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MUSLIMS ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA

Abstract

Within four decades of immigration, Islam has become the largest minority-religion in Denmark. This has resulted in a need for Muslim institutions in Denmark such as burial places, educational institutions and places for prayer. The need for these religious institutions has been disputed since they were first established. The aim of this article is to describe and analyze the strategies used by Danish politicians in dealing with the presence of Islam and Muslims in Denmark, illustrated by the debate on the plan for building a mosque in Copenhagen. The analysis of this debate in the Danish parliament during 1980–2007 shows how Danish politicians attempt to construct «otherness» (explicitly) and «Danishness» (implicitly) through their articulation on Muslims. Hereby they construct Muslims as the «otherness» of Danish identity which at one and the same time makes Danish identity possible and impossible. Possible, because Muslims as a relation of difference are, what gives identity to the notions of «Danishness» and «Danish culture». Impossible, because they prevent «Danishness» from becoming complete.

Key words: political discourse, Muslims, immigrants, Islam, mosques, Denmark

Introduction

‘A mosque will never ever be built in Denmark’

Mogens Camre, Member of the European Parliament for the Danish People’s Party, Annual meeting of the Danish People’s Party, September 16th 2001.¹

In the course of four decades of immigration, Islam has become the largest minority religion in Denmark, resulting in a demand for Muslim institutions such as burial places, educational institutions and prayer rooms. The need for such religious institutions has been disputed by politicians and commentators ever since the first Muslim groups began establishing mosques and schools. Most of the leaders of Islamic organizations belong to what is often termed as the first generation of the immigrant population. Their battle to establish mosques and other institutions has been a slow and enervating enterprise which was complicated by the lack of educated leaders, insufficient knowledge of Danish bureaucracy, and the lack of financial means. In this situation, the views of the authorities and politicians are a vital factor.

Through a discussion of political debates from 1980 to 2007 concerning the building of a mosque in Copenhagen, this article will show how the articulations of Muslims among Danish politicians attempt to construct 'otherness' (explicitly) and 'Danishness' (implicitly) in certain ways. Research shows that the state's attitude to religious minorities influences the institutionalization of the country's religions (Kühle 2006: 25–34; Landman 1991: 410–32, Warburg and Warmind 1991: 13–39). In a Danish context, this means that the state's relation to Muslim groups will have consequences for the development of Muslim communities in Denmark.

Migration of people with other religions than that of the majority has always been a cause of conflict in Europe. Today, these conflicts are reflected in the way the media describes the migrants, in the native populations' attitudes and practices toward groups of migrants, and finally in political debates in the national parliaments.² These debates are particularly important, as they reflect a general public articulation and construction of alterity in a particular society, but these constructions and relations are condensed in sources such as written oral debates, acts, Bills, Proposal for Parliamentary Resolutions, reports, questions, committee work etc. This assumption is connected with the conception of the state as an accumulation of sedimented social institutions and as a sedimented system in which political struggles take place (Torfing 1999: 71). This is why this article is mainly based on sources found in the Danish parliamentary archives, which means parliamentary debates on Bills, accounts etc. from the years 1980 to 2007. The first debate in Parliament on the mosque is from 1980, which is why the examination begins this year. These documents are taken as evidence of the political elite's views on Islam and Muslims as such and, in this specific case, on the building of a mosque in Copenhagen, and as a result, the state's view on Muslims and Islam if a policy is sedimented as law. When relevant, primary sources also include political debates from the municipality of Copenhagen concerning the building of the mosque as well as politicians' newspaper commentaries and statements on the topic.

Conflicts over the planning and building of mosques are of current interest in cities all over Europe, and have been so for decades (Cesari 2005: 1015–24). The conflicts vary in degree from popular resentment to local scepticism, as cases show in Italy (Saint-Blancat and Friedberg 2005: 1083–1104), Germany (Jonker 2005: 1067–81), The Netherlands (Landman and Wessels 2005: 1125–40) and other European cities.³ There are examples of very low levels of conflict, such as the case of Bradford (McLoughlin 2005: 1045–66), but they are rare and not representative for Britain as such. In a 2001 British Home Office survey on religious discrimination, more than half of all Muslim and Hindu organizations responding to the survey claimed to have experienced 'unfair treatment by planners', or 'unfairness in planning policy and practice', compared to one in five Christian organizations (Weller et al. 2001: 63). According to Brigitte Maréchal, the building of mosques and prayer rooms in Western Europe has slowed down since the mid-1990s (Maréchal 2003: 84). Whether this is the result of a wider development of anti-Muslim resentment in Western Europe remains unanswered, but it seems to be a reasonable suggestion when comparing with other research on anti-Muslim resentment in Europe (Klausen 2005: 58–63).

The aim of this article is to describe and analyse the strategies used by Danish politicians to deal with the presence of Islam and Muslims in Denmark. This is conducted through an analysis of the political discussions on the plans for building a mosque in Copenhagen. The strategies and political discussions provide illustrating examples of how politicians construct otherness in certain ways. By marginalizing and excluding the «other,» the shape and boundaries of a group's own identity come into focus. As a binary opposition to the «self,» the «other» becomes the representation of all the fears, anxieties and negative images from which the dominant group wishes to disassociate itself and thereby reinforce its own positive identity (Derrida 1984: 116). Although this article focuses specifically on the political debates concerning the building of a mosque in Copenhagen, it has wider relevance insofar as it resembles the political debate on Islam and Muslims in other European countries where anti-Muslim and Islamophobic sentiments are also articulated in a political context.

In order to analyse the problem I will first present my theoretical outline and exemplify what the construction of 'the other' means in a wider perspective. Secondly I will present a short history of Muslims in Denmark, including their number. Thirdly, I will analyse a number of political debates from the years 1980 to 2007. The analysis falls in two parts: First, I give a description of the events leading to an agreement in 1981 on the location of the mosque, which include an analysis of debates on oil-contracts in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Then, I analyse the debates from 1990 – 2007 concerning the plans for building a mosque on the location mentioned in the agreement. In my conclusion, I show the ways in which Danish politicians' articulation of Muslims have changed from 1980 to 2007. From being a marginalised issue in the beginning of the 1980s, where Muslims were parts of a wider discussion on the legal position of religious communities in Denmark, the debate on Muslims changed character in the 1990s. Hereby Muslims became the otherness of Danish identity, which at one and the same time makes a Danish identity possible and impossible.

The construction of the other

As the political scientist Ernesto Laclau points out, every system must, to obtain identity, presume something «other», something «outside» the system (Laclau 1992: 83–90). If every identity is determined by its distinction, there will always be something outside the identity which undermines it and renders its full constitution. However, this otherness is also the condition of the identity, because each unit must imply something other to have an identity at all. Hence the otherness is at once the possibility and impossibility of the identity. This way of thinking can be illustrated by the following example: In a parliamentary debate on the 13th January 2000, entitled «Which information can the Government give about Denmark's cultural development seen in the perspective of the growing islamization?», Pia Kjaersgaard, the leader of the political party *Dansk Folkeparti* (The Danish People's Party), talks about Danishness and Danish culture as being threatened by Muslims and Islam:

As Folketinget determines that Islam's progress in Denmark neither is in accordance with the wishes the Danish people have in regard to the nation's cultural development, or in accordance with the Constitution's [*Grundloven*] § 4, stating that: 'The Evangelical-Lutheran Church is the Danish national church [*Folkekirken*] and is supported as such by the state', the Government is imposed to implement initiatives which ensure the continuation of Denmark as a Christian nation (Folketingstidende 1999/2000: 2941, author's translation).

Hereby she constructs Muslims and Islam as the otherness of Danish identity. Muslims are what makes Danish identity both possible and impossible. Possible, because Muslims understood as a relation of difference are what gives identity to the notions 'Danishness' and «Danish culture». Impossible, because they are what prevents «the Danishness» from becoming complete. Any identity or unity is in this perspective always dependent on an otherness, which becomes its condition of possibility and impossibility.

Hence any identity is determined by its exclusion of something else, meaning that there will always be something outside the identity which makes its full constitution both possible and impossible. In other words, the construction of social identity implies the construction and exclusion of an otherness. When it comes to the construction of collective identities, what is at the centre, the political theorist Chantal Mouffe points out is the formation of an *us* through the delimitation of *them* (Mouffe 1993: 140–41). Mouffe argues that it is this logic of difference, which makes possible and probable, that social antagonisms come into existence. She claims that if identity can only be established by delimiting *us* from *them*, it follows that a delimitation can always be transformed into an antagonistic relation. Hence a social antagonism emerges when a simple *us/them* relation is transformed into a *friend/foe* relation. Based on this argument this article asks the question whether the articulation of Islam and Muslims in Danish political debates is sedimented as a social antagonism or not.

Muslims and mosques in Denmark

There were few Muslims in Denmark until the end of the 1960s. One of the earliest known Muslims in Denmark was the journalist Knud Holmboe (1902–1931) who converted to Islam in 1929 and took the name Ali Ahmed Knud Holmboe (Aoude 2002). In 1956, the teacher Svend Aage Madsen (1928–2007) converted to the Muslim reform movement Ahmadiyya and took the name Abdus Salam Madsen (Warwind 1991:43). Through active mission in Denmark, Abdus Salam Madsen succeeded in establishing an Ahmadiyya community, which in 1966–67 built the first proper mosque in Denmark, *The Nusrat Djahan Mosque* in Hvidovre. The present Ahmadiyya community in Denmark consists mainly of Pakistani immigrants and their descendants.

From the end of the 1960s, Muslims started to appear in Denmark in more significant numbers, primarily due to immigration. The migration of Muslims to Denmark can be divided into two periods: The first, covering the years from the end of the 1960s to the early 1970s, was the period when people came to Denmark as labour migrants from the

former Yugoslavia, North-Africa, Pakistan and Turkey. The second period, running from the mid-1970s to date, saw the immigration of refugees and families of former labour migrants. The movements of refugees have followed different patterns: the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88), the civil war in Lebanon (1975–1990), the civil war in the former Yugoslavia (1991–2001), the war in Afghanistan (2001–present) and the war in Iraq (1991; 2003–present) (Colemann & Wadensjö 1999, Jacobsen 2007: 143–165). This example of migration follows a general pattern of globalization. One of the characteristics of globalization is the increase in international migration, which often results in significant changes in the receiving countries, including Denmark (Turner 1994: 183–84; Beck 2000: 92–94).

Figure 1 shows that the number of Muslims has increased significantly since 1980 – from 0.6 % of the population in 1980 (29,269 people) to 3.9 % in 2007 (209,820). It should be emphasized that the estimation of the number of Muslim adherents in Denmark is based on several assumptions such as the percentage of Muslims in each and all ethnic groups in Denmark from countries with more than 5 % Muslim adherents. The percentage of Muslims is based on surveys carried out among the eight largest ethnic groups covering approximately 80 % of the Muslims in Denmark and the number of Muslims in other 64 immigrant groups' home countries.⁴

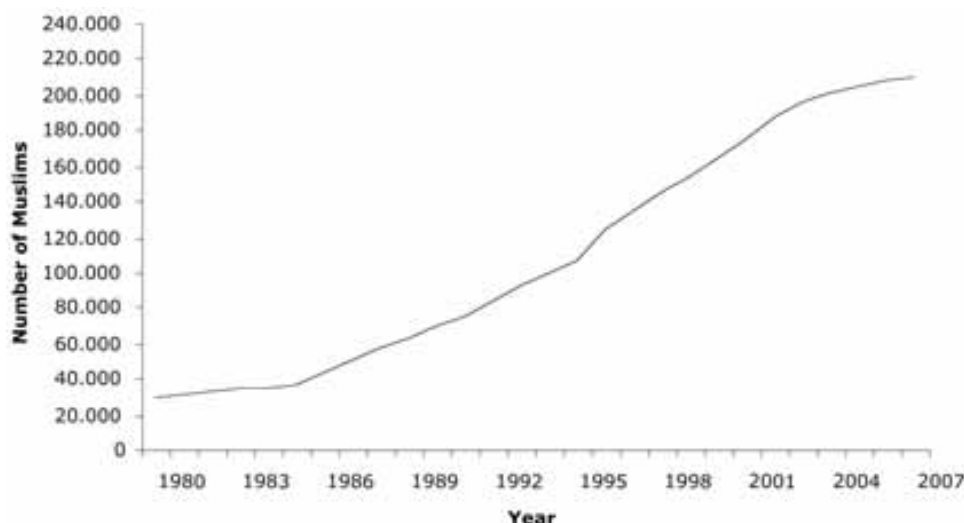


Figure 1. The number of Muslims in Denmark 1980–2007

Source: CIA - *The World Factbook* (2005); Integrations Status 1. halvår 2004 (Mikkelsen 2004); Jacobsen (2007: 143–165); *Religions of the World* (Melton and Baumann 2002) and Statistics Denmark (www.dst.dk)

Figure 1 also includes an estimation of converts and a calculation of third generation Muslim immigrants. Because individual religious beliefs are not registered by Danish authorities, it is generally difficult to gather reliable information on individual religious adherence. An example of the estimate in Figure 1 is as follows: The Turkish immigrants and their descendants were in 2007 estimated to 56,140 according to Statistics

Denmark (2007). Not all Turks are Muslims, which means we have to rely on surveys and other statistical information on religious adherence to estimate more precisely who belongs to different Muslim groups. The research institute *Catinét Research* has since 1999 made surveys every six months on different issues among eight ethnic groups in Denmark including the Turkish immigrants and their descendants (first- and second-generation immigrants) (Mikkelsen 2004). Their survey shows that 92 % Turkish immigrants see themselves as belonging to a Muslim religious movement. The remaining Turks see themselves as either non-believers or belonging to other religious groups. This means that only 92 % of the Turkish immigrants should be seen as Muslims, that is 51.649.

The estimate does not consider internal religious differences within Islam but includes groups such as Alawis, Shiites and Sunnis under the same heading. Today twenty-two Muslim communities are acknowledged in Denmark (Department of Family Affairs 2008). The Minister of Justice can, pursuant to the Act of Matrimony §16, subsection 1, n. 3, inform or give commitment to authorization of marriage to clergy within non-acknowledged religious communities and thereby acknowledge these as religious communities with the privileges this involves (termed 'acknowledged' religious communities). On August 8th 2007 twenty of these 'acknowledged' Islamic communities were on the list of the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs.⁵ It is estimated that 20–25 % of Muslims in Denmark are members of a mosque association, which corresponds to roughly 41,000–52,500 people (Kühle 2006: 39; 47). The number of actual members of a mosque association is low and research suggests that it is often only the father of a family who is a formal member although all family members actively use the mosque association, participate in its activities and are practising Muslims (Kühle 2007: 136). Finally, one cannot expect to find the same level of organisation or organizational culture in religious communities of non-Western groups of immigrants as in Western Europe, where there is a more than a hundred year old tradition of organizing people in religious associations, political parties, unions etc.

According to Danish sociologist of religion Lene Kühle, there are roughly 115 mosques in Denmark (Kühle 2006: 65). As mentioned above, the first mosques in Denmark were built by the Ahmadiyyas in 1967. Allegedly, the Shiite Ismailis acquired rooms for prayer in 1969/70, and the first Sunni mosques were established at the beginning of the 1970s, with the *Islamic Centre of Culture* in Brønshøj (Copenhagen) as the first in 1972 (Kühle 2006: 65). Today, there are mosques all over Denmark, but the largest concentration of mosques (and Muslims) is in the major cities such as Aarhus, Copenhagen and Odense. Most of the mosques are located in former office buildings and factory buildings, often not big enough to contain all the people who want to participate in the Friday prayers or other religious activities in the mosque.

In the next section, I will analyse the debate on the establishment of one particular mosque. The story begins in 1980, following the 1970s oil crisis and the escalation of the conflict between Arab States and Israel.

1980: Oil for a mosque?

The political debate on the building of a mosque in Copenhagen covers several years and affects different political fields of responsibility. The plans for building a mosque are discussed either explicitly as part of a §20 Question, Bills, Proposal for Parliamentary Resolution, accounts or enquiries.⁶ Since the parliamentary session 1980–81, the plans for building a mosque in Copenhagen have been discussed in relation to two accounts, four Bills, three enquiries and 19 §20 Questions. The latest debate took place in the parliamentary session 2001–02 (Folketingstidende 1980–2001).

In 1981, the State - through the Ministry of Defence - entered into a contract with the *Committee for the Islamic Centre of Culture in Copenhagen* concerning the rent of a vacant lot on Amager, an island two kilometres from the centre of Copenhagen. The Committee for the Islamic Centre of Culture in Copenhagen, which consisted of eight ambassadors from countries with Muslim majority populations (Folketingstidende 1982/83: 13 117), was planning to establish an Islamic Centre of Culture and a mosque on the vacant lot. The contract was to run for 50 years and the annual rent was set to 1,000 Danish Crowns (roughly 134 €) - a lucrative rent for a lot with such a central location in the municipality of Copenhagen. The agreement gained immediate attention in Parliament (*Folketinget*) where Christian Christensen from *Kristeligt Folkeparti* (The Christian People's Party) asked two questions to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Social Democrat Kjeld Olesen. He wanted to know if the Minister's possible assistance in the contract's coming into existence was to satisfy 'numerous Arabic countries concerning entering into an agreement on the State's purchase of oil' (Folketingstidende 1980/81: 13 500, author's translation).

The suspicion concerning the coupling of the policies of domestic, foreign and energy affairs was not new in the Danish Parliament. In 1980, several parties lead by the Conservative Party asked questions to the Minister of Energy, the Social Democrat Poul Nielson, concerning the content of the contracts on the purchase of oil between Iraqi and Saudi Arabic oil companies and the Danish state-owned *Dansk Olie og Naturgas* (Danish Oil and Natural Gas Company).⁷ The Conservatives feared that the Danish government had made political concessions in connection to the purchase of the oil.⁸ The concessions were to have entailed a shift of opinion concerning Denmark's official position regarding the conflict between Israel and the Arabic countries in return for oil to a lower price than the market price on the Rotterdam Oil Exchange. The Conservative Member of Parliament Annelise Gotfredsen expresses her concern in a §20 Question:

According to the media, the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs has, on an official visit to Copenhagen, explained that Iraq 'will not have anything to do with enterprises that employ or do business' with Zionists'. (Berlingske Tidende April 18th). Accordingly, according to the media in Finland, the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs has asked numerous companies to inform them 'whether any member of the board is a Jew or a Zionist'. This proves clearly that political conditions must be anticipated in connection with the purchase of oil. It will seriously threaten the security of supplies if such totally unacceptable demands appear subsequently (Folketingstidende 1979/80: 8214–8215, author's translation).

That suspicion of political concessions not only concerned foreign relations is shown in the following §20 question posed by the Conservative Member of Parliament Flemming Jensen:

Will the Minister [of Foreign Affairs] deny that he has addressed the Danish Broadcasting Corporation in order to ensure that the Broadcasting Corporation didn't broadcast unwanted programmes concerning the conditions in Saudi Arabia? (Folketingstidende 1979/80: 10 889, author's translation)

The government led by the Social Democrats generally denied that there would be any connection. This, however, did not convince the opposition parties who, based on newspaper information, saw a clear coupling of the purchase of oil and for instance the rent of the Ministry of Defence's Amager lot to the *Committee for the Islamic Centre of Culture in Copenhagen* on highly favourable terms. Who was right? Only the future opening of the state archives will tell us. Nevertheless, the discussion shows that the image of Arabs, Muslims and Islam as enemies is latently present in the parliamentary debates; a useful tool to discredit a government's political choices and objectives.

The starting point for the debate on the mosque on Amager is the question of oil contracts, which should have entailed an (perhaps hidden) agreement on the building of a mosque, prompting Christian Christensen from The Christian People's Party to ask the following question:

On which grounds has the Minister [of Foreign Affairs] contributed to Muslim countries obtaining very favourable conditions for renting a lot on Amager with the purpose of constructing a mosque and an Islamic Centre of Culture? (Folketingstidende 1980/81: 13 499, author's translation)

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kjeld Olesen, defended the contract out of consideration for Muslim 'guest workers';

[...] access to practising religion and Islamic studies of culture can be seen as a natural counterpart to the Danish authorities' effort in educational matters to contribute to the guest workers and their families continuing connection with their native countries' language and cultural traditions [...] It is a matter of consideration for the migrant workers' possibilities of adapting to the country of residence which has achieved international recognition. (Folketingstidende 1980/81: 13 500–13 501, author's translation)

The answer reflects the labour market discourse from the 1970s when the idea that the 'guest workers' would travel back to their 'home country' was common among politicians as well as in the rest of the population. The logic of this idea necessitated helping the 'guest worker families' to maintain their native language and cultural competences through for instance language courses and the practising of religion, thus easing their (inevitable) return to the home country. At the same time, the argument implicitly refers to the incipient articulation of integration policies which show 'consideration to migrant workers' possibilities of adaptation' (Folketingstidende 1980/81: 13 500–13 501, author's translation) in a new country of residence: *in casu* Denmark.

Christian Christensen's concern is not integration or the Muslims' legitimate presence in Denmark but rather a concern that the practice of the state helping a religious community other than the state church might expand to include to all religious communities:

It is therefore gratifying if the mentioned agreement expresses a changed attitude in the government that the state in the future will give religious communities outside the state church the same favourable condition with regards to the building of churches etc. (Folketingstidende 1980/81: 13 502, author's translation).

In other words the first questions on the building of a mosque on Amager concern religious communities' legal position in Denmark and the state's potential responsibilities for religious communities outside the state church. This is an issue which did not attract very much attention at that time (the early eighties), and it should thus be seen as a marginalized issue.

1990: The building of a mosque in Copenhagen?

After the signing of the contract, no further steps regarding the construction on the lot on Amager were taken until 1990 when the *Islamic Cultural Centre of Scandinavia* took over the lease. They had plans for an actual building project, including a mosque in a 20 meter high building. Such a construction required a change in the district plan of the municipal council of Copenhagen, but before this could happen the district plan had to be submitted to a public hearing. The public hearing resulted in more than 250 protests, according to the then Mayor of Copenhagen, the Social Democrat Jens Kramer Mikkelsen (cited in the newspaper *BT* April 8th 1991). Normally the number of protests on district plans is around 10–15 according to Principal Klavs Bjerring from the Agency of District Planning (cited in *BT* Marts 19th 1991). It was the highest number of protests in a public hearing the municipality had received until then. A petition was arranged against the construction of a mosque, and more than 6,000 signed it, according to the newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* July 21st 1991. It was, among others, the radical rightwing party *Nationalpartiet Danmark* (The National Party Denmark), which took initiative to the petition, according to *Berlingske Tidende* on Marts 20th 1991. The newspapers generally received many letters to the editor concerning the plans to build a mosque, and the politicians discussed the subject publicly. In spite of the protests, in 1992 the municipal council chose (with a large majority) to pass a district plan that reserved the lot on Njalsgade, Amager for a mosque.

The building project for a mosque on Amager also led to a debate in Parliament. This time the debate started on the January 31st 1990 in relation to a debate of accounts on 'Danish Culture Exchange', carried out by the Minister of Cultural Affairs Ole Vig Jensen from the *Radikale Venstre* (The Social Liberal Party). The cultural exchange between Danish and Muslim culture was a general topic in the debate and was conceived of as a positive factor by all the parties' spokespersons with the exception of spokesper-

son Pia Dahl from the rightwing *Fremskridtspartiet's* (The Progressive Party). She saw the Muslim way of life as a threat to the Danish one:

Mr Duetoft raised the question in the first round [of contributions], whether Danish culture is threatened by the Muslims. This urges me to say: Yes, as a matter of fact it is, especially in the long term because it is like this; the Danish family must work hard all around the clock to provide sufficient taxpayer means to preserve the Muslims' idyllic family pattern. Thus it is the Danish taxpayer who makes sure that the Muslims get sufficient time to educate their children in their religion and see to it that they can appear in their mosque (Pia Dahl (FP), debate of accounts on 'Danish Culture Exchange', 31.1.1990, author's translation).

The Progressive Party makes use of two discourses in the articulation on Muslim immigrants: The Muslim immigrants represent an economic burden, and Islam constitutes a cultural threat to Danish culture and religion: '[...] the Muslim faith is, as you know, at any rate expansive, and the church therefore has only one purpose, and that is to propagate Islam' (Pia Dahl (FP), debate of accounts on 'Danish Culture Exchange', 31.1.1990, author's translation). In several cases, it seems like the concept of 'culture' is used interchangeably with the concept of 'society'. The relationship between the two concepts is articulated in the conception of 'taxpayer means' as a societal phenomenon that creates cohesion in the Danish society, and that is threatened by the cultural family patterns and the faith of Muslims. There is an ironic symmetry in the fact that when the Progressive Party was established during the beginning of the 1970s, abolition of taxes was part of its political programme, while in this debate the concept of «taxpayer means» is articulated as a societal phenomenon that creates cohesion in the Danish society.

At the same time, the Progressive Party makes the project of building a mosque on Amager part of the debate by outlining a disproportion between Danish tolerance and openness to other religious communities and Muslim countries' hostility regarding other religious communities than the Muslim one:

[...] now the building of a mosque here in Denmark is being speculated in and I would like to know if the Minister of Cultural Affairs has ever tried to make enquiries either in Saudi Arabia or in Iran whether Denmark could obtain permission to build a small church in their country because I am sure, you see, that the Minister of Cultural Affairs would get a clear no. It doesn't seem like what we call mutual tolerance or mutual respect. Consequently it is a one-sided tolerance or respect. (Pia Dahl (FP), debate of accounts on 'Danish Culture Exchange', 31.1.1990, author's translation)

The conception of Islam as a threat to the Danish society gains no support from the other parties. During this period, *Det konservative Folkeparti* (the Conservative Party) and *Venstre* (The Liberal Party) are part of a coalition government with *Det radikale Venstre* (the Social Liberal Party). Their main argument to support the building of a mosque is that since the state has entered into an agreement to rent out the lot with the purpose of building a mosque, the state must observe this agreement. However, this does not stop the Progressive Party from, later that same year, presenting the following Bill: 'Motion for Bill to stop the Construction of a Grand Mosque on Amager' (L63,

7.11.1990). The Bill was not in time to be considered in Parliament before the general elections on December 12th, 1990 and as a consequence, it is reintroduced on January 23rd 1991 (the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party continued after the election in a new government without the Social Liberal Party), after which a long debate on the Bill followed at the first submission on February 22nd, 1991. The Progressive Party's key argument here is that the favourable contract between *the Islamic Centre of Culture* and the Ministry of Defence is unreasonable from an economic point of view. The explicit articulation on Islam as a cultural threat as practised by the Progressive Party in the debate of accounts in January 1990 is toned down in favour of an economic argument: 'If a Muslim Centre of Culture builds a mosque and otherwise observes the regulations on constructions etc. there will be no opposition from the Progressive Party. But we do make rescissions when the state rents 15,000 square metres at only 1,000 crowns a year' (Kim Behnke (The Progressive Party), first submission, L63, 22.2.1991, author's translation).

The government and the rest of the opposition's defence of the rent agreement is the Constitution's §67 which stipulates that 'Citizens are entitled to associate in communities to worship God according to their convictions. However, nothing may be taught or done which contravenes decency or public order.' (Peter Duetoft, *Centrumdemokraterne* (The Centre Democrats), first submission, L63, 22.2.1991, author's translation). At the same time, they refer to a Danish tradition for renting out state property to religious communities on very favourable conditions. The Socialist People's Party refers i.a. to this practice, while implying that that the Progressive Party has other concerns than purely economic ones when raising this debate:

The long tradition in Denmark for freedom of religion and tolerance is after all what the main target is for the Progressive Party' Bill today. It is a long tradition which goes back to the period of absolute monarchy. In 1585, the Danish state handed over, free of charge, the Church of Saint Petri to the German congregation. In 1886, they built the Russian-Orthodox Church, the Church of Alexander Nevski in Bredgade. In 1688, they provided for a lot for the activities of the Reformed Church in Denmark, free of charge. What the King at that time first offered was a location which was located so terribly far away from the centre of the city as Christianshavn. The Reformed Church declined this, and instead they received the more central location the Reformed Church has today. To that should be added a number of other churches, which another spokesman has mentioned from this place: the Swedish, the Anglican and the Norwegian Churches. (Pelle Voigt (The Socialist People's Party), first submission. L63, 22.2.1991, author's translation).

The spokesperson of the Social Democrats mentioned that 'the Anglican Church [pays] an annual rent of 500 crowns, there is the Swedish Church with an annual rent of 700 crowns, and there is the Norwegian Church with an annual rent of 100 crowns' (1. submission, L63, 22.2.1991, author's translation).

Throughout the debate, the rest of the opposition tries to make the Progressive Party admit that they have other reasons than purely economic ones for presenting their Bill. However, the Progressive Party maintains that the reason for their Bill is entirely economic.

The debate on the construction of a mosque shows how the debate on migrants has changed from 1980 to 1990: from dealing exclusively with the rights of minorities in 1980 to the introduction of the image of migrants as an economic burden and a cultural threat in 1990. However, in 1990 the two last-mentioned discourses are still marginalized discourses that do not play any major role in Parliament.

2001: The Building of a mosque is being debated again

In the autumn of 2000, *The Muslim World League* approached the state owned Property Company *Freja*, which now owned the lot reserved for the mosque, to get a price on the lot on Njalsgade, Amager. *Freja* set the price to 184,7 million Danish Crowns, according to the newspaper *Berlingske Tidende's* information on April 20th 2001.⁹ Representatives from *The Muslim World League* came to Copenhagen and negotiated the price, but the project was postponed indefinitely after September 11th 2001, according to the newspaper *BT* (November 11th 2001). The municipality of Copenhagen and the Danish government were in general sympathetic to the project but underlined that it should be financed privately and without any economic support from Danish authorities.

The Danish People's Party was at that time very explicit in their conceptions of Muslims as a cultural and security threat.¹⁰ Mogens Camre, Member of The European Parliament for The Danish People's Party, expressed his resistance against the Muslim presence in Denmark at the party's annual meeting on September 16th 2001: 'All the Western countries are infected with Muslims – some of them speak nicely to us while they are waiting to become enough people to kill us'. On the podium, the phrases 'kill us', stated in his original manuscript, was changed to 'get rid of us'. He then continued by stating that 'What we face is not only a brief military operation. It is a question of driving this ideology of evil out of Western civilization. Never shall Islam have any room in our countries'. (Camre's manuscript, distributed to the press at The Danish People's Party's annual meeting, 16.9.2001, author's translation). Referring to the building of a mosque on Amager, he stated, to standing ovations according to the newspaper *Weekendavisen* September 21st 2001 that 'A mosque will never ever be built in Denmark'. This view was not met with sympathy by the other parties, which all distanced themselves from The Danish People's Party's statements in the days following the annual meeting. However, the party leader Pia Kjaersgaard backed up the statements and emphasized her support from the Parliament's podium during the Parliamentary opening debate on October 4th 2001:

[...] that freedom of religion is not the same as equality of religion and I do not wish Islam to be propagated here in Denmark. I think that it is wrong. I think that out of respect for the values we have, we must say that the fundamentalist part of Islam is not welcome, that it creates problems, that it gives problems [...] with the fundamentalist tendencies we have seen Islam should definitely be fought against (Folketingstidende 2001/2002:117, author's translation).

The other parties in Parliament distanced themselves from the statements, although not unambiguously, and later debates and political initiatives actually show a broader political support to The Danish Peoples Party's political line.

For instance *Venstre's* (The Liberal Party's) members of Parliament, Birthe Rønn Hornbech and Inge Dahl Sørensen articulate a civilizing decisive difference between Islam and Christianity and/or the West. This is demonstrated in various comments, political statements and initiatives such as: 'internment of fundamental Muslims', 'expulsion of Palestinians', 'expulsion of all Muslims', 'Islam cannot be democratic', 'Islam equals unliberty' etc.¹¹

Whether it is this policy that led to *Venstre's* electoral victory in the November 2001 Parliamentary elections is difficult to say. However, discussions of immigration and integration policies as well as more general discussions of Islam and its influence on national and international levels did play a significant role in the election campaign – perhaps even a decisive role.¹²

The positions of the political parties in this debate are still identifiable from the debate on mosques from 1990. Thus, the sedimented logic from the 1980s on culture as the parameter on the basis of which the boundaries between *us* and *them* are drawn can now be characterized as hegemonic. The difference between the discursive positions of the parties is a question of whether the cultures of refugees and immigrants – including the construction of a mosque – are articulated as something positive with which *we* should comply and respect, or as something problematic which makes integration difficult.

From the beginning of the 1990s, Muslims and their religious practices are articulated as something distinctively different from Danishness. In this light, the construction of a mosque appears as something very particular which *we* Danes should either take into particular consideration or which *we* should prohibit out of concern for Danishness. Regardless of whether the politicians adopt one position or the other, the building of a mosque remains an example of something particularly non-Danish.

2006: Plans for a mosque

At the beginning of 2006, the building company *Njalsgade K/S* presented a project on the lot, allowing space for a mosque.¹³ In the light of the cartoon-crisis, the journalist, writer and former editor of the newspaper *Politiken*, Herbert Pundik on February 1st 2006 suggested that the Danish business community should raise 50 million Danish Crowns to build a mosque with a dome and minarets in Copenhagen as a gift from the people of Denmark to Muslims in Denmark.¹⁴ On March 31st 2006, the Newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* presented a poll from *Rambøll Management*, which showed that 60 % of the population in Copenhagen now supported the idea of building a 'grand mosque', while 31 % opposed it. This shows that the population's attitude had changed significantly since the beginning of the 1990s where a similar poll from *Observe* in the newspaper *BT* on April 8th 1991 showed that 55 % of the population in Copenhagen was against the building of 'a mosque with a dome' while only 22 % supported it. The Mayor of Copenhagen, Social Democrat Ritt Bjerregaard supported Pundik's idea but

the Liberal Party's Member of the Municipal Council, Jesper Schou Hansen opposed the idea. To the newspaper *Urban* on February 10th 2006, he stated that he found the proposed building 'tall, ugly and way too massive'. In addition, he did not find 'that the time has come to discuss a mosque since this, in light of the cartoon-crisis, can be interpreted as a genuflection for rabid Islamists'.

In April 2007, a new building project for the construction of a mosque on Amager was presented under the name *Grand Mosque of Copenhagen*. According to the newspaper *Nyhedsavisen* on April 23rd 2007, the project was designed by the architects *Wenzen + Tuxen* in cooperation with the moderate Muslim organisation *The Tabah Foundation*. This made Member of Parliament for the Danish People's Party, Martin Henriksen write an article on the party's webpage, stating that:

A mosque is not to be built on Amager [...] Experiences show that the grand mosques that have been built around European cities become the centre for fundamentalist activity in the shape of demonstrations, distributions of radical Muslim literature etc. (Martin Henriksen on Danish People's Party's webpage 2.7.2007, author's translation)

The debates on the building of a mosque in 2006/07 never reached the same level as in 2001 or as in the beginning of the 1990s. There may be several reasons: 1) the reserved lot for construction of the mosque surpassed into private ownership in 2005, and politicians have less reason to dispute private building projects within the limits of the law than if the lot is owned by the state; 2) according to polls, the population seems to support the building of a mosque, so it is not politically opportune to start a campaign against the building; 3) the political awareness of Muslim presence and the need for religious institutions in Denmark is (probably) stronger now than in 1980 when the debates on mosques reached Parliament for the first time.

Throughout the period examined in this article, Danish Muslims have tried to have the prestigious mosque built in Copenhagen with the help of individuals or institutions in the Islamic world. Why have they not succeeded in this attempt?

Besides the anti-Muslim sentiments analysed above, one important aspect of the mosque project is the lack of knowledge of the Muslim communities in Denmark by the authorities and the politicians: How many are they? Where do they live? What are their requirements regarding religious institutions? And how can 'we' as legislators and civil servants help ease Danish Muslims in their attempts at establishing religious institutions?

A further aspect of the mosque project is the interaction between the different ethnic Muslim communities in Denmark, an issue this article has not examined. For the different Muslim communities, it seemed to be the most logical option to join forces, both from a religious point of view and for financial reasons. Since the beginning of 1990s, the Danish authorities have endorsed such cooperation. However, the collaboration between the different communities has turned out to be rather problematic in practice. Some reasons for conflicts were the lack of mutual trust in organizational and financial matters, variations in religious practice between the different ethnic communities, and the absence of a common language, which made communication difficult. With the establishment of *Muslimernes Fællesråd* (The United Council of Muslims) on September 24th 2006 this

may change, however, this is still too early to tell. According to the spokesperson Zubair Butt Hussain, in May 2007 the council counts thirteen Muslim associations, which conservatively estimated muster 35–40,000 people' (quoted in the newspaper *Weekendavisen* on May 11th 2007, author's translation).

Another important aspect is disputes among Muslim leaders on whether it is Islamically accepted to build on a rented lot, not owned. According to one Muslim leader, Mohamed Mansuri at the *Islamic Centre of Culture* in Copenhagen, building on a rented lot is in conflict with Islam: 'According to Islam, it is not legal to build a sacred mosque on a rented lot. Mosques may only be built on soil we own ourselves' (cited in the newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* July 21st 1991, author's translation). Mansuri is not explicit as to his source, but Shaykh Abdurrahman ibn Yusuf Mangera supports his views on this subject. In his Islamic jurisprudence *Fiqh of Masjid & Musalla* (2004), Mangera makes a distinction between *Masjid* and *Musalla*: the former is a place that has been permanently dedicated to Allah, while the latter is 'a place where prayer is performed or where congregations are held, or worded differently, any temporary place in which worshippers congregate to perform their prayers' (Mangera 2004). According to this view, most of the mosques in Denmark are not actually mosques but *musallas* where worshippers congregate to perform their prayers. This view is also supported by the references in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. VI for *Masjd* (1991: 644 ff.) and VII for *Musalla* (1993: 658 ff.). Other Muslim leader, such as Imam Abdul Wahid Pedersen are involved in the building projects and use the term *mosque* according to statements in newspapers, as for example the daily *Jyllands-Posten* April 23rd 2007, when articulating the building's purpose.

Conclusion

The strategies of Danish politicians when dealing with the plan for building a mosque in Copenhagen have changed during the period examined in this article. In 1980, the dominant discourse on Muslims was part of a wider discussion on the legal position of religious communities in Denmark and the state's potential responsibilities for religious communities outside the state church. Articulations on Muslims constituted a marginalized issue, which did not attract much attention in the public sphere, although the starting point for the discussion on the plan for building a mosque was intense. The opposition suspected that the government had made political admissions to Arab countries in the Israel-Arab conflict, as well as an agreement on a relatively inexpensive lot in Copenhagen in exchange for oil-contracts.

During the 1990s, the discourse on Muslims changed, and this is reflected in the discussions on the plan for building a mosque. In the 1990s, migrants were constituted as an economic burden and a cultural threat. From being a marginalized discourse in the beginning of the 1990s, not playing any major role in Parliament, this is now the dominating discourse on Muslims in Parliament. According to this discourse, Muslims and their religious practices are distinctively different from Danish culture and Danish values *vis-à-vis* Danishness, which is why the construction of a mosque appears as something very peculiar.

Although different governments and authorities have at times publicly adapted positive attitudes towards the possible construction of mosques in general, they still maintain the position that they have no obligation to intervene in this area. For the Muslims in Copenhagen, nothing has happened: the lot is still empty.

It is characteristic of the debate that Danishness and alterity in the shape of the building of mosques, articulations of Islam etc. are framed with point of departure in freezing the relation *us* and *them*. The national discourse tends to colonize the world understood as the universal. The discourse appears to outdo the substance, understood as the way in which the hierarchical modes of categorizing *them* in relation to *us*, or reversed *us* in relation to *them*, become generally accepted, regardless of the content of the message. Thus, on one level, we notice the disagreement between politicians on the substance of categories – you may oppose or support the building of a mosque; on another level, we sense a wider agreement on the basic discourse denoting a cultural differentiation between *us* (the Danes) and *them* (the Muslims). It is this culturalistic relational thinking which is sedimented through the 1980s and which achieves hegemony in the Danish political consciousness in the 1990s.

Hereby Muslims are constituted as the otherness of Danish identity, which at one and the same time makes a Danish identity possible and impossible: Possible because Muslims, understood as a relation of difference, give identity to the notions of *Danishness* and *Danish culture*; and impossible, because they prevent ‘Danishness’ from becoming complete. In this perspective, the Danish case resembles other European cases such as the Dutch case as shown by sociologist of religion Sipco Vellanga (Vellanga 2008: 36–7). Denmark and The Nederland resemble each other in many ways concerning the question of Islam and the articulation on Muslims. One may notice the same kind of development in other European countries, but as research shows the Islamophobic articulations are not as harsh as in Denmark.¹⁵

Recent research indicates that Muslim identity is often understood as a binary antagonism of all that is popularly considered to be ‘Danishness’; according to this logic, one cannot be a Muslim and a Dane at the same time (Hussain 2007: 5). Because it is the religion of ‘the other’ – Islam – that is explicitly articulated, the religion of the Danish majority – The Evangelical-Lutheran Church – becomes implicitly important as a central part of the articulation of *Danish identity*. Thus there is a need to study why the Danish government, together with an increasing number of other European governments, adopts the culturalistic relational thinking and which consequences this social antagonism have for societies in general and for Muslim groups in particular.

The limitation of this study is that it is a case-study. Further research with a greater empirical basis should be done. This case-study of articulations of Muslims in a certain period shows how the articulation of Muslims has changed and when. The research does not answer why the articulation change and become an antagonistic relationship between ‘us’ – the *Danes* and – and ‘them’ – the *Muslims*. This will require other types of longititude and comparable research, which involve interviews with the opinion formers and attitude surveys in a population during several decades. In general, the case-study helps us to handle a topic that is based on many sources such as speeches, official documents, articles, comments etc. This also complies with this case-study. It shows a particular

development of the political elite's articulation on Muslims during a specific period, but not necessarily a general development in society as such. The public sentiments towards Muslims may be more or less antagonistic and they may vary both in time and geographical space in the same country.

With these limitations in mind, this study has showed the strategies used by Danish politicians in coping with the Muslim minorities during roughly 30 years – from a marginalized issue in 1980 to one of the most disputed issues in contemporary Denmark.

Notes

- ¹ The building of this mosque and the construction of a mosque in Odense in 1991 and one in Svendborg in 2000 make Camre's opening quotation ironic. It suggests that he does not know that at that time, three proper mosques had in fact already been built in Denmark. As the article will show, the mosque Camre refers to is the mosque being planned in Copenhagen.
- ² Cf. Vellenga (2008: 21–42) for public debates on Muslims in the Netherlands, which is in many ways comparable to the Danish case. For a European perspective, see the introduction in *The Islamic Challenge* (Klausen 2005: 1–14) and van Dijk's analysis on political discourse and racism in Western parliaments (Netherlands, Germany, France, and Great Britain as well as in the U.S. House of Representatives). See also Baumann for a more general account on the public articulation on ethnicity and religion (Baumann 1999: 62–4; 69–73).
- ³ Cf. special issue on Mosque Conflicts in European Cities in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 6, November 2005.
- ⁴ Cf. 'Muslimer i Danmark – en kritisk vurdering af antalsopgørelser' [Muslims in Denmark – a critical assessment of estimations] for this method of estimation of Muslim adherents in Denmark (Jacobsen 2007: 143–65).
- ⁵ Before the Parliamentary Election 2007 the responsible minister where the Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs.
- ⁶ §20 Questions: The Members of the Folketing can, according to the parliamentary rules of procedure, pose questions to the Ministers regarding a public matter and ask for a written or an oral reply. Replies to the oral questions are given in Chamber during the weekly Question Time on Wednesdays.
- ⁷ Det konservative Folkeparti (The Conservative Party) asked 13 questions, Fremskridtspartiet (The Progressive People's Party) asked three, Venstre (The Liberal Party) asked two and Socialistisk Folkeparti (Socialist People's Party) asked one on the coupling of oil purchases and political concessions of various kinds.
- ⁸ Cf. among others the following §20 Questions: Dyremose (Conservative): On the number of Western European countries which have made standard oil contracts with Saudi Arabia (Folketingstidende 1979/80: 11 492); Dyremose (Conservative): On the course concerning the purchase of oil with Saudi Arabia (Folketingstidende 1979/80: 11 628); Gammelgaard (Conservative): On possible liability to pay compensation to Denmark if the oil contract is violated (Folketingstidende 1979/80: 11 433); Annelise Gotfredsen (Conservative): On the State's purchase of oil from Iraq (Folketingstidende 1979/80: 8214); Annelise Gotfredsen (Conservative): On the State's trading oil with Saudi Arabia (Folketingstidende 1979/80: 10 927); Annelise Gotfredsen (Conservative): On the oil contract with Saudi Arabia (Folketingstidende 1979/80: 11 432); Annelise Gotfredsen (Conservative): On the stipulation of

non-fulfilment of the oil contract (Folketingstidende 1979/80: 11 593); Flemming Jensen (Conservative): On the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (The Saudi Arabia case) (Folketingstidende 1979/80: 10 889); Flemming Jensen (Conservative): On critical programmes in the Danish Broadcasting Corporation concerning Saudi Arabia (Folketingstidende 1979/80: 11 447).

- ⁹ On December 14th 2004, the director of Freja stated in an article in the newspaper Politiken that the price of the lot would be about 50 million Danish Crowns. Which newspaper is correct is difficult to judge; the prices could be seen as strategic statements in regards to ongoing negotiations.
- ¹⁰ The Danish People's Party was founded in 1995 when four Members of Parliament for The Progressive Party broke away from their party. In their first general elections to parliament, they gained 7.4 % of the votes, at the latest elections (2007), they got 13.8 %. One of their main issues is to restrict immigration.
- ¹¹ E.g.: In the newspaper Politiken: 'Debate: We have to contradict the unliberty' 14.9.2001 by Birthe Rønn Hornbech; 'News analysis: Fear and trembling in the duckyard'; 'Editors comment: Rhetorics' 4.10.2001 and Jyllands-Posten: 'The Liberal Party: No more missteps' 27.10.2001 by Inge Dahl-Sørensen; 'Debate: They have to be expelled from the country'; 'Politics: Danish Politics on an anomalous level' and 'JP analysis: Fogh's new agenda' 19.9.2001.
- ¹² The journal Politologiske Studier [Studies of Politics] no. 13 2002 dedicates a special issue to the discussion of the election outcomes and several of the writers point exactly to the topic of foreigners as decisive for the outcome of the election. Cf. also Hans Mouritzen: Er vi så forbeholdne? [Are we that reserved?] (2003:206ff.).
- ¹³ Njalsgade K/S bought the lot by the state owned Property Company Freja in the summer of 2005.
- ¹⁴ The Cartoon-crisis refers to the cartoons controversy which began after twelve editorial cartoons, most of which depicted the Islamic prophet Muhammad, were published in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten on 9.30.2005.
- ¹⁵ E.g. Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue (Tranchem & Rienstra 2008) and Muslims in EU Cities - the seven country reports on European countries monitoring the situation of «Muslims in EU Cities» including Denmark (EU monitoring and Advocacy Program 2007).

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