

Good Governance? The Prophet Muhammad Controversy and the Norwegian Response

Ada I. Engebrigtsen

NORWEGIAN SOCIAL RESEARCH, NOVA

S U M M A R Y : This article discusses the Norwegian government's management of the crisis between the West and the Muslim world connected to the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, published in Denmark and Norway in 2005 and 2006. While the Danish government rejected the efforts by Muslim leaders in Denmark who asked for some sort of official apology or regret that the drawings were published, the Norwegian government expressed their regret early in the process while at the same time emphasising freedom of speech and a free press as important aspects of democratic societies. These different reactions should be understood both as an expression of the different political situations in the two countries and as an expression of the different importance of the two publishing journals. The whole crisis should be seen as an important instance of the ongoing processes of religious integration that are taking place in Western countries as an aspect of the general civilising processes discussed by Norbert Elias (among others). The crisis raised a heated debate in Norway about the relation between individual rights as expressed by the freedom of speech, and collective rights as expressed by religious feelings among a minority. Several discussants criticised the government for meekness when confronted with Muslim threats. The author argues that precisely because of the ambivalence it expresses, the Norwegian management of this crisis was an instance of good governance; ambivalence being perhaps the only viable position in a multicultural society.

Key words : GOVERNANCE, CONTROVERSY, AMBIVALENCE, RELIGION, MUSLIMS, INTEGRATION.

Introduction

In 2006 Europe, or more precisely Scandinavia, was involved in a conflict that has been given many labels. The publishing of a series of caricature drawings in Denmark and Norway of what was meant to represent the prophet Muhammad with a bomb in his turban caused uproar among Muslim protesters all over the world, but most severely in Muslim countries. Because the conflict between the Danish government and Islam escalated, the media coverage has focused on the Danish public management of the conflict. In this article, I will draw attention to the reaction of the Norwegian government to the publication of the same drawings. I will discuss three main themes: 1. How should the conflict be understood in a global perspective? 2. Does the handling of the

controversy by Norway correspond to the official Norwegian migration policies? and 3. Should the Norwegian reaction be viewed as an example of good governance in a multi-ethnic community? But first, let me give some brief demographic and historical facts.

Norway – between multiculturalism and ethnocentrism

In 2005, at the time of the Muhammad controversy, there were *c.* 380,000 immigrants (including people with immigrant parents) in Norway that is *c.* 8 per cent of the total population and three times as many as was verified in 1980. The majority, approximately 205,000, came from Asia, Turkey, Africa and South America. About 65,000 came from Eastern Europe and the remaining 53,000 came from Scandinavia, the USA and other Western European countries. Approximately 46 per cent of these were Norwegian citizens, and about 115,000 were Muslims (Østbye, 2006).

Norway has, in sharp contrast to most European countries and the Muslim world, a history of relatively strong ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural homogeneity. That is, there have always been people with different ethnic and religious affiliations, with other mother tongues than Norwegian, but they have been few and powerless and have hardly challenged the Norwegian majority apart from some important instances (Kjeldstadli, 2003). People like the Roma are very few and not stationary; the local gypsies (Tater), together with Jews and Kvens (Finns) have all lived in different relationships to the majority and have suffered different kinds of assimilation efforts, injustice and extinction (most Jews were in fact deported during the Second World War), but they have not challenged the Norwegian cultural or political hegemony. The Sami people is the only minority in Norway that is organised as an ethnic group and after decades of assimilation and oppression, rebelled against the government, the last time in the early 1970s. This conflict resulted in their acknowledged status as an indigenous population and a certain protection of their territory, language, and traditional trade, reindeer herding, together with a degree of self-government (cf. Eidheim, 1971, 1992; Erke and Høgmo, 1986; Høgmo, 1986). The conflict between the Sami and the Norwegian government did, in my opinion, teach the Norwegian authorities and the Norwegian people a lesson that has influenced minority and migration politics since. At the same time as the Sami conflict evolved in the 1970s, Norway turned from being a country of net emigration to a country of immigration (Brochmann, 2003). Of course there has always been immigration to Norway, but during the 1960s with the expansion of the economy, migration of workers mostly from Italy and Spain, from North Africa and South Asia

increased substantially. When the borders were closed to labour migration in 1975, the influx of refugees took off and increased during the 1980s reaching its height in the early 2000s. From 2003 the borders were again opened to controlled labour migration from the EU and at the same time more restricted measures for the admittance of refugees and their families were introduced (Brochmann, 2003). Border control has been a constant preoccupation of Norwegian authorities in periods of “mass migration” as well as in periods of very limited migration. This is interesting as the migration to Norway always has been quite modest compared, for instance, to Sweden (Brochmann, 2003). However, the combination of controlled immigration and equal opportunities has been a leading principle of the Norwegian policy after the Second World War as Norway developed its welfare state, and has legitimated the authorities’ vigilance on immigration control. As the Norwegian welfare system developed and access to welfare benefits became a right to all legal inhabitants, Norway became an attractive destination for foreigners and the authorities increasingly wanted to control access to the country. But as the figures demonstrate, the immigrant population increased substantially after the late 1980s in spite of border control, mainly due to quite a liberal policy with regard to reuniting immigrants with their families.

The Norwegian minority policy after the Sami conflict may be described as ambivalent multiculturalism. As Nederveen Pieterse (2001) argues multiculturalism is, however, a slippery concept, that refers both to the ongoing flux of cultural identities and to political organisational arrangements. Multiculturalism, in this case, refers to a political process of renegotiation of power relations, where collective identities other than the majority identities are recognised, legitimated and supported by the state (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 393). In Norway, the basis of migration policies has been an ideology of equality, governance and welfare. New citizens are included into the welfare state and expected to exchange this inclusion with adherence to the Norwegian language, ideology of equality and with entrance into the labour force. Inclusion by equality is managed by different kinds of state interventions and compensatory measures, and by continuous public discourse on the rights and obligations of migrants, and public and popular demands for moral, cultural and religious “sameness” that many immigrants have experienced as assimilatory. To promote religious and political freedom and to support collective identities, the state also contributes to the immigrants’ ethnic and religious organisations. This dual approach of regulation, prescription and measures tailored towards individual integration, and support for organisations and thus for collective integration, mirrors an inherent contradiction of multiculturalism. Many critics have noted that

multiculturalism is a political strategy for recognition and protection of cultural groups that are threatened by state hegemony, but these strategies are always running the risk of cementing cultural identities and legitimising internal domination in cultural groups (Banting and Kymlicka, 2006; Nederveen Pieterse, 2001; Willett, 1998). In Norway, the inherent dilemma of multiculturalism policies, between collective and individual rights and obligations, has been handled by what I see as a form of double bind: “you may be a Pakistani, but not too much and not for too long and always only secondary to being a Norwegian”. But what it means to be a Pakistani or a Norwegian, and what “too much Pakistaniness for too long” means is vague and shifting. This complex system of ideologies and ideals, political strategies and measures that all aim at combining different aspects of equality as sameness (Gullestad, 1985) with the recognition of cultural differences is what I term ambivalent multiculturalism. I will come back to this theme later in this paper.

The integration discourse has however never been static, but has changed slowly from a focus on how immigrants should adapt to Norwegian society, and its values and practices, to view integration as a relational process that also demands changes in Norwegian society such as “culture sensitive” welfare services to ensure equal access to all citizens (Kjeldstadli, 2003). Arising from courses to help immigrants to adapt, the authorities have, during the last years, demanded that public services adjust their procedures and attitudes to service a multicultural population. But at the same time it seems that the public focus on culture has changed from a positive idea of culture as “something” that should be protected, to culture as a problem, because it hinders loyalty to “the Norwegian way of life”. The media coverage of immigration and immigrants, as well as the general public discourse, has been based on the implicit perception of an inherent dichotomy between social cohesion and immigration, and the inherent dilemma of multiculturalism manifested as a dichotomy between individual and collective rights has only seldom been discussed explicitly. This dilemma is mainly expressed in terms of discussions about the immigrants’ violation of cultural codes, such as, food traditions, women’s veiling, child-rearing practices, and violations of human rights such as female circumcision and forced marriages. The press has played a central role in this discourse of “foreigners as problems”. Simultaneously, parts of the press have always been critical to any strengthening of migration control and stigmatisation of immigrants. The current media coverage of the “multicultural Norway” is increasingly sensitive to any explicit stigmatisation of immigrants, in line with multicultural tendencies of integration rhetoric and policies, but it continues, nonetheless, to promote a view of immigrants and culture as inherently problematic.

There is, however, a substantial opposition, albeit ambivalent, to these multiculturalist perspectives. The far right party Progress Part (*Fremskrittspartiet*) has always opposed the hegemonic ideology on migration. This party has many agendas, but it is in the field of immigration that their rhetoric and policy represents the most explicit opposition to all other parties. This party has, however, been growing constantly in the last decade, while the other parties have been losing voters to them, a tendency that has pressed the political establishment towards more restrictions in many fields (see a similar situation in the Netherlands and in France). The combination of the state's ambivalent multicultural minority policy, the far right party's hostile propaganda and the media's preoccupation with immigration as a threat to social cohesion, has formed a public opinion of migrants as welcome as long as they are not too many and as long as they become Norwegian, but dangerous if some imagined limit is crossed and if they retain "too much" of their social and cultural particularism. After the 11 September 2001 the focus on Muslims as threats has of course been a preoccupation all over Europe, but anti-Muslim sentiments were rather slow to develop in Norway¹.

The demographic history of Norway has not given us great opportunities for learning how to handle culturally heterogeneous communities and my point here is that our homogeneous past has developed a certain attitude towards foreigners and foreign ways that has hindered the development of an explicit multiculturalist policy. Although equal opportunities through work and welfare for all has been, and is, a fundamental right for all living in Norway, it has taken a long time for public services to internalise ideas of cultural difference as a fundamental right as well. Even if there has been a slight shift in the government's integration policies towards an understanding of integration as a relational process where both parties need to be accommodated, the idea that Norwegianness is superior to most other ways of life, values and practices is still present and may limit minorities' equal access to public services and to the labour market. This is a tension that governs the relationship between minority communities and the majority. In a discussion I had about integration of migrants with a teacher working at a learning centre for immigrants in 2003, he expressed his monocultural world view in this way: "Don't you find it strange that people that have lived in Norway for 20 and 30 years still insist on being Muslims?"

But as we shall see, many initiatives also by government institutions have been taken at the same time, to bridge what is seen as the divide between Muslims and Christians and these long-standing processes may have counteracted and downplayed possible conflicts.

¹ Anti-Muslim sentiments have increased in recent years in part due to the prophet Muhammad controversy.

Inter-religious contact and dialogue

Since the early 1980s contact and communication between leaders of Christian and Muslim congregations in Norway has been established and this led to the first inter-religious congress “Norway as a multicultural society” in 1988. The first institutionalised forum for inter-religious dialogues were established with the Emmaus Centre for Dialogue and Spirituality in 1991. Oddbjørn Leirvik,² one of the founding fathers of the inter-religious dialogue in Norway, wrote that this process continued with the establishment of the National Christian-Muslim Contact Group of the Churches and the Islamic Council in Norway [*Kontaktgruppa for Mellomkyrkjeleg Råd og Islamsk Råd*] in 1993 and eventually with the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities [*Samarbeidsrådet for tros- og livssynssamfunn*] in 1996, and the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief [*Oslokoalisjonen for tros- og livssynsfrihet*] in 1998 (Leirvik, 2006). After the events of 11 September, and the consequent action in Afghanistan the next month, a letter was sent from the secretary general of the Contact Group of the Churches and the Islamic Council in co-operation with the largest Pakistani mosque in Oslo, in which the prime minister and leader of the Christian Democratic Party (*Kristelig folkeparti*), Kjell Magne Bondevik, was criticised for impetuously supporting the American bombing. When the war against Iraq began in 2003 the reaction in Norway was relatively united in the face of a much more troubled international picture. Together with countries like France and Italy, the Norwegian government refused to join the nations that wanted to go to war and Prime Minister Bondevik initiated a meeting with Christians, Muslims and other religious leaders where he underlined that God is with those that suffer, and opposed Saddam Hussein’s and George W. Bush’s efforts to exploit God as support for their war. Christians and Muslims gathered in a mosque in common prayers for peace (Leirvik, 2003). Norway did, nonetheless, eventually engage in the Iraq war by sending officers that trained the Iraqi police force and the so-called humanitarian personnel. It is important that government-supported, institutionalised inter-religious co-operation was established long before the Muhammad controversy took off. This made it possible for the Muslim and Christian leaders to co-operate

² Oddbjørn Leirvik is a professor of inter-religious studies at the Department of Theology, University of Oslo. He is one of the leading theologians of inter-religious dialogue in Norway and played a prominent role in establishing the inter-religious organisations and fora that were important for the constructive development and handling of the Prophet Muhammad controversy in Norway.

from the very beginning of the caricature controversy. Shortly after the cartoons were published in the Norwegian newspaper *Magazinet*, the contact group met and developed the basis for a joint statement that a broad range of Christian and Muslim leaders later made public on 3 February 2006 (Leirvik, 2006).

The Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* and the Prophet Muhammad controversy

In 2005 immigrants made up 8.9 per cent of the Danish population and about 180,000 were Muslims (Hedetoft, 2006; Bureau of Democracy, n.d). The Danish prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, a leader of the Liberal Party (*Venstre*), and a head of a right-wing coalition with the Conservative People's Party (*Det Konservative Folkeparti*), had just won his second term in office in 2005. This government had taken several measures to tighten migration control and integration policy, and sentiments critical of Muslims had been rising also spurred by the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands the previous year (Hylland Eriksen, 2007). On 30 September 2005 the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* commissioned and published 12 drawings of the Prophet Muhammad where he, among other things, was portrayed as a terrorist. The drawings were commissioned by the editor who, allegedly annoyed by several artist who had refused to make drawings of the prophet for a children's book, had invited the best newspaper artists in Denmark to draw caricatures of the Prophet "to find out how far the self-imposed censorship had reached" (Hylland Eriksen, 2007: 177). *Jyllands-Posten* is one of Denmark's largest and most influential newspapers with an explicit migration-critical readership profile, and represented a broad Islam-critical trend among intellectuals and politicians (Leirvik, 2006a). The caricatures raised anger and frustration among Danish Muslims, who sent a petition to Muslim ambassadors, and on 12 October 2005 the Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen was invited to meet with eleven diplomats of Muslim-majority countries in order to discuss what they saw as a general antagonistic campaign against Islam and Muslims in Danish media and politics. The prime minister rejected the invitation in a letter to the ambassador of Egypt stating that that freedom of the press is a fundamental principle in Denmark and that therefore he was not able to influence the press. He also stated that blasphemous expressions were prohibited by law and that the offended might bring the case to court (Kunelius et al. 2007). The Egyptian ambassador's written reply stated that

the intent was not to prosecute *Jyllands-Posten*, but that they wanted "...an official Danish statement underlining the need for and the obligation of respecting all religions and resisting from offending their devotees to prevent an escalation which would have serious and far-reaching consequences" (Egypten gav, 2006).

The Egyptian ambassador played a leading role in the diffusion of the drawings in the Muslim world, and Rasmussen and the Danish government were criticised by the Danish political opposition, by the former minister of foreign affairs and by a number of Danish ex-ambassadors. By refusing to meet the ambassadors and to give any kind of apology to the Muslim leaders, Rasmussen demonstrated that he did not regard the incident as a problem to the government. However, Rasmussen was proved to be very much incorrect. In October 2005 a Muslim organisation in Denmark filed a complaint with the police, claiming that *Jyllands-Posten* had violated the Danish criminal code concerning blasphemy and libel. The public prosecutor rejected these claims on the grounds that he found no basis for the complaints. Frustrated with this development two imams, granted sanctuary in Denmark, created a dossier containing several letters from Muslim organisations in Denmark complaining about the public treatment of Muslims, together with a sampling of offending anti-Muslim drawings and texts, among them drawings that had nothing to do with the current conflict, or with Muslims at all.³ The imams then travelled widely in the Muslim world circulating the dossier to influential Muslim leaders. On 6 December 2005 the dossier was presented to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). The OIC demanded that the United Nations impose sanctions upon Denmark (IslamOnline, 2006).

In January 2006 the first Arabic boycott of Danish goods was under way and the same day Danish flags were burned in Gaza. It was not to be the last time. Only after great pressure from the opposition, and not until mid-February 2006, did the Danish prime minister A.F. Rasmussen officially apologise for the offence that the cartoons had caused in the Muslim world: regretting the wounded feelings of many Muslims, but still repeating the newspaper's right to publish the drawings. A fortnight later *Jyllands-Posten* published several letters of apology on its web site, one of them in English, "In our opinion, the 12 drawings were sober. They were not intended to be offensive, nor were they at variance with Danish law, but they have indisputably offended many Muslims for which we apologise".

³ One picture was taken from a report in a French newspaper from a local pig festival, but presented in the dossier as yet another caricature of the prophet.

A longer apology from the editor-in-chief Carsten Juste in Arabic was also issued on the *Jyllands-Posten* home page on 30 January 2006. The editor underlined that the newspaper had established dialogues with Muslim leaders and Muslims in Denmark to try to establish peaceful co-operation on the issue (Selbekk, 2006).

The riots, however, continued and in September 2006 BBC News reported that the Muslim boycott of Danish goods had reduced Denmark's export by 15 per cent between February and June (BBC News, 2006). In addition, the Muslim reactions had caused 139 deaths in Muslim countries mostly by police firing on demonstrating crowds and the cost to Danish business was around €134 million (BBC News, 2006).

The conflict developed as a scismogenetic process (Bateson, 2000) where the spiral of incidents escalated on both sides and were self-confirming and symmetrical, based on their own logics and dynamics, without any intermediary agent. The inter-religious dialogues that had been going on for a long time in Denmark, as in Norway, were not employed as a controlling mechanism to bring the two sides in communication with each other. One important difference between the Norwegian and the Danish situation being that the Danish dialogue had not been institutionalised among the religious leadership and the government, a fact that may have limited its power to interfere. Another interpretation being that none of the parties wished to communicate as the conflict was in response to long-felt frustrations on both sides. Polls taken during the conflict showed that a large majority of Danes supported the publishing of the caricatures (Selbekk, 2006).

The Norwegian newspaper *Magazinet* and the controversy

On 10 January 2006 the small, relatively unknown Norwegian newspaper *Magazinet*, with a charismatic Christian readership profile, published the same pictures under the pretext of freedom of speech. The reactions were rather slow, but unexpected. Previously in that month, and before the international pressure towards Norway was significant, the Department of Foreign Affairs sent a list of arguments about the publication to its ambassadors in the Middle East to prepare them for discussions with authorities and religious leaders. These arguments expressed regret about the emotions that publication of the drawings had caused among Muslims, an appreciation that the drawings were viewed as disrespectful and that they contributed to create distrust and cause unnecessary conflict. It was also underlined, however, that the freedom of speech and the press is a

fundamental right in Norwegian society, but that legislation also limits hateful utterances and slander. This last phrase was strongly criticised by a member of the opposition who argued that the Foreign Ministry should have expressed a stronger concern about defending freedom of press than it had done regarding respect towards religious feelings. The reaction to the publication increased in strength and on 7 February 2006 the Norwegian force in Afghanistan was attacked in its base by furious demonstrators, six Norwegian soldiers and eighteen Afghans were injured while four demonstrators were killed. Shortly after this attack, several Norwegian embassies were attacked by angry demonstrators and the embassy in Damascus was burnt to the ground.

The following day, on 8 February 2006 the prime minister, Jens Stoltenberg, gave a statement about the situation to the Storting (Norwegian National Assembly). Here, he underlined the seriousness of the political situation both abroad and in Norway; that a multicultural society needs to develop respect for different values and that anti-Norwegian sentiment in Muslim countries was not to be interpreted as the general sentiment of Muslims. He emphasised that violent attacks are under no circumstances acceptable and that Norway would take the necessary measures to protect its citizens and properties. He then confirmed that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right; is established by the Norwegian constitution and is an important condition for religious freedom. He continued that freedom of speech is a right and not an obligation: "We all have the responsibility to take other peoples feelings into consideration when we express ourselves. Not least do we need to consider other people's beliefs and religions. The Muhammed caricatures have wounded the feelings of many Muslims"⁴ (Statsministerens Redegjørelse, 2006). He added that expressing regret for publication of the drawings is not to restrict freedom of speech, but to engage in the debate that is the main purpose of an unrestricted argument and freedom of expression.

On one of the first days of February, Foreign Minister Gahr Støre and Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg appeared independently on national television and declared that they lamented that the publication of the cartoons had upset Muslims, that they regretted the publication had occurred, but that freedom of press is a constitutional right and that the government could and would not interfere in the media⁵. During the Friday prayer, on the same day, Norwegian imams urged the congregation to self-restraint. Some days later the foreign minister, Gahr Støre, also had a meeting with

⁴ Author's translation from Norwegian.

⁵ It has not been possible to source the precise text of these broadcast comments.

the Islamic Council, the major Norwegian-Islamic umbrella organisation, and it promised to use its contacts to support the Norwegian government's case. As the uproar spread the government supported a delegation of Muslim and Christian leaders that had been prominent members of the inter-religious dialogue to meet the leader of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, Yusuf al Qaradawi, to present the official Norwegian stance on this conflict. After this declaration the Islamic Council in Norway declared that the planned next day demonstration against the drawings was cancelled and those who decided to participate were not true Muslims. Still, the demonstration gathered between one and two thousand people, but it was peaceful. In contrast to the poll in Denmark, a similar poll showed that 45 per cent of the Norwegian population thought that the caricatures should not have been published. Like the Danish people a majority supported their government (Selbekk, 2006).

A global process of religious integration

A global process of religious integration is one of the unintended consequences of economic globalisation. Norbert Elias's ideas of the civilising process vision which proposed that global social development leads to a constantly increasing social, economic and mental interdependence of all human groups, but that one expression of this process is the struggle for global supremacy that may lead to either war and disintegration or to integration (Elias, 2001: 227). Elias further states that one curious aspect of this process of global integration is that the *we-identity* of most people lags behind the reality of integration already achieved: "The we-image trails far behind the reality of global interdependence, which includes the possibility that the common living space will be destroyed by particular groups" (Elias, 2001: 227). Elias's point is that the "we-feeling" necessary for global consciousness is not developed or only developed in a very abstract sense and that politicians, as well as the media, who to a large extent influence people's opinions, identities and everyday lives, are mostly interested in understanding and governing their personal nation states. Lately, and after Elias's time, the preoccupation with global warming has confirmed Elias's insistence of all peoples "being in the same boat", a consciousness shared by most politicians and people in general, but as soon as the nation state appears to be threatened, as now with the financial crisis, it is this rather narrow "we-identity", that is given priority, even though the financial crisis more than any other crisis expresses our global interdependence as humans. Not only are we growing increasingly interdependent in solving the

ecological and economical problems that the earth faces, as people from distant places increasingly share the same living spaces and are presented with each others' values, practices and religious beliefs, we become increasingly interdependent socially and culturally. Religious integration is thus a consequence of social integration. This rapid religious integration is taking place foremost in Europe and the US and other migration destination areas, but it has, as we have seen, worldwide implications. By religious integration, I mean the increasing dialogue and influence between local interpretations and practices of religious texts and dogmas, as well as, between world religions. In Europe, the religious integration of Christians and Muslims in secular, as well as non-secular, states has been in the forefront of the public awareness. These are the most numerous and perhaps most comparable of the world religions and important political interests are anchored on a division of the Muslim and the Christian world. This sharing of the same living space between Muslims and Christians in secular, as well as in Christian states like Norway, challenges the religious and cultural hegemony of most nation states, the universal regulations that these states have agreed upon and thus the state as a core source of loyalty for the population. The merging of different religions, world views and practices may develop a common habitus of pluralism and peaceful coexistence, but also different and conflictual religious and cultural habitus that compete with and challenge each other.

Islam is, for reasons I have previously mentioned, seen as the major challenge not only to Christianity, but to democracy and individual freedom and equality. Thus Islam has taken on the emblematic nature of the religious enemy, although religious values and practices in Hinduism and Buddhism as well as several Christian faiths are just as contrary to many of the core western democratic values. The influx of Polish migrants to the Catholic Church in Norway is one example of local interpretations and practices that meet and must adapt to each other. But also Islam is going through a process of religious integration among Muslims that colour their relation to the majorities where they live. Muslims from different parts of the world, of all creeds and with different national interpretations and practices of their religion are merged together in Europe and other migration regions. This process of integration is also full of conflicts and set backs, but there are signs that a European Islam and a European-Islamic habitus is emerging. Although their position is much debated, religious scholars like the Swiss academic Tarique Ramadan who is advocating a new European Islam, the leader of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, Ysuf al Qaradawi, who advocates a development of democratic Islam are, together with the emerging co-operation between European governments and Mosques in the

education of imams and the proliferation of initiatives for secular–religious dialogues and inter-religious dialogues, all signs of emerging co-operation and communication between the state and religious institutions, and between religious leaders of all faiths. The Muhammad controversy must be understood as an instance of the process of integration between Christianity or secularism and Islam, with Islamic integration as a backdrop.

It is as an instance of the historical integration of religious, cultural and political configurations that have developed, if not in isolation then at least in relatively independent political entities, that we must understand the controversy of the Prophet Muhammad drawings. Rather than seeing it as a clash of civilisation, it should be seen as an instance, and possibly a decisive instance, in the formation of a new European social figuration where Muslims are not confined to the margins.

Religious freedom and freedom of speech

One may easily believe that the public debate that followed the controversy was about the conflict between two types of “freedoms” or “rights” that of speech and that of religion. A closer look reveals a more complex picture. As Leivrik (2004: 34) notes “in global inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogues the tension between a liberal accept of difference and a radical engagement for justice has become an urgent challenge”. The public debate that followed the Muhammad caricatures can more interestingly be classified as either defending the right to religious difference and the respect for different sentiments and creeds, or the right to freedom of speech and the battle against what was seen as irrationality in Muslim reactions. Thus the debate structured the tension that Leirvik writes about between a liberal accept of difference and a radical urge for justice and change. This tension again concerns the troubled relationship between individual rights and collective rights. Does the law protect the individual and his or her right to free choice or a religious or cultural group’s right to traditions that may violate individual rights? Religious freedom protects both the individual right to choose religious faith and a religious group’s right to traditions that are not necessarily valued by the majority, like institutionalised inequality between men and women. Freedom of speech is, however, predominantly an individual right.

The fronts of this debate were and are politically unclear and the borders are fuzzy. Human rights activists, sworn secularists, certain feminists and gay activists, together with a group of left wing authors, conservative

liberals and charismatic Christians were the most prominent defenders of an absolute definition of freedom of speech during the conflict. On the critical side we find other representatives for the political left, together with the leader of the Christian Democratic Party, the Labour Party leaders and the traditional Liberal Party, who argued for respect for religious differences and religious feelings. Several representatives of the educated élites among migrants voiced a critique of the political leadership's handling and criticised the government for not defending freedom of speech and for not confronting Muslim leaders more directly, while others again urged for respect for religious feelings and symbols and some even called for the re-implementation of the old law against blasphemy.

Many observers see the ongoing inter-religious communication between Muslim and Christian leaders as the basis and reason for the government's steady dialogic approach to the caricature crisis. As already emphasised, the Norwegian dialogue was institutionalised long before and the government played an important part in it, this made it possible for the political leaders to utilise it as a mediator between themselves and the Muslim leaders in Norway and globally. It is, however, also relevant to point to the political context of the controversy in Denmark and Norway. Norway had just elected a social democratic government coalition, where the socialist party, one of the most explicit parties in favour of immigration, held a firm position. The first government statements promised a more liberal migration policy and talked optimistically about the multicultural society.

An instance of ambivalent multiculturalism?

Since 2006 inter-religious dialogue has continued in Norway. But several voices have questioned whether the Norwegian official apology improved the position of liberal or conservative Muslims, and whether it has contributed to the inter-religious integration in Norway or to sharper divides and a greater distance between Muslims and Christians.

Apart from criticising the government for not explicitly supporting the principle of freedom of speech over that of respect for religious convictions, the government was also criticised for cutting corners in their handling of the controversy. The one major critique that has been presented is the government's alleged scapegoating of the editor-in-chief of *Magazinet*. Critics have pointed to the fact that the caricatures were published in several other more influential journals other than *Magazinet*, but as *Magazinet* represented a marginal part of the Norwegian public, the government chose

to lay the blame there. Several critics have also argued that the apology from Vebjørn Selbekk, the editor-in-chief of *Magazinet*, was a result of strong pressure from the government. The second major critique concerned the visit of the official delegation to the controversial leader of the European Council for Fatwa and Research, Yusuf al Qaradaw, during the conflict. Critics have argued that the government-supported delegation of religious leaders that met with Yusuf al-Qaradawi implicitly supported not only his leadership, but also his undemocratic views of difficult issues, such as the existence of the state of Israel. There are other interesting developments as well. In Denmark, the media announced that 2,000 Danes converted to Islam the following year (not documented) and that the far-right parties appear to have increased their supporters substantially in the following years. The same increase in support of the far right was repeated in Norway, in spite of the fact that the majority of Norwegians supported the government's handling of this crisis (Selbekk, 2006).

So is it reasonable to see the Norwegian official handling as an instance of ambivalent multiculturalism that I have described above as a characteristic of the Norwegian migration policy, or is it reasonable to see it as an instance of good governance? Or, is ambivalent multiculturalism a reasonable basis for good governance? This question should be discussed in a historical context just as the controversy must be understood in its long historical framework. From a rather monocultural history and perhaps most importantly a mono-religious history where the state and state-religion has played a prominent political role, Norway has in the last 30 years experienced a radical change in its demographic composition and a substantial challenge to its religious and cultural hegemony. During the last 30 years the number of members of Islamic congregations has increased from about 1,006 in 1980 to close to 80,000 in 2007. The number of Muslim-born citizens was estimated at around 150,000 in 2005 (Leivrik, 2006b), a number that generally has increased since then. This makes Islam the largest minority religion in Norway. And, as already discussed briefly, these Muslims have come from countries with different interpretations and practices of Islam, which has made it difficult for the government to consider and treat them as one group, as it has made it difficult for the Muslims themselves to act as one group towards the government. As we see from the development of inter-religious dialogues, the communication between religious leaders has, however, developed in accordance with the increase of Muslims from 1983. This fact, together with the fact that the Norwegian constitution is based in Christianity and that the Church of Norway is the official religion of the state, may have been decisive for the initiatives, but most prominently for

the institutionalisation of inter-religious dialogues. On the one hand the state church formation has been a challenge to Muslims due to, for instance, the Christian education in kindergartens and schools, on the other hand, this religious foundation of the state may have created a basic respect for faith in general among the Norwegian leadership.

And the religious controversies in Norway are not only between Christianity and other religions or internally among Muslims, there is an increasing plurality also among Christians in Norway, among these is what sometimes is termed “the new Christian right” (Leirvik, 2006a: 17). Parts of this movement has expressed much of the same attitudes towards Muslims as the Progress Party (*Fremskrittpartiet*) and in 2004 their leader was invited to speak to an congregation called the Living word (*Levende ord*) where he made strong accusations towards the Prophet Muhammad. This congregation has strong affiliations to the journal *Magazinet* and its editor-in-chief (Leirvik, 2006a). Leirvik (2006a) argues that the caricature controversy also was an expression of the political competition between the established state Church with its established policy of inter-religious dialogue and the religious opposition represented by *Magazinet* with its strategy of religious confrontation. Thus the controversy was about more than the freedom of religion and speech and of individual and collective rights, it can also be seen as an expression of the religious-political conflict between a consensus – seeking social-democratic government – and a more conflict-seeking political religious right.

In this light, the government’s management of the controversy was the only possible approach to protect its inter-religious process and confirm its legitimation in the Muslim and general immigrant population and at the same time take an active stand against the more conflict-seeking elements in Norwegian politics. The government’s management was also in line with the recent emphasis on integration as a relational process where all parties must adjust. Leirvik (2006a) further states that the controversy made it clear that Norwegian Muslims have become a powerful minority – one which may stand together if necessary – and that the Norwegian government must take this grouping seriously. I would suggest seeing the political management of the controversy as an example of emerging multiculturalist praxis both between the Norwegian and the Muslim leadership. The government signalled by its management of the crisis that immigrants and minorities are considered first of all as Norwegians and then as Muslims, citizens with different interests that demand equal respect, just like the Muslim leaders signalled that their Norwegian citizenship is as important to them as their religious “citizenship”.

The civilising process is, however, as Elias (2001) underlines, not without its conflicts, its setbacks and decivilising clashes. Some, among secularists, Christians and Muslims still hold that either freedom of speech or freedom of religion was violated by the consensus policies of the leadership and that the handling of the controversy is an example of ambivalent multiculturalism. In my own view, the leadership on both sides demonstrated that compromises constitute the art of the possible in a multicultural society. The Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1991) has argued that living with indeterminacy is necessary in a post-modern social situation, where “strangers” live close together. The fear of ambivalence and the faith in order and strict categorisations was the mark of the era of assimilation; the modernist era. Bauman argues that ambivalence is the only viable position in a situation where strangers can neither be killed, chased nor transformed, but where living with and respecting difference is the only constructive way (1991: 201). Elias’s theory of social integration as a historical, but non-linear, process parallels Bauman’s thoughts in several ways. Elias saw man as inherently social and inherently dependent of other humans. The civilising process was, in his view, in many ways a realisation of this interdependence of men. But the interdependence that Elias saw was not one achieved through assimilation or the creation of sameness, but rather created through interdependence dialogues that would diminish dividing differences and increase a society’s internal variation (Elias, 2001). This is how, I believe, we may imagine a multicultural society, not one based on sameness and the absence of conflict, but one based on conflicts that can be handled because the dividing differences are exchanged for some overarching agreements, and on the respect for variation and acceptable difference. It is in this line of argument that I consider a certain ambivalence necessary for good governance in a multicultural society (Bauman, 1991).

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Geras valdymas? Diskusija dėl pranašo Mahometo karikatūrų ir Norvegijos atsakas

Ada I. Engebrigtsen

NORWEGIAN SOCIAL RESEARCH, NOVA

S A N T R A U K A : Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas Norvegijos vyriausybės atsakas į krizę, kilusią tarp Vakarų ir musulmoniškųjų valstybių po to, kai 2005 ir 2006 m. Danijos ir Norvegijos laikraščiuose buvo išspausdintos pranašo Mahometo karikatūros. Šių dviejų šalių reakcijos į krizę buvo skirtingos – Danijos vyriausybė atsisakė bendradarbiauti su vietiniais musulmonų lyderiais, prašančiais oficialaus valdžios atsiprašymo, tuo tarpu Norvegijos vyriausybė netrukus po vietinio laikraščio sprendimo perspausdinti karikatūras atsiprašė musulmonų, tuo pat metu akcentuodama kalbos ir spaudos laisves kaip pamatines demokratinės valstybės vertybes. Tokios šalių reakcijos turėtų būti suprastos skirtingų politinių situacijų dviejose valstybėse kontekste. Krizė, kilusi po karikatūrų išspausdinimo, straipsnyje analizuojama kaip ilgalaikio religinės integracijos proceso, vykstančio Vakarų šalyse, pavyzdys, remiantis Norbert Elias ir kitų autorių darbais. Autorė Norvegijos vyriausybės atsaką į kilusią krizę vertina kaip ambivalentišką, teigdama, kad tokia reakcija yra gero valdymo daugiakultūroje visuomenėje pavyzdys.

P a g r i n d i n i a i ž o d ž i a i : VALDYMAS, DISKUSIJA, AMBIVALENTIŠKUMAS, RELIGIJA, MUSULMONAI, INTEGRACIJA.