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Performing identity: The Danish cartoon crisis and discourses of identity and security

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Abstract

The Danish cartoon crisis, which attracted international media attention in 2006, has largely been debated as an issue of freedom of speech, feeding into broader debates about the 'clash of civilizations'. This article aims to explore the dominant discourses that performed a seemingly stable and consistent Danish identity at the domestic and external levels. Domestically, the discourse of a progressive Danish identity under threat from unmodern others was performed via discourses of a 'culture struggle' and a restrictive immigration policy designed to keep intact a narrow definition of Danishness. Externally, Danish identity and security was performed and defended via participation in the 'war on terror', democracy promotion and overseas development assistance, which became tools that were not simply associated with security in the liberal sense but also contained a spatial dimension designed to keep consistent the image of the complete nation-state. By adopting a discursive approach, the article aims to explore the performance of Danish identity that animated the cartoon crisis in order to highlight the complexities and contestations that animate ideas of self.

Keywords

identity, security, Denmark, cartoon crisis, discourse, performance, intervention, foreign policy

Introduction

In September 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published 12 cartoons under the headline 'The Faces of Mohammed'.[1] The accompanying editorial by the newspaper's cultural editor, Flemming Rose, outlined the growing problem for democracy of self-censorship, accusing 'some Muslims' of rejecting 'the modern, secular society', demanding 'a particular position' and insisting that 'special considerations'[2] be made with regard to their faith. Rose argued that such a position was 'incompatible with a secular democracy and freedom of speech', where 'insult, mockery and ridicule' must be accepted (cited in Rytkønen, 2007: 90). While not all the published images reflected a visual clash of civilizations, the images that received the most attention were those that

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invoked themes of violence, radicalism, censorship and gender subjugation, with the most controversial image, drawn by Kurt Westergaard, being that of the Prophet with a lit bomb in his turban.

In a letter to the then Danish prime minister of the centre–right coalition government, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the ambassadors of a number of Muslim countries raised concerns about an 'ongoing smear campaign' against Islam.[3] Rasmussen refused to meet with the ambassadors, citing freedom of the press.[4] An attempt by Muslim organizations to take the matter to court as blasphemy failed in October, and the event soon became 'internationalized' as a delegation of imams took the issue abroad, European and Middle Eastern newspapers reprinted the images, and initially peaceful protests turned violent. Danish embassies in Syria and Iran were attacked, along with the country's consulates in Beirut and Jakarta, and over 100 died in riots and related protests in countries such as Nigeria, Libya and Afghanistan. Death threats were issued against the cartoonists, and Danish goods were boycotted in many Muslim countries. The controversy was revived in February 2008 when the cartoons were republished in response to a plot to kill Kurt Westergaard,[5] and the Danish embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, was attacked by a car bomb in June that same year. With a second attempt on Westergaard's life in January 2010, and arrests in Norway, Germany, Sweden and Denmark in connection with plots related to the cartoons, the crisis appears to be ongoing.

Throughout the crisis, freedom of expression has been upheld as a specifically *Danish* value, one that enjoyed not only constitutional protection[6] but was the 'driving force of enlightenment, education and development ... that has generated progress in Denmark' and other 'free societies' (Rasmussen, 2007). Accordingly, the crisis was largely framed as a broader civilizational clash, with scholarly analysis focused mainly on multiculturalism and Islam,[7] and on media discourse and journalistic ethics.[8] Critical accounts of Danish immigration and integration policy[9] and non-Western perceptions of the crisis[10] constitute a smaller portion of the debate. With the exception of Hansen's (2008, 2011a,b) innovative work on visual securitization, however, the cartoon crisis has largely been bypassed by international relations theory and security studies. This article aims to explore the impact of the crisis in terms of identity and security, with a view to highlighting themes of *performance* and *rupture*. Rather than framing the crisis as a purely civilizational clash, it is interested in the discourses of Danish identity at work, along with their limits and possibilities. Informed by a series of semi-structured elite interviews conducted in Denmark in 2008 with Danish parliamentarians and officials,[11] it starts out from Connolly's (1991: 64) premise that 'identity requires difference in order to be', and explores the dominant articulation of a seemingly fixed and stable Danish identity that developed over time and animated, or performed, the crisis at the boundaries of domestic and external policy. At the domestic level, Danish identity was asserted through the discourse of a 'culture struggle' (*kulturkamp*) and an immigration policy that reiterated identity in hierarchical and exclusionary terms. Externally, Danish identity and security was performed and defended via participation in the 'war on terror', democracy promotion and overseas development assistance, which became tools that were not simply associated with security in the liberal sense but also contained a spatial dimension designed to keep consistent the image of the complete nation-state. Yet, as Connolly suggests, discourses of identity that require difference are inherently insecure, and the final section of the article explores contestations of identity that were obscured by the discourses that underscored the cartoon crisis.

Performing Danish identity

The 'turn to identity' in contemporary international relations and security theorizing – most notably through constructivism – has reshaped how the discipline conceptualizes international politics. Identity matters, and can explain cooperation (or lack thereof) between states, foreign policy choices, and the rise of security problems or threats beyond purely rationalist paradigms (Katzenstein, 1996; Wendt, 1992, 1999; Hopf, 1998; Ruggie, 1997). Yet, the treatment of identity often presumes it to be an essential attribute of states, nations or individuals (Kuus, 2007: 91). This approach tends to assume that identity is static and complete. Reading identity in such a manner pursues the binary logic that competing identities are a disruption and challenge to the consistency of the self, making identity an inherently *insecure* concept, as it 'requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty' (Connolly, 1991: 64).

Critical scholars have mostly addressed this problem by reading identity in discursive terms, which opens up space for multiple and alternate identities and possibilities of being rather than presuming a singular and consistent identity (Fierke, 2001; Bialasiewicz et al., 2007; Zehfuss, 2002; Onuf, 1989; Milliken, 1999; Doty, 1998; Campbell, 1998). Discourses are systems of representation, but they are more than the intersection of words and things, or a confrontation between reality and language: discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, [1972] 1992: 48–49), producing and reproducing social relations and meanings that include representations and practices. Discourses are powerful because they set the limits of reality; it is the discursive mode through which ontological effects – such as the idea of the pre-existing state or national identity – are established (Bialasiewicz et al., 2007: 406–408). The cartoons can be said to represent a *visual* discourse (Hansen, 2011a), performing a particular idea of 'Danish' and 'Muslim' identity and security that is presumed to be settled and complete, yet the cartoons themselves contain ambiguity (Hansen, 2011a; Alhassan, 2008; Becker, 2008). Rather than read them as an independent event, which lends a temporality to them that often reverts to framing the crisis as a manifestation of civilizational clash, this article aims to explore the discourses of identity that underpin them, reading the crisis against the practices and contexts that produce, sustain and give meaning to specific discourses of identity. Viewed in this way, the cartoons are merely an *effect* of identity, performing identity or giving expression to a particular discourse of Danishness. Here, the concept of performativity points to the constructed and contested nature of identity. Performativity refers to the citational practices by which discourse produces the effects it names (Butler, 2011: xii, 140; Kuus, 2007: 92; Weber, 1998). Identity (be it gender identity or national identity) is 'performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results' (Butler, 1999: 33). Identity is the effect of performance, not the other way round (Bell, 1999: 1). This unsettles the notion of a naturally existing subject.[12]

But, as Kuus (2007: 93) makes clear, this is not to deny identity claims, nor to forget that discourses of identity have an internal consistency and real effects. Indeed, the performance of 'Danish identity' produces specific policy actions and outcomes – which, in turn, reiterate 'Denmark' – which this article explores across the domestic and external realms. But, what are the discourses that underpin 'Denmark' and 'Danish identity'? If identity is a citational performance, what is being cited? And how? Adding to the existing literature on identity performance, the case of Denmark provides a complex reading of the struggle between dominant and contested identities. In particular, this article focuses on how narrow discourses of identity became pervasive, obscuring alternative modes of inclusion and being, but also conditioning them through the very categories that garnered consensus, such as gender equality, welfarism, democracy and progressiveness. It then examines how these discourses operated through policy. Here, the article expands empirically upon Campbell's (1998: 73) distinctions between practices that can *affirm* more than refute, or *contain* rather than constitute. The defence of identity in foreign and domestic policy employed the same norms and values that provided a very different policy profile at other times. Yet, as much as the cartoon crisis appeared to perform one consistent account of Danish identity, it also brought to the fore the tensions and limitations of that account. The repetitional and citational practices that constitute identity draw on the same discourses and artefacts that reproduce the self. Accordingly, the discourses that perform identity can become sedimented (Butler, 2011) and inflexible, obscuring the potential for dynamic or alternative forms of identity that can be included in the repertoire of citational practices that constitute the self.

What defines 'Danishness'?

Throughout the cartoon crisis, the dominant discourse of Danish identity relied on a series of discursive hooks, or what Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 112) would call nodal points (privileged discursive points that partially fix meaning), that constituted ideas of the self. Denmark's self-identity is that of a modern and progressive state, characterized by a strong commitment to welfare, gender equality and open democracy. The approach to the domestic realm also translated to its international profile as a 'good state' – an expression that, in Lawler's (2005: 441–442) definition, invokes the idea of a moral and purposeful approach to the responsibilities of statecraft in the international state system. Denmark's postwar foreign policy was typified by its rejection of power politics and pursuit of peaceful initiatives in the form of overseas development assistance, promotion of gender equality, peacekeeping, mediation and commitment to international law.

Yet, this discourse of Danish identity becomes far more complex on closer reading and is the result of struggles over the 'true' nature of what it means to be Danish. In the 18th century, Denmark was a 'conglomerate' or 'composite' state that included the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, Iceland, Norway, the Faeroe Islands and Greenland, and comprised several different nationalities. Fears of German dominance fuelled competing discourses about Danish identity; ideas of patriotism saw national romanticism (which viewed society as organic and innate, based on genealogy) compete with cosmopolitan ideas that patriotism can be 'learned' through education and enlightenment; enemies were not other nationalities but 'false' patriots or those who were 'anti-patriotic' (Engelhardt, 2007: 209–214; Hansen, 2002; Østergård, 2004, 2006). In the carving out of these contested self-definitions, the ideal of the *folk* ('people') became central and developed an intricate link to the nation. Under the influence of N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), priest, philosopher, educator, politician and poet, *folk* schools promoted organic notions of belonging, combining individual enlightenment and a holistic view of identity linked to blood, birth and language,[13] which became crucial elements of Danish identity. As a larger, multinational entity, Denmark faced not only ethnic and cultural tensions between Danes and Germans but also social struggles between the 'upper class' and the *folk* – the 'real' Danes – with the latter positioned in anti-elitist terms against the state (Engelhardt, 2007: 212). Authenticity became a powerful discourse in the construction of Danish identity, a theme that re-emerges in recent debates about 'new Danes'.

The reduction of the Danish conglomerate state in 1864 and the loss of Schleswig-Holstein and southern Jutland represented a seismic shift in the physical and psychological idea of 'Denmark' itself. One of the first effects was cultural, with the loss of a heterogeneous mix of peoples, reducing the Danish population in numbers but also in ethnicity, making 'Denmark' more homogenous. As Denmark moved from a multinational, civic state to an ethnic state, Danish identity became an ethno-linguistic-religious-cultural concept (Kærgård, 2010: 473). A *folkish* democracy or 'peasant enlightenment' (*folkeoplysning*) emerged, combining a libertarian form of social solidarity mixed with modernity (Østergård, 2006, 2004; Witoszek, 1997: 75–87). As the Social Democrats became a potent political movement at the turn of the 20th century, they recognized the importance of appealing to the *folk*, incorporating the working class into this ideal and promoting a more inclusive society under the banner of 'Denmark for the people' (Korsgaard, 2006: 150–151; Østergård, 2004: 37). Ethnic and cultural homogeneity allowed core values such as solidarity, consensus, egalitarianism, rationalism, individual freedom and a progressive ideal of a collective historical destiny (*den danske vej*) to be firmly cemented. Danish nationalism is closely tied to the state and is 'implicit and elusive, a low-key ideology of everyday discourse rather than a matter of organized politics' (Jenkins, 2008: 163–166). The welfare state came to represent internal unity and solidified a popular nationalism akin to 'democratization from below' (Hansen, 2002: 58–60; Korsgaard, 2006: 144–146). *Folkstyre* ('rule by the people') forms an important part of Danish political discourse and policy, and this *folkish* individualism/independence can be seen in the terms of Denmark's membership of NATO and the EU, which are conditioned by a number of restrictive clauses (Lawler, 2007: 107–109; Hansen, 2002). The Grundtvigian notion of Denmark as a small power under threat from external influence has remained a powerful idea (Wren, 2001: 149).

Immigration policy: Threats to societal security and institutions

The idea of *Lille Danmark* (Little Denmark) as the small state imbued with humanitarian and progressive values, where the *folk* is central is, nonetheless, not without its tensions. Immigration – specifically non-Western[14] – has presented a challenge to cultural homogeneity, which Ulla Holm (2006) claims is the most important definitional element in the construction of Danish identity. Non-Western immigration in Denmark increased from 1.1% in 1982 to 3.7% in 1996 (a growth of 16.2%) (Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, 2007: 5, 15). Immigrants and their descendants constitute 9.8% of the Danish population, of which some 6.6% are from non-Western countries (Statistics Denmark, 2011: 5). According to one interviewee,

> What we didn't realize at the time was that even a relatively small level of immigration of people of very, very different backgrounds, different norms, different religions would create [such] heavy integration problems as we have experienced. We didn't foresee that. We were a very homogenous nation.[15]

As Doty (1998: 78–79) reminds us, homogeneity is unproblematic when no threat appears to it. For a nation whose identity has been largely defined by language and ancestry – the 'Danish tribe' is a common reference (Andersen, 2006) – immigration can challenge such 'complete' discourses of identity. In the 1960s and 1970s, government reports indicated that 'visitors' or guest workers (*gæsterarbejdere*) were not expected to settle or cope with life in Denmark (Wren, 2001: 148). 'The strangers' (*de fremmede*) were seen as outsiders whose spatial and cultural practices disrupted ideas of the Danish homeland and inspired fears of attempts to create a 'new homeland' in the space owned by Danes (Diken, 1998: 135, 38).

The rise in immigration in the 1980s due to family reunifications and refugees saw a tightening of the Aliens Act in 1986, making citizenship or asylum harder to obtain, and deportations easier. Increased numbers of refugees from Somalia and Kosovo arrived in the 1990s. The automatic right to family reunification was removed in 1992, and unemployment politicized the issue of immigration in the 1990s, providing fertile ground for the rise of the anti-immigration Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti, DF) in 1995. The minority Liberal–Conservative coalition government of Anders Fogh Rasmussen gained power in 2001; and, in exchange for parliamentary support, the

DF played a central role in immigration policy under the Rasmussen administration. In terms of policy measures, a legislative package passed in 2002 saw significant restrictions placed on immigration, most notably in the form of increased requirements for permanent residency from three to seven years, and the ‘24 years’ rule, which meant non-resident spouses could not live with their partners in Denmark until both were 24 years old, justified as an effort to control arranged marriages (supported by the Social Democrats) and ensure ‘proper integration’.[16] Legislative amendments included deportations for relatively minor crimes such as vandalism and tax evasion (Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, 2005: 4). These and other measures attracted criticism domestically from the Socialist People’s Party and the Danish Institute for Human Rights, and externally from the European Parliament, the European Commission and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In 2010, the government of Lars Løkke Rasmussen (who succeeded Anders Fogh Rasmussen when the latter became Secretary-General of NATO in 2009) introduced a points-based system for family reunification, whereby non-EU spouses of Danish residents and citizens would be able to stay in Denmark if they had enough ‘points’ for language, higher education, work and other categories. This proved so restrictive that it resulted in a 70% drop in approvals for residence permits (*Copenhagen Post*, 2011b). Naturalization is determined and approved by the Danish parliament, requiring language and citizenship tests,[17] the renunciation of one’s former nationality, and the signing of a declaration of loyalty to Denmark. Funding for many ethnic-minority organizations was withdrawn, while initiatives such as the ‘cultural canon’ were promoted to bolster Danishness (Sheikh and Crone, 2012: 188).

Societal integration is made difficult because immigrants face significant obstacles to citizenship, employment and access to key institutions such as the welfare state. Immigrants are expected to be self-sufficient and not rely on the state (Lawler, 2007: 113; Rasmussen, 2006). Non-Western immigrants in particular have higher unemployment and more reliance on welfare – a point consistently highlighted in media and research reports (Andersen, 2006; Ministry of the Interior, 2001: 3–4; Schmidt, 2009: 43) and exploited by the DF, which now claims to defend the welfare state rather than critique it. As a central institution in Danish society, the welfare state constitutes and performs societal security and solidarity – something ‘we’ actively create through work and taxation (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2007: 319). Hedetoft’s (2006) observation that the Danish welfare state is based on ‘culturally similar citizenry’ suggests limits to its supposed universality. According to one interviewee, the Danish model works against the integration of low-skilled workers from outside Europe, who are seen by the Danish working class to be the ‘new proletariat’.[18] Accordingly, there is a ‘lack of solidarity with newcomers’ because the welfare state is built on ‘a high level of *felt* solidarity, the *sense* of solidarity. It is not a formula, it is a *feeling*’.[19]

Kulturkamp and authentic identity

These institutional barriers to integration rely on a particular discourse about identity and belonging that structures a hierarchical understanding of self and other. Since the 1990s, the DF has used its political leverage to ‘monopolize’ and ‘own’[20] the debate on immigration by claiming to speak on behalf of ‘the people’ (*Folket*), which is a rhetorical device that ‘inhabits a superior position’ in domestic discourse (Hansen, 2002: 58; Koefoed and Simonsen, 2007: 321). The DF appealed to the anti-elitist sentiment of ‘ordinary Danes’, in contrast to ‘internationally oriented’ intellectuals who were more likely to be pro-globalization/pro-EU and happy to dilute Danish specificity. Furthermore, this discourse was not confined to the DF and spread across most of the political spectrum as political parties tried to demonstrate affinity with the interests of ‘real Danes’. Rasmussen earlier set the tone in his 2002 New Year Address, declaring that policy would not be decided by ‘so-called experts’ and ‘arbiters of taste’, and that the population ‘knew best’ (Jørgensen, 2011: 94). The power to speak on behalf of the people also forced other political parties to reposition themselves ideologically and rhetorically, making it impossible to speak about immigration in terms other than as a problem or threat, either to gain votes, to avoid appearing ‘soft’ on immigration or simply to participate in debate.[21] Subsequently, the public and elites have ‘grown deaf’ to the rhetoric and language used by prominent politicians and intellectuals who openly equate Islam with the ‘dark ages’, a ‘cancer’ or an infection of the body politic, or suggest it is inferior or unequal to Danish culture.[22] Before the cartoon crisis hit its apex, a ‘cultural struggle’ had been declared by Conservative Culture Minister Brian Mikkelsen (2001–2008), against a ‘medieval Muslim culture’ that could not co-exist with modern democratic Danish values, where it was claimed that ‘cultural shielding is the best vaccination’.[23] Rasmussen (2003a) had already signalled a firm rejection of cultural relativism and political correctness, claiming that Denmark had been ‘too gullible’ in the past and too ‘reluctant to state that one thing is better than another’. Such discourse promoted an ‘absolute’ and hierarchical understanding of culture and core values, which came to define the debate on immigration and identity,[24] limiting the possibility for multiculturalism and favouring assimilation to Danish values and the subordination of immigrants’ value and culture systems.[25]

Against this discourse, Muslims are largely seen to be different subjects within the Danish state: easily susceptible to extremism and radicalization and unable to separate their private (religious) and public (rational) lives.[26] As a visual discourse, the crisis replicated this divide via the different types of visual representations at play. The cartoons were seen to represent opinion, a form of critique against authority, free speech and satire, contrasted against factual photographic depictions and video footage of violent protest (Hansen, 2011a: 60; Becker, 2008: 123). The perceived (over) reaction to the ‘drawings’[27] and depictions of violent protest marked clear boundaries between the irrational, threatening and emotive Muslim subject (Blom, 2008) and the peaceful, rational and modern Danish self. Yet, this binary of the private/public and rational/irrational is not so secure: the Lutheran Church (*Folkekirken*) has a privileged status in Danish society and is state funded (Klausen, 2007: 92, 146), and images of the Danish flag (which itself performs identity through its repeated appearance in everyday life) being burned featured as one of the most emotive aspects of the cartoon crisis for the Danes.[28]

The concept of the ‘Danish Muslim’ or ‘new Danes’ – a term used to refer to those who originate from outside Denmark – complicates the discourse of authentic or true Danishness when identity is discursively framed by language, values and ancestry. The Danish imams’ trip to the Middle East was described by Pia Kjærsgaard (leader of the DF until 2012) as *landsforræderi* (‘country betrayal’ or ‘treason’)[29] by a ‘fifth column’ or ‘Islamic mafia’ who were not truly Danish (Andersen, 2007: 108; Hansen, 2008: 56). Media attention on radical imams and minority pan-Islamic organizations such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (which supports uniting Muslims under the caliphate and rejects the category of ‘Danish Muslim’, which it regards as a contradiction to be resisted) works to reinforce perceived incompatibility between Islam and democracy (Jacobsen et al., 2012; Kvaale, 2011). Within this discursive field, the subjectivity of Danish Muslims is inscribed by caricatures that serve as points of reference; even ‘moderate’ Muslim political figures or political party candidates are questioned over their loyalty to the state and Danish values (Sheikh and Crone, 2012; Schmidt, 2009: 48–49). Islam is seen as a ‘competing logic’ to the sovereign state, rejecting its boundaries and authority (Mendelsohn, 2005: 54–55). The concept of the *ummah*, the global community of

Muslim believers that functions as a source of identity that transcends the fixed nation-state (Saunders, 2008), is contrasted against the institutions and sovereign logic that constructs Danish identity. This obscures the possibilities of alternate readings of Danishness that are inclusive and accommodating, pursued by Danish Muslims who have formed organizations based on dialogue, such as the Forum for Critical Muslims and Muslims in Dialogue network (Schmidt, 2009: 44).

The idea of the ‘enemy within’ can also be directed towards Danes, referring to betrayal by ‘natural’ members of society. Around 3,000 Danes are converts to Islam and, according to Jensen (2007), are regarded as national traitors or contradictory individuals who produce confusion and anxiety about identity. These subversive or ‘interior others’ threaten the neat idea of the nation-state and national identity: a true or authentic identity must reject difference in order to exist (Connolly, 1991: 67, 206; Campbell, 1998: 3; Huysmans, 2006: 75). Likewise, a ‘soft’ approach to immigration invokes accusations of ‘enemy sympathy’ and a betrayal of the *folk*. This ‘battle’ also draws on the past, recalling previous threats to ‘Danishness’, played out historically in the formation of identity in the composite state and as a form of ‘modern resistance fighters’, drawing parallels with the Nazi occupation (Ström Melin, 2006). The discourse of the DF has appropriated the defence of core progressive liberal values in opposition to perceived Muslim intolerance, a move that many political parties find difficult to oppose lest they be seen not to be defending freedom of speech, women and gay rights, for instance. The DF has positioned itself as representing ‘real Danes’ against elites who allow foreigners to infiltrate the country, bringing external problems to Danish soil, thereby committing a form of treason, risking not only Denmark’s ethnic homogeneity but also its ‘historical destiny’ (Hedetoft, 2003). This presumption of a neat divide between internal and external is also played out in Danish foreign policy, which the next section explores.

Securing the state: Performing the external dimension of identity

The domestic realm is not the only site of the state’s performative constitution of identity, and the construction of the ‘foreign’ is made possible by practices that also constitute the ‘domestic’. Yet, the domestic and international realms are not independent, and each exerts influence over the other. They are intricately linked boundary-producing practices and performances that instantiate the identity of that in whose name they operate (Campbell, 1998: 62, 73). This section focuses on military intervention and development assistance as key sites where identity and security are reiterated and performed. These two areas of foreign policy are of particular significance to Danish self-identity, as the country’s profile as a humanitarian international actor has been carved out in these areas. Humanitarian intervention forms the core of Denmark’s commitment to conflict resolution, and development assistance has long enjoyed consensus as a necessary tool for tackling structural inequalities in the international system, such as poverty.

As part of the ‘coalition of the willing’, Denmark has contributed to military operations in Iraq[30] and Afghanistan in the ‘war on terror’. Although the government and the DF only narrowly secured the vote in parliament for action in Iraq (supported only by Venstre and the Conservatives), most parties came to support the action because they see Denmark as playing an important role abroad in terms of democracy promotion and ‘teaching democracy’.[31] In contrast, almost all political parties supported Danish intervention in Afghanistan from the start. By helping to promote democracy and rebuild these countries, Denmark is exporting its constitutional and democratic values, as well as core values such as gender equality. The promotion of progressive values and practices abroad may be viewed in the vein of a particular form of Nordic active internationalism, based on peaceful methods of addressing global problems and the exporting of domestic norms and values to the international realm. This progressive activism, however, may have more to do with ‘preserving a distinctive identity and way of life’ rather than the classic Nordic ‘moral imperative’ to export solidarity (Lawler, 2007: 103–104, 118), coinciding with a significant change in Danish active internationalism. Holm (2002: 19–22, 40) observes this shift taking place in the early 1990s, when a Danish White Paper put forward the idea that international cooperation should be shaped according to Danish interests and attitudes, defining security in terms of universal values combined with a willingness to use military power as an instrument of foreign policy. The ‘militarization’ of Danish post-Cold War foreign policy has meant important shifts away from peace support operations to war-fighting, representing a move from a cosmopolitan discourse of security (seeing security as a broad concept, stressing conflict management, non-military aspects of security and structural sources of conflict) to a ‘defencist’ view that sees Denmark as no different from other countries in terms of how it should seek security (accompanied by a more positive attitude towards the USA and a less critical one towards NATO) (Rasmussen, 2005: 73–76; Jakobsen, 2000: 64). Post-9/11, Denmark’s foreign policy profile has shifted away from a ‘civilian actor’ profile to that of a ‘strategic actor’, based on the notion that Denmark had direct enemies and needed to reform and use its military force to defeat them, even without UN authorization (Ringsmose and Rynning, 2008; Rynning, 2003: 30). In 2003, the Danish government revised its foreign policy priorities, stating that its primary goal was

> to promote Denmark’s security and prosperity based on a set of fundamental values; values that also constitute the backbone of Denmark’s open society. The core values are the individual and the community, freedom, democracy and security (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003a: 6, 22–24).

Danish involvement in the conflicts in Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq were about defending and securing values – freedom, democracy and respect for the individual: ‘Strong international involvement must take its point of departure in strong awareness of Danish history, Danish culture and national consciousness’ (Rasmussen, 2003b; Holm, 2006). Weber (1998: 93) illustrates how military intervention enacts or (re)iterates the sovereignty of the intervening state as much as it ‘brings’ sovereignty to bear on the target state. In this respect, a more robust form of intervention performatively enacts *one* reading of Danish identity inasmuch as previous, more cosmopolitan and ‘good state’ values informed another reading of the self, with different outcomes and approaches to the external realm.

In the same way, Danish identity was performed through development assistance. Denmark’s progressive development assistance profile was characterized by a commitment to humanitarianism coherent with Nordic solidarism, with generous aid and a rejection of ‘strings attached’ donor–recipient relationships. Since 2002, Danish development aid principles have altered, and the country’s aid budget for multilateral and bilateral programmes has been cut by 10%. Aid became a foreign policy instrument, a tool for promoting Denmark’s values abroad. The relationship with aid recipients has become tied to goals and targets; donations to sub-Saharan Africa were reduced owing to a lack of improvement in good governance (Olsen, 2003: 85). Most striking has been the revision in Danish aid priorities in 2003 towards more security-oriented outcomes. Alongside poverty reduction, human rights, democratization and good governance, environmental and social and economic development, new ‘threats and challenges’ have been included as a priority of Danish development assistance. These include humanitarian assistance, stability, security and the fight against terrorism, which aims to tackle radicalization. A new flank also focuses on refugees under an initiative called ‘Regions of Origin’. Initiated in 2003 and commanding a budget of DK 1 billion between 2004 and 2008, this aims to ‘help refugees and internally displaced people as close to their homes as possible, thus making it easier for them to return home while at the same time reducing political problems in the host countries’. Of note is an adjacent strategy aimed at ensuring ‘maximum coordination with the repatriation efforts for refugees resident in this country’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003b: 9). Although this approach coheres with a liberal view of security – the spread of democracy and the stability of states bring wider security payoffs – it mirrors a form of ‘cultural shielding’ designed to protect the state and coheres with domestic anxieties over immigration. Danish foreign policy as a performance of identity has become more overtly tied to projecting values (outwardly in the case of intervention); and, despite its external projection, development assistance is more closely tied to securing the Danish state by attempting to limit outsiders from entering. Both promote Danish security from afar, bringing a complex distancing to the performance of identity.

Points of contestation and rupture: The limits of the performative

Throughout the cartoon crisis, the performance of a narrow Danish identity premised on authenticity and modernity was defined against a threatening other that was its exact opposite. The possibility of plural forms of Danishness was not only obscured but ruled out by the very standards and norms that were central to constructing ‘Danishness’, which the above sections outline. The inherent insecurity of identity discourse that seeks to define identity negatively is nonetheless open to limitations as much as other interpretations are malleable. Discourses of identity are multiple, overlapping and engaged in a constant struggle for hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 110–115). Debates about inclusion and Danishness predate the event of the cartoon crisis, which brought into sharp focus one particular discourse that became stabilized over time. The discourses that animated the cartoon crisis aimed to perform a consistent idea of identity but also produced contestation.

At the domestic level, ruptures to dominant discourses were present. Mikkelsen’s *kulturkamp* speech was critiqued in the Danish press, and Rasmussen’s refusal to meet with the Muslim ambassadors was publicly criticized by 22 former Danish diplomats in the Danish broadsheet *Politiken*. Prominent Danish writers rejected the populist reading of Danish identity, and opinion polls showed a decline in support for freedom of speech at the expense of offending others (Klausen, 2009: 156–161). Over half the Danish public did not approve the reprinting of the cartoons in 2008 (Brun and Hersh, 2008: 20). Increased dialogue within society has also aimed to acknowledge a deeper historical relationship between Denmark and Islam that predates recent waves of immigration, as well as recognizing the lack of uniformity of Danish identity between towns and regions and the differences within the ‘Muslim’ community, which is comprised of many different nationalities, ethnicities and religious groupings (Schmidt, 2009: 40–45). The red–green coalition government of the Social Democrats, Social Liberals and the Socialist People’s Party, led by Social Democrat Helle Thorning-Schmidt, which won office in September 2011, has demonstrated a different reading of Danish identity that appears more inclusive in its approach to foreigners and immigrants. The new government has signalled plans to remove the points system (Buley, 2012), work towards better integration and treat immigrants with respect; it is currently debating the possibility of dual citizenship and removing the citizenship test.

Externally, the government has also signalled a shift in its approach to the EU, promising to abolish the longstanding Danish opt-outs in the areas of justice, home affairs and defence. In development assistance, the new priorities for 2013–2017 see an increase in aid and a commitment to returning to 1% of gross national income, less emphasis on Regions of Origin, and more on dialogue initiatives and multilateralism (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012). A new security policy also sees emphasis on 'soft' military operations and more parliamentary approval for deploying troops in international military operations (Thorning-Schmidt, 2011). The establishment of a commission to investigate Denmark's involvement in Iraq has also been announced, and it will examine the justifications for going to war and the treatment of Iraqi and Afghan prisoners of war who allegedly faced torture when handed over by Danish forces to detention facilities.[32]

Conclusion

By examining the discourses that performed identity in the context of the cartoon crisis, this article has attempted to bring a more complex reading of identity practices into focus. At the level of domestic and external policy, it is possible to see identity performed with an underlying incentive of maintaining a consistent idea of self. Yet, in performative analyses of identity, careful attention must be paid to the ability of discourses to appropriate and co-opt ideas of self from a shared or consensual stock of values and institutional practices. In many ways, this has been part of the success story of the securitization of Danish identity, because the discourse of difference was predicated on norms and values that were broadly consensual. By arguing that threats exist to the welfare state and Danish progressive values, the performance of a narrow exclusionary identity was able to guide the discourse that allowed elites and others to participate in identity claims.

Narrow and inflexible conceptualizations of identity fail to accommodate change and acknowledge dynamism. Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 2) observe a key challenge to understanding identity, that of 'permanence amidst manifest change' and 'unity amidst manifest diversity'. Danish identity discourses had been struggling with this challenge long before the cartoon crisis broke. But, it is important to not allow the civilization clash to dominate our understanding of the crisis. A discursive approach to identity goes some way towards opening up identity practices to self-reflexivity. In order to understand the performance and contextualize the event, we need to explore the discourses on which it relies and how such discourses are threaded through the fabric of domestic and external practice and being. These echoes or reiterations of identity are more than a reassertion – they are also normative in that the citational practices establish what qualifies as 'being', through reiteration and also exclusion (Butler, 2011: 140). As discourses perform identity, they constitute it; yet, Danishness relies on historical tropes and shared understandings that can be made oppositional not simply to 'outsiders' but also to 'insiders'. This makes the Danish case far more complex than a caricature of civilizational clashes. This is not to suggest that debates about values and belonging are not central: they clearly remain important issues requiring serious public reflection and academic investigation. Yet, closer inspection of the ideas of identity that animated the discourse also suggest that theorizing identity is an inherently 'slippery, insecure experience' (Connolly, 1991: 64). As a discourse in itself, the cartoon crisis provides a way to consider the performance of identity and security beyond the drama that accompanied the event, providing numerous avenues in which to further explore questions of the ontology of identity, the emotive construction of self and other, the broader international dimensions of the crisis and questions of international security, and the interplay between the universal and the particular.

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Notes

1. Rose invited members of the union of newspaper illustrators to draw Mohammed 'as you see him' after the writer Kåre Bluitgen claimed he could not find an illustrator for a children's book he was writing about Mohammed. See Rose (2006) and Klausen (2009: 14–27) for a detailed account of this 'experiment'. Klausen (2009: 30) argues that the newspaper's defence of free speech was disingenuous, as it rejected a satirical cartoon of Jesus, claiming it would not go down well with its readership.
2. The words 'particular' [*særstilling*] and 'special' [*særlig*] are, in Rytkønen's translation, interpreted as 'odd' or 'out of sorts', an important observation in the context of Huysmans' (2006: 7) point that language is able to mobilize specific meanings.
3. The UN's Special Rapporteur on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Doudou Diène, regarded the cartoon crisis as 'the most serious manifestation' of Islamophobia (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2006: 7–9). See Alhassan (2008) for an in-depth analysis of the images.
4. Rasmussen later met with the ambassadors and reiterated *Jyllands-Posten*'s apology for offence to Muslims. He did not apologize for the publication of the cartoons. Klausen (2009: 32, 151) notes the public regarded an apology as an admission of guilt.
5. Seventeen Danish (and three Swedish, Dutch and Spanish) newspapers reprinted the cartoons 'in solidarity' with *Jyllands-Posten* in response to the threat of 'terror' against the cartoonist (Ryan, 2008).
6. Section 77 of the Danish constitution (1849) states that 'censorship and other preventive measures shall never again be introduced'. Censorship had been a particularly sensitive issue under the Danish-German monarchy and German-enforced censorship of the press during World War II. I thank Jacob Christensen and Flemming Juul Christiansen for this clarification.
7. See Ammitzbøll and Vidino (2007); special issues of *Ethnicities* (2009) and *International Migration* (2006); Khader and Rose (2007); Lægaard (2007); Lindekilde (2008); Shearmur (2006); Asad et al. (2009).
8. See Eide et al. (2008); Berkowitz and Eko (2007); Hervik (2006); Holmström et al. (2010); Hussain (2007).
9. See Brun and Hersh (2008); Hedetoft (2006); Holm (2006); Klausen (2007, 2009); Lawler (2007); Rostbøll (2010); Rytkønen (2007).
10. See Blom (2008); Douai (2007); Hakam (2009); Soage (2006).
11. As part of a wider project covering Swedish immigration and security, eight Danish parliamentarians and officials were interviewed from the Social Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, the Social Liberal Party and the Danish Refugee Council. All interviewees were sent written transcripts of their interview for verification and approval.

12. By extension, performativity implies that identity itself is an empty category, containing no ontological status apart from the acts that constitute its reality (Butler, 1999: 173). This has significant implications for debates about the ontological status of identity. Kuus (2007: 93–98) in particular challenges us to abandon the search for a pre-existing subject in order to unsettle the link between the individual and the state and erode the reliance on the national. This is a worthwhile venture, but one that is unfortunately beyond the scope of this article.
13. Language was crucial to the 'natural' foundation of socio-political unity (Korsgaard, 2006: 137–138; Østergård, 2004: 38; 2006: 85) and remains central today to Danish identity (interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 28 April 2008).
14. 'Foreigners' include the descendants of immigrants and immigrants with residency. Distinctions are also made between foreigners from Western, non-Western and non-Nordic countries. Demographic trends predict an increase of 7.1% in 2017 and 9.1% in 2050 of immigrants and their descendants from non-Western countries, compared with 3.3% and 4.1% for Western immigrants respectively (Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, 2007: 6). Given Denmark's aging native population, anxiety over reproductive rates is a common theme in the discourse of the right (Bialasiwicz, 2006; Alhassan, 2008: 51).
15. Interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 24 April 2008.
16. Hedetoft (2006); interview with official from the Danish Refugee Council, Copenhagen, 21 April 2008; interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 24 April 2008; interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 28 April 2008; interview with political consultant, Danish Social Liberal Party, Copenhagen, 28 April 2008.
17. In 2005, the naturalization rules were reshaped to include a formal exam, which Klausen (2009: 153) argues only highly educated second-generation immigrants could pass.
18. Interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 24 April 2008.
19. Interview with official from the Danish Refugee Council, Copenhagen, 21 April 2008.
20. Interview with official from the Danish Refugee Council, Copenhagen, 21 April 2008.
21. Hervik (2006: 226); interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 24 April 2008; interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 28 April 2008; interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 30 April 2008; Lindekilde (2008: 16).
22. Interview with political consultant, Danish Social Liberal Party, Copenhagen, 28 April 2008; interview with Social Democratic Party officer, Copenhagen, 29 April 2008; interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 30 April 2008; Klausen (2009: 12–14); Lægaard (2007: 489); Schmidt (2009: 46).
23. See Mikkelsen (2005). I thank Katja Lindskov Jacobsen for the translation.
24. Hedetoft (2003); Østergaard (2006: 85); Diken (1998: 40–41); interview with Danish parliamentarian, London, 13 November 2007; interview with political consultant, Danish Social Liberal Party, Copenhagen, 28 April 2008.
25. One interviewee explained that parallel communities blocked solidarity: 'We don't like to go to a little Italy or a little Somalia where they speak their own language. I am sure that's unacceptable to 90% of the Danish population.' The UK is cited as an example to avoid: 'We think that it's scary that you guys don't own your country anymore' (interview with official from the Danish Refugee Council, Copenhagen, 21 April 2008). Søren Pind (immigration minister under the cabinet of Lars Løkke Rasmussen, March–October 2011) publicly stated that foreigners should not come to live in Denmark unless they 'want to be Danish'. A poll supported his position, with an overwhelming majority of respondents preferring to see foreigners adopt Danish norms and values (*Copenhagen Post*, 2011a).
26. Koefoed and Simonsen (2007: 314–317); interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 28 April 2008.
27. The description of the cartoons as 'drawings' – a less loaded meaning – was prevalent in Denmark and the Western press (Hakam, 2009: 43) and may appear less offensive. I thank Katja Lindskov Jacobsen for this observation.
28. Interview with political consultant, Danish Social Liberal Party, Copenhagen, 28 April 2008; Wren (2001: 149).
29. The phrase has strong connotations, likened to siding with the enemy in times of war (TV2 News, 2005). My thanks to Katja Lindskov Jacobsen for this translation.

30. Denmark's military presence in Basra province ended in 2007, but there was an increase in troops sent to Afghanistan. Some personnel remained in Iraq in order to contribute to police training.
31. Interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 23 April 2008; interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 24 April 2008; interview with Danish parliamentarian, Copenhagen, 28 April 2008.
32. It should be noted that, in the 1990s, Denmark undertook a major historiographical reassessment of its role during World War II. This challenged the established narrative of Danish resistance and the rescue of the Danish Jews, which had formed an important strand in the country's self-image as a good international actor (Østergård, 2006: 93). I thank the editor for highlighting this point.

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