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REJECTION OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM – THE DANISH CASE

Abstract

In Denmark, religion has for generations been a non-issue in public debates. However, as Islam has become the second largest religion over just one generation, religion has become a public issue (Hunter 2002). The rise of Islam is mostly due to immigration, and religious pluralism is therefore associated with integration (European Parliament 2007). Central opinion makers and politicians have reacted to the new challenge of religious pluralism by either trying to exclude religion from the public sphere or by proposing to insulate and expel religions which do not fit into the established model. Islamic identities have thus become suspect as spokespersons for the Danish majority either adhere to a policy of secularism or to a civil religious reference to the Denmark's Christian heritage. This article presents the major cleavages in the Danish debates about religious pluralism. The study is based on Danish material, such as articles in newspapers, public reports, and web-site discussions.¹

Keywords: religious pluralism; islamophobia; secularism

Multiculturalism and religious pluralism

Multiculturalism refers to appreciation of multiple cultures (Riis 2007a). It can be held as an attitude by individual citizens, expressed by interest organizations and parties, supported by the mass media and coined into a policy by the government. Sociologically, culture refers to socially significant relations to a set of symbols. It includes both a horizontal and a vertical dimension. The horizontal dimension refers to the social homogenization of symbolic relations, or the extent of sharing symbolic relations. This involves both an internal integration and an external exclusion. The vertical dimension refers to the evaluation of symbolic products. It corresponds with the anthropological distinction between high and low culture and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital in a competitive field. The vertical dimension refers to an internal differentiation and evaluation of cultural symbols. In a multi-cultural society the majority culture becomes fragmented and several subcultures emerge. This broadens the scope for personal preferences and mixtures, but it also challenges the status of the established elite, and it marginalizes members of majority with few cultural resources.

Sharing culture facilitates mutual understanding and thereby opens for mutual trust. Agents who share a symbolic universe are better able to read each other's minds and emotions, and they can better come to trust each other, and develop a sense of 'conscience collective' in Durkheim's term. People who share the same symbolic relations assume that they understand each other and hope they can trust each other. The cultural foundation is defined by an elite but its status and membership is subject to hegemonic struggle. History has many incidents where the established elite was criticized for being traditional, authoritarian, or arrogant.

Religion also contains a vertical and horizontal dimension. There are elitist and popular versions of beliefs and practices, and a religious community may be more or less integrated and distinct from other communities. In the Nordic countries, the established Lutheran churches are characterized by a large membership based on a weak authority, and the weak vertical dimension facilitates a strong horizontal one. The horizontal religious culture contains symbolic relations which point to shared social values and ethical models which may facilitate solidarity.

Religious pluralism indicates a positive attitude to a variety of religions within society. A sociological analysis of religious pluralism may refer to a state's formal toleration of religious diversity; to religious communities' openness to dialogue and collaboration; or to an individual acceptance of religious diversity. Religious pluralism is a matter of degree, scope, and conditions. A typical view at the positive end of the scale is that all religions address the ultimate questions of human existence in a meaningful manner and therefore should be appreciated by society as human resources. Both those who maintain that there is only one religion and those who reject all religions as delusion reject religious pluralism. Several nuanced positions can be found between pluralism and its rejection.

Since the establishment of democracy in the 19th Century, Scandinavia has changed from religious conformity to a common secularization. However, this uniformity was interrupted by migration in the late 20th Century. In Scandinavia, religious toleration is constitutionally established as rights to confess a faith and to assemble and perform religious rituals. Religion is mainly regarded as a personal relation to a deity. The established, Lutheran churches are widely supported because they allow for an internal toleration, while faith communities which stress a collective submission to a spiritual authority - an 'ecclesia' or 'umma' - are suspected of separatism and an ideological agenda which has wider implications for society. Secularization not only implies a laicization of social institutions, but also an exclusion of religion as a legitimate voice on social issues.

Danish immigration policy and multiculturalism

Culturally and religiously, Denmark has been a homogeneous society for centuries. This is expressed in religion, as four out of five Danes are members of the state-supported Lutheran church. Denmark is typically presented as open, egalitarian, and solidary. The central concept of 'hygge' combines these values by adding 'comfort'. These

values have been reflected by Danish politics which for the most part of the 20th Century has been based on an agenda of compromise and broad agreements, with shifting coalition and minority governments. As neither the major blocks of Social Democrats versus Conservatives and Liberals obtained a majority, the political centre obtained political weight beyond its numerical strength. The predominant centre party, *Radikale Venstre* (Radical Left) was inspired by Danish scholar Georg Brandes (1842–1927) and the cultural radical agenda for human liberation. Consequently, it followed a policy of opening Denmark to Europe and the (modern) world, and an open policy of immigration and integration. The ideological heritage includes scepticism towards authoritarian religion which restrains individual freedom. Similar ideas can be found among the left wing, but the centre has had more impact on the public agenda and actual policies, until 2001.

Danish policy on migration in the 1960s was mainly dictated by the needs of large employers for labour. After a period of accepting ‘visiting workers’, the Social Democrat (Labour) government in 1973 stopped work immigration while ‘family reunions’ were permitted. This led to an unanticipated flow of immigrants, and the local authorities struggled with the pressures for housing and schools. In most cases, the new immigrants were not welcomed by a social network which could guide and assist them, for instance to apply for housing or a job. Many immigrants were placed into social housing with high rates of social problems. They were expected to be integrated among Danes who were not socially integrated. Nevertheless, these immigrants were held responsible by the media and the politicians for the process of ‘ghettoization’ (Børresen 2000). Mayors who tried to raise a debate on integration problems were often brushed off in the debate. One issue was the cross-pressure experienced by immigrant children between the restrictive norms of their families and the liberal norms in kindergartens and schools.

In 1983, the Conservative-led government passed an Immigration Act (*Udlændingeloven*) which was proclaimed as the world’s most liberal. It was contested from its initiation. When the conservative Minister of Justice was shown to discriminate against refugees from Sri Lanka, the government resigned. Immigration and integration had become a sore political issue.

Around 2000, crime among immigrants became a major issue in the Danish media (Holstein 2002). The media reported several gang rapes where the victims were ethnic Danish girls and the offenders came from immigrant families. Newspapers referred to statistics which indicated high crime rates among immigrants and criticized mild sentences which referred to the cultural background of the offender as a mitigating circumstance. As the debate heated, spokesmen for major employers warned against racism and argued for a multicultural Denmark in a globalized world.

The Social Democratic government focused on its successful economic policy, while it tried to keep the theme of immigration and integration secondary. However, debates on immigration and religious pluralism continuously erupted in the media. The Social Democratic government was supported by parties at the centre (*Radikale Venstre*) and to the left (*Socialistisk Folkeparti*, *Enhedslisten*) who supported an open policy of immigration and multiculturalism. Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen

tried to placate those of his voters who were concerned about immigration by making Thorkild Simonsen Minister of Interior in 1997. As a mayor of Aarhus, Simonsen had voiced his concern about integration problems. In his New Years' speech on January 1st 2000, Nyrup Rasmussen addressed the problems of integration and demanded that immigrants adapt to Danish values. A more restrictive immigration policy was initiated by Karen Jespersen, who in 2000 succeeded Thorkild Simonsen as Minister. Her initial criticism of the oppression of women among Muslims led to a general critique of Islam and a restrictive immigration policy. Her sharp rhetoric was criticized by influential Social Democrats. This invigorated the debate even more and prepared the ground for the restrictive immigration policy of the populist *Dansk Folkeparti* (Danish Peoples' Party).

The Social Democratic government lost the election in 2001 dramatically, and a minority coalition government of *Venstre* (Liberal) and Conservatives was formed, with Anders Fog Rasmussen as prime minister (*Venstre*). It was the first government for generations which did not depend on the political centre and political compromises. Instead, the government formed a firm alliance with the populist *Dansk Folkeparti*, led by Pia Kjærsgaard. The new government introduced a series of restrictive immigration laws by the new Minister for Integration, Bertel Haarder. After the 2004 election, the government continued, and immigration laws were tightened even further.

Ethnic minorities and their descendants constitute 9 percent of the Danish population, and the majority of these originate from non-Western countries. Several recent indicators point to a relatively successful integration of immigrants. Levels of education, employment and fertility have converged between immigrants and resident Danes over a generation (Emerek and Jørgensen 2009). However, there are indicators of problems with cultural integration. The Prime Minister (2001–2009) Anders Fogh Rasmussen argued that the 'new Danes' have a responsibility for integration. He stressed the need for social cohesion based on shared liberal, democratic values, which in a Danish context are historically derived from Christianity.

The issue of immigration is closely connected with welfare policy. Scandinavian societies are based on a public sphere which relates citizens with social institutions, and a private sphere based on personal relations. Since the Second World War, Scandinavian societies have developed a universal, tax-financed welfare system, which is supported by an exceptional degree of public morality, according to the European Values Study (Gundelach and Riis 2000). This arrangement is unfamiliar to some immigrants, especially those who come from developing countries. They are accustomed to regarding their extended families and tribes as basis of solidarity, supported by religious norms and values. In the new context, religion may provide a 'tribalistic' plausibility structure, an anchorage for their identity and a foundation for solidarity. However, members of the majority regard such a religious particularism as a hindrance for integration and a challenge to individualism and religious freedom. Nevertheless, some religious minorities regard individualization a policy of fragmentation which leads to loneliness and insecurity.

Turns in the public debate on multiculturalism

According to international surveys, such as the European Values Survey, Danes do not differ much from other EU-citizens in their attitudes to ethnic minorities. The proportion of Danes who say that they do not want a Muslim neighbour was relatively low (15 percent) in 1980 and it remained stable until 1999 (16 percent), according to the European Values Survey. Since then it even decreased a little (13 percent in 2008). Nevertheless, the issue of religious pluralism has become a public concern and a majority of Danish respondents say that discrimination is common, especially against Islam, and that the government fail to fight it (Eurobarometers 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2009).² This seeming contradiction may be explained by separating toleration at a personal and a national level. While Danes are relatively tolerant to ethnic minorities at a personal level, they are less tolerant at a national level (Nielsen 2004b; Lüchau 2004), as many Danes want restrictions on immigration and simultaneously demand that those who are permitted to live in Denmark assimilate to its culture.

In the mid-80s, survey data indicated that growing immigration was perceived to be a threat to national identity (Andersen 2002: 9). While direct xenophobia was uncommon, most Danes were ambiguous about religious plurality, which they saw both as source of cultural enrichment and a potential threat, according to the survey on Religious and Moral Pluralism (Riis 2000). This ambiguity may explain why signs of religious discrimination erupt occasionally despite a general climate of religious toleration (Gaasholt and Tøgeby 1995). A survey by SORA (2000) indicated that 32 percent of the respondents felt ‘disturbed by the presence of’ people with another religion, against 15 percent in the whole EU (Nielsen 2004a: 243). While 36 percent did not want a close family member to marry a ‘person from another race’, the figure increased to 64 percent when it referred to ‘a Muslim’ (Gaasholt and Tøgeby 1995). The growing concern with religious pluralism is not traceable in all surveys. This ambiguity is reflected in a recent opinion poll where half the population was positive to immigration, but simultaneously, 55 percent regarded Islam as a threat to social cohesion (Rambøll, quoted in *Jyllands-Posten* 16.8.2010). Concerns with a divided society also emerged from mutual tendencies of endogamy among ‘ethnic Danes’ and ‘Muslims’,³ where «a wall has been built between the two camps» (*Politiken* 17.4.2010). Attitudes seem volatile, as a significant proportion of the population reacts according to issues raised by the politicians and the mass media (Gaasholt and Tøgeby 1995).

Danish media took a dramatic turn during the 1990s from pro-migration and multiculturalism to a sceptical or critical line (Hansen 2008; Wren 2001), and the critique increasingly focused on Muslims (Hussain et al. 1997; Hussain 2000, 2003). The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) warned in 2001 that some Danish media seem to promote negative stereotypes and prejudices (ECRI 2001). The criticized media saw this as a ‘totalitarian tendency’ and an act of censorship (Holstein 2002: 15), and the Danish Prime Minister rejected the report as outdated. Public debates on multiculturalism became harsher. The 2006 ECRI report said: «ECRI is of the strong opinion that the media and the politicians should play a more responsible role in the manner in which they portray minority groups in general and Muslims in

particular. It thus calls on the Danish government to carefully review the law on incitement to racial hatred» (ECRI 2006). This was rejected by the prime minister, who instead argued for the unconditional freedom of speech and exclusion of religion from the public sphere. Again in 2008, ECRI pointed to the need for giving a nuanced depiction of religion in public space and for advancing religious toleration. Several international organizations raised a critique against discrimination, such as Open Society Institute, the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. However, these reports were generally dismissed by the authorities as misinformed. When CERD criticized the fact that Danish authorities refused to consider whether Pia Kjærsgaard's remarks about Somali people's urge to genital mutilation were racist, *Jyllands-Posten's* editorial criticized the committee insinuating that UN was manipulated by Muslim states (*Jyllands-Posten* 12.9.2010).

Before 2000, religion was seldom mentioned in Danish newspapers, but it has since become a major subject (Rosenfeldt 2007). Religion became increasingly thematised as the role of Islam in Western democracies. This theme emerged with the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, and was followed up by the killing of Theo van Gogh and aggressive reactions against publications critical of Islam. Comments in the Danish newspapers were increasingly polarized between defenders of religious pluralism on the one hand and defence of Western liberty values on the other (Christensen 2010). Discussions on Islam also led to a search for Christian roots in Danish culture. Some public figures warned against self-censorship because of Muslim threats. A group of journalists and politicians from *Dansk Folkeparti*, including the pastor-politicians Søren Krarup and Jesper Langballe, established *Trykkefrihedsselskabet* (Society for the freedom of print). Furthermore, politicians from a broad spectrum of parties proposed to drop the law against blasphemy.

On September 30th 2005, *Jyllands-Posten* presented a series of cartoons depicting the prophet, Mohammed. The editorial argued that Western democracy and freedom of expression implies «readiness to receive mockery, insult, and ridicule» (*Jyllands-Posten* 29.11.2005). The newspaper thus confronted efforts by «some Muslims» to «intimidate public space» and create self-censorship among artists. However, the fierceness of Muslim reactions surprised the Danish public, as well as the tempered reaction of their allies (Stephens 2006). Some Danish newspapers argued that these reactions were provoked by a delegation of Danish imams, who criticized discrimination against Muslims in Denmark, rather than the cartoons (Ryste 2006).

Shortly after the publication of the cartoons, ambassadors representing Muslim nations were refused a meeting with the Danish prime minister. This led to many critical comments, even from major directors of export firms and the former leader of *Venstre*. The prime minister responded by attacking their 'lack of principles', as they did not defend the freedom of print. The prime minister regarded this freedom as fundamental, including the right to make jokes about religion. At the height of the debate Pia Kjærsgaard found it ridiculous to feel a collective insult on behalf of the prophet, and she insinuated that the crisis was a Muslim effort to force Danes to abjure their democratic rights. «The strife is not about drawings; it is a struggle about values

between a totalitarian, dogmatic Islamic way of thought and Western, free governments» (*Dansk Folkeparti* 6.2.2006).

Although the criticism refers to so-called Islam-ism, the meaning of the term is seldom clarified. *Jyllands-Posten*'s political commentator, Ralf Pittelkow, includes the Turkish AKP and the Gülen movement under the heading of Islam-ism, despite their public support for secular democracy. Islam-ism may thus include all kinds of social movements inspired by Islam. The critique against Islam-ism and distrust of religious pluralism is expressed by a broad spectrum of public commentators but especially by supporters of *Dansk Folkeparti*.

Politiken, affiliated with *Radikale Venstre*, was the only major newspaper which criticized *Jyllands-Posten* and the prime minister's handling of the crisis. It became subject of ridicule by government politicians and other newspapers. While 'humanism' formerly referred to unchallenged values, Danes who spoke for toleration were now accused of 'rubbish humanism'. The Danish debate was deeply divided, and opinions were more emotional than rational (Hervik 2002; Berg and Hervik 2007; Christensen 2010). While the debates referred to shared Danish values, the population was actually split on the cartoon issue (Riis 2007b). Those who defended the cartoons referred to joking as part of Danish culture and accused the critics for supporting 'political correctness' – like in Sweden. The critics of the cartoons saw them as part of a general pattern of harassment and discrimination of Muslims.

A survey among Danish Muslims by Catinét (*Newsletter* 44 March 2006) indicated a widespread frustration and anger. 69 percent thought that the Danish Prime Minister should apologize publicly, and 11 percent had 'full understanding' of the burning of Danish flags, destruction of embassies and boycott against Danish goods in Muslim countries (*Politiken* 12.6. 2006). For some commentators, this affirmed their suspicions of Islam.

The victims of Islamophobia⁴

As noted, Islam has grown to become the second-largest religion in Denmark. However, there is no registration of the exact number of Muslims in Denmark. Estimates are either based on the immigrants' country of origin or on self-identification in surveys. A reasonable estimate for 2006 was that 4 percent of the residential population may be regarded as Muslims (Warburg and Jacobsen 2007). The 54 Islam-inspired communities which are recognized by the state do not cover all mosques and all Muslims. Studies from Aarhus indicate that about a fifth of all self-identified Muslims belong to a mosque and less than a tenth participates at Friday prayer (Kühle 2007).

Most of the migrants have come for practical reasons, and studies on Muslims in Copenhagen indicate satisfaction regarding material conditions (Open Society Institute 2009). Members of ethno-religious minorities carry a dual identity, where the important point is the hyphen which symbolizes both the process and the possible disjunction of contexts. According to the Gallup Coexist Index 2009, European Muslims are at least as likely as their respective general populations to say they identify either «extre-

mely strongly» or «very strongly» with their country of residence, but they also identify strongly with their religion. This dual identification is a mark of separation from the religiously indifferent majority, which they share with most other religious minorities. It should be added that only 40 percent of Muslims in Copenhagen saw themselves as nationals (Open Society Institute 2009: 74).

Islam is a world-religion and many varieties can be found among Danish Muslims. Several Muslims originate from secular states, such as Turkey or the former Yugoslavia. Others come from developing countries like Somalia, where the role of religion is entirely different. Muslims in Denmark therefore differ regarding religious practices and their view on the proper role of religion in society. They also differ regarding integration or insulation, employment, education, social problems, and crime rates.

Danish Muslims recognize how varied their religion is and wonder about its common denominator. Young, well-educated Muslims participate in international networks and regard Islam as a global, dynamic religion (Schmidt 2007). For them, polarization threatens their efforts to become integrated citizens in a modern, democratic society, while they try to retain their religious identity. For Danish Muslims, 'political Islam' can have many meanings, which do not necessarily exclude democracy. For instance, immigrants who originate from Turkey know that the Islamic-based AKP is committed to secular democracy. Many modern Muslims regard *hadith* metaphorically, as guidelines for a good life, not as fundamentalist rules. Hardly any Danish Muslims accept terrorism in the name of their religion, and therefore do not feel any obligation to make excuses for such acts. The public criticism of Islam does not seem to refer to their religion, or it is so misinformed that it seems impossible to comment. Therefore, the voice of the majority of modern, moderate Muslims is muted in the polarizing debates.

Among Muslims in Europe, one major concern relates to religious discrimination (Open Society Institute 2009). Muslim and non-Muslim residents generally share the same values, but Muslims more often stress respect for all religions (Ministeret for Flygtninge 2007). European-born Muslim women especially notice religious discrimination from the general public. In Denmark, religious discrimination can be illustrated by an experiment where chances of an applicant being called for a job interview varied by a ratio of 1:32 depending on whether the name had Muslim associations (Hjarnø and Bager 1997). This corresponds with findings from the *Eurobarometer* (2008a, 2008b), where most Danes felt that visible expressions of religious identity were likely to be a disadvantage for job applicants.⁵ Members of ethnic minorities have retrospectively reported harassment in schools (Møller and Tøgeby 1999).⁶

Many Danish Muslims feel that they may only obtain social recognition if they abandon their religion and assimilate to Danish norms. Some react by criticizing Danish norms on alcohol, sexual liberty, and low level of family cohesion. Women may wear a Muslim scarf in order to indicate moral superiority, also over other Muslims (Maïa Consult 2009). Instead of being marginalized as second-class citizens, some Muslims raise a moral agenda which may support their self-esteem in a struggle for recognition. However, Muslims in Denmark are culturally fragmented and efforts to mobilize are seen by the political majority as an illegitimate interference of religion in public space.

Populism and anti-Islamism

The main issues of *Dansk Folkeparti* are migration and international threats from Muslim countries. Its voters are predominantly male, with many workers or retired persons, with a low level of education (Meret 2010). Elderly workers who feel entitled to its benefits are concerned about the future of the Danish welfare state. The populist electorate is characterized by a critical attitude to the political and administrative system and also by a social distrust, which is uncommon among other Danes. The degree of political distrust has receded since 2001 when the party gained influence, but the social distrust remains. Distrust towards immigrants is connected with a general social distrust. Those who are insecure about strangers tend to keep both immigrants and deviants from their own culture at a distance. Behind these attitudes we can trace a feeling of insecurity and alienation, a fear of becoming strangers ‘in your own society’.

Distrust towards Muslims tends to belong to a general pattern of social suspicion. A survey on religious and moral pluralism (RAMP) from 1998 (Riis 2000) contained a large set of items on religious toleration. The Nordic data indicated that in most cases attitudes towards minorities were ambiguous. Many people simultaneously see multi-cultural society as enrichment and danger. However, a minority of the ‘xenophobic’ respondents distanced themselves from ethnic and religious minorities on several items. This attitude correlated with social distrust and isolation. One factor behind distrust and distance is a general fear of strangers, including odd and deviant persons from their own culture. Sociologically, some persons have life experiences where such insecurity is understandable. An elderly Dane with few cultural and linguistic resources living in a neighbourhood among many immigrants may easily feel alienated and threatened (Hansen et al. 2009).⁷

Andersen (2002) found that anti-Islamic attitudes correlate with a general rejection of religion and concluded that secularization contains a paradox: The general critique of religion and the general permissiveness has led to an increasing intolerance against religions labelled as less permissive (2002: 22). The social horizon is often limited to the local community. Supra-national entities, such as the EU, are seen as suppressive, and globalization is regarded as disruptive.

Populism refers to ‘our culture’ as a shared frame of reference. It stresses the horizontal dimension of culture while its vertical dimension is ignored or criticized, ‘Our culture’ is the shared, popular culture, not the elitist one. Spokespersons of populism criticize the cosmopolitan cultural elite for its ‘arrogance’; especially by not addressing everyday problems of social integration. Populism seeks to bring back the ‘good old times’ before immigration growth, public bureaucracy, social complexity and globalization. It appeals to internal solidarity, including welfare benefits. However, this solidarity demarcates sharply between insiders and outsiders, and the line of demarcation is mainly ethnicity and religion.

Dansk Folkeparti was launched in 1995 as a moderate fraction which broke away from the right-wing populist *Fremskridtspartiet* (Progressive Party). One of the main themes of *Dansk Folkeparti* was immigration. It criticized the ‘immigration mafia’ and refused to implement integration policies until the flow of immigrants stopped. It pre-

sented itself as a defender of the nation and the welfare state. *Dansk Folkeparti* declared '...we love our fatherland and we feel a historical obligation to protect the Danish heritage' (*Dansk Folkeparti: Principprogram* 1997: 4). This heritage was seen as threatened by the development of a multiethnic society and the EU. The Working Programs specified the type of Denmark it strove to defend: «freedom, equality, individual responsibility and diligence» (*Dansk Folkeparti* 2001) and «the freedom of speech, equality, broad-mindedness and tolerance» (*Dansk Folkeparti* 2007). Simultaneously, the 2001 programme 'Common values – common responsibility' explains that the Western Judaic-Christian civilization is the historical carrier of democracy and freedom, while Islam represents a medieval, backward and intolerant culture. Its criticism of Islam was especially voiced by pastors who belonged to 'Tidehverv' (New Era) a conservative fraction of the Lutheran church. Its leader, Søren Krarup, was a reputed right-wing commentator when he joined the party in 1997. He and another pastor from *Tidehverv*, Jesper Langballe, were elected to the Parliament in 2001, where they warned against the advancement of Islam. *Dansk Folkeparti* perceived Islam as based on 'medieval ideas' which were incompatible with a Western liberal democracy. A publication by *Dansk Folkeparti* (*Danmarks Fremtid* 2001: 190) stated: «the Islamic way of living is incompatible with the Danish and Christian (sic!) way of thinking.» According to Søren Krarup, the Muslim headscarf «is the symbol of tyranny and slavery» (*Nyhedsavisen* 20.04.2007). For *Dansk Folkeparti*, the Muslim outrage against the cartoons affirmed that Islam is against freedom of speech and democratic principles (*Dansk Folkeparti: Kjærsgaards ugebrev* 5.12.2005). If Muslims were to live in Denmark, «they have to respect (Danish) fundamental values, among them the freedom of expression» (*Dansk Folkeparti: Kjærsgaards ugebrev* 17.10.2005). Kjærsgaard declared to *Politiken* (26.01.2009) that her aim is not to 'evict Islam' from Denmark but it should not advance 'under any circumstances'.

Several lines of argument can be traced among the opponents of multiculturalism.⁸ Some – like *Tidehverv* - reject the religious pluralism and multiculturalism of the cosmopolitan elite because it dissolves the Christian roots of Danish culture. Another concern relates to the formation of an insulated 'parallel society', especially through the ghettoization of Muslim neighbourhoods and Muslim women in burqa.

According to opponents of multiculturalism, the needs of large employers for cheap labour has opened the gates to the West and led to a 'demographic threat'. They argue that immigrants from «backward» (Muslim) regions try to find menial jobs and eventually undermine the welfare system. Immigrants do not seem to want to be integrated in a society with individual choice, gender equality, rationality, and democracy. Instead, they conclude that immigrants cling to their original culture, based on submission to religious authority, paternalism, and religious dogma.

Danish populism sees itself as part of an international movement which defends Western democracy and freedom of speech. It is sceptical to international conventions, such as the Declaration of Human Rights, since they lead to unanticipated consequences in the present situation of mass migration from Muslim countries (*Dansk Folkeparti: Ugebrev* 8.12.2008). It is also critical against the EU and the UN. International reports that criticize the Danish debate and policy are seen as superficial and based on

naive humanitarianism. The bureaucratic systems are inefficient in dealing with people who cynically abuse its rules, such as *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*. Even the Danish legal system is criticized for ‘rubbish humanism’ when the Supreme Court rejects evicting convicted immigrants.

In the Danish debate, warnings against Islamisation are often coupled with critique of the ‘arrogant’ cosmopolitan elite and its agenda of cultural openness and humanitarian values, because it is distanced from daily confrontations in a multicultural society and out of touch with popular Danish culture. Furthermore, they claim that research on religion which tries to be balanced or objective indicates ‘political correctness’ and ‘self-censorship’. Thus, populism merges an ‘internal’ critique of the cosmopolitan elite with an ‘external’ critique of Muslim culture. Islam is regarded as conspiring against Western values. ‘Naive western humanitarians’ allow Islamism an influence which will eventually undermine humanitarianism. Moderate Muslims are also seen as manipulated by religious authorities. For the populists, the only solution is to stop immigration and expel those who do not fit into a modern democratic society.

Anti-Muslim arguments typically focus on single cases that are used to construct popular narratives. This can be illustrated by Søren Krarup’s defense of Hedegaard’s claim that Muslims permit rape against their daughters. When he was interviewed, Krarup referred to one case in a book. When he was asked how he could generalize about Islam from one case, Krarup referred to the Qur’an and ‘numerous examples’ of ‘honour’-killings (*Kristeligt Dagblad* 29.12.2009). There are many similar cases in the Danish media, and the Muslim association is routinely mentioned. What is noticeable is the manner in which way Muslims are presented as subject to religious authority. The essence of Islam is rendered authoritarian and conservative and the critics suppose that Qur’an must be read in a fundamentalist manner. Islam is depicted as a warrior religion which seeks to establish tyranny based on *Sharia*. This is supported by quotes from selected Muslim authorities and references to states like Iran and Saudi-Arabia.

Anti-Islamists tend to regard Islam as an integrated vertical culture. Immigrants who originate from Muslim societies are assumed to be permanent obedient members of an authoritarian culture. According to an editorial in *Jyllands-Posten*, imams can mobilize Muslims by ‘channelling their emotions into tangible action’ (*Jyllands-Posten* 21.12. 2006). Authoritarian-minded Muslims cannot follow their personal choice, and therefore the rights of religious freedom do not apply. Muslim norms are supposed to make them immune to Danish democracy and gender equality ideals. Girls wear a scarf due to pressure from their parents. Active Muslims are not seen as individuals who follow their own choice. Individual Muslims can be good citizens, but they are actually victims of their religion without recognizing it, according to the Anti-Islamists.

Formal toleration as secularism

Formally, Denmark is tolerant to religion. The Constitution guarantees citizens the right to unite and worship God according to their conviction. Citizens cannot be hin-

dered from their full civil and political rights because of their religion, nor can they be exempted from these rights. However, the public status of religious communities in Denmark is complicated. According to the Constitution, the Evangelical-Lutheran church is the ‘church of the Danish people’ and ‘supported as such’ by the state. The original Constitution decreed that the status of other faith communities should be regulated by law; but such a law has never been proposed. Until 1969, religious communities could be recognized by a ‘royal resolution’, and since then they must apply to perform legal marriages. Thereby, they automatically obtain rights to tax deduction for membership fees. There is no public registration of religious membership, except for the state church.

The Constitution also states the right to publish one’s thoughts ‘under responsibility to the courts’. This includes blasphemy and defamation. These laws are seldom used, and the public prosecutor did not find sufficient reason in them for raising a case against *Jyllands-Posten*. A broad majority in the Parliament regards the paragraph on blasphemy as redundant, but *Dansk Folkeparti*’s proposal to delete it has not been followed.

Danish politicians agree that multiculturalism and religious toleration should not point to a ‘parallel society’ but to social co-existence. However, the Danish majority is assumed to determine the conditions for co-existence. Furthermore, except for *Dansk Folkeparti*, there is broad political agreement about trying to make religion a non-issue. This is pursued as different strategies of secularism (Christensen 2010).

The cartoon crisis was a symbolic demarcation of internal conflicts over multiculturalism and religious toleration. Prime Minister Anders Fog Rasmussen presented his view on religious toleration in a speech in 2005 (30.11), where he argued that the Danish ‘freedom rights’ were ‘cross-religious’. These rights demand respect for religious conviction, but cannot be reconciled with a ‘religion of the law’ that demands to be above the nation and the state, and that dictates the believer’s life from cradle to death. The prime minister demarcated such a version of Islam which is not compatible with the ‘social order of Denmark’. He believed that a majority of Muslims in Denmark want to avoid ‘an aggressive exercise of religion’ and to ‘escape from being imposed some fundamentalist medieval religious commands’ and ‘live in peace with one’s relation to Allah and Mohammed’. In *Politiken* (20.5.2006) he stated that, «religion is a matter between the individual and the God in whom this individual believes» and that Danes should «maintain a social order where laws and rules are above and neutral in relation to different religious opinions». He simultaneously argued that the Lutheran church was part of the state apparatus. Fog Rasmussen thus proposed an individualistic and secularist approach. By warning against religions that want to ‘dictate’ life, the prime minister challenged religions that attempt to guide the values and ethics of their congregations.

A broad spectrum of political parties regards religion as acceptable only as a private matter. Fog Rasmussen’s view on religious freedom and secularism does not differ much from the centre party’s (*Radikale Venstre*). However, their views on multicultural society differ widely. *The Social Democrats* endorse a policy of secularism, while they support a broad state-supported and state-controlled church as a civil religious institu-

tion. The left wing focuses on the social problems and ignores the religious label attached to them by populist debaters. However, this leads to ignore attempts to give religion a voice in public debates. Religion is seen as an irrational ideology that should not be heard on public issues. Thus, a broad political spectrum does not consider religion as a possible representative for the social values held by minority cultures in Danish society.

An individualistic and secularist approach to religious toleration is historically rooted in Deism which sees God as the designer of the natural world who situated human beings in it as intelligent managers. Deism is a prototypical ‘religion of humanity’ (Woodhead and Heelas 2000). It is ideologically congruent with Liberalism, which regards itself as a carrier of ‘modern’ Western freedom values that are contrasted with religious dogmatism and fundamentalism. Liberals perceive religious and political freedom as universal values which enlightened Muslims are supposed to share.

Tidehverv and its supporters in *Dansk Folkeparti* are critical to this liberal, humanist view. They regard humanism as man’s belief in himself, a belief which leads to an utopian effort to establish Paradise on earth. *Tidehverv* wants to bring Danish cultural identity back to its Christian roots. Krarup describes humanism as a delusion and human rights as ‘the Devil disguised as a humanitarian angel of light’ (*Politiken* 4.12.2007). Islam is essentially heresy and these rights open for tolerating it. *Tidehverv* aims to re-establish Christianity as a «religion-of-difference» in Woodhead and Heelas’ terms (2000), by demarcating it from other religions-of-difference, such as Islam.

The Conservative party also supports ‘the Christian roots of Danish national identity’. However, the Conservative party has a tradition of cosmopolitan values and it was originator of the first immigration law, mentioned above. Thus, the government’s majority rests on a constellation of different approaches to religious pluralism.

Secularism argues that it is possible and legitimate to differentiate between religion and other social institutions, and to exclude religion from ‘the public sphere’ and politics. In a European and American context, ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ are regarded as institutions which have specific functions and therefore should be separated from each other. This institutional differentiation results from a series of conflicts about the range of secular and sacred authority. This arrangement is not self-legitimizing for people who are accustomed to other institutional arrangements.

Ironically, this agenda of secularism seems to hinder a serious debate on actual democratic values, their sources and reasons, and their foundation in diverse religions and philosophies. By excluding religion from the ‘public sphere’, religion does not have a legitimate voice in debates on values. They are on the one hand regarded as arbitrary personal preferences and on the other as dogmatically fixed by religions. It is difficult to include religions in discourses about shared values and ethical issues. Such a debate may indicate a correspondence despite different premises. Even if values and ethics differ, peaceful and respectful co-existence may still be possible.

For outsiders, it may seem self-contradictory both to argue for secularism and to support a national church. This constellation is based on establishing a confessional latitudinarian Protestant church, with relatively independent congregations and a weak

hierarchy. This may also explain why the Lutheran church spans from *Tidehverv* to congregations who engage in interreligious dialogue or even offer the church as a sanctuary for evicted immigrants. This inner broadness explains why commitment to the national church as such does not correlate with negative attitudes to immigrants and Muslims (Lüchau 2004).

The pivotal political theme of the centre-right government and *Dansk Folkeparti* has been a 'struggle of values'. This implies a confrontation against left-wing values and the 'rubbish humanitarian' values of cultural radicalism, including Islam-ism which is posed as a source of authoritarian values. However, this agenda has not had a major impact on the public opinion. A recent survey (TNS Gallup 2010) indicates that the primary value among Danes is 'respect for others'. Those values proclaimed by the populists, such as 'Danishness', 'immigration policy' and 'struggle against Islam' have little support beyond *Dansk Folkeparti*. While the populists have succeeded in setting an agenda in the public debate, through its influence on the government, this agenda has only an impact on a narrow segment of the population.

Summary and perspectives

The Danish discourse on immigration, multiculturalism and religious pluralism has become polarized. The confrontations on religious pluralism involve three basic positions. There is a cosmopolitan humanist position which accepts all world views. This is confronted by a Lutheran exclusivism, which maintains one true religion. However, a more predominant position is secularism which excludes all religions from the public sphere. The issue of religious pluralism can be seen as part of a larger struggle for recognition (Honneth 1995; Kühle 2004). While the official policies focus on formal rights as citizens, the public debate concern affective bonds in the intimate sphere and conditions for social recognition in society at large. Both the new immigrant citizens and the populists are involved in the struggle for recognition. What is required for obtaining trust and recognition among sceptical members of the majority is not only Danish language, but 'Danish-ness'. Support for populism is often found among people with few cultural resources. They regard their indigenous culture as horizontal - threatened from the inside by an elitist cosmopolitan vertical culture and from the outside by cultures that try to immigrate. Populism thus struggles to re-establish a horizontal culture which can form the basis of mutual understanding and trust. Anti-Islamism is not only a concern about religion but part of a wider agenda of re-integration of a society which seems increasingly complex and fragmented.

From a sociological point of view, polarization expresses and supports mutual distrust and distance. Critics of multiculturalism and religious pluralism often express a concern about the development of a parallel society. However, this is increased by polarizing the debate. Extremist Islam and Anti-Islamism confirm each other. Anti-Islamism is based on forming an ideal type which corresponds to radical Islamism. Simultaneously, radical Islamism confirms its position by referring to a prejudiced, disrespectful, and suppressive opposition. In order to avoid religious confrontations, the

political majority follows a policy of secularism, which tries to exclude religion from the public discourse. However, this makes it even more difficult to address the value issues which are behind the debate on multiculturalism. Discourses on values and social ethics thereby refer to fixed positions. A multicultural society needs to address how people with different value-references may live peacefully and respectfully together. Religion may contribute constructively to such reflections, provided that it is permitted a voice in the public dialogues.

Notes

- ¹ This article is based on my key-note speech presented at the Nordic Conference for Sociology of Religion, University of Agder, August 2010. I wish to express my gratitude to Peter Gundelach, Lene Kühle, Inger Furseth and an anonymous reviewer who contributed with constructive critique of the manuscript.
- ² «Could you please tell me whether, in your opinion, it is very widespread, fairly widespread, fairly rare or very rare in (OUR COUNTRY)»? 55 percent of the Danish respondents reported religious discrimination against 39 percent in EU.
- ³ Only 39 percent of the Danes would accept that their children to marry a Muslim while 47 percent of the Muslim parents would accept that their children marry a Dane.
- ⁴ Thanks to Isa Kuyucuoglu for commentaries.
- ⁵ «(In (OUR COUNTRY), when a company wants to hire someone and has the choice between two candidates with equal skills and qualifications, which of the following criteria may, in your opinion, put one candidate at a disadvantage?» 68 percent of the Danes said yes versus 22 percent in EU.)
- ⁶ 8 percent of Bosnians, 12 percent of Lebanese, 17 percent of Turks, and 26 percent of Somalis reported they felt discriminated against in schools.
- ⁷ Peoples' choice of neighbours has different meanings in different neighborhoods.
- ⁸ This passage attempts to interpret the reasoning of the populist point of view, not an effort to make this point of view reasonable. The following summary is based on reading home pages which present such views, especially comments on the home page of *Jyllands-Posten*.

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