DANISH TEACHER ATTITUDES TOWARDS MUSLIM IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION INTO DANISH SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This proposal highlights the AERA 2007 theme of foreign educational research by seeking to pinpoint potential causes of inter-group conflict among the immigrant Muslim and native communities in Denmark by surveying Danish teacher values. The perceptions Muslim and non-Muslim teachers have about teaching Islamic and national values in Danish society reveal the level and depth for or against national civic and social integration. Survey data from teachers, the principal architects for shaping values in a society, yield significant insights into how social and political discourse might be shaped and public policy developed. Denmark’s localized Muslim immigrant community has leaders who lent support to this effort. Based on a summary of interviews, a validated survey instrument available in English and Danish has been designed and administered via the Internet to all teachers in Denmark in 2007.
Introduction

The new global confrontation is between secular western values and conservative Muslim religious beliefs. The problem for Europe and America is to find the right legal and political balance between cultural assimilation and national integration of all immigrant religions, but especially first and second generation Muslims. Unquestionably, the economic, political and social agenda for the next century will be the conflict between the secular developing world and its historical values accentuating individual rights and freedoms, and the burgeoning Muslim communities scattered throughout Europe that value more communal standards and not individual freedoms. It is problematic whether Muslim communities will ever become thoroughly assimilated culturally into European societies in the near future, whether or not governments agree on regulations for the wearing of the jihab gown on female Muslim high school students or head scarves.

The Dutch government, for example, passed new laws for immigrants entering the Netherlands in March, 2006 that include having them watch a video with nudes sunbathing on the beach and homosexuals kissing. These scenes are a part of a DVD in a package of study materials and a test to discourage applicants who may be offended by the content. The aim was to let naïve or uninformed Muslim workers know that a variety of different values are tolerated in western democracies. These strict new policies were made as a direct cause of the murders of Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn and the filmmaker Theo van Gogh, and former Dutch legislator Ms. Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s renunciation of her Muslim faith and the subsequent death threats against her. She now resides in the United States.

Unless Europe can at least nationally integrate its relatively small but restive Muslim immigrant communities as citizens, it will witness a Muslim majority in Europe by the end of the century. There are about 16 million Muslims in 15 countries in the European Union, about four percent of Europe’s total population. However, the fall in birthrates among native Europeans and the explosive growth of Muslim populations (about three times as high) represent a crucial demographic imbalance that cannot be ignored.

In 1982 there were 35,000 Muslims living in Denmark. By 2003 there were 162,000, a nearly five-fold increase in 20 years. This pattern of exponential Muslim population increase has been duplicated in Spain, Italy, France, Germany, and Austria during the same time period.

Moreover, nearly one million Muslim immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East arrive in Europe each year placing an already bur-
densome strain on the welfare system in most European nations. These arrivals tend to live in already crowded Muslim ghettos that exist on the margins of urban society. Many will not become citizens. This in turn makes many unemployed young men vulnerable to the lure of radicalism. Moreover, according to the U.S. Department of State, younger Muslims are resisting assimilation into secular European societies much more than their immigrant grandparents did. The clash between western secular traditions and iconoclastic Muslim religious views will only deepen throughout Europe in the following decades.

The integration of Muslims into Danish society has not been adequately studied and this investigation is an attempt to provide social science evidence for teacher attitudes. Everyone agrees that formal schooling is the primary social agent for nurturing social and civic integration. Accordingly, teachers are the linchpins for inculcating all the necessary values for integration. Hence, one question is: What do teachers actually believe about the integration of Muslims into the community and in the schools? This survey provides some answers for Denmark, a country of about six million that faces the same absorptive workforce and cultural dilemmas accepting larger number of Muslim members as other European countries.

A Clash of Values

The convergence of Islam and national and cultural identity in Europe, exacerbated by external events like a murder, assassination, riot, or even a satirical cartoon, has the potential for disrupting civic order and eroding movements towards cultural assimilation and national integration. Clearly, fundamentalism in any religion, Jewish, Christian, Sikh, or Muslim, can turn a few radicals into fanatics who seek the death of those whom they believe are infidels. Revealing the sources of cultural dissonance between Islamic faith and national identity can have a profound influence on how societies prepare for Muslim immigrant problems in Denmark, the country chosen for this investigation, and throughout Europe and even America.

A Pew Global Projects poll, surveying over 14,000 in 13 nations and released in June, 2006, found that Muslims and Westerners both tend to view the other as violent, intolerant and lacking respect for women. In selected European countries, respondents were asked whether Muslims were fanatical. The yes responses were: in Spain 83%, Germany 78%, France 50%, and Great Britain 48%.

This is not a research question for identifying a few surly young men in the mold of the Danish existentialist Soren Kierkegaard who pessimis-
tically brood on metaphysical issues, but of awakening the Muslim community to radicalized extremists who hijack the attempts of the majority who seek to peacefully integrate and conform to the demands of modern life.

In the United States and Europe where Muslims have the greatest exposure to western values and culture, they are increasingly embracing Islamic values. Western altruistic hopes for full integration of Muslims into national western cultures is unlikely to be realized.

This proposal will provide a modicum of evidence for the depth and level of the Muslim immigrant population towards integration and away from violence in the native Danish immigrant Muslim population towards continued tolerance. This proposal seeks to pinpoint potential areas of disagreement among Danish educators, and to provide evidence for or against inter-group conflict by examining values in Danish schools among regular and Muslim Danish teachers.

**Why Denmark?**

Danish society was traumatized in 2006 by the global outrage over the publication of satirical cartoons about Mohammad in September 2005. The violent attacks on Danish embassies in Syria, Iran, Libya, Pakistan and Indonesia, and to some other Nordic individuals throughout the Islamic world and the boycott of Danish commercial goods, shattered the tranquility of Scandinavian insouciance. This is an opportune time to explore whether this national awakening to the depth of Islamic fervor will lead to a retrenchment of social interaction between Danes and their immigrant Muslim communities, deepen the fear and mistrust between natives and the immigrant community, or result in a new show of tolerance between the native and non-native groups and diminish the potential for violence.

The ultimate fear is that terrorist attacks within Denmark will damage the collective psyche and jeopardize the high level of tolerance for new or recent Muslim immigrants, and mistrust of third generation Muslim residents. But just as real is the political backlash from Danish right-wing proponents. A right-wing, anti-immigrant, xenophobic political party, the Danish People’s Party led by Pia Kjaersgaard, has already emerged to challenge the widening tolerance toward Muslims among Danes. Polls have shown that growth in this party from 13.3% in the 2005 general election to 17.8 percent in 2006, and there has been a surge in membership applications.

Denmark has passed laws in an effort to speed Muslim immigrant integration into Danish society by limiting the practice of second-
generation Danes returning to the ancestral countries to find husbands and wives.

The Danish Foreign Ministry sponsored a conference on March 10, 2006 of preachers, Arab media representatives from Kuwaiti TV and the popular Al Jazeera network based in Qatar, and various scholars to engage in dialogue. It included 25 young people from Denmark and 25 from the Arab world. No imam from Denmark, however, was invited, as Imam Ahmad Abu Laban, who was based in Denmark and was interviewed in 2006 preparatory for this proposal, had organized trips among Danish imams to Egypt and Lebanon stirring up outrage in the Arab world about the Danish cartoons. Participants at this conference openly expressed fears about new extremism on both sides. (Imam Abu Laban died in the winter of 2007.)

**Radical Islam**

Islam means “submission,” a yielding to the Koran and the precepts of clerical exponents. Any undermining of the claims of Muslim faith and the authority of religious belief is liable to retribution, not just by a few hotheads but by huge crowds of Islamic believers flooding the streets of cities. The global Islamic response to perceived blasphemy, and not just from terrorists, has been predictably violent.

The attempts to pillory or destroy traces of forbidden images is similar to the iconoclasm of the 6th through the 8th centuries when Christian emperors in Constantinople initiated the destruction of images, art, and shrines. Islam now attempts to destroy, not just images within its religious purview, but all instances that satirize its sacred beliefs in any religious or non-religious context. Many businesses, media outlets and governments, under the guise of apologetic sensitivity to religious beliefs, have obediently complied. The response is similar to the iconoclasm of the Byzantine era.

Moreover, most Muslims claim that their attitudes towards the so-called infidels are peaceful. But the Koran contains passages that radicals can claim to give them leave to condone violence. With these phrases as divine sources of legitimacy, a Muslim who chooses a violent response or a jihad can find all that is needed to authorize militancy.

*When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield, strike off their heads.*  
*(Sura 47:4)*
And fight in the way of God with those who fight with you...And slay them whenever you come upon them, and expel them from where they expelled you.” (Sura 2:190)

When the sacred months are over slay the idolaters wherever you find them. (Sura 9:5)

Lest anyone think these scriptural claims are only token symbols of a faded past, it is instructive to recall the statement of Mohammed Taheri-Azar, a Muslim student at the University of North Carolina, in a letter to the local ABC TV affiliate on March 3, 2006 where he wrote:

Allah gives permission in the Koran for the followers of Allah to attack those who have waged war against them, with the expectation of eternal paradise in case of martyrdom and/or living one’s life in obedience of all of Allah’s commandments found throughout the Koran’s 114 chapters...I did not act out of hatred for Americans but out of love for Allah instead.

Mr. Taheri-Azar ran down students on a sidewalk with his car in 2006. Fortunately, no one was killed though several were injured. This is a chilling reminder of how literally some U.S. Muslim believers and other religious fundamentalists take scriptural passages for direct action. This one incident also shows that violence condoned by the Koran is not limited to jihad websites that specifically shows violence against the non-believers. Similarly, Hamed Bitawi, a newly-elected Hamas legislator in the Palestinian parliament in Gaza said, when it approved the Islamic group’s new cabinet in April, 2006: “The Koran is our constitution, Jihad is our way, and death for the sake of God is our highest aspiration.”

It has been reliably reported that only about 13% of Danish Muslim immigrants active attend Friday mosque ceremonies. This does not always reveal irreligious sentiments, however, as Islamic websites provide abundant sources of literature, news and information from the Arab world, devotional content, and even radical recruitment for jihad movements.

Methodology

The method is to evaluate both native Danish and Muslim teacher beliefs about integration into Danish nationality. After interviewing an imam, headmasters, professors and teachers in the summer of 2006, researchers designed a survey form for Danish teachers of Muslim students for use in the school year of 2007 via the Internet. The attempt was not to try to identify a terrorist cell, mentally disturbed church arsonist, or grave
desecraters, but to gather credible evidence about prevailing social values that inform public opinion and which could drive legislative or government policy initiatives. Such evidence about values and beliefs can reveal tendencies among immigrant communities towards possible isolation and retreat from integration or spot progress towards assimilation into Danish culture.

A key objective was to learn what values Muslim teachers teach Muslim or other Danish students, and what values Danish teachers who are not Muslims teach Danish students about Islam. How do schools grapple with differing values in a Danish society now that Denmark has emerged as a target of global Islamic hostility? The perceptions Muslim and non-Muslim teachers have about teaching Islamic and national values in a Danish society will reveal the depth of antagonism for or against national integration. The tension between secular and nationalistic values favoring the individual and strongly-held views about religious identity that may disfavor individual freedoms will yield significant social insights into how policy might develop to reduce friction.

The argument for and documentation about national integration of immigrant Muslim communities is found in the Danish goals of education. Here is a typical schooling goal that educators in western societies easily subscribe to. In fact, it is one of the chief goals of Danish education:

“The Folkeskole shall familiarize pupils with Danish culture and contribute to their understanding of other cultures and of man’s interaction with nature. The school shall prepare the pupils for active participation, joint responsibility, rights and duties in a society based on freedom and democracy. The teaching of the school and its daily life must therefore build on intellectual freedom, equality and democracy.”

The key phrases here are 1) “rights and duties in a society based on freedom and democracy,” and 2) that the school must emphasize “intellectual freedom, equality and democracy.” Such phrases encapsulate the hard-won freedoms of the Renaissance, Enlightenment and the outcome of religious, civil and even world wars in the West over the last two hundred years. These are not the phrases to which devout Muslims, much less radical fundamentalists, would automatically yield assent. While attempting to preserve their own religious freedom, immigrant Muslims in Denmark and elsewhere also typically believe that they are entering a traditional society that will only absorb them culturally on its own terms.

The typical environment for assimilation in western societies is the school system, which is why this project has chosen teachers to glean
attitudes about these social imperatives. Denmark has both public and private Muslim schools. Both native Danish and third and second generation Muslim Danes teach in both kinds of school.

A research project conducted by Prof. Annette Ihle of Copenhagen University and released in June, 2006 in the newspaper *Berlingske Tidende* followed three Muslim schools in Copenhagen through the 2006 school year to study whether students learned citizenship values. She found that performance at independent Muslim schools did not meet the provisions of the education Act in several fields. While education in Danish, English, and mathematics match the demands of the *Folkeskole*, performance falls short in art, gymnastics, and science. Moreover, neither the content nor the authoritarian methods in the subject’s religion and mother tongue meet the education act’s demands. She concludes that students at the selected schools are not learning citizenship values.

**Interview Results**

Preliminary interviews for this project were conducted in July, 2006 in Copenhagen and Aarhus, two cities in Denmark where large concentrations of Muslims live. Interviewees included at least one Imam, two school administrators, one teacher, and four professors.

Here are the sample interview questions:

- Do Danish Muslims denounce radical Islamic jihad and violence?
- Can Danish Muslims integrate successfully into a western, secular society and still preserve their religious identity?
- Do Danish Muslims understand the secular nature of western societies, which is to preserve religious plurality in the nation?
- Can Denmark grow to accept and respect Muslim immigrants while preserving other religious persuasions?
- Should Danish schools give any special privileges to Muslim students?
- Are there age or gender differences in how Muslim immigrants approach living in Danish society?
- Are there generational differences between first, second, and third generation Muslim immigrants?
- Should more tolerance for all faiths be taught in schools?
- What would you suggest should be the best government policy for successful Muslim integration into Danish society?
Those interviewed included:

Ahmad Abu-Laban (deceased), Imam at the Islamic Community in Denmark
Jens Raahauge, Headmaster of Folkeskole with many Muslim students
Penille Rasmussen, teacher at Folkeskole with Muslim students.
Annette Haaber Ihle, Cross-cultural & Regional Studies, Language, Religion and Society at Copenhagen University
Tallat Daniel Shakoor, Danish University of Education, researching parental attitudes in Muslim schools
Jens Lundby, Vice-Principal, Lykke Skolen, a private Muslim school in Aarhus
Karen Bjerg Petersen, Danish University of Education, researching Danish as a second language
Osman Oztoprak, Turkish Professor at the University of Aarhus

Based summary of these interviews, a validated survey instrument was designed and administered via the Internet for administration in the school year 2007 to an anticipated audience of one thousand teacher participants of Danish and Muslim teachers of Muslim students and results tabulated. Survey statements were gleaned from interviews questions and responses and some from the Danish legal education requirements. Teachers responded to positively-worded statements based on their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert-like form, available in English and Danish.

Sample Survey Statements

DIRECTIONS: Please tick the space that best represents your response towards the attitudes and statements (very strongly agree VSA/strongly agree SA/agree A/ no opinion NO/disagree D/strongly disagree DS/very strongly disagree) VSD.

Students need to learn about tolerance for all religions and faiths.
Teachers in my school teach tolerance for all religions.
Students need to learn about major religions.
Teachers in my school teach specific religious values.
Students need to learn about the major tenets of Islam.
Muslim students need to learn how to integrate into Danish society.
Teachers in my school teach Muslim students how to integrate into Danish society.
All students must reject violence.
Many Muslim immigrant students look favorably on jihad.
Muslims students reject jihad and violence. Teachers in my school teach students to renounce violence. Students need to learn to treat everyone without prejudice. Some teachers in my school hold prejudicial views about Muslim students. Students need to learn how to treat everyone with equality. All students need to learn the value of individual political Freedoms & rights of citizenship. All students learn the value of, & respect for, intellectual freedoms & think, believe and speak freely. Muslim immigrant students lack basic Danish language skills. Schools should give special preferences to Muslim students in learning their native language. The majority of Muslim immigrant students have behavioral problems. Denmark should increase its Muslim immigrant community to satisfy the labor shortage. Danish Muslim students will integrate successfully into Danish society.

Respondents

Here are some facts about the 176 respondents thus far: 34% have taught less than 5 years, but 31% have taught for 19 years or more. 94% have only formal training at the teaching certificate level. Less than 5% have advanced training. Respondents teach equally in all major school subjects in roughly equal proportions.

Initial Survey Results

Four conclusions

[1] In general, teachers agree that students need to learn tolerance for all religions, to reject violence, to treat everyone without prejudice, and to learn the value of individual rights and freedoms. These are the standard values formal Danish schooling seeks to inculcate, in conformity with Danish educational standards.

[2] But, while expressing these supportive values, respondents are less likely

- to believe that Muslim students will integrate successfully into Danish society.
to want to increase the Muslim immigrant community to satisfy the labor shortage.

[3] On the one hand, although Muslim teachers overwhelming (75%) believe that Denmark should increase the Muslim immigrant community, only 27% of Protestant teachers believe likewise. Similarly, while 100% of Muslim teachers believe Danish Muslim students will successful integrate into Danish society, only 52% of Protestant teachers believe so.

[4] More disturbing is that over 40% of Protestant teachers believe Muslim students look favorably on jihad, and 30% of Muslim teachers agree. Whatever values teachers seek to inculcate in students, student acceptance of the violence of the jihad movement among Muslim youth is alarming. This shows that the jihad movement among Muslim youth is likely formed by influences outside the school, commonly believed to come from jihad websites but not, according to our interview responses, from the mosques or sermons by the imams. Both Muslim and Protestant teachers agree in equal proportions that Muslim students do not reject jihad or violence. Moreover, 25% of Muslim teachers agree that teachers are not teaching students enough to renounce violence, while less than 2% of Protestant teachers think so. One conclusion is that Muslim teachers may see teacher instruction for renouncing violence as more importantly than do regular Danish teachers, or that more needs to be done about greater instruction in non-violence.

The authors of this survey will continue to seek teachers to take the survey, which is still available on teacher association websites, and will expand its use to vocational and folke school teachers. Additionally, the survey is being administered in Belarus, has a large number of Muslims attempting to enter European Union countries through Belarus. We hope to report on a comparative analysis between these countries at a later time.