

# The Danish Cartoon Affair: Free Speech, Racism, Islamism, and Integration

## Contributors:

**Professor Tariq Modood**, University of Bristol, is currently working on multicultural challenges to secularism, including a Leverhulme Programme project on British National Identity, Religion and “Difference”. His next book, *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea*, Polity Press, appears in April 2007.

**Professor Randall Hansen**, University of Toronto, organized this debate. He became interested in the controversy for two reasons. First, as he witnessed the events unfolding in late 2005 and early 2006 it seemed to him that the whole crisis raised basic questions about multiculturalism, religious accommodation, and integration. Second, the crisis coincided with an email debate that he was having with members of the political science department at the University of Toronto (including Joseph Carens) about how liberals should react to an event, organized here, entitled “Israeli Apartheid week”. He is the author of *Citizenship and Immigration in Postwar Britain* (OUP, 2000). His website is [www.randallhansen.ca](http://www.randallhansen.ca).

**Professor Erik Bleich**, Middlebury College, is the author of *Race Politics in Britain and France: Ideas and Policymaking since the 1960s* (Cambridge University Press, 2003) and has written extensively on issues of ethnic minority integration in Western Europe. His current research focuses on state responses to hate crimes and other forms of ethnic, racial, and religious violence.

**Professor Brendan O’Leary**, University of Pennsylvania, is the author, co-author, or co-editor of 15 books, including *Terror, Insurgency and the State* (2007), *Understanding Northern Ireland: Colonialism, Control and Consociation* (2007), *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq* (2005), and *The Northern Ireland Conflict* (2004). He is now evaluating the stability of pluralist federations and consociations.

**Professor Joseph H. Carens**, University of Toronto, is the author of a book on multiculturalism (*Culture, Citizenship, and Community*, Oxford University Press 2000) and is completing a book on the ethics of immigration tentatively titled *Who Belongs? Immigration, Democracy, and Citizenship*.

# The Liberal Dilemma: Integration or Vilification?<sup>1</sup>

Tariq Modood

The origins of the infamous Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad do not lie in an attempt to offer contemporary comment, let alone satire, but the desire to illustrate a children's book. While such pictures would have been distasteful to many Muslims – hence why no illustrator could be found – the cartoons are in an entirely different league of offence. They are all unfriendly to Islam and Muslims and the most notorious implicate the Prophet with terrorism. If the message was meant to be that non-Muslims have the right to draw Muhammad, it has come out very differently: that the Prophet of Islam was a terrorist.

Moreover, the cartoons are not just about one individual but about Muslims per se – just as a cartoon portraying Moses as a crooked financier would not be about one man but a comment on Jews. And just as the latter would be racist, so are the cartoons in question.

That does not in itself mean such cartoons should be banned. One relies on the sensitivity and responsibility of individuals and institutions to refrain from what is legal but unacceptable. Where these qualities are missing one relies on public debate and censure to provide standards and restraints. Hence, where matters are not or cannot easily be regulated by law one relies on protest as well as empathy. This is how most racist speech and images and other free expressions (e.g. the use of golliwogs as commercial brands or British television's *Black and White Minstrel Show*) have been censored – rather than censored – away.

Sometimes legal intervention is also necessary. For example, when there is a serious risk of incitement to hatred; or when the “fighting talk” is likely to inflame passions and risk public order; or when it is likely to reinforce prejudice and lead to acts of discrimination or victimization.

In recognition of this, the British parliament passed a bill on 31 January 2006 to protect against incitement to religious hatred. Yet it was only passed after members of both houses of parliament – supported by much of the liberal intelligentsia – forced the government to accept amendments that weakened its initial proposals. A key sticking point for the critics – that incitement must require the intention to stir up hatred – reveals a blind spot in liberal thinking that the Danish cartoon case amplifies.

If the intention of the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* was not to cause offence, there clearly was a purpose of trying to achieve some kind of victory over Muslims, to bring Muslims into line – especially as it has recently emerged that the same paper refused to print cartoons ridiculing Jesus because they risked offending some Christians (see G. Fouché, “Danish paper rejected Jesus cartoons”, *Guardian*, 6 February 2006).

The Danish editor cannot plead ignorance about the effect the cartoons would have on Muslims, for the whole exercise was premised on the view that a collective effort involving 12 cartoonists was necessary to withstand Muslim opposition. As for the republication of the cartoons across continental Europe, this was deliberately done to teach Muslims a lesson.

### **A hole in the mind**

But the cartoons themselves are a trigger rather than the main issue, for everyone – Muslims and non-Muslims – “views” them (whether literally or imaginatively) in a wider domestic and international context that is already deeply contested. From the Muslim side, the underlying causes of their current anger are a deep sense that they are not respected, that they and their most cherished feelings are “fair game”. Inferior protective legislation, socio-economic marginality, cultural disdain, draconian security surveillance, the occupation of Palestine, the international “war on terror” all converge on this point. The cartoons cannot be compared to some of these situations, but they do distil the experience of inferiority and of being bossed around. A handful of humiliating images become a focal point for something much bigger than themselves.

This at least helps to explain if not condone some of the violent protests in several Muslim cities, and the language of some of the initial protestors in places like Copenhagen and London. Such behaviour is wholly unacceptable and does great damage to the cause of the protestors and to the standing of Muslims in general. Yet while violent protests do not win Muslims many friends, they are not the principal reason for a lack of sympathy for Muslims. Much more real estate has been burnt and more lives lost and endangered in protests in, say, Detroit or Los Angeles; in cases like that protest has been understood by many commentators and politicians as legitimate rage to be addressed by positive socio-economic policies.

Two factors are critical to the lack of sympathy for Muslims in Europe. First, there is a lack of recognition that the way that Muslims are treated is a form of racism – after all it is less than 15 years ago that Britain’s Commission for Racial Equality and most British anti-racists denied that the vilification of Muslims was

a form of racism. Most of continental Europe has hardly begun to have that debate. The suggestion that Muslims are not the subject of racism because they are a religious group is nonsense when one considers that the victimization of another religious group, the Jews, is paradigmatic of many peoples' understanding of racism, especially on the continent.

The second reason is the idea – prevalent among anti-racists, the progressive intelligentsia, and beyond – that religious people are not worthy of protection; more than that, they should be subject to not just intellectual criticism but mockery and ridicule.

The idea is that religion represents Europe's pre-enlightenment dark age of superstition and clerical authoritarianism and so has to be constantly kept at bay. Look at how Richard Dawkins in the recent Channel 4 series, *The Root of all Evil*, traduces faith by identifying all religious people with the worst cases.

This understanding of religion is deep in the culture of the centre-left intelligentsia and is what is being appealed to in the current sloganeering around "freedom of expression". That's why, when Muslims counter by citing what Europeans regard as acceptable limits to freedom of speech (e.g., the imprisonment of holocaust deniers), it cuts little ice; for no one actually disagrees with limits to freedom of expression as such, it is just that some will not limit it in the field of religion. In this, liberals are no less following a creed, indeed are no less fundamentalist, than some of those who they want to be free to abuse.

### **Marginal or equal?**

Satirizing clericalism may have been emancipatory, but vilifying the marginal and exhorting integration is a contradiction. For radical secularism – no less than aspects of the "this is our country, you Muslims will have to put up with our ways" right-wing nationalism – is an obstacle to Muslims becoming included in Europe and coming to have a sense of being part of Europe.

Europe has to choose which is more important, the right to ridicule Muslims or the integration of Muslims. If the Danish cartoons have not been reprinted in Britain it is because we came to this fork in the road with the *Satanic Verses* affair. While we could not be said to have made a decisive choice there is greater understanding in Britain about anti-Muslim racism and about the vilification-integration contradiction than in some other European countries.

This is not to say that Muslim sensibilities must be treated as fixed. They too will rightly change and adapt to new contexts. The point is that this cannot be a

one-way process. Civic integration and international interdependence – let alone anything as ambitious as a dialogue of civilizations – means that there has to be mutual learning and movement on both/all sides, not just the hurling of absolutes at each other. This is not just a matter of compromise but of multicultural inclusion: Muslim sensibilities, concerns and agendas should be knitted into society just as is the case when other marginalized groups or classes are accepted as democratic equals.

The current temper of the controversy in Britain – in particular the non-publication of the cartoons – is a sign of some progress since the *Satanic Verses* affair. But we have only just begun on a long journey and the task of carrying our European Union partners with us makes it more uphill. The important thing is not to lose focus. If the goal is multicultural integration, then we must curb anti-Muslim racism and exercise restraint in the uses of freedom directed against religious people – who, after all, are a minority in Europe. While in the United States, the Christian right stand in the way of civic integration, the secularist intelligentsia needs to consider whether it is not playing the same role on our continent.

#### NOTE

1. This essay was originally published on the independent online magazine [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net) on 8 February 2006. The responses below grew out of an email exchange between some members of the Ethnicity and Democratic Governance Project, a new international Canadian-based five-year major collaborative research project detailed at [www.edg-gde.ca](http://www.edg-gde.ca).

---

## The Danish Cartoon Controversy: A Defence of Liberal Freedom<sup>1</sup>

Randall Hansen

The Danish cartoon controversy,<sup>2</sup> which erupted following the publication by a conservative Danish daily of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, provoked popular passions and intellectual debate that recalled the 1988-1989 Rushdie

affair. In this piece, I review the Danish cartoon controversy and offer a robust defence of the right to free expression that, importantly, rejects the notion that Islam and the West are split by any immutable differences of principle. The “clash of civilizations” thesis is another rendition of the argument made dozens of times in the settler societies – against Germans, Jews, Italians, Asians, and East Europeans – that this current batch of immigrants is for reason x harder to integrate than previous waves of immigration. Against this argument stands the weight of history: all of these groups have integrated into Canada, the United States, and Australia. The precedent suggests the same will be true of Muslim migrants; indeed, in most cases, it is already true. The corollary of rejecting the thesis of Muslim exceptionalism, however, is the rejection of any claim to religious, in this case, Muslim preference: like all actors living within the liberal state, observant Muslims’ beliefs are to be respected, but they are to be accommodated within the norms and principles that underpin the liberal constitutional state. They cannot be accommodated through a revision of those norms and principles.

### **Events, dear boy, events: the development of the Danish cartoon crisis**

On 17 September 2005, the Danish newspaper *Politiken* published an article titled “A profound fear of criticizing Islam”, which discussed the difficulties encountered by a Danish writer, Kare Bluitgen, in finding an illustrator for a children’s book. The paper attributed its difficulties to self-censorship. Two weeks later, *Jyllands-Posten*, published 12 caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. *Jyllands-Posten* is a conservative newspaper with a circulation of 175,000, the largest in Denmark. It has close ties to the Prime Minister of Denmark, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, whose coalition includes the far-right Danish People’s party. Its core demographic is made up of farmers and the provincial middle class. It had never published anything that would offend their religious sensibilities (Klausen, 2006).

The cartoons themselves, depending on one’s tastes, varied from the anodyne and perhaps even amusing to the offensive. One was a subtle attack on the paper itself: in it, Muhammad is not the Prophet but rather a young boy, a second-generation migrant. He points to a chalkboard script: “The editorial team of *Jyllands-Posten* is a bunch of reactionary provocateurs”. The most offensive portrays Muhammad with a bomb, replete with a lit fuse, in his turban. It was penned by a member of *Jyllands-Posten*’s staff.

Following the publication of the cartoons, Muslim groups in Denmark launched a series of protests. All of these fell well within what we would regard as regular

interest group activity. The Islamic Society of Denmark demanded an apology and the withdrawal on the cartoons on 9 October, and 5,000 people held a peaceful protest at the Copenhagen offices of *Jyllands-Posten* on 14 October. At this moment, the crisis became international. On 19 October, ambassadors from 11 Islamic countries requested a meeting with the Danish Prime Minister, Rasmussen, to discuss the cartoons. He refused, citing free speech and his government's unwillingness to influence editorial opinion. A week later, Muslim organizations in Denmark filed a complaint against the paper, claiming the publication constituted blasphemy under a rarely invoked section of the Danish criminal code. At the end of the month, there were the first signs of what was to come. Muslim youth, possibly taking inspiration from the French suburbs, rioted in a suburb of Aarhus, citing in part the cartoons as justification.

Until this point, the story was a Danish one. Then, with the court case undecided, a delegation of imams headed off to the Middle East with a 43-page document titled "Dossier about championing the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him". The dossier contained the 12 caricatures, pictures from another Danish newspaper, anti-Muslim hate mail, a televised interview with Dutch member of parliament Ms. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who received the Freedom Prize from the Danish Liberal Party, and three additional images. The last included a picture of a man with a pig's face. The dossier claimed that this was an insulting representation of the Prophet Muhammad, but it was in fact the winner of a French pig-squealing contest that had nothing to do with Islam. The delegation's spokesperson was Ahmed Akkari. Akkari was secretly filmed by a French TV crew suggesting, to the delegation's head, Sheikh Raed Hlayhel, that Naser Khader – a moderate, integrationist Muslim and member of the Danish parliament – be bombed. When confronted, Akkari rediscovered his sense of humour (though he remained irony-blind): he was only joking. It was a form of expression presumably covered by free speech principles.

In early 2006, things began to get ugly. A Norwegian newspaper republished the cartoons, followed by other papers and the *Brussels Journal*, which published all 12 cartoons. On 24 January, Saudi Arabia publicly condemned the cartoons, followed by Yemen and Syria. Libya closed its embassy in Denmark. The Danish flag was burned in Nablus and Hebron, on the West Bank. *Jyllands-Posten*, clearly taken aback by the events it unleashed, issued two apologies for hurting Muslim feelings, though not for publishing the cartoons. They had no effect. On 30 January, armed gunmen in the Gaza strip stormed the European Union (EU) office in Gaza, threatening to kidnap the workers unless the EU issued an official apology. Hamas's leader demanded that Denmark punish the cartoonists and *Jyllands-Posten*.

By February, one French, four German, one Italian, one Spanish, one American, and three Dutch publications had decided to publish (some or all of) the cartoons. Publishers in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Costa Rica, Honduras, India, Ireland, New Zealand, and South Korea followed suit. Demonstrations were organized outside the Danish embassy in London, during which radical Islamists brandished placards stating: “Slay [also butcher/massacre/behead/exterminate] those who insult Islam”, “Free speech go to hell”, “Europe is the cancer and Islam is the cure”, and “Europe will pay, your 9/11 is on its way”. In the Middle East, Syria and Lebanon decided to instrumentalize the crisis. In Damascus, demonstrations (with direct or indirect government assistance) were organized outside the Swedish and Danish embassies, and the building housing both was set on fire by a mob. The Norwegian embassy was next, and it too burned. In Beirut, protesters set the Danish embassy ablaze. In Gaza, the same happened to a German cultural centre. Demonstrations became ever more violent, and in Somalia, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan people were killed. When the protests finally ended, some 139 people were dead.

### **Reactions in the EU and the West**

As the accusations of Western hypocrisy and Islamophobia became ever louder, reactions in the West became ever more accommodating. The EU protested the burning of the embassies, but balked at the prospect of collectively withdrawing its ambassadors. In the face of the unofficially encouraged boycott of Danish products, the EU threatened vague retaliation, but did nothing. As Danish flags burned – the protestors demanding respect for religious symbols that matter to them but showing none for the national symbols of others – the EU remained silent. The EU’s reaction was nothing short of feeble.

The United Nations (UN) had entered the fracas in the autumn. Under pressure from Muslim countries, some of whose records on tolerance are hardly without blemish, it requested observations from the Permanent Danish Mission to the UN and launched an investigation into the cartoons’ “racism”. Next, the Council of Europe attacked the Danish government’s invocation of free speech as a defence of the cartoons. The cartoons were “insulting” and a “seam of intolerance” characterized the Danish media.

Finally, major politicians – active and retired – offered their pronouncements. Tony Blair and George Bush, according to *Guardian* commentator Jonathan Steele, showed their “good sense...by siding with left-wing and liberal critics of the offensive drawings’ publication”. But it was Bill Clinton who went furthest in attacking the cartoons, describing them as “totally outrageous” and comparing European Islamophobia today with pre-war anti-Semitism.



## Whither freedom of speech?

In the midst of the furore, those who defended the cartoons in the name of free speech – the Millian principle that we may hate what people say but will defend to the death their right to say it – found themselves isolated and their motivations impugned. They were at best hypocritical, and worst racist. As a Research Fellow at the University of Manchester put it:

A chorus of European commentators have invoked the freedom to speak as a smokescreen for the crudest form of racist vilification. In addition to Israel, this racist vilification spans at least 13 European states. The constellation of responses spanning media coverage cannot have escaped anyone's attention. Reminiscent of the liberal inquisition pursued by western commentators during the Rushdie affair in 1989, we are yet again witnessing attempts to denigrate legitimate Muslim political expression. Back then Muslims merely questioned the conventional criteria of free speech. Now, however, they recognize free speech as *the* red herring in an Islamophobic onslaught... These cartoons cannot be located in the tradition of European satire, but they can be located within the tradition of racist representation, currently directed at Europe's powerless minorities (Nabi, 2006).

If there was a "chorus", it was barely audible; the majority of liberal newspaper commentators and scholars did everything they could to judge the motives of the cartoon's publishers – they were racist, wanted to provoke, in partnership with the right-wing government, and so on – and to relativize that of the violent protestors – they were frustrated with poverty, social exclusion, discrimination, the war in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. When an earlier version of this paper was sent to the misnamed website OpenDemocracy, they rejected it on the grounds that their coverage had "moved on". Some weeks later, the headline story sung from what has become the standard scholarly song sheet: "the Muslim protest...challenges the conceits of liberal democracy".

The equation of the cartoons with racism has become so common (a Google search of "Danish cartoons" and "racist" produces 232,000 hits) that it is rarely, if ever, questioned. It should be. Three possibilities present themselves. The first is that the cartoonists and editors are themselves racist. They might well be, but the cartoons themselves do not provide a doorway into their heads. The second is that Denmark is a particularly anti-Islamic society, and that the publication of the cartoons reflects that hostility. Again, this might be the case, but it might not. Comparative public opinion polls, content analysis of editorials, and studies of day-to-day discrimination faced by Muslims would shed light on this question. The cartoons themselves tell us nothing. The third is that the cartoons equate Muslims with terrorists.

Do they? The question is open to interpretation, but none of the cartoons portrayed stereotypically looking Muslims; they were not, as many claimed, the equivalent of *der Stürmer's* hooked nose, bearded Jew reaching into a pot of gold. The most offensive cartoons portray Muhammad with an unsheathed sword and with a lit bomb in his turban. They seem to equate Islam with terrorism, to argue that Islam is an essentially violent and deadly religion. This is of course nonsense, but is it racism? It is not. It is hatred of a religion. And in a liberal society, there is and must be a distinction between racism and religious hatred, for the simple reason that while there can be no acceptable reason to object to "blackness" there are many good reasons to object to religion, whether Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Many people believe, not without historical evidence, that religion encourages intolerance and violence (how many throats have been slashed in religion's name?) and oppresses women and minorities (think of all three religion's attitude toward gays). In a liberal democratic society, religion is, like it or not, a fair target for criticism, satire and, fortunately or unfortunately, mockery and ridicule.

This point relates to the question of whether the cartoons were hate speech, the only conceivable grounds for censoring them. Most of them were not. The sword/bomb cartoons came closest, but again only if they are read as equating Muslims with terrorists, or if it can be shown that they provoked attacks on Muslims. As far as we know, they only provoked attacks by Muslims.

Some might reject the hatred of religion/hatred of race distinction as untenable on the grounds that putative hostility to religion masks a deep-suited hostility to Muslim people. Tariq Modood (2006) argues this case, pointing to two pieces of evidence: "First, the suggestion that Muslims are not the subject of racism because they are a religious group is nonsense when one considers that the victimization of another religious group, the Jews, is paradigmatic of many peoples' understanding of racism, especially on the continent". Second, there is an "idea – prevalent among anti-racists, the progressive intelligentsia, and beyond, that religious people are not worthy of protection; more than that, they should be subject not just intellectual criticism but mockery and ridicule" .

The first argument oversimplifies the matter. A religious group may be transformed by racists into an ethno-racial group, which is exactly what happened to the Jews. There are, of course, clear cut instances when Muslims are attacked because they are Muslim: women wearing the hijab are spat on, men with beards or who otherwise appear Muslim are denied jobs. Such and similar incidents are depressingly common. Islamophobia does exist, but this does not mean that every injustice suffered by Muslims – social exclusion, poverty, physical and verbal attacks – can be related back to a hatred of religion. In many if not most cases, those committing the injustice could not distinguish a Muslim from a

Hindu and are motivated by nothing other than base racism. Many of those who invoke September 11th as an excuse for attacking Muslims would have attacked them pre-September 11th as Asians, Pakistanis, or Indians. Some readers may view the hatred of religion/hatred of race distinction as one without a difference, but there are broader issues at stake. Some of those who are quickest to claim Islamophobia – and I cite the Muslim Council of Britain here – have an interest in essentializing Muslims, placing their religious identity above their nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, or any other sort of attachment they might have. Rather than being Pakistanis, Indians, Saudi Arabians, Britons, Germans, Londoners, Berliners, Europeans, cosmopolitans, gays, atheists, workers, or anything else, the foundation of their identity can only be Islam (Adamson, 2006). And their spokespeople head an organization that denounces homosexuality as a sin, does not include Muslims gays and lesbians, and refuses to recognize Holocaust Memorial Day.

Modood's second argument can be easily dismissed. Defenders of free speech do not hold that religion *should* be subject to mockery; they hold that it *can* be subject to mockery. In a liberal democratic society, religion is, like it or not, a fair target for criticism, satire and, fortunately or unfortunately, mockery and ridicule.

### **Hypocrisy and free speech: the case of holocaust denial**

Defenders of free speech are frequently accused of hypocrisy because of the West's treatment of the holocaust: it criminalizes holocaust denial while allowing Muslims to be mocked, ridiculed, and vilified. While this argument seems superficially appealing, it too is unsustainable for three reasons. First, banning holocaust denial while allowing the ridicule of religion is not inherently hypocritical. Liberal thinkers have long admitted exceptions of freedom of speech, and it might be argued that criminalizing holocaust denial is an acceptable limit while limits on religious satire are not. Denying a historical fact is not the same thing as mocking a religion. The accusation of hypocrisy would only make sense if it were the case that *any* limit on freedom of speech was evidence of hypocrisy; clearly this is not so. Second, holocaust denial is hardly illegal across all of Europe, though that is the most common position; it is perfectly legal in the United Kingdom and in Denmark. Third, and most importantly, there are many liberals – including Ronald Dworkin and Deborah Lipstadt (and the author) – who believe that such laws should be overturned in the name of freedom of speech and who oppose the recent imprisonment of historian David Irving under Austria's holocaust denial laws.

### **Who's the hypocrite now?**

The real hypocrisy and inconsistency would be if Western countries protected some religions but failed to protect others. They do not. When Christian

fundamentalists burn abortion clinics, demand the teaching of education and prayer in school, and attempt to have homosexuals fired, they are told that their religious beliefs are inconsistent with liberal constitutional values. If any religion has been treated with leniency and indulgence, it is Islam. As noted, in the weeks since the protests erupted, major politicians – George Bush, Tony Blair, Jack Straw, and Bill Clinton – and liberal intellectuals (see the contributions to <http://www.guardian.co.uk/cartoonprotests/0,,1703418,00.html>) have lined up to denounce the cartoons; they have urged self-censorship; and they have expressed sympathy with offended Muslims. I doubt that Christian fundamentalists would receive such an empathetic response under comparable circumstances. If, following the screening of the *Last Temptation of Christ*, Christian fundamentalists had burned theatres, and held placards in Times Square saying “Death to you and your Freedoms”, the response from the liberal intelligentsia and politicians would have been total condemnation. I find it unlikely that either would justify their actions with reference to the difficulty of living in a world that does not respect one’s deepest beliefs, or explain that years of seeing babies murdered (which is what abortion is for Christian fundamentalists), deviant lifestyles flaunted, and insulting representations of Christians (think of the Church Lady on *Saturday Night Live*) led to a level frustration that boiled over because of the film.

One ironic element in the whole crisis was that the real hypocrites were not identified. They were not observant, non-violent Muslims: it is entirely right of them to let their offence be known, and to protest, as Catholics and Jews do, a failure to respect their religion. They only have to accept that they may not convince everyone that it or any religion is worth respecting. Nor, for that matter, were the violent Muslims hypocritical: the position of those few who shouted “massacre those who insult Islam” was all too clear and consistent.

Neither were Danes hypocritical: Denmark has some of the most robust free expression laws in the world. It is the home, against German protests, of many publishers of neo-Nazi propaganda, and it hosted, against Russian accusations of support for terrorism, a Chechen congress. Danish courts rejected police demands that a journalist reveal his sources for a story on Islamic extremists in Denmark. Danish artists have with impunity painted murals of Jesus with an erect penis and made films portraying him as a sexually active terrorist. The country consistently ranks near the top of “Reporters without Borders” world-wide index of press freedom. Since the crisis erupted, there has been much talk of the importance of context – particularly broader Muslim frustration and deeply held prejudice in Denmark – but little has been said about this libertarian Danish context. In failing to placate Muslim demands for censorship and/or apology, the Danes were on one level treating them as citizens rather than foreigners.

The real hypocrites in the debate were liberal intellectuals, too many to name, who spent years denouncing Christian fundamentalist demands for prayer in and the teaching of evolution in schools, the censorship of books and films, limits on abortion, only to cave to fundamentalist Muslim demands: for the introduction of Shari‘a law, for separate swimming classes for boys and girls, and – in the Danish case – for the respect for religious rules not only by members of the religious group but by the society at large. Portraying the Prophet may be prohibited for Muslims, but it is not and cannot be for anyone else. Muslims may ask that others respect their religion’s precepts, but they cannot demand it any more than observant Jews can demand that their fellow citizens not shop on Saturdays or Christians can demand that non-believers respect their sexual mores. That liberal intellectuals could be so absolutist in their dismissal of the demands made by Christian fundamentalists but so apologist and relativist in their indulgence of those made by Muslim fundamentalists beggars belief.

### **Muslim exceptionalism?**

One argument for a Muslim “opt-out” of the liberal free speech requirement might be that Muslims take their religion more seriously than Jews or Christians. I know many Jews and Christians who would disagree, but let’s admit the possibility. If we do, then there is a problem. Academics, including myself, have for years rejected as bigoted the argument that Muslims are particularly difficult, relative to earlier generations of migrants, to integrate. Many of those angered by the cartoons would also reject the claim, but they cannot have it both ways. They cannot argue that Muslim integration does not present particular challenges *and* that religion is so important to Muslim identity that our conception of and laws on freedom of speech have to be changed. Because if the latter were the case, then Muslim integration would raise particular challenges and present particular difficulties.

For my part, I am convinced that it does not. I am sure it is the case that many Muslims are deeply and genuinely offended by the Danish cartoons, and I sympathize with them. But this offence is the price of living in a liberal society, one that has been paid by many groups before. Soldiers in Canada or Britain who were disgusted by the thought of serving in the army with homosexuals have been told they must; Christians and feminists who object to pornography have been told that others have a right to view such material; Bavarian Catholics who demanded a crucifix in every school were told that respect for other religions in Germany meant that they couldn’t. Elderly Jews, including holocaust survivors, have been told that they could not stop neo-Nazis from marching past their front windows. Going back further, racists have been told that their deepest convictions were unacceptable. In these as in many other cases, people have been told that their firmly held beliefs and attitudes were inconsistent with liberal democracy and that, however important those beliefs and however offensive a

failure to respect them was, they simply had to accept it. So it is with those Muslims who think that their religion is above satire and mockery. It is not; no religion is.

At the end of the piece cited earlier, Modood presents Europe with a choice: it has to decide which is more important, the right to ridicule Muslims or the integration of them. This gets it entirely wrong. It is not Europe that has to choose; it is rather those who wish to restrict free speech, whether they be Muslim or non-Muslim, citizens or non-citizens, recent immigrants or long-standing permanent residents. They have to decide whether they wish to live in a liberal democratic society. If they do, they have to accept that they will hear and see things that offend them, sometimes deeply. They are free to protest them peacefully, but not to demand their criminal sanction. They will hopefully do this in the knowledge that that same liberal democracy sustains many values and practices from which they benefit and that they cherish. In the end, the same liberal democratic values that protect a right to practice one's religion, to maintain one's distinctive cultural practices, to be reunited with one's family through family reunification, protect the right of free speech. It is part of the liberal democratic framework, not a negotiable addition to it.

## NOTES

1. This piece first appeared in *EUSA Review*, 2006, 19(2), Spring: 1-6. I am grateful to Amy Verdun and the editors of the *Review* for granting permission to reproduce the piece here.
2. I have discussed the issues raised in this essay with many people, and I am grateful for their comments: Emmanuel Adler, Fiona Adamson, Erik Bleich, Joseph Carens, Matthew Gibney, Todd Lawson, Rahsaan Maxwell, Shourideh Molaei, Shahreen Reza, Phil Triadafilopolous, Gokce Yurdakul, Melissa Williams.

## REFERENCES

- Adamson, F.  
2006 "‘Muslim’ as a politicized identity category: changing discourses of ‘immigrant’ mobilization and political incorporation in Western Europe", paper presented at the Council of European Studies conference, Chicago, 29 March-1 April 2006.
- Klausen, J.  
2006 "Rotten judgment in the state of Denmark", *Der Spiegel*, 8 March 2006, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,399653,00.html>.
- Modood, T.  
2006 "The liberal dilemma: integration or vilification?", *Open Democracy*, [http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-terrorism/liberal\\_dilemma\\_3249.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-terrorism/liberal_dilemma_3249.jsp).
- Nabi, S.  
2006 "Honing European traditions", *OpenDemocracy*, [http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-europe\\_islam/muslim\\_cartoons\\_3244.jsp#seven](http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-europe_islam/muslim_cartoons_3244.jsp#seven).