

# The cartoon controversy and the possibility of cosmopolitanism

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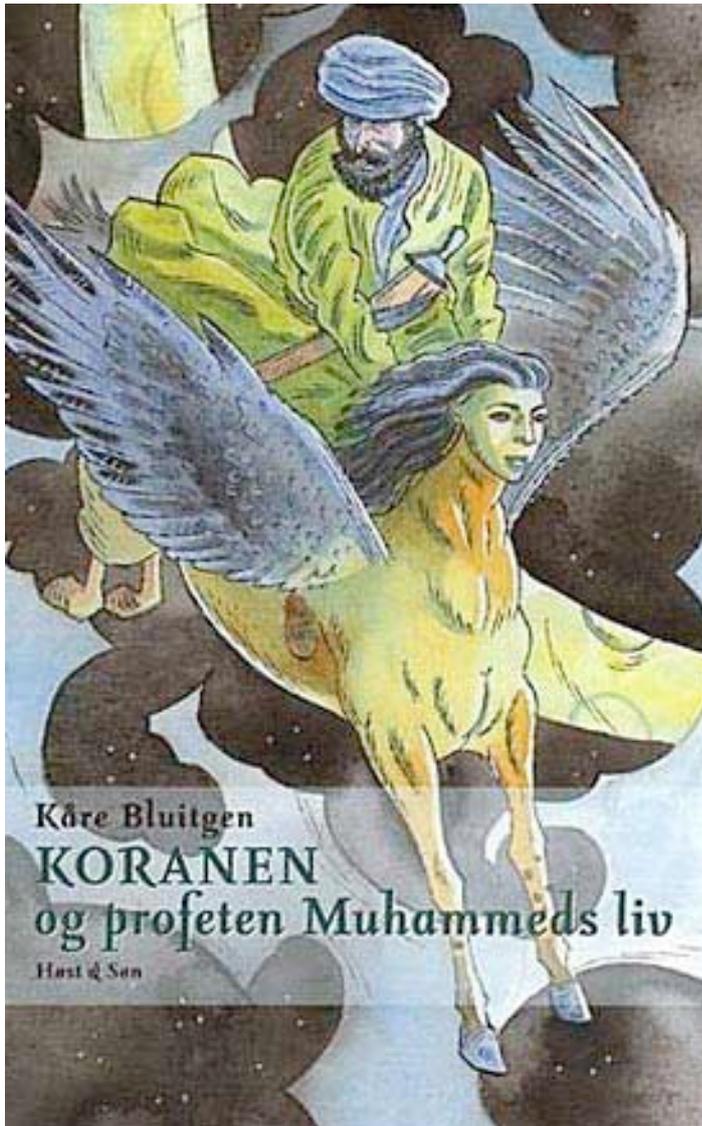
The so-called cartoon controversy, which erupted unexpectedly early in 2006 and began to fizzle out a couple of months later, has a profound significance for any discussion of cosmopolitanism. Some of the several thousand media

commentators worldwide talking about it in January and February 2006 compared it to the Rushdie affair from 1988 onwards, but the more recent drama was simultaneously less and more significant than the Iranian *fatwa* on Salman Rushdie: This conflict reached its climax within weeks and waned afterwards; and it involved governments and businesses in a much more comprehensive way than the Rushdie affair, which remained focused on a single person for over a decade.

The controversy showed that offensive messages are quickly and easily globalised in the information era, that the statements and views which get the most attention need not be representative of substantial groups, that symbolic power discrepancies inform reactions to public statements involving intergroup relations; and it was an indirect reminder that mere religious differences are not sufficient for igniting serious conflict. In this contribution, I shall discuss the implications of the cartoon affair for anthropological theorising of cosmopolitanism.

## **The facts**

Let us first go through some of the facts. In the summer of 2005, Flemming Rose, the cultural editor of Denmark's largest subscription newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* (described by Christopher Hitchens, with characteristic large-country stupidity, as a newspaper 'nobody had heard of'), discovered that a Danish author called Kåre Bluitgen had written a children's book about Muhammad but was unable to find an artist willing to illustrate it. The Danish public sphere had been shaken by the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam a year earlier, and the ban on depicting Muhammad in Sunni Islam was well known. The book was, incidentally, published in 2006, beautifully illustrated by an anonymous artist (Bluitgen 2006).



Rose had an idea. He decided to invite the leading newspaper cartoonists of the country to make cartoons depicting the Prophet, in order to demonstrate that the freedom of expression was non-negotiable and absolute in liberal Denmark, or in his own words, to “find out how far the self-imposed censorship had gone”. Twelve of the forty gave a positive response, and the resulting twelve cartoons were published in the weekend edition of *Jyllands-Posten* on 30 September 2005.

Bluitgen’s book, published in 2006

The cartoons range from the harmless to the potentially deeply insulting (although the general ban on depicting the Prophet in Sunni Islam must be kept in mind, meaning that any drawing of Muhammad might in principle be seen as offensive). One of the cartoonists used the competition as a pretext for criticising *Jyllands-Posten*’s antagonistic approach to religious pluralism in Denmark. His drawing depicts a dark-haired schoolboy called Mohammad (from 7a, Valby school), and the text on the blackboard reads (in Persian, with Arabic script): “The journalists at *Jyllands-Posten* are a bunch of reactionary agitators”. Several of the others must be judged harmless. Only

one is genuinely funny in my world: A bedraggled group of suicide bombers arrive at Heaven's Gate, only to be met by an apologetic Prophet who says: "Sorry boys, we've run out of virgins." Another somehow anticipates the reactions to the cartoons: Some angry, armed men appear, ready to go out and kill, when the Prophet, holding a sheet of paper, raises his hand and says, "Easy friends, when all is said and done, it's just a rough sketch made by an infidel from southern Jutland."

A few of the cartoons are less benign. The most infamous one is the drawing of Muhammad wearing a bomb in the shape of a turban on his head. Yet the message is not necessarily that Muhammad was a terrorist, but could equally well be that the religion he founded is about to become the victim of terrorists who give it a bad reputation (the person about to blow up, after all, is Muhammad himself). Yet the only obviously offensive of the twelve cartoons is the one depicting Muhammad with a lifted dagger, his eyes concealed, apparently with the missing piece of fabric from the burka worn by the women standing behind him. This is an unambiguously negative comment on gender relations and the concept of *jihad* in Islam.

There was no immediate outcry following the publication of the cartoons. Only when journalists from other newspapers began to ask conservative imams in the main Danish cities about their views, some of the latter said that the cartoons insulted all Muslims of the world. A demonstration in central Copenhagen was then organised in October, led by the Danish imam Ahmed Abu Laban (who died of cancer in January 2007). The demonstration was not, incidentally, all about the cartoons, but was directed against the perceived growing Islamophobia in Danish society.

With other Muslim leaders from Denmark, Abu Laban soon afterwards travelled to several Muslim countries, asking for support in protesting to the Danish state. Hearing about this, the Danish right-wing populist leader Pia

Kjærsgaard, whose Danish People's Party incidentally supports the current government, claimed that these Muslims were traitors.

The most tangible result of the trip to the Muslim countries, however, was a letter of protest sent by eleven Muslim governments to the Danish prime minister, Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, asking him to meet with their ambassadors to explain the situation. Rasmussen declined, simply stating that it was not the government's business to interfere with the press.

In December 2005, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the Arab League then called for a general boycott against Denmark. Unverified stories began to circulate in the Arabic-speaking world, about Bluitgen's book being a "government-commissioned new Koran". Some of the cartoonists received threats.

In January 2006, an obscure publication in Norway – unlike *Jyllands-Posten*, which is among Denmark's most important newspapers – called *Magazinet*, re-published the cartoons. This magazine has a modest circulation and is published by a fundamentalist Christian group, and it was in fact a publication few had heard about, even in Norway, before it reprinted the Danish cartoons.

As a result of this, however, Norway was increasingly perceived as being complicit with Denmark in the conspiracy against Islam. By the beginning of February, protests in many countries had turned violent. Embassies were burnt down in Damascus and Beirut; Libya closed its embassy in Copenhagen, armed men stormed the EU offices in the Gaza strip, and there were angry demonstrations in many countries with substantial Muslim populations. During the riots in early February, people were killed in Gaza, in Libya, in Pakistan and elsewhere (but, ironically, not in Europe) – only in Nigeria, 38 people were reported killed during anti-cartoon riots.

At the same time, the cartoons were reprinted as an act of solidarity in several other countries; *Die Zeit*, *The Times of India*, *France-Soir*, *La Stampa*,

*El Periodico* and *El Mundo*, to mention a few – even the BBC showed the cartoons on TV.

Also at the same time, however, Danish and Norwegian authorities were increasingly feeling uneasy. The Norwegian Foreign Minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, made a public apology to Muslims on a trip to Palestine in January, saying that the freedom of expression was a strongly held value in Norwegian society, but that this did not mean that one was justified in insulting others. As things got out of hand, even *Jyllands-Posten* apologised “for having offended many Muslims”, the Danish Prime Minister mumbled his apologies as he realised that Muslim countries were boycotting Lego, Bang & Olufsen and Danish butter; and even the conservative Protestant who edited the Norwegian fundamentalist magazine got his ten minutes of fame had a reconciliation meeting with leaders of the Norwegian Islamic Council. By this time, however, the affair had gained momentum, and the rioters in the Muslim countries did not closely follow developments in northern Europe. Most of them, presumably, had not even seen any of the cartoons.

The public debates, the demonstrations, the accusations, the riots and anger flared up suddenly, and vanished in the same way. By early March, the cartoon controversy appeared to have died down, and in spite of temporary effects such as the cancellation of a Danish state visit to India because the Indian government felt Mr Rasmussen had ‘become too controversial’ in April, there are no indications that Denmark’s international reputation has suffered.

Before I begin the analysis, some additional contextual information may be helpful. First of all, it should be noted that an Egyptian newspaper actually reprinted the caricatures already in October 2005. Nobody in the Arab world demanded a boycott of Egyptian goods for that reason. A Jordanian weekly, *Al-Shihan*, published three of them in February 2006, along with the rhetorical question: What harms Islam the most, these pictures or images of

violent hostage-takers in Iraq? (The editor was dismissed, the newspaper removed from the kiosks.) It may also be of some interest that *Jyllands-Posten* was offered some funny drawings of Jesus Christ in 2003, made by the Danish artist Christoffer Zieler. The Sunday editor wrote, in his reply to Zieler: “As a matter of fact, I do not think that the readers of *Jyllands-Posten* will enjoy the cartoons. Actually, I think they will lead to an outrage.

Therefore, I will not publish them.” (Larsen and Seidenfaden 2006: 264) One may moreover suspect that a few Danes, in spite of their suddenly vehement support of the freedom of expression, would have been annoyed if a Muslim cartoonist had made a few such caricatures and had them published in a leading newspaper – even if there is no ban on depicting Jesus in Christianity.

It should also be kept in mind that the actual number of demonstrators was very modest: 300 in Pakistan, 400 in Indonesia, 200 in Tripoli, even fewer in Damascus. In other words, a very limited number of persons – some radical imams and their followers in Denmark, a few hundred youths in Muslim countries, a couple of editors who disliked Islam – proved themselves capable of setting political and civil society agendas in large parts of the world for several weeks, and also clearly contributed to the growing polarisation between Muslims and others in several countries.

A factor which most of the non-Scandinavian commentators have not taken into account, is the heightened tension between Denmark’s Muslims and mainstream Danish society following the change in government in 2001, when a conservative government supported by the right-wing populist Danish People’s Party took the reins. Denmark is in this respect not just another West European country; it has in recent years introduced draconian legislation on minority issues, affecting both new immigration and forms of integration into Danish society for immigrants. The reactions to the cartoons among many Danish Muslims, led by Abu Laban, must in this way be seen as a pretext for addressing other problems they experience in Danish society. In

the most comprehensive study of the cartoon controversy published so far, Larsen and Seidenfaden (2006) argue that the sharp turn to the right in Danish politics, where the conservative government depends on support from the right-wing populist *Dansk Folkeparti* (The Danish People's Party), explains much of the dynamics of the affair: Danish Muslims felt disenfranchised, and leading Danish media had for years taken a hard line on political Islam and in general focused intensively on problems with Muslims in Danish society.

As a result of the polarisation resulting from the cartoon affair, Islamophobic Danes and militant Islamists were given ample media space, at the expense of almost everybody else. Abu Laban himself said to a German journalist in February: "I have to thank the government for its stubbornness." His formerly marginal congregation grew rapidly in 2006. Neither Islamists nor the Danish People's Party and its sympathisers see it as being in their interest to depict Danish Muslims as ordinary Danes. In the interview quoted from above, with *Die Zeit*, Abu Laban says that a Muslim

could never be a normal citizen of a Western state. He makes a "security contract" with the secular state, but as a true believer he can never accept secularism – the separation of religion and state. He must always remain loyal to the highest religious law, the Sharia. "We Muslims must use freedom of speech," says the imam, "to the extent that it serves the goals of Islam." (Lau 2006)

However, Abu Laban is also quoted as having said, in the same period, that "I condemn every violent act against the Danish military or others" (Larsen and Seidenfaden 2006: 142).

*Der Spiegel's* Henryk M. Broder, thinking along similar lines as Lau, states that "Unfortunately, the paper [*Jyllands-Posten*] apologized for the

Muhammad-critical cartoons and democratic values lost out to totalitarian ideology (*Spiegel*, 1 February 2006). In other words, if you apologise for having offended someone, you are a weakling who lacks proper liberal values.

### **Possible positions on the cartoon affair**

More complex positions are common, and several of them are relevant for a discussion about cosmopolitanism. We may provisionally divide the positions on the caricature issue in two: The confrontational and the conciliatory. As shown already, the caricatures were not published as a matter of principle: *Jyllands-Posten* had refused to print caricatures of Jesus, and they were in their right to do so, since the freedom of expression does not oblige one to print anything. The newspaper is, incidentally, supportive of the government, unlike the liberal left-of-centre paper *Politiken*. The editor of the Norwegian *Magazinet* was, until the cartoon controversy, a staunch supporter of a law against blasphemy which Norwegian society has to date not succeeded in getting rid of, but he subsequently changed his views. In other words, a principled defence of the unlimited freedom of expression does not, in this case, sound convincing. (Besides, the freedom of expression is already limited in every country.) On the other side, Muslims who reacted with violence against the caricatures were also clearly not interested in promoting cosmopolitan values (what exactly they are, or can be, will be considered later).

There can be several reasons for rejecting the middle ground, just as there can be different middle grounds. If we concentrate on Danish (and, to a lesser extent, Norwegian) society, leaving the problems of the Arab and Muslim worlds aside for now, it may be said a priori that those who defended the view that the controversy proves the existence of an insurmountable gulf between “us” and “them”, demonstrated limited faith in the possibility of a

society based on both shared values and different values; in other words, they rejected a cosmopolitan ideal of dialogue and mutual understanding which does not mechanically lead to agreement and similarity.

A few examples of this kind of attitude follows as illustrations.

In late January, the Norwegian Progress Party (a large right-wing populist party) demanded that the government should cease to have contact with the Norwegian Islamic council, since the latter was opposed to printing the cartoons.

On 2 February, Mullah Krekar, a controversial Kurdish religious leader who has spent much time in Norway, said to a newspaper that the publication of the cartoons was tantamount to “a declaration of war against Islam”.

The social scientist Johan Galtung said a day later, to another newspaper, that one must expect terrorist attacks in Norway and Denmark now. He saw the publication of the cartoons as an insensitive use of freedom of expression, and compared it to publishing a cartoon which depicts sex between the Virgin Mary and the Holy Ghost. (And yet it must be pointed out that such cartoons doubtless exist.)

The Danish government’s refusal to meet ambassadors from Muslim countries could equally be seen as an indication of an attitude precluding the possibility of mutual understanding. (Strangely, the Danish government at one point requested Arab governments to apologise for the burning of the Danish flag.)

These views seem to deny the possibility of a middle ground. Alternative views are even more diverse.

On 10 February, a Norwegian NGO, *Antirasistisk senter*, organised a demonstration in favour of the freedom of expression, against violence and for respect. Their position, which did not attract much attention from the media, was complex in that it argued that a condition for practising the

freedom of expression in a culturally diverse society would be mutual respect. It goes without saying that it is impossible to legislate for or against respect.

The famous Muslim academic Tariq Ramadan, writing in the *International Herald Tribune*, elaborates on the same position:

What we need now on both sides is an understanding that this is not a legal issue, or an issue of rights. Free speech is a right in Europe and legally protected. No one should contest this. At the same time, there should be an understanding that the complexion of European society has changed with immigrants from diverse cultures. Because of that, there should be sensitivity to Muslims and others living in Europe. (Tariq Ramadan, IHT, 5 February 2006)

Note his use of the term *sensitivity*. Compare this with the celebrated critic Christopher Hitchens, writing on the website Slate ([www.slate.com](http://www.slate.com)). He first reminds the readers that Arab newspapers routinely print anti-Jewish cartoons, and adds, in the climactic part of the brief article: "I am not asking for the right to slaughter a pig in a synagogue or mosque or to relieve myself on a 'holy' book. But I will not be told I can't eat pork, and I will not respect those who burn books on a regular basis."

This is another complex position. Hitchens concedes that synagogues and mosques may be a special kind of building for certain people, but that he is not required to respect them any more than faithful believers can be expected to respect him. This position, veering towards mutual indifference, is compatible with cosmopolitanism given certain conditions, to which I shall return.

Most of the lengthier commentaries that were published in the Danish and Norwegian press about the controversy may be classified as

“conciliatory” or “complex” in their attitude. Although there was disagreement over the good sense in publishing the cartoons, few believed that this kind of thing should be banned. There was also disagreement over the use of boycott as a way of expressing disgust; but boycott has been used by liberals and socialists in our part of the world in the recent past as well, most famously in the international campaign against apartheid, and even today, there are people who will not buy Israeli goods. This kind of disagreement is compatible with cosmopolitanism.

A Muslim writing in a Norwegian newspaper pointed out that there exists a set of ethical guidelines for the Norwegian press, known as the “Be Cautious poster” (*Vær varsom-plakaten*), where (in paragraph 4.3) it says that one shall show respect for peoples personal peculiarities, private life, race, nationality and religion. Within (Sunni) Islam, the writer adds, it is an absolute and incontestable sin to depict Mohammad. A possible response to this view is that it may be a sin for you, but for me it ain’t.

The Danish liberal MP Naser Khader, who describes himself as an “ultra-light Muslim”, called for the establishment of a network of “cultural Muslims” and pragmatic Muslims who saw their religion as just one of several of their identities. In an interview, Khader said, “The Mohammed cartoon dispute also has a positive side. Now we know where the radicals stand. It’s up to us moderates to develop an alternative. What is at stake is no less than the soul of Islam.” In fact, a trilingual (Arabic, Danish and English) website was set up by “moderate Danish Muslims” under the heading “It’s enough now!” (*Nu er det nok!*), with a mission statement saying that “everything can now be discussed and criticised”, adding that the Muhammad cartoons were a provocation, but that one cannot prohibit such statements in a liberal society.

Substantial segments of the Danish and Norwegian populations (just how substantial one cannot know) believe that it was “unwise” to publish the

Muhammad cartoons, while others think that it is exactly for this kind of purpose the freedom of the press exists. As I shall argue, the latter position is incompatible with cosmopolitanism.

Interestingly, some prominent North American reactions have been more in line with Egyptian columnists than with Danish members of the government. Bill Clinton was quoted as having commented: "None of us are totally free of stereotypes about people of different races, different ethnic groups, and different religions. ... There was this appalling example in northern Europe, in Denmark, ... these totally outrageous cartoons against Islam." He may not have seen the cartoons (perhaps one or two could reasonably be described as "outrageous"), but that is not the point.

Notwithstanding the predominance of nuanced and complex positions on both sides – for example, the Lebanese prime minister Fouad Saniora said, in a comment to the destruction of the Danish consulate in Beirut, that "this is absolutely not the way we express our opinions" – the debate took place chiefly on the terms of the antagonists, and the controversy might easily be invoked by enemies of cosmopolitanism as evidence that societies can only be cohesive if they are based on sameness.

The rapid escalation of the conflict from December to the beginning of February looks like a classic instance of Batesonian schismogenesis (Bateson 1972). On one side, the extremists argued: "See, we told you, the West is against Islam." On the other side, the other kind of extremist said, "See, Muslims can't be integrated into Europe, and they are destroying our values by not accepting what we stand for." From this starting point, the conflict began to escalate.

As is well known, Bateson applied the concept of schismogenesis to as diverse phenomena as alcoholism, gang violence and arms races. Convinced that the cause of some of the most widespread forms of schismogenesis was an error in the dominant Western mode of thought – the error of

individualism – Bateson wrote that if, for example, boasting is an element in the relationship between group A and group B, then "it is likely, if boasting is a response to boasting, that each group will drive the other to an exaggerated emphasis on this pattern, a process which – if it is not checked – only can lead to more and more extreme rivalry and, in the final instance, to enmity and breakdown in the entire system." (Bateson 1972: 68) Another example could be a marital conflict. He accuses her of spending too much time outside of the home, so that he rarely gets freshly ironed shirts and dinner at a set time. She accuses him of trying to control her and to deny her self-realization and an independent career. Unless a third instance, such as a conflict broker, children's points of view, a new argument or an original perspective, is drawn in, the relationship may well deteriorate right up to the point of divorce.

The limitations of classic system theory are evident here. There was no shortage of "rational" third instances or alternative framings of the situation in the cartoon affair. Quite the opposite: no chauvinistic or antagonistic statement was made in the European public spheres without immediate counterstatements adding nuance, correcting mistakes and making appeals to dialogue, respect and tolerance. What we need to understand, before considering the possibilities of cosmopolitanism, is why certain views and statements become so much more powerful than others. Batesonian or other system theory cannot answer this question. Now, as I have earlier argued in a book about the new enemy image of Islam (Eriksen 2001), in order to understand the disappointment and occasional rage encountered in Muslim societies, it is necessary to look not at the relations of production, but at the relations of communication. Humiliation, a result of disrespect, is a key term here. It is a common view among Muslims that they are not taken seriously, not listened to, not treated as equals. That is certainly a widespread perception in contemporary Denmark. Uneven relations of communication

result in one party feeling that it is not being heard. Thus Danes may say to the Muslims that you can say whatever you like about our gods, and we say whatever we like about yours, and we then have equality. Quite apart from the fact that Danes are generally secular and Muslims are generally religious, and that there is a religious ban on depicting the Prophet in Sunni Islam,

Muslims know that this is a bogus equality, for reasons that are so obvious that we do not need to go into them here. This inequality partly accounts for the violence in the reactions of some, and the calls for moderation in the use of the freedom of expression among others. An image that comes to mind is that, reported in the press in 2005, about a demonstration in Afghanistan following a rumour that American marines in Guantánamo had urinated on the Holy Koran. The report led to a public enquiry, and in fact, the soldier who had done the urinating admitted it, but explained that he had really just urinated on a prisoner, and that a few drops accidentally fell on the Koran. This is the kind of world inhabited subjectively by many Muslims.

But we must return to the cartoons. Historically, caricatures have usually been “a weapon of the weak” used to humiliate and shame powerful groups, but it can also be a weapon of the strong, as in the case of anti-Semitic caricatures in Germany before and during the Second World War. In this context, given the geopolitical situation and the situation of Muslims in Western Europe (and, perhaps in particular, in Denmark), there can be no doubt how the cartoons were perceived there.

### **Vulnerability and cosmopolitan ideals**

In the real world, sameness cannot be achieved. Given the fact that a newspaper feature in an obscure North European country could lead to riots and violence as far afield as Nigeria and Afghanistan, it is clearly not

sufficient, following the logic of sameness, that the members of “a society” have the same views about this and that. (Which they never do, but that’s another story.) If fundamental disagreement is dangerous, then it would seem that the only solution is a global ethics based on a set of common denominators ensuring that nobody is ever offended. This would be the ultimate result of the position Hitchens attacks, where “respect” and “consideration” leads to massive self-censorship, and where the tolerant are instructed to respect the intolerant. In such a world, where offensive messages are globalised as easily as emails, many essential debates would become private and might even go underground, for fear of offending the sensibilities of others. It would be reminiscent, on a huge scale, of the dinner party organised by Mr. Fielding in E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, where our good Englishman worries about the menu – the guests have different religions and subscribe to various food taboos. In the end, the public sphere would be left empty under such a regime. Another option would consist in exploring the possibilities of living with difference, that is to say the project of cosmopolitanism as it has been formulated in Europe since Montaigne, but especially since Kant.

Let us suppose that secularised Danes were to take the religiosity of Muslims seriously and treat it with respect, much as they treat their old parents with respect. In that case, they would easily know how to manoeuvre in order not to offend them. Not even trying to manoeuvre indicates a strong inclination not to live in the same society even if one lives next door to each other.

The kind of cosmopolitan attitude leading to restraint can be compared to the underlying reasoning behind the ban on smoking in public, which is these days being implemented in many parts of the world – but, ironically, not in Muslim countries! A Swede who lives part of the year in Cairo, part of the year in Göteborg, told me that in Göteborg he can have his beer any time

anywhere, but he has to go outside to smoke; in Cairo it's the other way around. The point is, however, that supposing I smoke and you do not, and we are in a room together, I might just tell you that if I smoke and you don't, we both enjoy our liberal freedom. This is the problem of the cartoon controversy and the simplistic liberal responses to the offended reactions among Muslims. Muhammad cartoons to them are like tobacco smoke to an asthmatic.

Cosmopolitanism presupposes the acknowledgment of living in the same society, which confers not only rights but also responsibilities. When Salman Rushdie's Indian publishers was offered *The Satanic Verses*, they were uncertain as to what to do, given the already controversial reputation of the book, and they asked Khushwant Singh for advice. Singh is an unrepentant liberal in Indian public life, having written a very great number of satirical and sometimes serious books, articles and columns all over the country since just after the Second World War. He hates sectarianism and enjoys his whisky in a very public way. Surprisingly perhaps, Khushwant Singh recommended that Rushdie's book should not be published. His reasoning was that the few members of the Indian cultural elite who would really enjoy it could get it from England anyway, and if it were to be published in India, the result was likely to be riots and unnecessary deaths (Waldrop 1999). And so the book was not published in India, and this may be seen as a clear victory for a cosmopolitan attitude that transcends mere liberalism and acknowledges that difference necessitates respect.

## **Conclusion**

In a review of Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism* (Appiah 2006) John Gray states that "As a position in ethical theory, cosmopolitanism is distinct from relativism and universalism. It affirms the possibility of mutual

understanding between adherents to different moralities but without holding out the promise of any ultimate consensus.” (Gray 2006)

In other words, fervent missionary activity is not, according to this view, compatible with cosmopolitanism, nor is an ethical position which assumes that there is but one good life. The question asked by liberals may be why they should tolerate intolerance; the answer is that they are not asked to do so. They are only asked to coexist with, and collaborate with people of different persuasions when the need arises. Most conflicts involving immigrants in Oslo, where I live, are of a practical nature: Why do the parents of immigrant children active in sports so rarely take part in the community work – organising fleamarkets, selling hot dogs on match days and so on – which is essential to raise money for the children? Why do immigrant parents let their children play noisily outside late in the evening? Why do Norwegians never invite their immigrant neighbours for a cup of tea? It is this kind of everyday problem that creates coldness and distance between natives and newcomers – I have yet to hear of a single conflict between ethnic Norwegians and immigrants that directly involved differences in religious beliefs. The main flaw in many accounts of cosmopolitanism consists in their reliance on dialogue, verbal exchange, mutual cognitive understanding and so on. Where I live, we don't really care which political party the neighbour votes for, and we don't know if they have any religious beliefs or if they love European classical music as much as we do, nor do we care, as long as they take their turn shovelling snow in our common courtyard in the winter months. Cosmopolitanism may degenerate into missionary liberalism, but it may also degenerate into indifference. As long as there are practical tasks at hand, which need to be handled collectively, this is not a danger. If anything, it is the lack of such tasks that prevent cosmopolitanism in North Atlantic societies, not the lack of things to disagree or agree about in the media. Principled liberal individualists like Christopher Hitchens can perfectly well live

in a cosmopolitan society without respecting other people's beliefs and religious practices, but only in so far as he engages in common activities with them. "Rational discourse", which both Hitchens and Ramadan believe in, can only get you so far. There is nothing like getting your hands dirty together. It can be said, and is often said, that violence begins where language ends, but it may just as well be said that violence begins where interaction ends.

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A few useful Internet sources

<http://www.rezgar.com/camp/i.asp?id=50> (*Nu er det nok*)

<http://face-of-muhammed.blogspot.com/>