other explanation held the government responsible for the fact that the crisis had spun out of control. The focal point of the critique of the government was its refusal to meet with the eleven ambassadors, which was partly seen as evidence of arrogance and partly as evidence that the government, and particularly the Prime Minister, with this refusal had missed an obvious diplomatic opportunity that might otherwise have served to settle the controversy at an early stage. This thesis was most notably advanced by *Dagbladet Politiken*, which increasingly emerged as the opposition's most consistent critic of the governance of Anders Fogh Rasmussen, as well as, obviously, by members of the opposition. As early as December 20 – that is, before things turned violent in the Middle East – this thesis had gained leverage when twenty-two former Danish diplomats, in a quite uncharacteristic turn, broke their silence in an article in *Politiken*, in which they strongly criticised the Prime Minister for having refused to meet with the eleven Muslim ambassadors.

Both theses had been touched upon and discussed back in October, but without being ascribed anything resembling the significance with which they were to be assigned in February. The Imams' action committee had of course been noticed, just as their threats that the matter would have serious consequences for Denmark if the government did not, in addition to issuing a formal, public apology, take action against *Jyllands-Posten*, had been noted. But the threats were generally met by incredulous puzzlement, and perceived as shrill rhetoric to which not much significance could be ascribed. Indeed the action committee had succeeded, by means of e-mails and text

messages, in establishing a network which subjected *Jyllands-Posten's* electronic mail system to a veritable bombardment of disagreeable e-mails threatening the newspaper's employees. But the notion that this committee could be capable of bringing about a trade boycott against Danish companies on a scale of billions of DKK, and inspiring the mass protests and violent agitation which would sweep the Islamic world a few months later, hardly occurred to anyone, until it actually happened. In a similar turn of events, criticism had early on been levelled at the Prime Minister for his refusal to meet with the Muslim ambassadors, without this criticism being accompanied by anything resembling realistic predictions of the violent episodes the world would witness just over three months later. The content of the letter sent by the Prime Minister to the eleven ambassadors, including the refusal of their request for an emergency meeting, enjoyed widespread political support. However some, particularly among the opposition, voiced the opinion that the Prime Minister himself, or, alternatively, his Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is formally in charge of relations with foreign diplomats, might well have hosted a meeting communicating the content of the letter in conjunction with the offering of coffee and cake.¹³ But in October, nobody ascribed the non-meeting the significance it was later to acquire as the main explanation for Denmark's worst foreign policy crisis since the Second World War.

In hindsight, it seems obvious to ascribe significance to these two theses concerning the role played by the Imams and the Prime Minister's non-meeting, in understanding why matters went so awry in connection with *Jyllands-Posten's* drawings of the prophet. There can hardly be any doubt that the campaign of the Imams, including the two trips to Syria, Egypt and Lebanon which they organised in December, and during which they informed high-ranking politicians and religious leaders about the Danish Muhammad affair, contributed to the escalation of the conflict, just as the notorious misinformation with which they entertained the Arab press while the crisis raged did nothing to calm tempers. Also, the Egyptian ambassador must without a doubt be ascribed a part in the escalation of the conflict, as she provided the Imams with contacts as well as on the basis of her interactions with the Egyptian government. Although, at least on the part of the Imams, some measure of misinformation was disseminated, it has not been documented that they committed any downright unlawful acts. Strictly speaking, they effectively exploited and enhanced one interpretation of *Jyllands-Posten's* intent, which, as demonstrated, was common in the Danish debate as such: that they were the victims of a "harsh note in the Danish debate on immigration", a tone which had now been sharpened by an act of direct offence against one

¹³ Cf. John Hansen op.cit. p.

of the most unassailable aspects of their faith, the prophet Muhammad. This was their construal of *Jyllands-Posten's* drawings, and it was soon to acquire widespread support in the Danish debate. It served to discredit the Imams that they had added for instance a picture from a French pig festival, which was entirely unrelated to the matter at hand, to the material they passed on to Islamic leaders in the Middle East – it must, however, really be considered a crude and stupid attempt at emphasising and enhancing a point which actually was – and likely still is – widely held in the kingdom of Denmark and is part of the image of Denmark many foreigners had acquired subsequent to the tightening-up of national immigration policy, namely that the rhetoric applied in connection with Muslim immigrants was tough and harsh.¹⁴ Regardless of whether or not they in fact had desired such an outcome, and of the fact that it makes them look bad that several of them were actually caught in the act of dissembling and thereby contributing to misinformation, it remains entirely out of proportion to imagine that their effort alone could have been the direct and actual cause of the worst foreign policy crisis in Danish history since the Second World War. This amounts both to giving them too much credit, and to a misreading of the whole matter.

The same is true for the government's handling of the matter of the drawings: Anders Fogh Rasmussen's refusal to meet with the ambassadors can rightly be considered a diplomatic *faux pas*, which certainly did not make it easier for the government to deal with the matter in the event of its subsequent escalation. But to ascribe decisive significance to it in bringing about the firebombing of Danish embassies, the loss of 138 lives in connection with mass protests, and the loss of close to a billion DKK's worth of Danish export revenues is simply disproportionate to the actual facts of the

¹⁴ The tightening-up of Danish immigration policy which has been implemented by the government of Anders Fogh Rasmussen has, in the international press, been represented in critical terms, which has painted a picture of Denmark as hostile to immigration and immigrants. In connection with Denmark's presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2002, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark attempted a counter-offensive, which was supposed to rectify the negative image; see *Berlingske Tidende*, June 10, 2002: "Vi beskriver hvad der sker" ("We Describe What's Actually Happening"). A number of reports from e.g. the UN and the European Council have likewise criticised Denmark for implementing legislation which is allegedly in violation of international conventions. Whether one agrees with these accusations and considers the negative representation of Denmark to be in accordance with the actual state of affairs or not, the image abroad has contributed to the representation of Denmark as a country which enforces a very strict policy towards immigrants, and whose debate on the issue is characterised by a "harsh tone". This, combined with a view of Denmark as a close ally of the United States in terms of Middle East and security policy had thus, even before the Muhammad affair, with regard to people in Europe as well as in the Middle East, prepared the ground for the Imams' message concerning the "hostility towards immigrants inherent in the debate" in Denmark. In other words, even before the cartoon controversy, a critical image of Denmark had had been formed abroad, including in the Middle East, which was confirmed and enhanced by the interpretation of the caricatures as a reflection of a xenophobic and "harsh tone" in the Danish debate on immigration.

matter. In a report commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, to be prepared by a group of scholars under my leadership, in connection with the ministry's preparation of a basis for legislation to be presented to Folketinget (the Danish parliamentary assembly) concerning the continuation of the Arab Initiative, we established that the refusal of the Prime Minister to meet with the eleven Muslim ambassadors might well be considered a greater insult than the cartoons themselves.¹⁵ We had, in late March of 2006, been asked to provide a number of analyses, including one of the ramifications of the matter of the drawings in terms of the continuation of the Arab Initiative. We had not been asked to provide an assessment of the matter of the drawings, something which we were not in any case equipped to carry out, but only our assessment of the possibilities of continuing the Arab Initiative in light of the controversy. The Arab Initiative was about dialogue, in which Denmark in equal partnership with a number of Arab countries wishes to promote democratic reforms in a wide sense of the term. One of the countries with which Denmark is in dialogue is Egypt, which has agreed to discuss issues considered important by Denmark. In relation to this, it is easy to interpret the refusal of the Prime Minister, who in this matter equals the Danish state, to meet with the Egyptian ambassador as an indication that it is Denmark and Denmark alone that decides the content of the dialogue which is to take place between the two states, something which can in no way be defined as either a partnership or a relationship between equals. Formally speaking, this of course constitutes a much more offensive act than the drawings in and of themselves: the fact that a Danish newspaper, quite in keeping with the law and outside of Egyptian (and Islamic) jurisdiction, publishes some caricatures which some Muslims, including Egyptian ones, perceive as offensive, hurtful or insulting, does not amount to the Danish state insulting that of Egypt; but it constitutes an insult to the state of Egypt when Denmark – which itself has in fact issued an invitation to political and cultural dialogue – rejects this very dialogue because the Danish government considered the chosen subject irrelevant to the dialogue. This precisely

¹⁵ The analyses commissioned of the SDU by The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark in connection with the ministry's preparation of a basis for legislation concerning the continuation of the Arab Initiative included six area studies (of individual states), six thematic studies and four organisational analyses. In fact only a single, small paragraph in one report attracted the attention of the media, namely the analysis *Betingelser for dialog. Civilisationskonflikt eller anerkendelse* (*Conditions for Dialogue. Clash of Civilization or Recognition*), prepared by Lars Erslev Andersen, Gunna Funder Hansen and Kirstine Sinclair. *Weekendavisen* drew attention to the paragraph, which was referred to under the hard-hitting heading "Forhåneren Fogh" ("Fogh the Debaser") (5/24, 2006). The context, the remainder of the material as well as our concise description of the actual content of the report was of no interest. The report, together with the rest of the material and reports, is available at The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark's website:

<http://www.um.dk/da/menu/udviklingspolitik/bistandipraksis/detarabiskeinitativ/analysefdetarabiskeinitativ/baggrundsanalyser/baggrundsanalyser.htm>

constitutes the diplomatic *faux pas* of the government, firstly because here was an obvious opportunity to clarify, through dialogue, what constitutes freedom of speech and freedom of the press in a democratic state based on the rule of law, and is this not exactly the kind of dialogue the government aims for with its Arab Initiative? Secondly, because Denmark with this rejection showed the relationship between the two states to be anything but one of equals, and Denmark to be, politically and morally, on a higher level than Egypt, and thirdly, because Denmark cut itself off from an opportunity to engage in a dialogue of equals with Egypt with a view to settling tempers in the matter of the drawings when it escalated in earnest – but, obviously, in October no-one knew that this would be necessary. It goes without saying that refusing dialogue on a specific issue makes it all the more difficult to engage in a dialogue over that same issue at a later date when the need for this arises. Criticism of Anders Fogh Rasmussen for being arrogant in rejecting this dialogue grew even more forceful as he, on December 18, 2005 at Marienborg, smilingly received the Dutch Member of Parliament Hirsi Ali, the previous year's recipient of Venstre's freedom award. Hirsi Ali had come to Denmark to launch a book critical of Islam, and was known as the author of the manuscript for *Submission*, a controversial film directed by Theo Van Gogh; Van Gogh had been killed by an Islamist because his film had been considered blasphemous. Anders Fogh Rasmussen was criticised for his willingness to meet with a controversial critic of Islam while refusing to meet with eleven concerned Muslim ambassadors, something which critics saw as proof that the Muhammad matter was in fact not about freedom of speech; rather, it constituted a campaign against Islam.¹⁶

It is interesting to note that the discussion over who was responsible for the manner in which the Muhammad crisis had developed itself followed the pattern of interpretation which had emerged upon the publication of the drawings; it took the form mainly of a confrontation between those who support the government's immigration policy and those who oppose it. For those who supported *Jyllands-Posten's* project and the government's policy on the issue of free speech, the trips to the Middle East made by the delegation of Imams had served to internationalise what they perceived as the efforts of Danish Islamists to force self-censorship upon Danish public life. Meanwhile, for those who opposed the project, the rejection to meet with the Muslim ambassadors constituted yet another instance of the harsh tone in the debate on immigration, which was now backfiring because *Jyllands-Posten* with its drawings of the prophet had overstepped the limits of common decency and

¹⁶ Cf. John Hansen op.cit. p. 77

respect for the religious feelings of others. As the crisis in the Islamic world took an almost surreal turn, the Danish debate became increasingly polarised, and while it had previously been difficult to adopt a balanced point of view, during and in the aftermath of the crisis it became a near impossibility. Take for instance the opinion we had argued, in our report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark – within a context which neither was, nor presumed to be, an evaluation of the government’s handling of the matter – that the refusal to meet with the ambassadors could, from the particular perspective described in the above, be perceived as a greater insult than the drawings themselves; this was, by the Danish media, turned into the sensational line: “scholars place the main responsibility for the Muhammad crisis on Anders Fogh Rasmussen”. Representatives of the Danish opposition cited the report as conclusive evidence that the main cause of the violent events in the Middle East and Asia had been the rejection of the ambassadors’ request for a meeting. Although this was in fact *not* what we had written, and although we clarified our opinion in a commentary in *Jyllands-Posten*, we were nevertheless attacked by two commentators from the same newspaper - who seemed to insist that we had put the primary responsibility on the Prime Minister, then proceeded to reject that view – one even referring to our work of more than 150 pages as “completely silly”.¹⁷ Of course we, and our work, did not constitute the real aim for the two commentators; rather, their objective was to present a vehement argument that the Imams and the Egyptian ambassador had been the true culprits. Ironically, the arguments made in both commentaries implicitly supported our claim that the Prime Minister’s rejection of the meeting constituted a diplomatic *faux pas*: the first thus called the rejection a breach of diplomatic “etiquette”, but, in terms of diplomacy, etiquette surely entails more than fine dinners, polite chats over coffee and cocktail parties? Diplomacy is in fact supposed to serve to prevent disputes from developing into actual crises, let alone wars, and therefore it is of course not unimportant that diplomatic etiquette be observed, particularly in a crisis. The other commentator argued that the non-meeting had merely served as a welcome opportunity for the Egyptian ambassador in her efforts to exacerbate the crisis.¹⁸ All right, one might say, but in that case, she would have waited in vain for that opportunity had the meeting in fact taken place. Yet others argued that the Prime Minister was right not to agree to the meeting, because the request had been accompanied by threats. Again, diplomacy is exactly about preventing threats from becoming reality, which

¹⁷ Ralf Pittelkow: “En fuldstændig gakket rapport” (“A Completely Silly Report”), *Jyllands-Posten* May 28, 2006

¹⁸ Peter La Cour: “Politisierende forskere” (“Politisizing Scholars”), *Jyllands-Posten*, June 1, 2006

must mean that the more threats that are made, the greater the need for diplomatic contacts – this is the very *raison d'être* of diplomacy.

Just as the unfortunate behaviour of the Imams, including their dissemination of misinformation in the Middle East and, most significantly, the eagerness with which they brought the matter to the attention of Middle Eastern leaders, cannot be considered the main cause of the Muhammad crisis, so neither can the Prime Minister's refusal to meet with eleven Muslim ambassadors in Copenhagen back in October of 2005 be considered to have been of decisive importance in terms of the scale of the crisis. Both explanations emphasise Danish circumstances and extrapolate these out into the surrounding world, hereby failing to take appropriate account of the fact that the escalation of the crisis first and foremost pertains to international circumstances, particularly circumstances in South Asia and the Middle East. In other words, to understand the Muhammad crisis, one must both begin and end with the Middle East: this is where the demonstrations took place, this is where the boycott of Danish goods was carried out, and this is where diplomatic offices belonging to Denmark and other countries were attacked, events quite unheard-of and entirely out of proportion with that which had occasioned it all, twelve drawings in a Danish newspaper. It is worth keeping in mind that we did not in Denmark witness anything even remotely on scale with the scenes of violence witnessed in the Middle East, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Indonesia.

The Role of the West and of Denmark in the Battle over Values in the Middle East

After 9/11 and the establishment of the new US Middle East policy, which aims at bringing about global security through the dissemination of Western values based on democracy and liberal rights, an intense battle over values has been played out between what are perceived by the West to be universal values versus an Islamist interpretation, which would base political order on Islam. This battle over values is mainly played out in Muslim societies, where criticism of Western liberal values is widespread. In addition, many who live in Muslim immigrant communities in Europe, including Denmark, are actively involved in the battle over values which is waged in the Middle East and South Asia, over the proper political role of Islam in the establishment of a Middle Eastern order.¹⁹

In all the Middle Eastern countries, forces in favour of reform exist. Elections have been held throughout, although in some cases these have appeared as mockeries of free and democratic elections. And throughout, opposition against reforms is growing. The reasons are various and related to local circumstances. It would be inaccurate to speak of a united Islamic fundamentalist opposition. Even in Palestine, in Iraq, in Yemen, in Syria and in Egypt, Islamism is fragmented and split into various fundamentalist construals of the nature of the true Islamic state. But throughout there is agreement that the Palestinian policy of the West and the United States is hypocritical, and on a scepticism regarding the objectives of the West's efforts at democratisation, which are perceived as a strategy which aims at the further exploitation and oppression of Muslims and their nations – and that the true basis for politics must be sought in a political interpretation of Islam. For Islamists, the war on terror is, first and foremost, the West's attempt at achieving dominance by waging war against Muslims and their faith.²⁰

They find confirmation of this in Western praise for Israel for its withdrawal from Gaza, while Israel constructs a wall which encloses the Palestinians and systematically undermines any possibility of a Palestinian state ever becoming a reality; that Muslims are locked up at Guantanamo without any semblance of due process; that Iraqis are tortured in an effort to establish a state governed by law in Iraq; that

¹⁹ This argument is developed in my book *Innocence Lost* op.cit.

²⁰ Ibid.

Yemen, in the name of democracy, receives support while its government carries out a massacre of the Yemenite population in the northern part of the country. They also find confirmation in the fact that Saudi Arabia is commended for being tough on terrorists without making any efforts to supplement the numerous murders with rights and liberties for the people; that Western countries are implementing legislation against terrorism which is aimed primarily at Muslims; that, on the basis of their names and beliefs, Muslims are to a large extent shut out of labour markets in the West; that Muslims are being transported by secret CIA aircraft, to be interrogated and detained in secret prisons; that the right to free speech is absolute and inviolable where criticism of Islam is concerned, but less so as pertains to Islamist criticism of democracy, and so forth. Well-meaning individuals and politicians in the West have offered explanations along the following lines: anti-terrorism legislation is *not* aimed at Muslims as such; the West, led by the USA, still supports the notion of a Palestinian state, and the torture that took place at Abu Ghraib was the work of a few bad apples within the U.S. Army. But these explanations leave Islamists unmoved. In their view, Western liberal values entail a justification for oppressing and making war on Islam. This does not constitute a marginal attitude, limited to a small, extremist group of fanatics. It is an understanding which is widespread and deeply rooted in Middle Eastern populations.

The Islamist battle over values also has many supporters outside the Middle East: in parts of Africa, in Indonesia, in the Philippines, in Chechnya, in parts of Central Asia and in Muslim immigrant communities in Europe. The Islamist message can be heard in mosques across Denmark, in the United Kingdom and throughout Europe; it appears on numerous websites, it is available on cassette tape, in pamphlets, on DVDs and CD-ROMs, and when a number of Danish Islamic groups and organisations host discussions and debates, it is the message that is offered.

The Drawings of the Prophet

The Islamist battle over values requires symbols in the form, for instance, of events and episodes which, when merely referred to, metaphorically incarnate the entire content of the struggle. The Abu Ghraib scandal has become such a symbol which in a simple way communicates the Islamist message that the declared objective of the United States to establish democracy and the rule of law in Iraq is merely a rhetorical cover for the true intentions of the superpower, which are to oppress the Muslims and exploit Arab resources, even if this entails violence and the use of torture. Guantanamo is another such symbol which, by its mere mention in the Islamist discourse, communicates the

message that the United States and the West consider Muslims to be inferior human beings who cannot lay claim to the very rights held sacred by the West for its own citizens. *Jyllands-Posten's* drawings of the prophet had all the makings of a symbol of the Islamist battle over values: in their interpretation, they illustrated, in an easily accessible manner, that the West has no respect for the Muslim faith, but rather the policy of the West aims solely at propagating its own secular ideas, which it considers to be universal, even if this entails a profound violation of the religious feelings of Muslims. In the eyes of the Islamists, the West's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are not waged for the purposes of creating better societies, but primarily constitute a war against Islam. The fight for free speech, as represented by the drawings of the prophet, are in that perspective seen as a defence of the right to fight Islam by attacking and ridiculing the very messenger of Allah, the prophet Muhammad, who for the Muslim faithful stand as the shining and impeccable example to be emulated. This is fully in keeping with a construal of the West's efforts to introduce democracy in the Middle East as interference with the divine creation of Allah by allowing the people to make its own laws, which is blasphemous as there *are* no true laws besides the ones given by Allah in the form of the revelations received by the prophet Muhammad. The insurgence and the opposition to the American order in the Middle East, and the opposition to a notion of freedom of speech which allows violations of the religious feelings of Muslims through the creation of caricatures of Allah's chosen messenger, constitutes two aspects of the same cause in the Islamist battle over values. The feeling of victimisation which Danish Islamists like to ascribe to themselves in their rhetoric and criticism of the harsh tone in the debate on immigration, appears on a larger scale in the Middle Eastern battle over values, where Islamists see Muslims as victims of Western imperialism which aims at turning Islamic territory into a substrate for exploitation. But for Islamists, the drawings of the prophet symbolise the message more purely, simply and immaculately, because the feelings of offence at and opposition to them is not associated with the terrorism of al-Qaida or Hamas, and because it is free of nationalistic and sectarian undertones: the violation is aimed at all Muslims, irrespective of place and Islamic creed, because they all share the one basic statement of faith: "There is but one God, Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet".

Therefore, the drawings of the prophet could – and can – be used as a symbol in the battle over values by government salaried Grand Muftis in Saudi Arabia and Egypt as well as by television Imams on *al-jazeera* and Shia Muslim leaders in Lebanon, Iraq and Iran. And they certainly were – as a symbol of the disrespectful attitude of the West towards Muslims in Western societies as well as in the Islamic world. The symbolism was applicable both in the internal power struggle between Islamists over

who represents the true Islam, and in the relationship between the Middle East policy of the West and the Islamist insurgency. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the jihadists behind the terrorist attacks in the West, Iraq and elsewhere were reluctant to use the drawings of the prophet as a symbol in their discourse.²¹

Their struggle is in fact nationalistic, sectarian and concrete, wherefore the pure symbolism of the drawings of the prophets appeared as a distraction from the real battle to liberate Iraq, Afghanistan and the rest of the Middle East from American influence and dominance. It thus took a long time for al-Qaida leaders to get involved in the Muhammad matter, and although their message was given considerable attention in the Western media, most people missed the fact that the message from al-Qaida consisted of an appeal for the focus of the Islamist discourse to be returned to the real struggles in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Chechnya and Sudan. This was where the battle was to be won, not in a moral revolt against the West's and Denmark's lack of respect for the prophet. However, it was this latter issue which appealed to Muslims far beyond Islamists circles, which is why al-Qaida was finally forced to take a stance with regard to *Jyllands-Posten's* drawings.

The embattled and dictatorial Arab regimes were likewise able to use the pure symbolism of the drawings of the prophet to form a rare alliance with the Islamists. The regimes, which are pressured by Western demands for reforms and the demands of Islamists for a political order based on Islam, were, exactly because the symbolism of the drawings of the prophet was free of nationalistic and sectarian undertones, able to use the issue to form a rare front together with the Islamists in their criticism of the West represented by the small kingdom of Denmark. They were hereby able to send the message to the West that there are limits to Western secularism as a means for political reform and if these limits are overstepped, Islamist chaos lies in wait, and, at the same time, direct Islamists criticism away from themselves, onto the West, with Denmark as the symbolic focal point. This was exactly what the embattled Syrian government did, when it used the Muhammad issue as a vent for Islamists anger by refraining from preventing their attack on the Danish embassy on February 4, 2006.

Such diversion tactics have been used before. In the 1970's, the Saudi Arabian government was facing mounting internal Islamist criticism, criticism which culminated when, in 1979, a group of Islamists occupied the Grand Mosque in

²¹ Cf. Truls H. Tønnesen: *Jihadist Reactions to the Muhammad Cartoons*. Working Paper, presentation FFI, Oslo, March 15, 2006 as well as *Innocence Lost* op.cit. p. 150

Mecca. At that point, the United States' support for and funding of the Islamist resistance to Soviet occupation forces in Afghanistan was a godsend. They were now able to export critics to Afghanistan, while at the same time supporting the holy war against the Russian infidels. This lasted until the Soviet Union gave in and the Saudi Islamists returned to the kingdom; here, however, support for their opposition remained in force, and they were now able to gain backing for al-Qaida's battle against the American infidels.

Jyllands-Posten's drawings of the Prophet became a means for such diversions. This resulted from a combination of a grossly politicised campaign on the part of radical Danish Imams, beleaguered Arab regimes needing to divert Islamist criticism away from themselves, and a hesitant and confused political reaction on the part of the Danish government and the Danish population – who could never have imagined the potential for political symbolism inherent in these twelve drawings of the prophet Muhammad. One may well wonder whether it was purely coincidental that it happened to be a Danish matter which turned out to be such a useful diversion, or whether its being Danish made it so? One might suspect that the fact that Denmark is such a small country, which is, in addition, associated with the U.S. as a war-faring member of the alliance in the Middle East, and with an already tainted reputation in connection with immigration policy, may have made it a convenient target for the unleashing of these uncontrollable forces. The cost of a potential backlash against the Middle Eastern countries would presumably be negligible compared to those resulting from a conflict with a larger country. This view seems to be borne out by the reluctant responses on the part of the European Union and the United States, and it was telling that two of the countries which played significant parts in the affair, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, received almost no noteworthy international criticism; this was mainly directed at Iran and Syria.²² In the light of the intense battle over values in the Middle East, one might also consider whether the conflict was in fact really triggered by the offence against religious feelings attributed to *Jyllands-Posten's* drawings, or whether they just happened to occasion a politically engineered diversion, in a situation where a conflict involving the unleashing of uncontrollable forces was due regardless? Whatever the case may be, the frustration and anger which was expressed in connection with the matter of the drawings results from the battle over values taking place in the Middle East and South Asia, a battle which has long characterised the political situation in the region.

²² Cf. *Innocence Lost*, op.cit. p. 85 ff.

Less than six months after the Muhammad issue dominated the Danish political scene and the Danish media, as well as involving Denmark in its worst foreign policy crisis since the Second World War, we observe that it plays only a minor part in the public debate; that there is wide parliamentary support for the continuation of the Arab Initiative; that the Danish – Egyptian Dialogue Institute remains in existence; that the culture festival *Images of the Middle East* was carried out as planned and with great success; and that Arla (the major Danish dairy producer) products are back on the shelves in Arab supermarkets. The Middle East, and the coverage by the international media of the region, are dominated by a different and much more serious conflict, namely the shaky security situation in Lebanon, together with the hopeless situation in Palestine, the still deteriorating situation in Iraq, and Iran's insistence upon its project to produce enriched uranium. In this context, the matter of *Jyllands-Posten's* caricatures seems quite peripheral and unimportant. But its potential as an easily accessible metaphor for the battle over values in the Middle East means that it, when the opportunity arises, will again be taken up by Middle Eastern Islamists. Like the Rushdie affair, it will likely never be subject to complete closure, although it will be overshadowed by other discourses, only to reappear suddenly in the headlines, but the occasion for this will likely not be found in Denmark, but rather in the Middle East. This is something Danes will just have to live with. As such, the image of Denmark in the Middle East has forever been altered by the Muhammad cartoon controversy.²³

The consequences, however, need not be purely negative. In Denmark, the matter led to an awareness among Danes that Danish Muslims constitute a much more heterogeneous group than, and are in no way identical with, a small group of Imams who, prior to the controversy over the prime ministerial meeting schedule, and by means of extensive coverage in Danish newspapers, had strived for and almost managed to achieve a monopoly on representing Danish Muslim immigrants. The Muhammad case revealed that they represent only a small, but extraordinarily visible, minority within Danish society. The majority is made up by people who quietly and calmly go about their daily business, but who, during the Muhammad debacle, got involved in the debate, for instance, but certainly not only, by establishing the network of Democratic Muslims, on the initiative of Member of Parliament Naser Khader. Many other voices were heard, which contributed to a more complex and comprehensive image of Danish Muslims than ever before. This may lead to a greater degree of normalisa-

²³ Actually a "second" cartoon crisis evolved in February 2008 after reprinting the cartoons in most of the Danish newspapers. The reprinting was caused by the police's disclosure of assassination plans against one of the cartoonists.

tion of the relationship between Danish society and Islam. Perhaps the Muhammad matter may, in due time, when it ceases to be monopolised by Islamic Imams in the Middle East who strive to be the true representatives of Islam, have the same kind of consequences in the Middle East, and call upon other voices in the regional battle over values, and hereby contribute to emphasising the pluralism which of course also exists there, but which has been made subject to taboo by Islamists as well as by the authoritarian regimes.