



## **Contested Caricatures: Dynamics of Muslim Claims-making during the Muhammad Caricatures Controversy**

**Lasse Lindeskilde**

### **Abstract**

The publication of the twelve Muhammad caricatures in a Danish newspaper in September 2005 led to the first large scale mobilisation and prolonged intervention in the public debate by Muslims in Denmark. This dissertation provides a description and analysis of the dynamics, characteristics and trajectory of Danish Muslims' claims-making in response to the publication of the Muhammad caricatures. The thesis focuses on the determinants of Muslim claims-making during a well defined public controversy. As such, it aims to provide answers to the following questions: How were the grievances introduced by the Muhammad caricatures collectivized and turned into Muslim mobilisation? What role did the particular Danish context or Islamic ideas play in this process, and what kind of Islamic actors were active? Following a common assertion in much public discourse about Islam stressing the incompatibility of Muslim claims-making and the political culture of secular democracies, the dissertation also investigates the extent to which the actual form and content of Muslim claims-making during the controversy challenged the principles of the secular public sphere. The dissertation pays careful attention to the diversity of Muslim claims-making in the controversy and attempts to explain variance across types of Muslim actors, across time and between different arenas of claims-making.

Departing from a theoretical integration of both social movement theory and elements of the sociology of religion, the dissertation argues that the nature of Muslim claims-making during the controversy was best described as de-essential, de-exceptional and dynamic. Muslim mobilisation and claims-making was not predetermined, uniform and unidirectional, as has been suggested, but rather multi-vocal, multi-directional and multi-paced. Rather than leading to a unified protest, the publication of the Muhammad caricatures led to intense internal positioning among Muslim actors in Denmark. The claims-making by Danish Muslims seems to have been no more emotional, irrational or ideological than claims-making by other types of actors. In fact, the causal mechanisms driving Muslim mobilisation and claims-making in the controversy were similar to those driving other forms of contention. Thus, there seems to be little *sui generis* about Islam that made Danish Muslims react the way they did. Danish Muslims stressed partly different issues, solutions and interpretations of the principles of the secular public sphere than non-Muslim claimants did in the debate, but they did so using contentious performances and arguments that did not fundamentally challenge these basic principles. Finally, the claims-making of Danish Muslims during the controversy proved to be historically and spatially linked to prior instances of public smearing of Islam and the simultaneous actions by other claimants in the debate. Danish Muslims' claims-making changed in form and content as the circumstances of the debate changed with, for example, the international escalation of the controversy.



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### **Lasse Lindekilde**

In January 2009 Lasse Lindekilde will take up a three year post doctoral fellowship at the Department of Political Science, University of Aarhus, Denmark. Lasse has disseminated several of the findings from his Ph.D. dissertation in journal articles and working papers. These include: "Mobilizing in the Name of the Prophet? The Mobilization/ Demobilization of Danish Muslims during the Muhammad Caricatures Controversy," in *Mobilization* 2008, 13(2); "Muslim Claims-making in Context: Comparing the Danish and the Swedish Muhammad Caricatures Controversies," forthcoming in *Ethnicities*, August 2009, Co-authored with Göran Larsson, University of Gothenburg; "Transnational Activism among Danish Muslims during the Muhammad Caricatures Controversy: A Negative and Reversed Boomerang Effect", RSCAS Working Papers 2008/18.