Henrik Lindberg HANSEN

Satirical Cartoons and Strategies of Intercultural Struggle

1. *As a Danish pastor working with and doing research on dialogue in Cairo, Egypt, the issue of the satirical cartoons in a Danish newspaper of the prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) has been hard to avoid. This research focuses on some of the structures behind dialogue in the society of Cairo and on how to differentiate between different kinds of dialogue on this basis.*
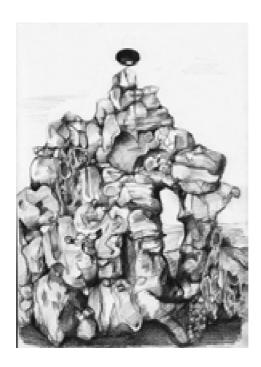
   This has inspired me to look at some of the structures behind the Cartoon Crisis*, giving clues to how to address similar issues and avoid adding to the problem in the attempts to diffuse the situation.*

Methodology

2. Pierre BOURDIEU (2005) suggests investigating practices not by looking on the surface structure of how people consciously rationalize their actions, but on a deeper level to how a specific field (context) and a specific habitus reciprocally construct each other, building a matrix of understanding the world from which people rationalize their actions.

   This underlying habitus is the basis for different economical strategies which rationalize one choice over another, depending on how present different economies are. These economies are not only monetary, but can also be social or cultural, and are in play with each other.

   The present analysis will not look at the habitus of persons in a specific context and their unconscious strategies, as the issue covers vast areas involving many different habitus which then can not be constituted by a single field.

The analysis, however, inspired by the thoughts of Pierre BOURDIEU, looks at the *strategies* underlying the "who-misunderstood-whom" and "who-is-right" of the analysed issue.[1] So, this analysis is inspired by Pierre BOURDIEU's focus on practices and the relations between practices (strategies).[2]

3. To analyse the strategies underlying the Cartoon Crisis, it is necessary to differentiate between a curious and a closed approach to another person or culture. The hypothesis is that the relation to the other is shaped by the attitude towards and proximity to the other culture and its people (Mikhail M. BAKHTIN 1989. 607−608).

The attitude is connected to how the other culture is evaluated: if it is considered to have positive authority or value. If it holds

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[1] These strategies are not seen as part of the essence of the world, but rather as a road map in trying to find our way around the issue (BOURDIEU 2005. 34.).

[2] This legitimizes the inspiration from BOURDIEU as it is the analysis of the strategies that leads to an understanding of the habitus and not the other way around. It does not, however, remove the problem of operating with a notion of an *intercultural field* of dialogue in a reciprocal relation to people with different habitus. The problem is then that I am assuming the existence of an *interfield* in describing common strategies of interaction between fields, which is not accounted for in BOURDIEU's thoughts. As there does seem to be meaningful interaction, intercultural interaction constitutes a field and habitus as part of the interaction.

positive authority, the attitude can be *curious* (there will be a drive to understand how the other person understands herself or himself as part of a different culture). If not, the attitude is likely to be *closed* (the system of thinking on the other as, for example, threatening).

Proximity can be defined as the difference in cultural bodies between the *relational* "we" and the *non-relational* "them," where the unity of the cultural body does not necessarily lie in conformity of thought, but rather in a notion of unity against what is perceived as another unity. Depending on the attitude and proximity, an understanding of the other is constructed: incidents are interpreted and used according to positive or negative strategies.

The Case

4. A brief survey of the incident until February 2006:

A. *September* 2005: The Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* publishes twelve cartoons. Some of the cartoons are on the prophet, while others are directed against the newspaper publishing the cartoons.
For example, one depicts a boy in sixth grade by the name Muhammad, who writes on a black board in Farsi that the newspaper is reactionary; in another the prophet is calming down some angry people showing himself as a preacher of peace.
B. *October 2005*: A debate in Denmark over the cartoons begins. Death threats from a few Danish Muslims are issued against the cartoonists. A Danish imam discusses the cartoons on the satellite TV station *Al Jazeera*. Three and a half thousand Danish people demonstrate peacefully against the cartoons.
Eleven ambassadors from Muslim countries ask for a meeting with the Danish Prime minister but are denied. The reason stated for denying the meeting was that a Danish Prime minister has no influence over the newspapers of the country.
The ambassadors are referred to the Danish courts, which are the authorities on the matter. Foreign Western newspapers address the issue. The Egyptian newspaper *al-Fagr* prints six of the cartoons. Eleven Danish Muslim organisations take the issue to the Danish court.
C. *December 2005*: A reward is issued on the internet for killing the cartoonists. The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) brings the issue to the high commissioner of Human Rights of the United Nations (UN). There are strikes in India against the cartoons.

Twenty-two Danish top-diplomats and politicians argue the case with the Danish Prime minister. They believe he should have a meeting with the ambassadors. Demonstrations take place in Pakistan, where some threaten to take the lives of the cartoonists. The Arab League criticises the Danish government for its handling of the case.

D. *January* 2006: It becomes public that a group of Danish Muslims have been travelling to Muslim countries to gain sympathy for their case. Some of the information brought to the Muslim countries is shown to be obviously wrong.

The Danish foreign minister seems to settle the case with the Arab League. A Norwegian newspaper prints the cartoons. Burning of Danish and Norwegian flags occur in several Muslim countries and are combined with death threats against Danish citizens in general.

A boycott of Danish products spreads in several Muslim countries, beginning in Saudi Arabia. An anti-boycott spreads in the West, starting in the USA. The grand imam of the Egyptian al-Azhar university and the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia demand that the Danish newspaper be punished.

The Danish ambassador of Saudi Arabia criticises *Jyllands-Posten* publicly. Saudi Arabia and Libya pull out their ambassadors from Denmark. Danish people are forced to leave Gaza and the West Bank, including aid organisations because of death threats and demonstrations. Some of these are violent.

Widespread peaceful demonstrations take place in Iraq. The foreign ministers of the European Union (EU) are expressing sympathy for the Danish defence of the freedom of speech. The editor-in-chief of *Jyllands-Posten* expresses a limited apology on an Arab network.

The Danish Prime minister distances himself personally from the cartoons, but stresses that he does not have the authority to apologize on behalf of the newspaper. The cultural editor of *Jyllands-Posten* regrets the cartoons on the network al-Jezeera, but it is not translated because the translator was late in starting.

The Danish foreign minister meets with the American foreign minister, several Arab foreign ministers and later with the General Secretary of the UN. Threats of terrorist actions against Denmark are issued on the internet. The Egyptian parliament criticises Denmark because of the cartoons. The Danish foreign ministry sets up a webpage to state the facts.

E. *February 2006*: A French newspaper publishes the cartoons. The editor-in-chief is fired. Newspapers from Germany, Italy, Holland,

Spain and Iceland print the cartoons, primarily to stand behind the freedom of speech.

Three newspapers from Yemen print some of the cartoons (in a censored edition) with an appeal to accept the apologies and move on through dialogue; the newspapers are closed down for three months.[3]

Newspapers in Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Malaysia and Indonesia publish the cartoons to criticize them with varying results. There is an attempt to establish an anti-boycott and burning of Arab flags in Denmark, but very few are willing to do so and more demonstrate against it. Several politicians talk publicly against doing it. It never happens.

Others start a campaign in Denmark to smile and be friendly to Arabs and Muslims in Denmark and support Muslim shops in Denmark. This campaign has some momentum. The Danish Prime minister explains without excusing the cartoons on the network al-Arabia.

The Danish and Norwegian embassies are burned in Syria. A right wing group in Denmark demonstrates against Muslims. Twenty-thirty people show up. A much larger counterdemonstration is gathered. There are rumours that al-Qur'an al-karim will be burned, but it never happens.

The Danish consulate is burned in Lebanon. Rumours spread in some Muslim countries that editions of al-Qur'an al-karim are burned frequently and publicly in Denmark and that the cartoons are printed on posters and displayed publicly all over Denmark by the Danish government (these rumours are obviously not true).

The Western media is starting to follow the case more intensely. A demonstration for peace is held in Denmark. The first people are killed during demonstrations in Afghanistan. Protestors attempt to set fire to the Danish embassy in Iran.

Norwegian UN peacekeeping forces are attacked in Afghanistan. Five people are killed during demonstrations in Pakistan. The Italian minister of reform is wearing a t-shirt with one of the cartoons publicly. He steps down the next day.

The Italian embassy is burned in Libya, ten people are killed. Fifteen are killed in unrest in Nigeria. Eleven churches are burned. Ten thousand people demonstrate in New York and one thousand in London against the cartoons.

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3   www.yobserver.com/cgi-bin/yobserver/exec/view.cgi/22/9861 tells the story of the trial of their editor after publishing the cartoons. The page shows a dynamic debate on the issue of the cartoons in an Arab country which is not prominent in the Danish press.

Two and a half thousand people demonstrate peacefully in Copenhagen for reconciliation on the issue and for understanding between Muslims and Christians. The Danish are depicted as a naive and disrespectful people in *Sixty Minutes* in American television. An Egyptian singer publishes a song calling Denmark a "son of a bitch."[4]

Dynamic Connections

5. Instead, the negative incidents can be seen as part of the ongoing dialogue between cultures. This gives a different understanding of dialogue as general connections between cultures.[5] In this understanding, the negative incidents are not just something that happens to us but rather something we create between us in the negative connections sustained by a negative matrix of thought.

Then the strategies of dialogue can be either negative (closed) or positive (curious), distinguished by producing either closed or curious dialogue (connections), in this case between the cultural bodies of the Middle East and Denmark (or in the wider body, the "West").

Fear

6. The closed approach to the other is sustained by a variety of factors. Fear is a basic instinct closing the understanding of a too complex world: fear of the unfamiliar, fear as a minority, fear that leads to scapegoating a minority.

Feelings of inferiority or superiority may prevent understanding the other. The one who feels inferior may feel repulsed by the superior; the superior may feel self-sufficient to a degree that the one seen as inferior is deemed as unnecessary or even threatening because of what is seen as, for example, brutal ignorance. Fear has many reasons and takes all shapes and sizes. When fear is potent, it can show itself as hate, disgust, anxiety, bitterness—all things negative and aggressive.

These basic feelings distance the other to a degree because understanding of the other is done by one's own way of thinking and

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4   The survey is taken primarily from www.wikipedia.org and www.dr.dk in a shortened form and in my translation. It does not hold enough information on a Danish right wing party of parliament. They criticised Danish people, who were publicly against the handling of the case by the Danish government, calling them traitors.

5   This is also why the issues building up before the incident are not mentioned. The incident is part of a process influenced both positively and negatively. We have to start at one point, and it seems obvious that this point is the printing of the cartoons. This is to say that all relations between the West and the Middle East before this particular incident have influenced this incident, and analyzing the relations between this incident and earlier incidents such as 9/11 or national Danish incidents are relevant, but not necessary for the point made here.

the thoughts of the other are seen as wrong or dangerous. The way of thinking of the other becomes something we have to resist and somehow remove from our own life world.

During the Cartoon Crisis, many expressed the fear that the freedom of expression was under attack in Denmark, as they felt that it was no longer safe to express opinions freely about Islam without risking personal safety. In Egypt, many people expressed the fear that the Western countries would impose their culture and religion by attacking Islam.

The Threat

7. Closed dialogue spawns actions to eliminate what is seen as a *threat*. This can only be done if there is a threat, so closed dialogue looks for threats among the others. The threats can easily be found if closed dialogue is spawning among the others also.

These threats produce negative examples of the other, which can then be interpreted in closed dialogue as threats to our or their world and life. This means that closed and curious dialogue both connect to the other in the same degree, the curious in finding positive examples and the closed in finding negative examples. While curious dialogue connects positively, closed dialogue connects on the basis of negativity.

Closed dialogue cannot spawn on its own; it must connect with other closed dialogue from which it can dichotomize itself. Closed dialogue strives for dichotomization and finds an enemy within another context. Unfortunately, there are plenty of people who spawn closed dialogue, replenishing closed dialogue on both sides of a dichotomization with threats.

Threats are important elements in the strategies of closed dialogue. The threats produced by the others become examples of the evil or barbarity of the other, while the threats produced against the other are seen as justified as they are reactions to the evil or barbarity of the other. Closed dialogue is dependent on non-relationality with or distance from the other; this does not have to be a physical distance, as distance in the way of thinking is enough.

The cartoon issue was one of these threats. The cartoons were drawn and published to stand the ground against aggressive Muslim censorship. It was seen as a justified act against an oppressor of opinion.

Many Muslims saw the cartoons as yet another example of the West attacking Islam and acted to demonstrate against this threat in what they saw as justified actions—some of which in turn were interpreted as threats in Denmark.

Dichotomization

8. Antagonism (and the absence of relations and dialogue) is sustained through the dichotomisation of cultures, when produced threats are interpreted as the essence composing the opposing culture. In this way, the origin of the threats is placed within the persons, societies, religions, and/or cultures of the other.

Being different from the other becomes part of self-identity, again sustaining closed dialogue in readings and interpretations of history which culminate in dichotomized connections where a clash is inevitable because of the essence of the other.

Science, religion, literature, media, art and politics are part of the spawning of closed dialogue in the description and action upon this inscribed essence of the other. This negative stereotyping, based not on the colour of the skin but on religion and/or culture, can adequately be termed religious or cultural racism.

The dichotomizations arise when the threats are placed in a table to form a coherent picture of the other. This picture not only actively attempts to understand the other, but forms the picture of one's own culture, as the self is defined in contradiction to the other.

In this way, the threats become arguments for "how we are right and the other is wrong." Once this table is established, it sustains the interpretation that the actions of the other are unjustified or evil and the actions against this other are justified.

This table can then be the basis of science, religion, literature, media, art and politics. In Denmark, the reactions to the cartoons provided illustrations of Islam as a violent and intolerant religion, sustaining the reasons for publishing the cartoons in the first place.

In Egypt, the cartoons were often interpreted as an example of the decadence and the incompatibility of the West with religious values. The issue then sustained the often used dichotomization between the secular West and the religious Middle East, which was the basis for the issue in the first place.[6]

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6   This is in the first place a false dichotomization as secularism is a product of modernism and not necessarily opposed to religion as such.

The Interpretation of Intentions

9. Let us consider this on the level of friendship. If you have a friend, whom you trust and appreciate, and this person does something you find inappropriate or wrong, as long as you are able to forgive these incidents, you will still view the friend as a good person.

But forgiveness is not always easy. When it is difficult, the negative incidents will often be ascribed to a personality or essence of the person in order to distance oneself from this very person.

All actions are interpreted as the actions of a person. The attitude towards this person is fundamental in the interpretation of the person as a carrier of the action. All actions can be understood both positively and negatively; the deciding matter is how we view the intention of the person.

This is where the interpretation lies. Not even extraordinary good behaviour will regain the favour of a person in ill favour, as it is not the actions that are decisive, but the interpretation of the intentions behind the actions.

The negative interpretation sets up a distance between the persons, which can only be bridged if it is done from both sides. This can only be overcome if the person placing another in ill favour is open to interpret positively.

And this is extraordinarily difficult if the understanding of the other person is placed in what is believed to be the personality or essence of this person. This is where forgiving becomes difficult. This goes for the *others* in dialogue also.

The Solution of Closed Dialogue

10. The solution of the produced threats in closed dialogue is to change the others in order to reduce the asymmetry between them and oneself. The others must change their threatening ways (produced by closed dialogue) in order to become part of our own way of thinking.

This is not likely to happen as the differences in ways of thinking *are* different and make sense only within themselves. In a very developed and potent closed dialogue, the resolution will be the final solution: the elimination of the other.

The Basis of Curious Dialogue

11. Curious dialogue functions on the basis of similar strategies, but instead of producing threats, it produces good examples of the other through engagement in order to understand the other's way of thinking. The distance in the curious dialogue is lessened though being relational, as the differences are appreciated in efforts to understand the life of the other.

The Self-sustainability of Closed Dialogue

12. Closed dialogue does not demand much nurturing; once begun, one threat will produce the next. Once the other is seen as a threat, fear is produced, and the obvious reaction is to protect oneself against this threat, often by producing other threats.

This is sustained by a barrier in asymmetry of thought. It takes a positive effort to get beyond this barrier in curious dialogue and produce good examples, but the barrier can be used to produce threats without effort by closed dialogue as the ways of thinking *are* different and unfamiliar. Closed dialogue only has to start a process of fear, spawned by pointing toward the threats produced by closed dialogue.

Allies

13. Closed dialogue has at least three "neutral"[7] allies with their own agendas. Closed dialogue is reliable as it produces reliable results, and it can very easily be used in politics to promote a political career. On the other hand, potent closed dialogue can easily destroy any political career, if the given politician is not choosing the right side (or sides, which are produced by closed dialogue).

Often the media sees negative news as good news and positive news as bad news, as the negative news seems to secure high ratings. Media is, more often than not, business, and as the threats produced by closed dialogue make money, they get disproportionately more attention.

The media can also be taken over by closed dialogue, for example in calling criticism of closed dialogue unpatriotic—by placing curious dialogue on the other side of the conflict produced by closed dialogue.

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7   The actors from each of these groups of allies can be less neutral and participate actively in either closed or curious dialogue.

Closed dialogue is big business in general. When closed dialogue is pushed into warfare, it makes a lot of people a lot of money. The resources of the world are not unlimited and the powers of the world need access to them. Access to these limited resources is power.

Closed dialogue can legitimize the use of power to gain access to these resources. The international focus on business is also the reason why boycotts can be effective, but they do hold the danger of furthering closed dialogue, especially when they are a reaction to threats produced by closed dialogue.[8]

But neutral allies are not restricted to these three. Religion can easily become an ally of closed dialogue if it defines itself negatively as being different from other religions and, in turn, defines these other religions as threats.

Believing then becomes a battle of truth against everyone not believing in the same way. The negative use of power can then become the foundation of faith, as believing entails a struggle against what is different.

In this way any institution or individual who operates with a notion of an absolute truth in a negative self definition can potentially find enemies in those who do not live by this very same truth.

False Questions

14. Even though curious dialogue has its own strategies, it is often forced into the strategies of closed dialogue. Closed dialogue dichotomizes different ways of thinking in examples found in the produced threats, and if curious dialogue is not aware of this, it will be sucked into the strategies of negative dialogue.

The rhetoric of closed dialogue demands taking sides in the dichotomized examples or threats produced. When curious dialogue reacts to the threats produced by closed dialogue, it often believes it has to do so on the premises of closed dialogue. Curious dialogue then has to "take sides," calling the threats of one side justified and the other wrong or evil.

A former major Christian leader was speaking at a conference in Alexandria during the Cartoon Crisis, and during his speech (which was on a more general level) he kept mentioning the issue of the

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8   A Danish researcher, Jørgen THULSTRUP, believes according to www.dr.dk (13 June, 2006) that the issue of the cartoons has strengthened the Danish economy. Even though the Arabic market has been slowed down, it is not significant as a market for Denmark, and stronger markets have opened up to Denmark to a larger degree because of the anti-boycott. This could point in the direction that the markets are affected or not by being neutral to dialogue, closed or curious. And it points in the direction that the boycott has had few of the positive effects wanted only digging the ditches deeper and helping closed dialogue.

cartoons as something done by the Danish people as a whole and as a clear example of what should be avoided and fought against.

Instead of pointing out that the cartoonists drew attention to the fear of Islam and that the newspaper printed the cartoons as a contribution to public debate in Denmark, he sustained the strategies of closed dialogue by building a dichotomy.

At another conference in Cairo, an Egyptian journalist told me that the entire problem of the cartoons stemmed from the dominating religious thought of the Middle East, which he clearly felt suffocated by.

According to this journalist of Muslim roots, Islam was intolerant and incapable of decent dialogue, and this could clearly be seen in how Muslims in general reacted violently to the cartoons. When the Danish embassies were burned, it was yet another example of the aggressive and medieval ways of his religion as a whole.

Both of these men seemed genuinely open-minded and forthcoming to different ways of thinking, but both renounced the way of thinking of their own background to accommodate the different way of thinking.

While this might seem munificent, it does not take the differences in the ways of thinking seriously, as the one way of thinking is perceived as right and justified and the other as wrong and threatening.

In a perfect world we certainly would have only curious dialogue, but this is not a perfect world, and curious dialogue is often left with the primary task of cleaning up the mess made by closed dialogue.

But what is needed for curious dialogue is to disclose or unmask the strategies of closed dialogue instead of buying into these strategies and taking sides which have been created by closed dialogue.

It is more productive to refuse to answer the dichotomized question of "*Does the world need to be secular or religious?*" One should instead point it out as a dichotomy produced by closed dialogue which should be avoided.

Too often, curious dialogue reacts to the threats created by closed dialogue or uses the threats as examples of negative entities building closed dialogue. Too often, curious dialogue functions by the strategies of closed dialogue, which results in curious dialogue feeding closed dialogue by legitimizing the dichotomization of closed dialogue.

Denmark has conducted public debates through satirical cartoons

for decades, depicting *everything* satirically; Sunni Muslims have been prohibited to depict their major prophet for centuries. A key reason it has become an issue now is that it was opportune for closed dialogue.

Criticism is still possible within curious dialogue. Constructive criticism is *only* possible within curious dialogue, as it can be done acknowledging the asymmetrical ways of thinking of the other.

This positive situation involving criticism by curious dialogue is how we ourselves grow: by engaging with what is genuinely different from us. Differences can be understood by curious dialogue as a chance for growth, while negative dialogue sees them as something threatening.

The Approach to Closed Dialogue

15. Curious dialogue cannot begin with closed dialogue, as tolerance meets its boundary in intolerance. Curious dialogue has to use the strategies of closed dialogue against itself to push the persons involved into curious dialogue.

This is not to say that "fire should be fought with fire," but it is to say that there is a struggle, which we have to take seriously and engage in. It is necessary to challenge closed dialogue and its strategies.

Curious dialogue does not do this by attacking with negative examples, but by showing positive examples of the other which are ignored in closed dialogue and by revealing that threats are constructed in the dynamic process that constitutes negative dialogue. Curious dialogue is then using the strategies of closed dialogue against itself, since positive examples from curious dialogue are threats to closed dialogue.

Curious dialogue needs to unmask these threats (as something constructed by closed dialogue) and state continuously that none of the threats are legitimate. Our own threats are not more justified than the threats of the other; the threats of the other are no more evil than our own threats.

These threats are constructions and should be dismissed as such. This will help in the never-ending process of collapsing closed dialogue, as the threats are the pillars of the whole structure of closed dialogue.

In as far as a person is defined by her or his thoughts and actions, the persons engaged in closed dialogue are defined by negativity.

The persons involved in curious dialogue need to ask very publicly if the persons involved in closed dialogue really want to be defined by negativity. This is also an ethical and religious issue and should be addressed as such.

What Curious Dialogue Needs to Do

16. Reading Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN, we realize that our access to reality is dependent on the life form (way of thinking) we partake in, but he also states that these life forms are dynamic. The dynamics of the life forms inspired by Michel FOUCAULT can be seen as power struggles.

Different "factions" are struggling to gain power and, in doing so, they are building science (or knowledge in general) around their specific claims of truth. The (broadly defined) institutions of society are used to implement a specific life form, legitimizing it as truth.[9]

Curious dialogue should take this seriously and engage in the power struggle for dominance against closed dialogue. Curious dialogue should work to shift the negative focus of closed dialogue to the other, to focus on a positive approach to the other. In this way we are positioning ourselves critically outside a negative power struggle between life forms as suggested by J. ROUSE (GUTTING 2005. 108–120).[10]

Curious dialogue needs to distance itself from closed dialogue and must push to make itself more reliable for the politicians and more profitable for the media and market than closed dialogue.

It must take over dialogue. To do this a strong alliance is needed between the different cultures, building an arsenal of positive examples of the other. A history of curious dialogue and de-masked closed dialogue needs to be written, building on common historical roots in life, belief and thought.[11]

Science, religion, literature, media, art, politics, etc. have to be pushed into the service of curious dialogue. If we only respond to the particular threats produced by closed dialogue, then we are fighting a losing battle. We need to address the strategies of closed dialogue behind the particular threats.

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9   This is done by investing it in the habitus of its people.

10   It should, however, be realized that this positioning is still a power struggle.

11   For an agenda of a common history of common roots, read: BULLIET Richard. W., *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*. New York, 2006.

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Henrik Lindberg HANSEN was born in Denmark in 1974, and ordained a pastor in the Danish Evangelical-Lutheran Church to function as a liaison officer in Cairo from 2004–2010. Here, he develops knowledge on Islam and enters into dialogue at the Muslim al-Azhar University. The dialogue carries its own meaning, but is also directing him to be able to function as a resource in this field in Denmark. See more details at www.faithtofaith.dk. His email address is henrik@faithtofaith.dk.