

*The Satanic Verses*

and the

Danish Cartoons:

*“Muhammad’s Face”*

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## Introduction

The novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988-1989) the *Danish cartoons* entitled "*Muhammad's Face*" (2005-2006) both sparked off simultaneous protests around the globe. In the name of both these pieces of work death (and the threat of), destruction, vilification and diplomatic crises arose. This dissertation juxtaposes the reactions to the novel *The Satanic Verses* and the *Danish cartoons*. The focus of this comparison is on the Muslim populations in the non-Muslim polities of Britain, for *The Satanic Verses*, and Denmark, for the *cartoons*, and also an overview to the international reaction, especially that by the Muslim world that occurred. The comparative analysis provided by this paper claims that the predominate explanations that occurred in elucidating the reactions, with regards to the novel and cartoon were false. The main arguments that this paper wishes to refute are: the theory "Clash of Civilisations" (Huntington: 1993) that outlines two inimical cultures which are perceived to have clashed during these two events; A lack of understanding by Muslims that freedom of speech is an inflexible and foundational value of the "West" and democracy; The inability of some Muslims to reconcile themselves with a civilisation based on secular-liberal democratic values (Mansur: 2006); Comparisons of many Muslim protestors to Nazi's and totalitarian regimes.

All these arguments do not give an accurate account of the reactions that occurred and miss the underlying structure that produced the conflict both in Britain and Denmark and also internationally. This paper will argue, with regard to Britain and Denmark, it was sociological issues such as high unemployment, discrimination and highly isolated and frustrated communities that were the primary factors that caused the reaction to become intelligible. The international reaction, which will only be looked at briefly in both cases, was due also to sociological conditions and the rise in religiopolitics. Each political grouping, which reacted in the name of either controversy, did so overwhelmingly to space specific pressures and motives.

The comparative analysis is split into three sections: The first section describes and analyses what became known as the “Rushdie Affair<sup>1</sup>.” This chapter outlines the background of the author, Salman Rushdie, and the basis for the protests that it precipitated. The analysis reviews the political and social environment in India where the protest began and how it spread and took root in Britain. The analysis shows that by placing the reaction into the sociological situation of the eclectic Muslim population in Britain, the response to *The Satanic Verses* can be understood. The international reaction to events in India and Britain are reviewed contemplating how this reaction is reignited in India, Pakistan and Iran. In this section the national and international politics of these countries are reviewed looking at how and why various governments and political groups used the “Rushdie Affair” to achieve specific national, regional and international political goals. Finally the chapter reverts back to Britain to show how these international events had a deeply aversive effect on the situation of the protest in Britain and for the various British Muslims themselves.

The *Danish cartoons* will be analysed in a comparable way to that of the “Rushdie Affair.” This chapter looks into the background of the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, which published the cartoons of the prophet Muhammad, and the reasons that were given for publication. The reasons given by members of the Danish Muslim community as to why they found some of the cartoons particularly offensive are laid out and the defence given by the cartoonists. Then similar to the analysis of the “Rushdie Affair” a sociological summary of the Muslim community in Denmark is given. This section, as with the review of the “Rushdie Affair”, argues the point that to understand the reaction to the cartoons, and the reason why the newspaper that published them did so, you have to place them in the context of the sociological condition of Muslims in Denmark. With specific reference to the *Danish cartoons* this section also shows that the media

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<sup>1</sup> After the author of *The Satanic Verses* Salman Rushdie and the global reactions that occurred in apparent response to the novel.

had a particularly prominent role in the rise of the far right and strong anti-immigration and discriminatory policies that have been adopted by the Danish government, directly aimed at the Muslim community. Therefore, the publication of the *cartoons* in the media, and particularly *Jyllands-Posten*, gives the *cartoons* a particular historical context. Thus, through this local context it is argued it also becomes intelligible, regardless if it was a (in)correct decision, as to why some members of the Danish Muslim community felt that they had to go to Egypt to carry on the protest. The analysis of the international reaction is reviewed centring on Egypt and Saudi Arabia but also the global spread of violence that occurred under the banner the *Danish cartoons*. As in the “Rushdie Affair” it is argued that various political groups and governments used the *Danish Cartoons* to achieve specific national, regional and international goals within each nation state.

The final section is an analysis of the result of juxtaposing the “Rushdie Affair” and the *Danish Cartoons*. This section argues that the escalation of both these crises was because of the marginalisation of the respective Muslim communities in Britain and Denmark. The refusal by both the British and Danish government to protect a besieged minority and the refusal of both societies to allow the Muslim community to construct a self-determined national identity is what lay at the heart of both these crises in the context of the Danish and British polities. A comparative analysis of the international reactions shows that the responses to both the crises were rooted in politics at various levels and thus were place specific. Therefore the reactions are not intelligible to the meta theories of a “Clash of Civilisations,” different cultural understandings of freedom of speech or by comparing the Muslim reaction to that of totalitarian or Nazi movements. Instead it is argued that in both crises local sociological conditions and place specific national, regional and international politics were paramount in allowing the protest to become comprehensible.

## The “Rushdie Affair”: *The Satanic Verses*

Salman Rushdie

“Before the Partition massacres of 1947, my parents left Delhi and moved South, correctly calculating that there would be less trouble in secular, cosmopolitan Bombay. As a result I grew up in that tolerant, broad-minded city whose particular quality – call it freedom – I’ve been trying to capture and celebrate ever since”

(Rushdie: 2002: p.195).

Salman Rushdie was born on June 19<sup>th</sup> 1947 in Bombay, eight weeks before India’s independence, to a Muslim family that spoke both English and Urdu at home. He started his education at a Cathedral school in Bombay and left India for the first time to go to English boarding school, Rugby in 1961. From Rugby he then moved to Kings College Cambridge where he obtained a degree in History, in which he studied Islamic history in detail. In 1975 Rushdie published his first public novel *Grimus* and this was his first open attempt at exploring ideas of personal and national identity, the legacy of colonialism and the problems of exile (Cundy in Bloom: 2002: p.23). In 1981 Rushdie won the coveted Booker Prize (and later the prize for the best of 25 years of Bookers) with *Midnight’s Children*. This book was a watershed in the post-independence development of the English-Indian novel and celebrates the tension between personal and national identity, playing up and with both their polarity and their unity (Rege in Bloom: 2002: p.145). The protagonists in *Midnight’s Children* were routinely faced with and forced to embody drastic, impossible choices: self or nation, loyalty or betrayal, modernity or tradition (Ibid: p.153). When Rushdie toured India to publicise the book in 1983 it was to a “triumphal homecoming” and hundreds of people flocked to see him (ibid: p.146). In this same year Rushdie would start on his next novel *The Satanic Verses*:

“In 1988 I was planning to buy myself an Indian base with the advances I’d received for my novel. But that novel was *The Satanic Verses*, and after it was published the world changed for me, and I was no longer able to set foot in the country...”

(Rushdie: 2002: pp.195-196)

### *The Satanic Verses*

There are many narratives that run through the novel but the focus of the book is migration. In particular how transformations affect the migrant who leaves his homeland with its familiar reference points and cultural certainties, to find himself in a game where the rules are different and all the markers have been changed (Ruthven in Appignanesi and Mailland: 1989: p.21). Translation is a central concern. As Fischer and Abedi (1990) further explain, this is not simply translation across languages or cultural borders but among interest groups and discourses competing for hegemony within social arenas be they local, national or transnational (p.108). The novel also continues the themes found in his other novels of personal identity, the legacy of colonialism and problems of exile.

The main complaints made of *The Satanic Verses* that appeared as the basis for what would become known as the “Rushdie Affair” were as follows: The first is the use of the name Mahound, a negative Christian term for the prophet Muhammad (ibid: p.124). The offences caused within the story of the book are the two chapters entitled “Jahilia” and “Return to Jahilia.” Within these two chapters there are three main areas that constitute the most controversial moments. The first highly controversial scene is the so called “Satanic Affair” when a revelation to Mahound tells him to accept the peace deal offered to him by the Jahilian Grandee. This would mean however that Mahound would have to accept the Jahilian goddesses as minor deities in the new religion<sup>2</sup>. Mahound

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<sup>2</sup> Implying there was more than one God.

would later claim that the revelation was the work of Satan<sup>3</sup>, once Hind the Grandee's wife withdrew her husbands offer (Mufti: 1991: pp.102-103). The second incident is Salman the Persian scribe who alters the verses of the revelation as they are dictated to him by the illiterate Mahound (ibid: p.103). Finally, the last and most controversial aspect of the book is the whorehouse scene, in which the prostitutes take on the name of Mahound's wives to heighten the excitement and pleasure of their customers (ibid).

Despite the huge reactions which these various passages caused, Fischer and Abedi claim: "There is nothing in the novel that is not explicitly grounded in the Hadith literature" (ibid). They go on to state that it is only the brothel scene that can be said to be a Rushdie invention (ibid). However, even this invention in its outer form can be "psychologically registered in the Qur'an" (ibid). Despite the defence by some that Rushdie's work was a sincere effort to think through the psychology of both the early days of Islam and more specifically the psychology of Muslim immigrants living in the West (ibid: p.130) the use of deliberately sexual imagery combined with Islam was antagonistic to sections of the Muslim community. Nonetheless, as Piscatori (1990) states, no matter how gratuitous and offensive Rushdie has been, he belongs to a prominent tendency in modern Islam (p.778). Therefore the speculations engaged in by Rushdie were not his invention (Fischer and Abedi: 1990: p.150). Rushdie questions the bona fides and exclusivity of the established religious authority and proposes new arbiters of community opinion (Mufti: 1991: p.104). This would create a deeply transgressive force in the contemporary political atmosphere of Pakistan and India, where the battle for the authority to speak for various communal groups was particularly intense. *The Satanic Verses* mounted a serious literary challenge in recent years to the legitimacy of certain brands of Islamic (ibid) and communal politics.

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<sup>3</sup> Labelled the Satanic Verses

## The Protest

The “Rushdie Affair” began when *India Today and India Sunday* published featured interviews with Rushdie, in mid-September 1988, publicising his new novel. Both reports caught the eye of Syed Shahabuddin, a member of the opposition Janata parliamentary party in India, who called for an invocation of the constitutional laws that protect religious feelings of Indian citizens and thus an immediate ban of the book. This was quickly accepted by Rajiv Ghandi’s government on October 5<sup>th</sup> 1988, soon after the book was published in Britain (Appignanesi and Mailland: 1989: p.36). The reason for this quick acceptance was, with a general election a year away, Ghandi’s increasingly unpopular Congress Party decided it could not afford to risk losing the votes of India’s 100million Muslims<sup>4</sup> (ibid: p.36). There was added to this, sensitivity to literature written in English by an Indian Muslim, the language of the non-Muslim former British Raj, which so openly criticised Islam. Further to this was the way in which the critique was formulated. Vilification of the prophet and the Islamic faith has been central as to how the West has expressed hatred towards Islam and this has often led to violence on a large scale (Modood: 2005: p.106). Therefore, there were various political incentives to ban the book, as this act became a simultaneous symbol of protection of Islam and an act of defiance against the West. Subsequently, it would not be long before other countries followed India’s example, especially those with colonial and immigrant connections with Britain. It was no surprise that Pakistan was to follow India’s lead with South Africa, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Qatar and Sudan all banning the book. As such the entwined colonial history present in the reaction to the Satanic Verses meant it surely could not be long until the coloniser would find the “Rushdie Affair” metamorphosing towards its shores.

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<sup>4</sup> Muslim politicians had recently demonstrated that they could mobilize the Muslim vote. Just before the “Rushdie Affair” Muslim politicians had mobilized the Muslim population and had been able to vote against a Supreme Court decision that interfered with Muslim personal law (Van Der Veer: 1994: p.186)

## Muslims in Britain

The expansion of British colonial power over India (and the newly created Pakistan and Bangladesh) was essential in bringing Muslims to Britain. However, it would be post-World War Two, in the period of terminal decline of the British Empire, which would bring the bulk of Muslims to Britain. These predominately economic migrants fed the increased hunger of the British manufacturing industry. Subsequently, it is this period that is most frequently referred to as the start of Muslim migration to Britain. In 1950, Vertovec (1996) states, there were 23,000 Muslims this would increase to 1.4million by 1991 (1991 Census<sup>5</sup>), making up roughly 2.7% of the British population.

As the majority of the immigrants to Britain were former colonial subjects they would have a distinct advantage over those immigrants who were not. They were eligible for citizenship of the host nation, often had some form of education in the language of the receiving country, and were slightly more familiar with values, norms, and practices of the postcolonial centers (Buijs and Rath: 2002: p.6). The 2001 census states that 74% or 1.2Million British Muslims are from an Asia background with 43% being Pakistani, 16% Bangladeshi, 8% Indian and 6% from other Asian groups. Of all the ethnic groups of British Muslims Pakistanis are the least likely to be found in the South East of England and are mainly from the North and Midlands. Subsequently, Pakistani British Muslims suffered the most from the factory closures that occurred in the 1970s post-Fordist era and benefited least from the economic growth of the early 1980s. Bradford was one of the worst hit and in a pattern that replicated itself in much of Britain's cities: 'White flight' occurred. This was the ability of the white population to take advantage of discriminatory council-housing policies that allocated whites to new housing estates cut off from the now Asian areas of the old manufacturing

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<sup>5</sup> The 1991 census did not include questions of religious affiliation but ethnic group was indicated and these calculations were done on the basis of ethnic origin (Rex: 2002: p.52)

terrace houses. 'White flight' also meant that housing prices were low and thus more Muslims moved in (Ansari: 2004: p.178).

This turned many British cities and towns into mutually exclusive areas, especially in the North of England (ibid). Socio-economic discrimination was rife and for the vast majority of South Asian Muslims high unemployment was compounded by the low access to educational opportunities (ibid), especially in the North. Despite this feeling of alienation Britain is unique among European countries in terms of citizenship. UK residents with Commonwealth citizenship could vote<sup>6</sup>. The active political participation that many Pakistani and Bangladeshi partook in meant that by the 1980s more British Muslims knew their rights and how to access the political system. Ansari (2004) argues that the 1980s saw Muslims struggling for official acknowledgement of religious rights against a background of increasing anti-Muslim sentiment (p.232). Thus, when the "Rushdie Affair" occurred various Muslim groups, in particular the Pakistani Muslim groups, mobilised and united in Britain like never before.

#### The Start of the "Rushdie Affair"

Nonetheless, even among the Pakistani British Muslim population mobilisation did and does not occur along singular structures. This is also despite the fact that Pakistani British Muslims are almost homogeneously Sunni Muslims. This is due to that fact that within Pakistani Sunni Islam there are three notable divisions: the majority of the Pakistanis in Britain are Barelvis<sup>7</sup> but there also a significant number of Deobandis<sup>8</sup>. Both Barelvis and Deobandis sects came into existence in post-1857 British India and were concerned with maintaining Islam as a living social force in a non-Muslim polity and ruling culture ((Modood: 1990: p.150). The third significant theological sect in Britain is a small network of Saudi-funded

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<sup>6</sup> Until 1983 new nationality Commonwealth Act

<sup>7</sup> A more traditional group with a pro-British Raj history and an "Islam of personalities" as the Prophet Muhammad is imbued with a metaphysical significance and devotional reverence (Modood: 1990: p.150).

<sup>8</sup> A apolitical conservative revivalist movement which has built a mass following and also an international reputation in Islamic learning forming a world wide organisation Tabligh-i-Jamaat (ibid)

middle class whose Islam is based on a distinct type of socially conservative religiopolitics, which is closely linked with Jamaat-i-islami<sup>9</sup> (ibid). This religiopolitical group are small in number within the UK compared to the Deobandis or Barelvis and has negligent working class community links. However, due to Saudi Arabian money and support, it was far better nationally and internationally organised (ibid).

The roots of the “Rushdie Affair” in Britain would therefore be, not in the grass root British Muslim organisations of Deobandis or Barelvis but, in the Pakistani religiopolitical movement Jamaat-i-Islami and its transnational tentacles. In Madras, Aslam Ejaz of the Islamic Foundation wrote to his friend, Faiyazuddin Ahmed, head of public relations of the Islamic Foundation in Leicester. He told Ahmed about the ban in India of *The Satanic Verses* and that a similar campaign should be started in Britain (Appignanesi and Mailand: 1989: p.56). Mr. Ahmed would then be the key propagator in the “Rushdie Affair,” he bought the book, photocopied the offending passages and sent it to the leading Islamic organisations in Britain (ibid). It was not hard to quickly stir up trouble within Britain as the Prophet in all South Asian traditions, and especially the Barelwis, is held in great veneration (Lewis: 1994: p.154). For many of these Muslims an attack on the prophet was a direct attack on themselves and the community. Due to the fact the Muslim population in Britain, especially in the North was on the defensive at this time, a framework for potential conflict was constructed<sup>10</sup>.

Four days after Mr. Ahmed received the letter, copies were dispatched to the forty-five embassies in Britain that were member countries of the Organisation of the Islamic Council<sup>11</sup> (ibid). By the end of October 1988, a month after the book was banned in India, three specific demands were made by British Muslims: Firstly that the book should be withdrawn from the market and pulped. Secondly,

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<sup>9</sup> A group based in Pakistan, Jamaat. In Britain Jamaat is represented by the Islamic Foundation in Leicester and the UK Islamic Mission.

<sup>10</sup> See pp.9-10

<sup>11</sup> This included Iran

a public apology be issued and finally, the payment of damages to an Islamic charity (Fischer and Abedi: 1990: p.114). Dr. Syed Pasha secretary of the Union of Muslim Organisations, an umbrella organisation for Islamic groups in Britain, wrote to Viking/Penguin, the publishers of the book, on October 20<sup>th</sup> and got no reply. Following this he wrote to the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher asking her to prosecute Rushdie and Penguin under the Public Order Act (1986) and the Race Relations Act (1976) (ibid). As Van Der Veer (1994) argues, the easy success in India getting the book banned may have given British South Asian Muslims expectations that the British state would act in ways similar to those of the Indian state<sup>12</sup> (p.189). These were to prove to be false expectations and the Prime Minister on November 11<sup>th</sup> made it clear that there are no grounds on which the government would consider banning the book. There would be further anger and antagonism when the book was short listed for the Booker Prize and won the fiction category of the Whitbread Award.

#### The “Rushdie Affair” and the media

Frustrated by the governments lack of response and even communication with the Muslim community on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December, 1988, seven thousand people attended a peaceful demonstration in the northern town of Bolton and burned copies of *The Satanic Verses*. As they did not notify the press before hand such acts would subsequently go unreported<sup>13</sup> by the national press. It would be in Bradford, also a northern industrial town, where after four months of being ignored a group of British Muslims, further exacerbated by discovering that English blasphemy laws only applied to Christianity, would demand media attention and the “Rushdie Affair” was constructed in Britain. Efforts by Muslims in Bradford to have blasphemy laws extended failed. The solicitor advised that if it was publicity that they wanted they would be better off informing the media that

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<sup>12</sup> As the India state recognised Muslim “communal” difference from the “mainstream” Hindu society. However, in Britain it became clear that the government was not ready or prepared to develop policies based upon that recognition (Van Der Veer: 1994: p.189).

<sup>13</sup> The Bolton Evening News did however report that there would be a protest

there were would be a protest and then burn the book in full view of their lenses (Fischer and Abedi: 1990: p.114). The 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1989, saw a gathering of 1000 Muslims who rallied in Bradford in front of an expectant media and burned *The Satanic Verses*. The media would burst with condemnation at the act. They cited it as evidence of an uncivilised and intolerant Muslim nature and comparisons were frequently drawn with the Nazi book burning's of the 1930s. The press dutifully published some of the offending passages from *The Satanic Verses* and did not interpret them or set them in their context (Parehk: 1990: p.4). Most of the national papers conceptualised the entire controversy in terms of freedom of speech (Ibid: pp.10-11). Aghapour (2005) claims by taking a political stance that is divergent from the common culture, British Muslims appeared to threaten the very assumptions on which British secular identity is constructed (p.16). Much of the media promoted an idea that loyalty to archetypal Britishness was deemed essential to a constructive social and political participation (ibid).

## Bradford

The controversy over *The Satanic Verses* reached Bradford just two years after the "Honeyford affair" in which tensions between the Muslim community and the white population were stretched to breaking point. In 1982 Bradford's education authority issued guidelines to schools – *Education for a multicultural society for pupils of ethnic minority communities* – intended to accommodate Muslim cultural and religious needs (Lewis: 1994: p.147). Ray Honeyford a head teacher in Bradford felt greatly aggrieved at having to accommodate for Muslim pupils in his school (Fischer and Abedi: 1990: p.113). The government came out openly on Mr Honeyford's side and Thatcher would invite him to Downing Street (Ruthven: 1990: p.77). The Bradford population was becoming increasingly polarised with the majority of the white population being pro-Honeyford (ibid). During this period of protest by Muslims the community was portrayed as a threat to democracy for their supposed attack on Mr Honeyford's freedom of speech (Lewis: 1994: p.153). The often pragmatic and moderate stance of the Council for Mosques'

leadership remained invisible (ibid). However, after a two year campaign the Muslim population finally managed to force Honeyford out but with a large severance package and under the proxy of early retirement. The periods then before the “Rushdie Affair” were marked with communal conflict, in which the Muslim community were trying to establish their rights and create a self-determined British Muslim identity. This would rise to the surface in the protests framed under the “Rushdie Affair”.

Therefore, there were specific sociological reasons for Muslim defensiveness and anger in an increasingly racist British atmosphere, especially in Bradford (Fischer and Abedi: 1990: p.124). The protests and the burning of the books was seen by the Muslim Bradford community as a continuation of the struggle to establish their rights. Slogans such as, “Honeyford has insulted us!” was replaced by “Rushdie has insulted us!” The “Rushdie Affair” was a continuation of the “Honeyford Affair” in the struggle to be recognized as an oppressed group in British society. Sections of the British Muslim community were demanding that their dignity as Muslims be respected by the rest of society and called to be protected by law as other oppressed groups (Modood: 1990: p.124). As Modood (1990) explains the protestors interviewed used words such as “honour” and “dignity” rather than “blasphemy” with reference to the “Rushdie Affair” (p.124). However, these calls were not heeded and, as with the Honeyford saga, media images of angry demonstrations and inflammatory placards, fixed in the public imagination a fearsome and negative image of Muslims, serving to further alienate the community (Lewis: 1994: p.159). The Muslim community in Bradford, and much of Britain, would become even further alienated when the “Rushdie Affair” appeared to migrate around the globe.

## The global spread of the “Rushdie Affair”

Five months from the banning of the book in Pakistan on the 12<sup>th</sup> February 1989 five or six people were killed and a hundred injured protesting *The Satanic Verse* in Islamabad, Pakistan, the first scenes of death in the “Rushdie Affair.” The ostensible reason for the protests was the forthcoming publication of the book in the US. However, as Benazir Bhutto<sup>14</sup> stated: “The question that perturbs the present Government was whether agitation was really against the book, ...Or was it a protest by those people who lost the (November 1988) election, or those people who were patronized by martial law<sup>15</sup>...” (Pipes: 2003: p.25). Subsequently, a mob of 2000, suspected Jamaati led protestors, stormed the US embassy in Islamabad. Also protestors chanted few slogans concerning Rushdie, instead focusing on “American Dogs” and “US and Israel are enemies of Islam” (Independent in Appignanesi and Mailand: 1989: p.81). As the *Pakistani Times* observed “It is hard to see how the US government became the prime object of mob anger...” (in Appignanesi and Mailand: 1989: p.130). The radius of implication in the “Rushdie Affair” had expanded rapidly and as a result became incoherent and unintelligible. Hence the very categorization of these events under the “Rushdie Affair” starts to become increasingly false. After the riots in Islamabad similar scenes would be seen in Srinigar, India, in which one person would lose their life and sixty people injured. Again protests against *The Satanic Verses* had been used as a way in which various groups could push their specific agendas.

Unfortunately this was not the end of the violence (or threat of). On February 14<sup>th</sup> the Ayatollah Khomeini would issue a fatwā calling for Rushdie’s death. Ironically Iran had been one of the few Muslim countries not to have put a ban on *The*

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<sup>14</sup> The President of Pakistan at the time

<sup>15</sup> i.e. Jamaat-i-Islami who were in alliance with Zia-ul-Haq (the military dictator who would stage a successful coup against of Benazir Bhutto)

*Satanic Verses*<sup>16</sup>. The Ayatollah had picked the “Rushdie Affair” to achieve very specific local and regional political goals: Establishing Iran and himself as the leader of Islamic affairs (revitalising the “Islamic Revolution”) therefore pushing Saudi Arabia aside, cutting across the Sunni-Shia divide, and marginalising the ‘liberals’, such as Rafsanjani. None of these goals would be achieved by the Ayatollah. The effect of the Khomeini edict was an immediate escalation of the crisis that would now spread throughout the Muslim world (Ruthven: 1990: p.114).

The Saudi Arabian government was not going to allow the Ayatollah to pursue his goals unchallenged. Saudi Arabia soon realised that they had been outmanoeuvred and banished the topic from the media and Egypt was to do the same (ibid). Therefore, Saudi Arabia would soon create its own stance of rather than placing a death sentence on Rushdie, labelling him an apostate and requiring him to stand trial. Saudi Arabia would ensure that its sphere of influence would tow its line. As a result only Libya officially supported the Ayatollah’s position. The Iranians subsequently pushed the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to take a more assertive position (Piscatori: 1990: p.784). Instead the OIC would align to the Saudi Arabian line and suggested Rushdie be put on trial, while making this impossible by banning him from entering all Muslim countries (ibid). The European Community issued a joint statement by the twelve ministers that all ambassadors to Tehran were to be recalled and the freezing of all high level visits between their countries and Iran (Appignanesi and Mailand: 1989: p.122). After the tough EC statements Western aligned countries came to their support and committed themselves to the EC’s position (ibid: p.127).

Despite this supposedly tough line within a month most of the EC top diplomats were sent back and within two months France and West Germany (who had been the most ferocious “defenders” of “freedom of speech”) in two months. In

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<sup>16</sup> Although the book was not widely available in the country and the lack of a ban was largely the cause of the lack of restrictions on works in foreign languages (Ruthven: 1990: p.108).

Britain a different tact was chosen and the reaction was one of rapprochement with Tehran. Although British diplomats were called back they did not break diplomatic relations. As a result it was Iran on the 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1989, that formally broke off diplomatic relations with Britain. For all this animosity, trade between the two countries continued oblivious to the rhetoric. The U.S. government, other than the Islamabad embassy statement made no formal statement or adopted a position on *The Satanic Verses* and it was clear they dearly wanted the issue to go away. The Iranian representatives desperately tried to keep the issue alive in Europe but they found little support among Muslim immigrants (Ruthven: 1990: p.153). Publication of *The Satanic Verses* in France and Germany past without incident and the issue soon went away in the US too (ibid). Muslims in France declared in a petition "...We are all Salman Rushdie" (ibid) In Britain the issue was still burning and the fatwa had been an unmitigated disaster for the Muslims in Britain and especially Bradford.

#### The return to Bradford

The process of demonization of Muslims that had already begun earlier now accelerated (Lewis: 1994: p.159). In June 1989 a rally organised by the Bradford Council erupted in sporadic violence engineered by a small group of Muslim youth (ibid). Not surprisingly more negative images were produced of the Muslim community. On the front pages of the local press an effigy of Rushdie with red paint and slogans such as "Kill The Pig" appeared (ibid). The Council quickly suspended public demonstrations locally but by then the damage had been done (ibid). The Council decided to adopt no position on the book but this was equally disastrous as it caused many Muslims to "applaud Khomeini as a hero" (ibid: p.162). It was clear that the situation had become uncontrollable. Muslims in Bradford and across Britain were angered by the Saudi Arabian position of inaction<sup>17</sup> and the leadership of those at the top in Britain. Modood (1990) states

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<sup>17</sup> This was further compounded with memories of the effort Saudi went to, to prevent the showing of the film *Death of a Princess* on British TV (Modood: 1990: p.155)

that many British Asian Muslims felt even further let down by the London secular Asian intelligentsia who not only refused to act during the crisis as an intermediary but also joined in the public vilification (p.155).

Lessons were learnt quickly and on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1989 the Bradford Council for Mosques launched a ten point charter. This included lobbying local and national politicians, making future electoral support conditional upon a positive response by the government and the establishment of a Muslim think-tank to combat anti-Muslim propaganda in the media (Lewis: 1994: p.163). Nothing showed more that lessons were learnt than the move from book burning to a vigil (ibid). The Council was finally able to transcend sectarianism and respect for the council and its leaders were held in Barelwi and Deobandi circles outside Bradford (ibid: p.172). By the middle of 1989 the furore of *The Satanic Verses* had ended among British Muslims. It lasted roughly eight months since its publication.

## *The Danish Cartoons: "Muhammad's Face"*

### *The Jyllands-Posten*

Seventeen years on from the start of the "Rushdie Affair" *Jyllands-Posten* Denmark's most widely read (broadsheet) newspaper would spark a similar reaction. The culture editor Flemming Rose, contacted twenty five members of the association of Danish cartoonists asking them "to draw Muhammad as you see him" (Rose: 19/02/06). This reason for this announcement was prompted by Danish writer Kåre Bluitgen, who had experienced difficulty in finding an illustrator for a children's book on the life of the prophet Muhammad (ibid). Three people Bluitgen contacted turned down the job, for fear of the consequences of depicting the prophet. The person who finally accepted to illustrate the cartoons only did so, on the condition of anonymity (ibid). Running parallel to this was a Danish Comedian who at the end of September stated on TV, that he would urinate on the bible but would not dare do the same with the Koran (ibid). Rose (19/02/06) therefore, "...Commissioned the *cartoons* in response to several incidents of self-censorship in Europe caused by widening fears and feelings of intimidation in dealing with issues related to Islam" (ibid). Rose (19/02/06) explains that through his call to depict images of the prophet Muhammad he was outwitting a "...popular trick of totalitarian movements: label any critique or call for debate as an insult and punish the offenders" (ibid). Rose (19/02/06) would elicit twelve responses to his challenge and on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2005 *Jyllands-Posten* published twelve cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad.

### *The Cartoons: "Muhammad's Face"*

Published under the heading "*Muhammad's Face*," Spiegelman (2006) argues this was the ostensible point (p.47). A mocking language was built into the *cartoons* that were subsequently bound to offend all believers (ibid). In terms of the content of the twelve *cartoons*, seven were particularly insulting. The

*cartoons* are of varying quality and can now be found widely on the web. In particular, one of the *cartoons* depicts the prophet Muhammad wearing a bomb shaped turban with a lit fuse. The Turban had written on it “There is no God but Allah, Mohammad is the Prophet of Allah.” The Danish Muslim population interpreted this to mean that the Prophet Muhammad is a terrorist and his message, the religion of Islam, is the ideology of terrorism (Hassan: 2006: p.5). The cartoonist Brink (28/02/06) who drew this image defended the cartoon by stating that it was not directed against Islam as a whole, but a part of it which can inspire violence, terrorism, death and destruction. He goes on to state that: “in Denmark anything can be mocked. Anybody...I am not a Muslim, it is not my religion, I am in my own country...” Brink (28/02/06) finally concludes that freedom of speech is one of the cornerstones of our (Danish) democracy and the cartoon he depicted was necessary because people practicing religion began to demand a special position in the public arena. Another cartoon that was also particularly offensive was one, as Spiegelman claims: “...has no redeeming features; in fact it has no features at all” (p.49). However, it does have an accompanying poem that translates as “Prophet, you crazy bloke, Keeping women under yoke” causing particular irritation to parts of the Danish Muslim community who interpreted it to mean that Islam calls for the subjugation of women (Hassan: 2006: p.6).

Among the *cartoons* that were not offensive were attacks upon *Jyllands-Posten* itself. One of the *cartoons* depicts a seventh grade boy named Muhammad in a school in the immigrant district of Copenhagen, pointing to a sentence in Farsi on the blackboard stating: “The *Jyllands-Posten* journalists are a bunch of reactionary provocateurs.” This however, did not allow the artist to escape the implication of being among the cartoonists and a death sentence was put on his head, along with the other cartoonists (Spiegelman: 2006: p.50).

## Muslims in Denmark

The Muslim presence in Denmark originated from the import of labour from Yugoslavia, Turkey, Morocco and Pakistan which started in the late 1960s (Hjarnø: 1996: p.291). The majority of these Muslims that came to Denmark and Scandinavia are on the whole Sunni<sup>18</sup> (Stenberg: 2002: p.122). The presence of Muslims or any sort of immigrant community before 1960 was virtually non-existent in Scandinavia, in the 1930 census thirteen people identified themselves as Muslim (Stenberg: 2002: p.121). Foreign labour imported to Denmark was always expected to return home and the recruitment of foreign labour officially stopped in 1971 (Hjarnø: 1996: p.291). However, the number of immigrants coming into Denmark continued to grow primarily through foreign workers not returning “home” and subsequently bringing their families to settle in Denmark. The Danish Muslim population began to settle in mainly urban inner city areas and became highly isolated from the rest of Danish society. This isolated population was added to by an influx of political refugees. Contact between the Danes and the immigrant population is minimal. A national survey done by Aarhus University reported that 85% of Danes had no social interaction with individuals from other ethnic minorities (Hussain: 2000: p.95).

By the end of the 1970s it was realised by the indigenous Danish population that the “guest workers” and political refugees were in Denmark to stay. This realisation was simultaneous to a gradual economic decline replacing full employment with unemployment (ibid: p.293). Subsequently, Wren (2001) argues that commentators in Denmark noticed a fundamental shift in attitude towards immigrants in the 1980s (p.142). In 1991 Hjarnø claimed that: “Denmark was emerging as one of the most racist countries in Western Europe” (in ibid: p.142) and this was primarily due to the change in the economic situation (Hjarnø: 1996:

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<sup>18</sup> With regards to the *cartoons* of Muhammad this is particularly significant, as Sunni Islam forbids the depiction of the prophet Muhammad. Whereas Shia’s have no qualms of depicting the prophet Muhammad or their imams and in Iran and other Shia dominated communities you will often find pictures depicting various religious figures on sale in the market (Dabashi: 23/03/06).

p.295). However, contrary to this statement Danish society has traditionally regarded itself as a liberal and tolerant society, placing a high value on social equality and social cohesion, promoted through a well-developed welfare state (Wren: 2001: p.142). Denmark does have one of the longest and best respected histories in global humanitarian interests (ibid).

Yet despite this, modest levels of immigration provoked a reaction of rampant discrimination and racist practices. These include the adoption of discriminatory housing quotas for ethnic minorities (based around a 10% tolerance threshold), compulsory dispersal which operates along similar lines and the banning of marriage to non-EU citizens if under the age of 24 (this law was directed at the Muslim community to stop arranged marriages) (ibid: p.146). This created a situation in which Danish Muslims and the immigrant community in general become increasingly marginalised. As a result of this a non-Danish immigrant identity has emerged (Shah: 2006: p.34). This non-Danish identity is based on a youth culture that gravitates towards Islam. The hijab and jilbab, two cultural garments Danish society has frequently stated it hates, have become signals of defiance (ibid). The crisis of the Muslim community in Denmark is even more evident when looking at the jail population, in which Muslims account for a third of the prison population in Copenhagen (Shah: 2006: p.36). In Denmark, as opposed to Britain, enthusiasm for a Danish Islam is absent, younger Muslims consider the term an obscenity (ibid: p.37).

Wren (2001) claims that the absence of a significant non-white immigrant population in Denmark before 1960s meant that a paternalistic approach to non-whites was dominant (p.146). Cultural racism lay at the heart of this paternalism in which Europeans are not racially, but culturally superior<sup>19</sup>. Also countries such as Denmark that rely on a perceived culturally homogenous national identity have provided fertile territory for cultural racism, with immigrants being constructed as a threat to national identity (ibid: p.144). With Islam establishing

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<sup>19</sup> Cultural Racism is a theory traced to Fanon (Wren: 2001: p.143).

itself as “...the second biggest religion in all Scandinavia countries<sup>20</sup>” (Stenberg: 2002: p.121) through immigration, immigration itself was perceived as a specifically Muslim issue. Thus there has been an increasing tendency in Denmark since the 1980s to explain all problems as related to immigration and refugees as linked to Islam (Hjarnø: 1996: p.300).

There was little that the Danish Muslim population could do through official channels to stop the deteriorating situation in Denmark. As political participation is very low both at national and local levels (Stenberg: 2002: p.127). In 2006 the Danish Institute for Human Rights reported ethnic minorities are underrepresented at a ratio of 1:3 (Zarrehparvar and Olsen: 2006: p.14). This situation was made even worse by the Danish government’s insistence of sidelining religious figures and speaking to representatives of secular and ethnic organisations (Shah: 2006: p.37). The lack of political participation by those in the Muslim and larger immigrant community is also due partly to the restrictive naturalization and citizenship process, deficiency of knowledge of the political system in the immigrant communities, little contact with Danish political organisations and a distinct lack of affiliation to Denmark (Zarrehparvar and Olsen: 2006: p.14). Participation in politics, at parliamentary and local levels, has therefore been off-limits to those Muslims who are not perceived to adhere to “Danish values” (Shah: 2006: p.34).

As a result of the perceived threat that the immigrant population was deemed to pose, Danish nationalism experienced a reawakening in which Islam was to be its main source of energy. Politicians seem occupied fighting cultural battles rather than focusing on integration. Mainstream social science research in the 1980s, which was closely linked to public policy, was to be essential in legitimising and maturing cultural racism and the closely linked nationalism. In

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<sup>20</sup> An estimated 270,000 Sunni Muslims live in Denmark making up roughly 5% of the countries population (BBC – US state department).

the late 1980s two large research programmes on immigration were initiated, one focused exclusively on Islam and the other on immigration (Hussain: 2000: p.99). The main body of research was anthropological in which the culture, transitions, religion and family structure of immigrant communities was the primary focus. Little attention was paid to a sociological analysis in terms of issues such as social, cultural and economic discrimination towards immigrants and Muslims. Issues such as the crisis of the social welfare model were set aside in a favour of cultural dissonance (ibid). The media thrived on these research projects, embedding and allowing a consensus to emerge that Islam was an obstacle to successful integration (ibid). However, more importantly other obstacles to integration were predominately ignored and Islam was treated as an almost singular obstacle to integration. As Rose (19/02/06) in his justification of the *cartoons* stated: "We are integrating you into the Danish tradition of satire because you are apart of our society not strangers". Meanwhile just three months before this statement the Danish government signed an accord with the far-right Danish Peoples Party (DPP) to further limit the criteria for Danish citizenship<sup>21</sup> (Diène: 2006: p.10).<sup>22</sup>

### The role of the media and the Rise of the Far-Right

The absence of legal constraints on the Danish media has meant that it has been a very effective vehicle for the propagation of anti-immigration views such as Den Danske Foerhing<sup>23</sup> and the DPP (Wren: 2001: p.156). A UNESO report, in the early 1990s, reported that the Danish press had a very nationalist and racist perspective (ibid). The DPP was given great media coverage and next to the minister for immigration the party leader, of DPP, Pia Kjærsgaard was the person most quoted on immigration matters during the second half of the 2001 election

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<sup>21</sup> Which was already regarded as one of the strictest in Europe

<sup>22</sup> Although it is noted that the media and the state do not have a direct connection as will be noted in the next section *Jyllands-Posten* and other parts of the Danish media have been instrumental in the rise of the DPP and other far right groups

<sup>23</sup> Den Danske Forening evolved from a grassroots protest group that played on a vision of Denmark as a unified Homogenous Christian State in which immigrants can only ever appear as guests and that their continued presence was a threat to the Danish home (Wren: 2001: p.153).

year (Diène: 2006: p.493). Media organisations have tended to ignore their own codes for professional ethics and policies for public service broadcast and have been unresponsive to appeals and suggestions from various international bodies<sup>24</sup> to promote acceptance of diversity and fair portrayal of ethnic minorities (ibid: p.110). Therefore, it is partly through the media that the DPP has been able to adopt the master frame of radical right wing populist parties and achieve electoral success (Rydren: 2004: p.481), the DPP holds 13% of the seats in Parliament (Diène: 2006: p.10). The DPP combined an ethno-pluralist, xenophobic nationalism and anti-political establishment strategy, initiated by the Front National<sup>25</sup> in the 1980s, which has been mediated by a far-right circle of intellectuals (ibid) and the media. In their party programme the DPP states: “Denmark is not a country of immigration, and has never been one. We cannot therefore accept a multiethnic transformation of the country...we are against giving other cultures, building on completely different values and norms than ours, leverage in Demark” (Dansk Flokeparti 2002 in Rydgren: 2004: p.484)

Almost all the news stories in which religious predicates were invoked were framed in a conflict perspective with Danish society, culture, administration and institutions (Hussain: 2000: p.106). Hussain (2000) argues that dialogue in the media focuses on reproducing a discourse that legitimises ethnic inequalities in Danish society (p.109). This would culminate in 1997 when *Ekstra Bladet*<sup>26</sup> took it upon itself to “open up” the debate on ethnic minorities in Denmark (Wren: 2001: p.156). This campaign effectively legitimised the populist and racist views among the general public. The view from many was that freedom of speech was regarded as a cornerstone of Danish society and is generally felt that extremist viewpoints are best dealt with in an open and democratic forum (ibid: p.157). In this campaign however, such a forum was not present and newspapers that

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<sup>24</sup> These include the European Commission Committee on Racism, the Council of Europe, International Federation of Journalists, European Broadcasting, Public Service Broadcasting for a Multiethnic Europe (Hussain: 2000: p.110)

<sup>25</sup> Led by Jean-Marie Le Pen who in the 2002 Presidential elections obtained 16% of the votes in the first round of voting enough to qualify him for the second round (BBC).

<sup>26</sup> The largest read national tabloid in Denmark with a majority working-class readership

attempted to engage in a balanced intellectual debate were shut out for being “out of touch” (ibid). The campaign was extremely damaging to race relations. A public demonstration was organised by Muslim and other immigrant groups. This demonstration however, was depicted by the media and the Danish public as infringing the right of Danes to free speech and was associated with book-burning and religious fundamentalism (ibid).

The media therefore played a pivotal role in the marginalisation of the Danish Muslim community and the immigrant community at large. Media organisations have shown to be actively involved in ethnic politics through the construction of popular anti-immigration and particular anti-Muslim consensus (Hussain: 2000: p.111). This is what lay at the heart of the *cartoons*. In a similar fashion to *Ekstra Bladet*, Jannik Brinch (28/02/06) in his justification of the cartoon of Muhammad, explained how he was debating the place Muslims have in Denmark: “We were obliged to defend our view of freedom of speech, because a religion or people practicing a religion and perhaps subscribing to the more fundamentalist aspects of it have begun to demand a privileged or special position in the public arena”. The reaction to this was expressed by Alev (2006) a Muslim Danish columnist, for *Daily Politiken*, who argued that the publication of the cartoon’s by “Denmark’s most Islamophobic<sup>27</sup> newspaper... (was) the last straw” (p.43).

In Denmark therefore the *cartoons* depicting Muhammad were done in an extremely hostile environment for Muslims. This had been made even worse by the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. Since September 11<sup>th</sup> reports of attacks and hate speech have increased against the Muslim community across Europe and in Denmark in particular (Hassan: 2006: p.2). In 2005 there were 48 incidents of racially motivated harassment, vandalism and violence (Zarrehparvar and Olsen: 2006: p.13). There had also been an uncomfortable history of hate speech in Denmark. According to statistics from the National Commission of Police in 2005

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<sup>27</sup> Hussein (2000) in his study of Media coverage of Ethnic Affairs in the Press and Public Service Television from the 1<sup>st</sup> September to the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1996 shows *Jyllands-Posten*’s coverage of ethnic affairs had a 74% negative content (however, this was not the worst) (p.104).

there had been 41 cases of hate speech and in 15 of these cases charges were initiated (ibid). One particular case in which charges were not carried through was the instance of a Danish MP's personal website. In which it was stated on the website that Muslim men thought it to be their right to: "rape Danish women" (ibid: p.15). In much of the Danish Muslim community and the immigrant community in general a view was and is held that the Danish government was failing to uphold its obligations under international law to prohibit incitement and discrimination against vulnerable individuals and minority groups (Hassan: 2006: p.1). This view was also held up by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ERCI) in which it stated that it believed there was a notable reluctance by the Danish police to register complaints of racist statements and to investigate and press charges (ibid: p.4). For many Muslims *Jyllands-Posten's* *cartoons* of Muhammad came from the intellectual elites that represented the dominant culture and targeted a harmless and marginal religious minority in Danish society (Baksh: 2006: p.25). The *cartoons* therefore were: "...symptoms of a disease not the cause" (Spiegelman: 2006: p.43).

### The *cartoons* and the reaction

After the publication of the *cartoons* in *Jyllands-Posten* on the 30<sup>th</sup> September the editor at first received angry letters of complaints but little else (Q&A Guardian: 07/02/06). As Magala (2006) argues the Danish *cartoons* may have gone unnoticed by the Danish Muslim population but religious leaders made a case against the *cartoons* on the basis that they represented the de facto discrimination that Muslims faced in the education and job markets (p.12). Three of the artists then received death threats<sup>28</sup>, which were widely reported within Denmark and prompted anti-Muslim comments on chat shows (Q&A Guardian: 07/02/06). Subsequently, on the 14<sup>th</sup> October a demonstration by 5,000 Muslims was held in Copenhagen. At this stage the dispute attracted scant media attention internationally (ibid). The only international paper to really pay attention

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<sup>28</sup> The seriousness of these initial death threats is contested

to the issue was Egyptian newspaper *al-Fagr*<sup>29</sup> that reprinted some of the *cartoons* on its front page during the holy period of Ramadan, describing the *cartoons* as a "continuing insult" to Islam by Europeans and a "racist bomb" (BBC: 19/02/06). However, little attention was paid to the issue by other media sources in Egypt or the region, no recorded protests occurred or any reaction from the government. October 19<sup>th</sup> the Ambassador of ten Islamic countries requested a meeting with the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, which was refused on the basis that the Prime Minister cannot interfere with freedom speech (Times: 06/02/06). Then on the 21<sup>st</sup> October Mr Ramussen stated offended parties should use the courts to air their grievances (ibid). Subsequently, on October 28<sup>th</sup> a group of Danish Muslim filed a criminal complaint against *Jyllands-Posten*, under section 140 and 266b of the Danish Criminal Code (Danish Government: 23/01/06). Further anger was caused when it was revealed that in 2003 *Jyllands-Posten* rejected unsolicited *cartoons* depicting Jesus Christ on the grounds that they would cause offense and were not funny (Fouch: 06/02/06).

The protesters were getting increasingly frustrated by the governments reaction and members of the Muslim community in Denmark felt that the Prime Minister in his "absolute" and "not negotiable" defence of freedom of speech: "...encouraged incitement against Danish Muslims and Arabs" (Hassan: 2006: p.11). Thus a group of Danish Muslims led by a young imam Ahmed Akkari left for Egypt to further the "Danish communities" complaints at the end of November-beginning of December<sup>30</sup>. Akkari and his group went to Egypt stating he wanted to prevent another Theo Van Gogh<sup>31</sup> (Musharbash and Reiman: 01/02/06). In Egypt they met the Foreign Minister Ahmed Abu al-Gheit, representatives of the Arab league, Egypt's Grand Mufti and other high level officials (ibid). They took with them a dossier of racist and culturally insensitive material circulating around the

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<sup>29</sup> Adil Hammuda the editor in chief of Al-Fagr, a liberal Egyptian weekly, expressed his astonishment when the storm erupted in January (Zand: 13/02/06)

<sup>30</sup> The exact date is unclear

<sup>31</sup> A Dutch film maker who was murdered in 2004 linked to him making several films critical of Islam

country, including the publication of the Muhammad *cartoons* (ibid). The dossier begins: “As a group in society, we’ve been simply ignored” and goes on to state that there is “currently a climate (in Denmark) that is contributing to an increase in racism” (ibid). However, within this dossier there were also several highly offensive pictures that included a Muslim as a paedophile, another depicting Muhammad as a pig and a praying Muslim being raped by a dog (ibid). There are however, conflicting reports as to the circumstances in which these more offensive images were presented to the Egyptian audience. Akkari himself, states he clearly kept them separate from those published by *Jyllands-Posten* (ibid).

The global spread of the *cartoons*

6<sup>th</sup> December an OIC meeting in Mecca focused on the Danish *cartoons* (Fattah: 09/02/06). This meeting would result in: “something of a turning point” in the saga (ibid). It was at this point that the *cartoons* lost their Danish context and became entangled in political agendas in which Islam was a highly prized political commodity. As Tariq Ramadan (06/02/06) argues, with reference to the *cartoons*, governments in the Middle East were only too happy to prove their attachment to Islam. Then on the 12<sup>th</sup> December Jamaat-i-Islami offered a bounty for anyone who murders the illustrators of the *Danish cartoons* (Gudmundsson: 04/12/05). The framework – and even the meaning – of the *Danish cartoons* in question began to change as the context went global (Spiegelman: 2006: p.46). This was articulated by Jamaat-i-Islami who targeted not the cartoonists but the Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and the U.S. (Tisdall: 21/02/06). The Danish government saw that the situation was rapidly deteriorating and on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2006 Mr. Rasmussen condemned any actions that “attempt to demonise groups of people on the basis of their religion or ethnic background,” but reiterated Denmark’s commitment to freedom of speech (Jorgensen: 06/02/06). This poor attempt at reconciliation was soon quashed on January 6<sup>th</sup> when the Regional Public Prosecutor of Viborg discontinued the investigation into the *cartoons* (Hassan: 2006: p.7). It was also felt by parts of the Muslim community

in Denmark that the Danish Prime Minister had prejudiced the investigation by taking an official stance against investigation (ibid: p.9). However, this seemed of little consequence now.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> January *Magazinet*, a Norwegian<sup>32</sup> Christian newspaper, reprinted the *cartoons* and would firmly establish the controversy into the anarchy of international and Islamist politics. The Saudi Arabian government renewed calls for *Jyllands-Posten* to be punished and recalled its ambassador from Denmark, on the 26<sup>th</sup> January with Libya closely following the Saudi Arabian example (Times: 06/02/06). Following this an unofficial boycott of Danish goods started in Saudi Arabia and gradually spread throughout the Muslim world<sup>33</sup>. *Jyllands-Posten* on the 29<sup>th</sup> January printed a statement in Arabic saying the drawings were published in line with freedom of expression and not a campaign against Islam. It was a gesture that was far too late and even further too little. On the same day as the apology, Palestinians burnt Danish flags in a 50,000 strong protest and this was followed by further scenes of particularly strong violence as masked gunmen stormed the EU office in Gaza (ibid). Danes were told to be vigilant in the Middle East; however there were no reported incidents of Danish civilians being attacked. Even Flemming Rose (19/02/06) realized in a statement that: "The narrative in the Middle East is more complex, but that has very little to do with the *cartoons*" (Rose: 19/02/06).

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of January parts of the Muslim community in Denmark realized how out of control the situation had become and a group of Danish imams issued an acceptance of the statements of apology from *Jyllands-Posten* and the Prime Minister, and declared how surprised they were as to the extent of the protests

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<sup>32</sup> In the 1970s Norway had also been at the centre of a similar event to the Danish *cartoons*. A cartoon published by *Bergens Tidende* (a daily local paper) showed Ayatollah Khomeini as an executioner holding a blood-stained sword and a copy of the Koran from which a stream of blood was pouring out. Muslims in Norway protested against the treatment of the Koran, not Khomeini. A legal case was brought by the Muslims to the Norwegian courts but they were dismissed. The newspaper declared that these Muslims were friends of Khomeini and compared their behaviour to the Nazis and Fascists (Stenberg: 2002: p.135).

<sup>33</sup> This would cost Danish companies \$170million  
(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5329642.stm>)

(Times: 06/02/06). However, other European countries were not ready it seems to drop the issue and on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February newspapers in Germany, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands publish one or more of the *cartoons*. A newspaper in France, *France Soir*, published all 12 of the *cartoons* and a new cartoon of its own but the editor was fired by the newspaper's French-Egyptian owner. Syria also withdrew its ambassador to Denmark soon followed by Iran (ibid). On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February Mr. Rasmussen appears on *Al-Arabiya*, a Saudi Arabian news network, to try and calm the situation. On the same day the Jordanian newspaper *Al-Shihan* printed the drawings but the editor was subsequently sacked (Zand: 13/02/06). In London a group of Muslims<sup>34</sup> outside the Danish Embassy called for execution of those who insult Islam. On the 4<sup>th</sup> February mobs in Damascus attack the Norwegian, Danish, Swedish and French embassies but were beaten off by riot police. Demonstrators the next day set fire to the Danish Embassy in Beirut, overwhelming Lebanese security forces. A protester dies and this was the first death involved with the *cartoons*. America and Lebanon blame Syrians for the riot who were suspected of loading buses with protestors from Northern Lebanon and 77 of the 192 arrested were of Syrian nationality (Zand: 13/02/06). As Zand (13/02/06) argues mobilizing people on Arab streets is a proven tool of rulers in many Arab regimes, sending a clear message to the West that if you didn't have us, you'd be dealing with it. Western diplomats have pointed to similar motives in Libya and Egypt that have also seen similar scenes (ibid).

In Iran, after heavy press coverage in official news media (Fattah: 09/02/06) a rather belated response on the 7<sup>th</sup> February was made by the Iranian government that cut off all ties with Denmark, as several hundred protestors attacked the Danish embassy in Tehran. Following this on the 13<sup>th</sup> February a leading Iranian newspaper, the *Hamshahri Daily*, launches a competition asking people to submit *cartoons* about the Holocaust, which the paper says is to test

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<sup>34</sup> However, these protests were not entirely spontaneous and an Islamist sect Al-Ghurabaa (essentially the same organization as al-Muhajiroun which was a sect that was forced to disbanded and frequently linked to violent acts) had largely organized these deliberately provocative placards (Cobain, Fielding and Cowan: 11/02/06).

the boundaries of free speech of Westerners (BBC: 19/02/06). In Pakistan there were several scenes of violence throughout the month of February in which several people were killed and mass protests occurred in various cities. Several different religiopolitical groups in Pakistan, following Jamaat-i-Islami, placed bounties on the heads of the cartoonists. In Libya 10 people were killed and several injured in the Libyan city of Benghazi in clashes during a protest outside the Italian consulate. However, it was in Northern Nigeria that the largest single act of violence occurred when on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 15 people were killed when Christians were attacked and Church's burned (Jorgensen: 06/02/06). These riots were more anti-Christian riots than anything to do with the *cartoons* or Denmark (Reynolds: 22/02/06). In Turkey Tens of thousands of protestors chanting slogans against Denmark, Israel and the United States (Jorgensen: 06/02/06).

In the UK and the US the mainstream media refused to print the cartoon (Magala: 2006: p.16). The Bush administration, which had initially voiced understanding for the Muslim protests changed and sharpened its tone. The response by the EU was similar to that of the US, which at first expressed concern with the "Danish satirical and offensive *cartoons*" (ibid). But gradually as the protests spread and became more violent across the world the EU would change its official position and upheld the right for free expression of opinion on all topics, including religion (ibid). By the end of February the situation had finally died down, nearly five months from when the *cartoons* were first published. At this stage, according to the Danish online newspaper *eJour*, 143 newspapers in 56 countries around the globe, including Christian and Muslim ones, republished one or more of the *cartoons* (Gudmundsson: 03/02/2006)

## Comparative Analysis

*The Satanic Verses* and the *Danish cartoons* tell intricate and complex stories of: migration and translation; minority and majority relations; citizenship and nationhood; local, national, regional and international politics; colonisation and post-colonisation; art and insult.

### *The Satanic Verses* and “*Muhammad’s Face*”

*The Satanic Verses* can be seen as a piece of intellectual insight into the effects of migration in terms of translation and identity, grounded in Islamic history and tradition. However, *The Satanic Verses* written by a secular British Indian Muslim seemed especially insulting to some members of the British Muslim community because of the sexual imagery used in conjunction with the prophet’s life. As this has been central to how Christians have used anti-Muslim polemics (Asad: 1990: p.242). The writing of *The Satanic Verses* in English for the readership of a non-Muslim majority was also significant. To the extent that members of the South Asian Muslim community in Britain felt deeply betrayed and further insulted by a perceived member of their community turning abruptly against them, in similar ways to that of the British media and government, i.e. attacks (and perceived attacks) aimed towards Islam. In comparison the *cartoons*, does not have any of the historical and intellectual substance of *The Satanic Verses*. The *cartoons* were produced as an attack against perceived censorship in criticising Islam. However, the *cartoons* entitled “*Muhammad’s Face*” in *Jyllands-Posten*, written primarily by non-Muslim Danes, were seen as anti-Muslim polemics in themselves and a direct attack on much of the Danish Muslim community.

An overwhelming majority of both the Danish and British Muslim communities did perceive both *The Satanic Verses* and the *cartoons* as insults. However, the reaction was also a protest against poverty, joblessness and racist behaviour by the “native” community. Large parts of the Muslim community in the industrial

towns of both Britain and Denmark were highly isolated and aggrieved during the periods before the protests. The 1970s can be seen as the root in which tensions between the “native” community and parts of the British and Danish Muslims communities lay. This was due primarily to the arrival of the post-Fordist era in the West, in which a massive decline of the manufacturing industry and economic downturn, as economies were restructured, occurred. This would be particularly harmful to the Muslim communities in Britain and Denmark as many worked and lived in the manufacturing heartlands.

The resulting poverty, high unemployment and marginalisation of the Muslim population, was translated by much of the mainstream media as a result of Islam, perceived to be an obstacle to integration. The media in both countries would play an essential role in marginalising their respective Muslim communities both before and during both crises. The British media played an essential role in the vilification of Muslims. This was articulated when for the second time the Muslim community, this time in Bradford, burnt copies of the *Satanic Verses*, in which the media made unjustifiable connections with the book burning to that of Nazi and totalitarian movements. In Denmark much of the mainstream media played a vital role in the rise of far-right anti-immigration parties in terms of legitimising and allowing a prominent platform for their politics. Much of the media, and prominent socio-political commentators and intellectuals, falsely expressed the reasons, in both cases, for the protests through rhetorical devices such as: Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilisations”, different and conflicting cultural understandings by the Muslim community to freedom of speech, pre-modern ideologies (i.e. Islam) and comparisons of many Muslim protestors to that of the Nazi’s and totalitarian regimes.

All these arguments resulted in a framework of debate that left out what this paper regards as the major issues for the protests that occurred in Britain and Denmark: Sociological issues such as access to educational resources, employment and engagement by the majority with the besieged and highly

isolated minority Muslim communities, especially in the industrial towns. Enmeshed within these sociological issues, was also the question of identity and the lack of acceptance by both the Danish and British indigenous population of a “Muslim” identity within a British or Danish one.

The question of the inter-relationship between equality and pluralism (Modood: 1990: p.160) was central to both crises. The Muslim community resisted being treated as “outsiders” but at the same time resisted and faced barriers to assimilation as traditional European citizens (Al-Sayyad: 2002: p.9). Muslims in Europe were and are wrestling to be identified as who they are instead of what the native community think they ought to be. As Tibi (2000) points out, a passport does not provide citizens with identity if the cultural underpinning is lacking, nor does it convey membership in the “club” (p.34). In the process of this not only are these new citizens negotiating a new identity but the relatively indigenous population of Europe is being forced to rethink their own collective identity (ibid). The reluctance by much of the British and Danish “native” majority to re-think or contemplate a collective identity that would allow an incorporation of a Muslim one has allowed friction to occur between the two indistinct communities. As Modood (1990) argued with reference to the “Rushdie Affair,” but applicable to both events, the protests called for the need to construct a dialogue on the rights of non-European religious and cultural minorities in the context of a secular hegemony (p.160). It is hoped that this dialogue would then allow a self-determined identity construction to occur in the sections of the British and Danish Muslim population.

In both these crises however, there was a distinct lack of flexibility and dialogue by the native population. In both cases parts of the Muslim community attempted to pursue their case through the respective domestic courts. Both cases were thrown out of the respective courts with little continued dialogue of how to resolve the situation. This meant that certain members of the Muslim community in both countries in both sagas perceived they had no choice but to take drastic action.

In the “Rushdie Affair” this meant burning the book and with reference to the *cartoons* it resulted in members of the Muslim community in Denmark going to the capital of Egypt, Cairo. The refusal to engage in any meaningful dialogue by the British and Danish governments meant that in both cases there was also a risk for the crisis to escalate. However, all these arguments that this paper argues to be essential in stopping a reoccurrence of similar events were muffled even further in both cases when the two events spread internationally.

### The global spread of *The Satanic Verses* and the *cartoons*

A major difference in the spread of these two controversies was that, unlike the *cartoons*, the “Rushdie Affair” did not start in Europe. The “Rushdie Affair” was created by the communal political forces of India, and migrated to Britain through religiopolitics, externally funded, networks of the diasporas. However, the “Rushdie Affair” did not break out of these diaspora networks until five months after the publication of the book. The containment was broken when the Ayatollah issued a fatwā on Salman Rushdie, calling for his execution. The fatwā lead to diplomatic manoeuvring by various countries in the West and throughout the Muslim world. It would cause Saudi Arabia, which had been outmanoeuvred by Iran, to pull in its sphere of influence and reduce the political capital the Ayatollah could use out of the issue. Therefore, apart from Iran and Libya, much of the Muslim world’s condemnation of *The Satanic Verses* was restrained in terms of official government channels, as the various nation-states<sup>35</sup> under Saudi Arabian influence felt it was best to tow the Saudi Arabian line. In both the Western world and those Muslim countries aligned to Saudi Arabia there was a will to wish the issue away. However, the Ayatollah and religopolitical groups such as Jamaat-i-Islami attempted to keep the issue burning.

In Denmark the first signs that the issue could become global, was a meeting requested by ten countries from the Muslim world who were members of the

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<sup>35</sup> Within these various nation-states there was also an antagonism towards Iran

Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), but were refused by the Prime Minister of Denmark. Certain members within the Danish Muslim community chose to force their qualms with regards to the *cartoons*, after four months due to the perceived inaction of the Danish government, by going to Egypt. It was after this trip that at an OIC meeting in Mecca that the *Danish cartoons* would become the central talking point. Soon after this meeting Jamaat-i-Islami would offer a bounty for anyone who murders the cartoonists. Then a Norwegian paper republished the cartoons. It was at this stage that the Saudi Arabian regime decided to take strong diplomatic action and recall its ambassadors from Denmark, with Libya closely following, and spark the international crisis that occurred. Following the diplomatic withdrawal by Saudi Arabia from Denmark violence in Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Libya and later Northern Nigeria would occur, all in the name of protests against the *cartoons*. During this crisis, Iran was relatively quiet and only the controversial aspects that occurred was a call by a leading national Iranian newspaper for a holocaust cartoon competition to test European freedom of speech<sup>36</sup>.

These international reactions can become intelligible to both *The Satanic Verses* and the *cartoons* by viewing the events through what Keddie (1998) calls religiopolitics (p.699). An essential element of religiopolitics is the acceptance of Islam as integral to identity formation, which has opened the gates to Islamist intrusion into the postcolonial political process (Ayoob: 2004: p.3) and emerged as an alternative to the perceived failures of secular democracies (Esposito: 2000: p.50) As a consequence of this: Islamic symbols, rhetoric, actors and organisations all became sources of legitimacy and gained the ability to mobilize sections of the Muslim world, informing political and social activism (Esposito: 2000: p.50). This Islamisation process of the politics in the Muslim world has a special relationship with the West. As Cleveland argues (2004) one of the driving forces behind the Islamic resurgence a rejection of the dependence of the Muslim world on the West (p.441). *The Satanic Verses* and the *cartoons* gave an

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<sup>36</sup> A Danish Newspaper *Information* published six of these cartoons in September 2006 (BBC: 08/08/06)

opportunity to many governments in the Muslim world to rid themselves of the image of being subservient to the Western world, by standing up to the West in defence of Islam. Simultaneous to this, Muslim governments could also co-opt their Islamist rivals through claiming the roles of champions of Islam (thus beating the Islamists at their own game). However, it also allowed Islamist groups, such as Jamaat-i-Islami and others, to use these two crises to mobilize people against the government and pursue their goal of political power through creating civil unrest.

Added to the internal threat of Islamism within states, was evidence in both controversies of competition between states, in particular the rivalry between Saudi Arabia (Sunni Muslim) and Iran (Shia Muslim). Both these states tried to become the voice of a transnational Islam and the jostling between the two (and their spheres of influence) is evident in both the controversies. It is significant that during the *cartoon* row Saudi Arabia took a prominent position in the international protest that occurred. This was in stark contrast to the “Rushdie Affair,” in which Iran was the focal point of the international escalation in the crisis having outmanoeuvred the Saudi Arabian’s to lead the protest. However, the increasing rise of religiopolitics and the heavy reliance of the Saudi Arabian regime on the Wahhabi movement meant that Saudi Arabia<sup>37</sup> was not likely to allow it to be usurped as it was in the “Rushdie Affair.” However, the Saudi Arabian’s were at a distinct advantage in the case of the *cartoons* as the Danish Muslims went to raise the issue in Egypt, a predominately Sunni Muslim country and more importantly in the Saudi Arabian sphere of influence. This meant that it was easier for Saudi Arabia to react faster and claim the issue as theirs, as the Danish Muslims came under the Saudi Arabian political sphere. Also with Iran entangled in the escalating row with the West over its nuclear programme officials in Iran may have thought it best to leave this issue alone in terms of official government statements, after the experience of the “Rushdie Affair”.

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<sup>37</sup> Evidence of the rise in religiopolitics and concern by the Saudi regime was articulated by the change of title by the King of Saudi Arabia, after the “Rushdie Affair”, from ‘his royal majesty,’ to ‘servant of the two sanctuaries’ of Mecca and Madina (Ayubi: 1991: p.104).

A third aspect of the added contexts that became attached to the controversies was communalism. In the case of the “Rushdie Affair” communal conflict in South Asia was a key propagator in spreading the conflict. In India the nervousness of not only communal violence but the perceived prospect by the ruling party of losing a large section of the Muslim vote meant the book was banned with little discussion. Therefore, the action of banning the book and arguably starting the “Rushdie Affair” was a result of the communal politics of South Asia. Communal politics that claimed relation to the *Danish Cartoons* would result in violence and cause death and destruction in Nigeria and South Asia.

Each governmental regime, political activists and other various groups fighting for legitimacy and political power used the vocabulary of defending Islam to serve specific objectives in their own discrete settings. Therefore, clear local contexts explain each reaction to *The Satanic Verses* and the *cartoons* in every instance. What appeared by some to be a unified condemnation by the Muslim world, articulated in Huntington’s “Clash of Civilisation” and arguments citing different “values”, miss the glaring differences in the response of the various regimes and populations of the Muslim world.

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