A Case for Constructivism
Investigating the Danish Cartoon Controversy

Nils Dahlqvist
ABSTRACT
This essay evaluates social constructivist theory by analyzing how it brings understanding to an empirical case. The case under study is the Danish Muhammad Cartoon Controversy of 2005-2006, and by using a constructivist conceptualization of identities and norms this essay attempts to demonstrate how constructivism helps in understanding the event where rationalist theories fall short. This essay concludes that these two concepts do further understanding of various social elements that contributed to the explosiveness of the conflict but that there is a difficulty in establishing causality and outlining in detail how they do so.

Keywords: Constructivism, Denmark, Jyllands-Posten, Muhammad Cartoons, Clash of Civilizations, International Relations.

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1. INTRODUCTION
This essay attempts to demonstrate the usefulness of social constructivism in furthering our understanding of international relations and the international system. By analyzing an empirical case: the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis of 2005-2006, I hope to present an international controversy that traditional theories have had a difficulty explaining without altering their framework but that fit well into a constructivist understanding of international relations. By doing so, constructivism can further reassert itself as its own, alternate paradigm within international relations.

1.1 THE MUHAMMAD CARTOON CRISIS: AN OVERVIEW
Few people could have avoided hearing about the worldwide conflict following the publication of the 12 cartoons that depicted the Islamic Prophet Muhammad in Danish Jyllands-Posten in September 2005. Some would view this event as yet another example\(^1\) of a civilizational clash between the West and the Muslim world as notoriously predicted by Samuel Huntington (1993). Others admonished such interpretations and called for increased intercultural discussion (Kunelius et al. 2007: 12; Klausen, 2009: 168-9).

Initially, the controversy over the caricatures was limited to peaceful protests outside Jyllands-Posten’s offices in Copenhagen, but soon after the publication, Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen was contacted by several diplomats who requested a meeting with him (Klausen, 2009: 36-7). Rasmussen, however, ignored the request for a meeting and underscored instead freedom of speech laws. Around one month later, the conflict started receiving worldwide attention, especially after the Organization of Islamic Cooperation\(^2\) (OIC) and the Arab League\(^3\) became involved in the debate and questioned the actions of the Danish government. It was first early January, though, that the issue exploded and became global when it became known that two Danish imams had been traveling in the Middle East in an attempt to rally support for their cause against the publication, and several other European newspapers printed the caricatures in solidarity with the Danish publishers (Rynning & Holmgaard Schmidt, 2006: 12-3).

\(^1\) Other incidents commonly considered to be such clashes are the fatwa calling for the killing of author Salman Rushdie, the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, and the ban on headscarves in French schools (Lægaard, 2007: 147).

\(^2\) Established in 1969, the OIC consists of 57 member states and presents itself as the collective voice for Muslims. Its purpose is to advocate and protect the interests of Muslims around the globe (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, n.d.: n.p.).

\(^3\) The Arab League, officially named the League of Arab States, consists of several Arab states and works to promote understanding between Arab states and the rest of the world (League of Arab States, n.d.: n.p.)
On January 22, boycotts against Danish products were initiated in many Middle Eastern countries (Sløk, 2009: 237), and in early February, the conflict climaxed when Danish embassies in Damascus, Tehran, and Beirut were attacked and burned down (Lægaard, 2007: 148). Facing mounting pressure, Jyllands-Posten apologized for the “inadvertent effects” the cartoons brought but did not apologize for publishing them in the first place, and Rasmussen and other notable Danish officials toured the Middle East and entered into dialog with the OIC and other organizations to mediate the conflict, and eventually the waves of protests faded (Rynning & Holmgaard Schmidt, 2006: 14-5).

Overall, the protests had a massive impact on Denmark. Estimations suggest that the country lost over 180 million US dollars due to boycotts and broken business relations (Klausen 2009: 150) and its previous reputation as an open and tolerant country was tarnished (Rynning & Holmgaard Schmidt, 2006: 11). Sources differ on how many people were killed due to happenings related to the cartoons: Kunelius et al. report over 130 dead (Kunelius et al., 2007: 11), while Klausen, who seems to have a more complete and detailed record, counts to over 241 dead and over 800 injured (Klausen, 2009: 107).

Interestingly, a vast majority of the casualties occurred in Nigeria, far away from the drawing studios in Denmark, again underscoring the global and very unpredictable character of the course of events. In fact, Europe’s only casualty was a Pakistani student who committed suicide after being suspected for attempted murder on the Editor in Chief of a German newspaper that had reprinted the caricatures (Gebauer & Musharbash, 2006). Therefore, what happened during those turbulent months of 2005-2006 is perhaps more difficult to define than meets the eye. Lindekilde et al. (2009: 296) go as far as calling it a “unique case,” and they add further that what it is a case of depends on what perspective one has.

The perspective I argue from in this thesis is that the Cartoon Crisis is a very relevant case for constructivism. From an IR perspective, the controversy is particularly interesting for understanding the power of identity and norms in shaping the international system because it underscores that identities and norms matter and can have serious material impact. Again, over 241 dead, 800 injured, and 180 million dollars lost. By applying constructivist theory on this event, I hope to demonstrate the usefulness it has for understanding the international system, because, as this thesis argues, constructivism provides a theoretical framework for understanding how normative, ideational conflicts initiated by non-state actors can lead to protracted conflicts between states and have severe material impact on the world.
2. PURPOSE
This section first outlines the aims of the thesis by placing the paper in a context in which constructivism has been challenged for having underdeveloped empirical foundations, and thus showing how it relates to the IR-debate at large. It should be underscored here that the primary aim of this thesis is not to analyze the Cartoon Crisis per se, but rather to use the crisis to test constructivism. The Cartoon Crisis is merely used to provide empirical data that demonstrates the usefulness of constructivism.

2.1 TESTING CONSTRUCTIVISM EMPIRICALLY
Critical theories have often been criticized for having underdeveloped empirical foundations (e.g. Mearsheimer, 1994: 44), and for having insufficient predicative powers compared to realism. That is, they fail to introduce any novel analytical tools to help improve understanding empirical events and changes in the international system or confront realism’s explanatory power (Desch, 1998: 158). Duffield criticizes reservations that scholars typically make to theories because they make it impossible to falsify a theory completely; as soon as scholars are faced with some unexplainable phenomenon, ad-hoc explanations are made to preexisting theories (1999: 168). One prominent constructivist scholar identifies exactly this empirical “ad-hocism” as a major problem with constructivist research (Checkel, 1998: 325). Consequently, the only way constructivism can establish itself as an alternative paradigm is if it can explain empirical phenomena in IR that realism cannot explain without making additions or reservations to its theoretical construction. By doing so, not only would realist theory be challenged but constructivism would also assert itself as a theory in its own right (Duffield, 1999: 166).

In other words, if culturalism predicts something that realism does not—such as a state will go to war to defend its self-perceived identity (as say, a great power)—and evidence can be produced to corroborate this hypothesis—such as a state going to war in which it has no interests at stake—this suggests that culturalism is a progressive research program (Duffield, 1999: 165)

The aim of this essay is to do exactly what Duffield calls for: to test constructivist theory empirically. I hope to do so by showing that the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis is a particularly interesting case because its central conflict appears to fall outside the scope of realist theory. Since the crisis was largely an ideational conflict, arising from mere cartoons that should be inconsequential to any state, it is then difficult to explain how it could lead to such devastating, material consequences. Why, for example, did Saudi Arabia sever its, until then
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prosperous, trade relations with Denmark because of a few cartoons in a newspaper that in no way were directed toward Saudi Arabia as a state, toward its people, or threatened its security? Moreover, how can realism explain Rasmussen’s stubborn refusal to take any steps toward reconciliation with the upset parties, even after the conflict had escalated and potentially could have severe economic consequences? Responding to these challenges, this essay develops the idea that a constructivist take on identity and divergent norms makes one better understand the conflict. As such, the analysis of the Cartoon Crisis itself is secondary; the primary aim of this thesis is to demonstrate the usefulness of constructivism. It should be added too, that the essay does not attempt to challenge realism but rather seeks to solidify constructivism. This essay is rather an answer to Checkel when he points to the need of cross-country and longitudinal analysis to show exactly how norms and social structure determines behavior (1998: 339). Or to quote Martha Finnemore, “Simply claiming that ‘norms matter’ is not enough for constructivists. They must provide substantive arguments about which norms matter as well as how, where, and why they matter” (1996: 130). This essay hopes to do exactly this and directs the attention to the constructivist conceptualization of identity and norms.

2.2 Research Question

This study tests the analytical capabilities of constructivist theory and methodology empirically by applying it to the Danish Muhammad Cartoon Controversy. For this reason, the study moves away from discussions about whether the publications of the cartoons were justified or whether the responses of the different governments were warranted. The case study itself is only instrumental and is not the main purpose of the essay; instead, the aim is to evaluate the usefulness of constructivism when it comes to analyzing the unfolding of events in the Cartoon Crisis. As such, the following is my research question:

How does a social constructivist understanding of identity and norms in IR further our understanding of the underlying forces at play in the Danish Muhammad Cartoon Controversy of 2005-2006?
3. **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This essay does not primarily seek to add any new theoretical knowledge or aspects to the constructivist database; rather, it evaluates the already existing theory to see if constructivism “measures up” to its promise. This chapter presents an overview of the voluminous literature concerning constructivist theory with the intention of placing the paper in a larger theoretical context and to present points of contention within the theory. However, the theoretical elements (identity and norms) that are used later in the analysis are not elaborated on here. Instead, an in-depth discussion about them is in the theory section.

3.1 **A REVIEW OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY**

Borne out of the Cold War as a reaction to the limited scope of the neorealist and neoliberal theorizing (Brincat, 2010: 682), the constructivist school of thought has transformed into being a subfield within IR in its own right. Moving away from a materialist and individualist view of IR in which the physical, material world and individual states are the primary objects of study, constructivists are prone to discuss ideas and holistic structures and view them as ontological objects as well (Wendt, 1987: 351). Thus, what differentiates constructivism from these rationalist schools of thought is the focus of inquiry. Instead of accepting a static approach to states and other actors, constructivists tend to discuss underlying nonmaterial factors that influence such actors (identities, interests, and so on) and assert that the actors and this system depend on each other (Kowert & Legro, 1996: 421-2). In short, with a constructivist perspective, actors and the international system are social constructions and are subject to change (Hopf, 1998: 181). Although created largely as a reaction to traditional IR-theory, constructivism has since moved on to become its own, separate theory where discussions take on their own characteristics, and traditional schools of thought have themselves been influenced by constructivism (Checkel, 1997: 473). As neatly summarized by Checkel, “Constructivism is trendy” (2004: 229).

Yet, far from being a uniform movement, there is a controversy among constructivist scholars about how methodology and analysis should be approached (Sterling-Folker, 2000; Wendt, 1999: 29). According to one observer, the peril of constructivism is that it is not well defined and the meaning of the term changes depending on whom you ask (Palan, 2000: 578). Two central points of contention are, firstly, how research should be conducted, whether it should be done in a positivist or post-positivist fashion, and, secondly, whether material or ideas, structures or individuals are the most useful analytical units. However, these two debates are closely related, as post-positivistic analysis tends to focus more on structural and
ideational factors while positivist scholars are more prone to discuss material and individual factors (Checkel 1997; Wendt, 1999).

Consequently, it is impossible to speak of one unified constructivist theory; rather, much of the internal debate is about where on this continuum IR-analysis should be made (see Figure 1 and 2). Hopf describes two central groups of constructivism, which he labels conventional and critical respectively (Hopf, 1998: 171). While both these groups seek to “denaturalize” IR-theory and while both argue that institutions are created through social interactions and human agency rather than being static and natural, conventional constructivists use more of a positivist epistemology (Hopf, 1998: 181-3). The critical side, on the other hand, contends that actors and observers cannot be separated; since knowledge production is contingent not only on the phenomena studied but also on the researcher, who is inseparably linked to the real world, knowledge production is therefore colored by the researcher and so objective portrayal is unachievable (Thaddeus Jackson, 2008: 147). Instead, interpretive methods are preferred.

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Others have presented constructivism as a middle ground, as a balance between traditional rationalism and postmodernism (Adler, 1997; Checkel, 1997; Wendt, 1992). The graphs above show where Adler presumably finds his “middle ground” in his understanding of international relations; that is, in the space between post-positivism and positivism and in the center of the structural ideational versus material and individual continuums. As both rationalist theories and postmodernism have been criticized, the former for having a flawed and too rigid methodology and the latter for relativism and lack of scientific standards (Patomäki & Wight, 2000: 213-4), constructivism, falling in the middle between these two extremes, can possibly play a crucial role in bridging the gap between them.
However, critics of this position contend that attempting to find a methodological middle ground does not solve any inherent problems of either side. Establishing a middle ground between two extremities does not necessarily improve on the other two positions but runs the risk of incorporating into the middle ground problems inherent of both sides (Patomäki & Wight, 2000: 215; Thaddeus Jackson, 2008: 131). Additionally, realism and critical theories might have more in common than meets the eye. Contrary to what Checkel argues, that a middle ground can enable a dialogue between competing methodological positions (Checkel, 1997: 488-9), Patomäki and Wight argue that those positions, in and of themselves, are not necessarily the binary opposites that they are often purported to be (Patomäki & Wight, 2000: 216-7).

In addition, critics have questioned whether constructivism actually presents a new theoretical paradigm. Sterling-Folker, for example, has argued that aspects of identity and cooperation that may account for structural change in the global system are already present in neoliberal institutionalism; constructivists merely tend to imitate explanatory models already utilized. She concludes that constructivism, therefore, fails to present itself as an alternative paradigm (Sterling-Folker, 2000: 98). Both Wendt and Checkel see the similarities between liberalism and constructivism, but they suggest, in contrast to Sterling-Folker, that constructivism provides different—though still valuable—insights in the understanding of norms (Checkel, 1997: 488) and identity- and interest-formation (Wendt, 1992: 394). Alder, moreover, maintains that constructivism is distinguished by its ability to account for socio-cognitive factors, although he concedes that this aspect has been underdeveloped (Alder, 1997: 320). He continues by stating that constructivism is not a political theory per se, but is a social one, and that the challenge it presents to realism and liberalism is epistemological and ontological rather than political; it is a different way of understanding international relations, and in this lies the usefulness of constructivist thought (Alder, 1997: 322-3).

In conclusion, constructivist contribution to IR-theory is important, especially the social understanding of the world it brings with it. While scholars are in disagreement about many epistemological matters, constructivist school of thought presents a valuable addition to traditional literature. In the theory chapter of this paper, I outline in detail a constructivist conceptualization of identity and norms. This conceptualization is a highly social one, which, as shown above, is often considered the strength of constructivism.
4. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This chapter outlines first a methodological overview of the constructivist school of thought. As partly discussed in Chapter 2, constructivists are in disagreement about questions of methodology. Nevertheless, this essay adapts more of a positivist understanding of IR. Secondly, this chapter outlines and defends the chosen methods for data collection and analysis. This is done with the intent of showing the reader how the essay was produced.

4.1 CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORETICAL METHOD

Thaddeus Jackson notes that within IR there has been a long tradition of conflating the concepts of method and methodology. He, on the other hand, discerns these concepts by defining *method* as being the techniques for data gathering and analyzing, i.e. how to perform research, and *methodology* as being the epistemological foundations on which the research is made (Thaddeus Jackson, 2008: 131). As described earlier, constructivist method is rather heterogeneous. Scholars range from preferring interpretive methods and opposed to any clearly defined and rigidly used method (e.g. Brincat, 2010: 680) to coming close to using positivist scientific methods (e.g. Wendt, 1999). Indeed, as Pouliot contends, constructivism does not introduce a radically new set of methods; instead, the challenge is primarily methodological (2007: 360).

What differentiates constructivists from most traditional scholars *methodologically* is that they distinguish between explaining and understanding international phenomena. This stems for a tradition within sociology to view the meaning of human actions as subjective (Hollis & Smith, 1990: 68-9). That is, we cannot explain human actions or symbols the way we explain natural sciences. For example, when chemical reactions occur, they do so simply because the conditions for such reactions to take place are met. Chemical elements have no ulterior motives for forming or breaking bonds, so they will always react the same way under the same conditions. However, this is not analogous to social sciences because there actors can take seemingly similar actions but the meaning and reasons for them can be widely different. There are no single explanation to why actors behave in certain ways and the meaning of their actions are dependent on the context and interpretation, so the focus should be on understanding the meaning of the actions rather than just explaining them because an explanation is just a perspective, not a complete, unchallengeable truth (Hollis & Smith, 1990: 75; Moses & Knutsen, 2007: 210-14).

Moreover, in natural sciences, the observer and the observed object are clearly separated and what people believe about certain factual issues has no bearing on what is actually true;
instead, the truth is always “out there” ready to be taken down and made sense of. For example, despite being conventional wisdom at the time, and perhaps to the Catholic Church’s dismay, the sun never orbited the earth. However, constructivists argue that this logic cannot be applied to social sciences because they deal with human beings and their interactions, so knowledge about the world and the world itself cannot be separated (Thaddeus Jackson, 2008: 142). For example, the opinion a social scientific researcher has vis-à-vis the objects of study may well influence—not predict—the behavior of those objects. When, say, scholars predict a clash of civilizations, central actors that are aware of this prediction might act accordingly and thereby make it a self-fulfilling prophecy (Bottici & Challand, 2006).

In addition, who does the research matters also because the experiences of the researcher invariably color the research. This leads some feminists, for example, to question whether men can do research about women’s issues (Seale, 1999: 11). Some go as far as asserting that rather than measuring the quality of a research program by its ability to generalize or predict, it should be measured by the impact it has and its ability to encourage changes in the physical world (Seale, 1999: 9; Brincat, 2010: 683). Critical constructivists are often on the clear that their works contain normative dimensions (Checkel, 2004: 231). Knowledge, then, is political, and this necessarily implies that the current state of IR does not exist as a natural necessity but as a social construction.

However, it needs to be pointed out again that constructivism is a broad school of thought, and while constructivists acknowledge the social elements of IR, many remain sympathetic to positivist methods. Adler, for instance, points out that unlike its more radical brethren post-structuralism, the advantage of constructivism is that it may acknowledge this and use interpretive approaches while still relying on scientific methods and posing falsifiable hypotheses for research (Adler, 1997: 334-5).

These methodological positions are relevant also for the purposes of this essay, because by testing the power of constructivism, also the methodological aspects of the theory must be used. Firstly, as already presented, this essay is built around a testable hypothesis, but at the same time it will not, and does not seek to, produce a solid answer or a definitive explanation to the empirical phenomena discussed. Nevertheless, the methods I subsequently outline in this chapter and later use in the analysis are largely positivist in nature. As a result, epistemologically this thesis comes closer to conventional constructivists such as Adler and Wendt.
4.2 Case Study Analysis

For an accurate assessment of how well constructivism can explain phenomena happening in the Cartoon Crisis, it is imperative to obtain a detailed understanding of the unfolding of the events that took place. If this is not realized, the aim of the thesis is unfulfilled because there is little value in testing a theory on a case that is not accurately described. Firstly, the analysis itself would have no value; secondly, and more importantly, the essay would have no bearing on whether constructivism can make one understand what actually happened. In short, this essay stands or falls by its ability to present high quality empirical data. Therefore, seeing that this essay is highly reliant on a detailed description of an event to test the theory, it should be advantageous to use a single case study method because it allows for gathering detailed information about the case under study (Moses & Knutsen, 2007: 139). In Yin’s words, “the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena” (2009: 4).

There are several different categories of case studies. For the purposes of this essay, using a theory-confirming case study should prove most efficient, because, as the name suggests, such case studies serve to “demonstrate the explanatory power of a particular theory” (Moses & Knutsen, 2007: 133) by investigating to what extent a theory furthers understanding of an empirical event. This method runs a considerable risk of bias by excluding invalidating data, or even seeing confirmation of theory in such data; that is, fitting a theory where it does not fit (Moses & Knutsen 2007: 133-4). Nonetheless, a rigorous protocol of data collection and triangulation (see 4.3 Materials) can minimize this risk.

Yin outlines several different types of analytical techniques used for case studies. This essay will use what Yin calls an “Explanation Building” mode of analysis (2009: 141-4). By producing a narrative of the case with the aim of explaining causal links between different occurrences, I thereby attempt to account for how the case unfolded. Yin points out that such types of narratives are not an exact science; nevertheless, the value of such case studies, he continues, is the possibility to reflect on theoretical assumptions by first making theoretical propositions and then testing them on the case and then further refining them (2009: 141).

This concurs with the overall aim of the thesis, so the subsequent chapter will outline these theoretical propositions: constructivist view of identity and norms. After that, I test them on the case to see how well they fit. In an effort to highlight precisely how constructivist theory improves one’s understanding of the event, I have separated the analysis into different sections where each section discusses a particular stage of the event. These sections contain two subsections: the first subsection is a narrative of the event (a synthesis of different
empirical records) without introducing any theory. The second subsection then applies theory to the previous narrative to investigate how the theory helps understanding the narrative. This separation of theory and description is done with the intent of making it clear to the reader what the theoretical tools do (and do not do) in improving understanding of the event by contrasting the general, descriptive data from the conclusions drawn with help of theory.

4.2.1 Defining the Cartoon Crisis

The cartoons that provoked the crisis were first published 30 September 2005. This date, essentially, is advantageous to consider as a starting point. From this date and onwards the crisis escalated rapidly and climaxed on January 26 in a boycott of Danish products in several different countries. After this came a period of reconciliation between the different parties that went on until late spring 2006. However, as noted in 2008 by Hervik et al. (2008: 29) the Cartoon Crisis is not a clean-cut event with a clear end and beginning. The treatment of the Muslim minority in Denmark, for example, is important for understanding the context in which the cartoons were printed. Moreover, the controversy still lingers, with, for example, previous Foreign Minister Lene Espersen as late as 2010 expressing regret over the indignation the cartoons caused (Andrew, 2010), and with the attempted terrorist attack against Jyllands-Posten in 2010 (Sandels & Stobart, 2010).

For the purposes of this essay, the analytical focus will be the first five months following the publication, as most of the state-level interactions took place during this time. A longer time-period could have been used, and could certainly be interesting for further research. For this thesis, however, the Cartoon Crisis itself is not the main focus, and for this reason, a shorter time period is used to limit the analysis to the most relevant, testable parts of the crisis in which state interaction peaked. However, a short background description of the domestic situation in Denmark before the publication is included as well. This description is not discussed later in the constructivist analysis; instead, it is written with the intent of making the reader aware of the context in which the cartoons were published.

4.2.2 Materials

To obtain an accurate analysis, it is important to have several different sources that discuss the same situations but with different perspectives and to cross-examine these sources to look for differences and areas of controversy as well as note were they might concur. Otherwise, the data covers only a very limited perspective, which, in turn, questions the validity of any analysis using that data. Therefore, this essay relies on Yin’s recommendation of using a
method of data triangulation (2009: 115-8); that is, to compare how different authors describe the same event and based on that create an analysis. Metaphorically, this process of triangulation can be described as several photographers taking pictures of the same building from different angles—the resulting snapshots all show the same building, but one still sees different things in each one of them and no picture captures or represents the whole essence of the building. Only by looking at all the pictures, the view acquires a proper understanding of how the building looks like.

However, relatively little is written on the Cartoon Crisis with the aim to provide a holistic, comprehensive narrative about “what happened.” Rather, much of the material that I have come across while producing this essay discusses the event in relation to more specific issues e.g. questions of the Danish Muslim minority (Feldt, 2009), or to use the event—like this essay does—to discuss theory (e.g. Hansen, 2011). This lack of comprehensive data poses a challenge to the thesis because if it is comprised only of literature that has perspectives on isolated issues that are unrelated and incomparable, then the data cannot be triangulated and an accurate analysis cannot be constructed.

Still, there are accounts that present the case in-depth, the most thorough description being The Cartoons that Shook the World by Jytte Klausen. Some parts of the analysis rely chiefly on her account, but wherever possible I try to substantiate her arguments with other sources. In addition, Klausen’s work is especially useful because it contains interviews with central actors, such as IOC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu. Such interviews provide opportunity to explore another important dimension: how different actors justify their actions. Another example of such a source is Flemming Rose’s article “Why I Published those Cartoons” in Washington Post, which reveals the justifications Rose made for his original publication after the conflict had started to escalate. These sources are in and of themselves useful for analysis without any type of triangulation because they demonstrate how important actors justified their actions.

4.3 DELIMITATIONS

As pointed out earlier, this essay is not an attempt to make a chronological, unabridged description of the Cartoon Crisis, and it offers only a limited perspective of the event. Nevertheless, one aspect of the crisis that is largely untreated in this essay is the role of media and the media discourse. In other literature, the Cartoon Crisis is often framed as a global media event and it has been, for example, the subject of journalism studies (cf. Eide et al., 2008). This perspective is lacking in this thesis. The point here is that there are different
angles from which the Cartoon Crisis can be analyzed and evaluate and that this essay presents only a very limited view of it, so the understanding of the Cartoon Crisis is limited as well.

Moreover, it is necessary, considering the limited scope of this essay, to consider only certain actors; therefore, this essay primarily analyzes the behavior of the Danish government, the Arab League, and the OIC. These entities were selected because they were the most important actors in shaping the event. While references are sometimes briefly made to other countries and organizations, this delimitation is necessary for obtaining the adequate detail required for a successful analysis—if more entities would have been included, the analysis would run the risk of being crude and diluted and thus of low quality. A more comprehensive essay could probably benefit from including a wider range of actors.

5. CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY

The aim of this essay is to show how constructivist aspects of identity and norms can help one understand why the Cartoon Crisis unfolded the way it did. These two concepts are theorized here and are prepared for empirical testing. This essay adapts the distinction Kowert & Lergo make between norms and identities by considering “norms as the regulative cultural content of international politics and identities—regulative accounts of actors themselves” (1996: 453. Original emphasis). Put differently, norms operate on a systematic level by regulating what actors should and should not do, and identities operate on a state level by regulating how a state constitutes itself.

5.1 IDENTITY

Wendt argues that the identities of central state actors are stable, though not static, and are formed in a milieu together with other states, so it is not possible to understand the identity formation of a state without considering other states surrounding it because they influence and shape that identity. Moreover, by drawing parallels to human individuals, who have multiple identities that each change depending on the context (car mechanic, father, ice hockey enthusiast), he argues that a state is not restricted to having a single identity either (Wendt, 1992: 396-8). This analogy also demonstrates how identity is established in relation to other entities because just as human beings act differently depending on what context they in are and whom they are with, so do states. He exemplifies this by pointing out how the United States during the Cold War perceived British missiles entirely differently than it perceived Soviet ones (Wendt, 1992: 397). In this example, decommissioning of Soviet missiles would
be welcomed, while if the British decommissioned their missiles, it would have been met with great concern. That is, the meaning of missiles is understood socially by looking at how the United States perceives Russia and vice versa. What follows is that identity is fundamental for determining interests because as the example above shows, the United States viewed the Soviet Union as a threat not because it had missiles (Britain had them too!) but because their social identities were opposed each other. This is not to say that to know the identity of an actor means that one can predict its behavior because although states do not always follow what appears to be in their interest. States are not entirely rational and do not according to some prerecorded pattern, but in general, identity contributes to the formation of state interest (Wendt, 1992: 398).

Michael Barnett argues along the same line that identity is formed in relation to, against, some other entity. State identity emerges through differentiation from other states—his empirical example being how pan-Arabism developed through viewing Israel as a threat (Barnett, 1996: 413-4). Barnett further notes that within the present West (in 1996), in the absence of prominent external threats, free markets and democracy are laudable characteristics and are central to identity formation (Barnett, 1996: 407-8). Kowert and Legro concur and exemplify how support of free trade became an important characteristic of states in 19th century Europe, not because of material changes but because of the spread of liberal ideology. The advantages of free trade were not only promote but free trade also worked prescriptively by defining how state ought to look like (Kowert & Lergo, 1996: 453). That is, identity regulates what values states ought to constitute of internally and those values produce, in turn, norms about how states should behave toward other states. What follows this line of reasoning is that states tend to form collective identities with other states, often in relation to other states, and these identities determine interests and norms (Wendt, 1999: 229; Jepperson, et al., 1996: 54). This goes both ways, however, as norms sometimes act prescriptively and inform the identity of states, so these two concepts interact with one another and neither can be taken out of the equation.

However, localized, domestic opinion can also shape state interest and the state’s behavior in the international system. Finnemore mentions Switzerland’s long lasting neutrality as an example of a strongly rooted conviction held domestically giving the nation a peculiar characteristic when compared to similar nations in its vicinity (Finnemore, 1996: 145). States, consequently, do not automatically conform to prescriptive characteristics present in neighboring states. Zehfuss draws the same conclusion and adds that there can be different opinions within about what a state should and should not do; that is, there can be multiple
competing identities within the same state, so state identity is not necessarily so uniform or stable as Wendt claim it to be (Zehfuss, 2009: 332-3).

In sum, what these discussions boil down to is that identities are socially created through interactions both on a domestic level, together with similar states in the form of collective identities, and against states that are considered different. Identity is an important determinant for state interest—what states want—and identity can therefore be viewed as the expected behavior of a state.

5.2 NORMS
This essay adapts Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein’s definition of norms, namely the “collective expectations about proper behavior for a given identity” (1996: 54). Norms in this sense can be “constitutive” by reflecting the identity of states or “prescriptive” by informing what characteristics ought to be present in states (Jepperson, et al., 1996: 54). Norms, in other words, are expectations states have on one another (Kower & Legro, 1996: 453). This undermines the traditional rationalist view of actors.

Finnemore argues that many norms are so commonly accepted that they are difficult to identify as norms at all because they are never violated, and adhering to them is not a conscious choice but seen as the only way to act (1996: 23). However, at the same time, she goes on to say that in there are no ideal economic or political arrangements that are universally agreed upon; instead, there is a tension between what different states want. Therefore, social institutions are tested and challenged by incompatible ideas. States “learn” from other states, IOs, and NGOs how to behave (Finnemore, 1996: 135). Likewise, Wendt argues that both states and international norms shape and change through imitation and social learning. In a sense, states converge around values and ideas that seem most successful (1999: 324-5), which is why there are enclaves of states with similar core values (1999: 338). In Europe, for instance, few would ever question women’s right to vote. This does not mean, though, that all norms are “positive” or improve the well-being of people. As Finnemore points out, history is abound with examples of societies promoting slavery and racism, so to say that social norms affect the international system is not to imply that the world we live in is ideal (1996: 128).

Shannon similarly describes the role of norms as a spectrum of different possibilities. Similarly to Finnemore (1996: 23), he states that in some situations, norms are universally accepted and such norms are seen as natural. Conforming to them is routine and does not contradict state interest. At the other end of the spectrum, there are no agreed upon norms so
states act freely on their interests without normative constraints. However, between these two extremities is a gray area where there are ambiguous norms to which states may or may not want to conform. Here, norms are a potential source of conflict and they might be broken (Shannon, 2000: 299-300). Still, such norms bring stability and adhering to them is the “default option” and is usually the most beneficial course to take, but at the same time, they are not set in stone and can have numerous interpretations. So while states tend to avoid judgment by other states, which comes with breaking norms, some norms have enough interpretive room for state leaders to define them in favor of their own interests or to encourage other states to behave in a certain way. By defining a norm so that it suits state interest, some norms are possible to circumvent without ramifications. However, if several states attempt to shape the same norm in their favor, conflicts might arise (Shannon, 2000: 294; Finnemore, 1996: 24). Additionally, when a state deviates from norms that are so accepted and powerful that breaking them is considered unacceptable, other states use ridicule and exert economic and diplomatic pressure to force it to conform to the norm (Shannon, 2000: 297). With this conceptualization it is entirely possible that norm disputes—in and of themselves—can lead to conflicts between states given that either the norms are ambiguous and states compete over defining them or when states disregard already agreed upon norms (Kowert & Legro, 1996: 455).

Norms in this sense can be viewed as a type of power because they establish rules of how actors should conduct, and if they do not conform, they risk being punished. Power, then, is not limited to material superiority, as, for example, about military forces and the ability to influence others through coercion; immaterial structures too are considered to possess power because they are as likely as anything to constrain actors.

Power, in short means not only the resources required to impose one’s view on others, but also the authority to determine the shared meanings that constitute the identities, interests and practices of states, as well as the conditions that confer, defer or deny access to “goods” and benefits. (Adler, 1997: 336)

So to define norms, or in Adler’s terms to control “the rules of the game,” is perhaps the most effective form of power because of its inherent subtlety and difficulty to overtly and deliberately oppose and challenge (Adler, 1997: 336). With Wendt’s and Finnemore’s discussion about states learning and interacting with each other, it is both possible and probable that norms emerge and become unquestioned (in Shannon’s sense) in particular
clusters of states, separated and at distance from other clusters in which those norms might not even exist.

In sum, norms refer to the collective expectations states have on another. Norms are sometimes *universally accepted* and states conform to them without question, sometimes they are *disputed* and can lead to conflict when states break them or define them in their favor, and lastly, in some situations there are *no norms*—no expectations—for how states should behave.

6. CASE ANALYSIS – THE MUHAMMAD CARTOON CRISIS

This chapter begins by giving a background of the status of Muslim immigrants in Denmark, a brief overview of global East-West relations, and to describe briefly the characteristics of the cartoons. This is done with the intent of giving context to the subsequent transnational reactions to the cartoons, which is the essay’s analytical focus. These background descriptions might appear lengthy, but I consider them indispensable for the analysis that follows. After these backgrounds, the empirical component of the case study is first described without any theoretical discussions. This narrative is not wholly chronological; instead, it is arranged by underlying themes and discussed separately in each subsection. After each of these descriptive sections, the data it is analyzed with the theoretical tools developed in the previous chapter.

6.1 BACKGROUND TO THE CARTOON CRISIS

6.1.1 EAST-WEST RELATIONS BEFORE THE CARTOONS

As subsequent chapters will describe, the Cartoon Crisis can be viewed as a transnational event in which various actors invoked civilizational identities; therefore, the event needs to be described also with the background of the global relations between the West and the Islamic world. Edward Said notes that in beginning of the second half of the 20th century, the image of Arabs within the West took an anti-Semitic turn in which Arabs and Muslims caricatures replaced previous Jewish ones. With West’s increasing dependence on Middle Eastern crude oil, Arabs were portrayed as a threat to the free, democratic world (Said, 1978: 284-6). With the end of the Cold War, the West gave further attention to the Middle East. For instance, in 1993, Samuel Huntington presented his Clash of Civilizations theory in an article in *Foreign Affairs*. Following the massive response it received, he further refined the theory, which resulted in a book bearing the same name in 1996. What his theory predicts is that “In the emerging era, clashes of civilizations are the greatest threat to world peace, and an
international order based on civilizations is the surest safeguard against war” (Huntington, 1996: 321). In Huntington’s work, much analytical focus is dedicated to the relations between Islam and the West (1996: 209-218). He quotes Barry Buzan saying, “a societal Cold War with Islam would serve to strengthen the European identity all round at a crucial time for the process of European union” (Huntington, 1996: 212). Although Huntington’s theory has received much criticism, for instance for simplifying very diverse nations and cultures to make them fit into a civilization (Said, 2001), it has enjoyed much popularity. While popular already when it was released, it became especially widespread after the September 11 terrorist attacks and since then it has contributed significantly to the self-perception of many Western policymakers (O’Hagan, 2004: 31). Other recent events that have significantly shaped West’s perception of the Muslim world are primarily the terrorist attacks in London and Madrid, but in connection to the Cartoon Crisis many debaters also recalled the reactions to Salman Rushdie’s novel The Satanic Verses from 1988 after which he had to go into hiding fearing repercussions from upset Muslims.

At the other side of the coin are the “War on Terror,” the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the double standard of human rights shown with the humiliating treatment of prisoners in Abu Ghraib and the illegal detention of suspected terrorists in the Guantanamo prison. All these events have contributed to a conspiratorial perception among some Muslims that the West is not pursuing a “War on Terror” but a “War on Islam” (Jensen, 2006: 4). Consequently, there is a feeling among Muslims that the West does not accept them as being equals. The cartoons were published in the light of this, so for many Danish Muslims the cartoons merely underscored that they were not an accepted part of Danish society. Later when the cartoons eventually spread to other parts of the world, they were not viewed as a matter of freedom of speech but as a deliberate provocation and humiliation against Islam and Muslims.

6.1.2 THE DANISH DOMESTIC SITUATION

Like in many other war-torn countries in Europe, migrants coming to Denmark in the 1950’s and 60’s were initially welcomed as a source of labor (Nørby Bonde, 2007: 37). However, since then the political attitude toward immigrants, especially Muslim ones, has been increasingly assimilationist with the ambition of having migrants adhere to Danish national culture (Larsson & Lindekiilde, 2009: 364). This trend came to the fore with the rise of Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People’s Party), an essentially xenophobic and islamophobic neo-nationalist party advocating “Danishness” with an explicit focus on immigration problems.
For example, in May 2005, a few months before the cartoons were published, party leader Pia Kjærgaard asserted that within Copenhagen lived people from “lower stages of civilization,” and while Cartoon Crisis unfolded, one senior member, at that time running for Mayor of Copenhagen, called Islam a “cancer” (Jensen, 2006: 6). After the 2001 elections, Rasmussen’s government relied on Dansk Folkeparti for parliamentary majority and gave it considerable influence over immigration politics; consequently, the immigration debate polarized and harshened and Muslim immigrants were been singled out as especially difficult to integrate and to be at odds with traditional Danish culture (Nørby Bonde, 2007: 34). With immigration increasingly being framed as a problem and as a security issue, human rights groups criticized the Danish government for counteracting efforts against discrimination and racism (Jensen, 2006: 5).

With the securitization of migration in Denmark, cultural debates about values, freedom of speech, multicultural recognition, and so forth multiplied among the people and in media outlets as well (Feldt, 2009: 176). Jyllands-Posten, a supporter of the Rasmussen government and its immigration policies (Lægaard, 2007: 148; Hansen, 2006: 8), was not an exception to this. Peter Hervik, for instance, considers the Muhammad cartoons to be just one of many islamophobic provocations forwarded by Jyllands-Posten and views the publication as yet a mere symptom of a broader political environment that has developed the last fifteen years (Hervik, 2008: 64). He cites a study from in 2001 that analyzes editorials in Jyllands-Posten; it reveals that editorials dealing with Islam describe the religion as “abhorrent,” “medieval,” and containing “forces of darkness.” One editorial asserts that Danish people, naïve as they are, passively stand by as these dark forces introduce “conditions of the middle-ages” in Denmark (Hervik, 2009: 64). Jensen nuances this picture by pointing out that Jyllands-Posten was not unreservedly backing Rasmussen’s government and that before the Cartoon Crisis, Jyllands-Posten often had sensible and respectful portrayals of Muslims and Islam (Jensen, 2006: 7). Nevertheless, it is far to conclude that Jyllands-Posten did have a history of forwarding very blunt comments on Islam and, it is fair to argue, singling out Muslims and instilling fear among ethnic Danes. Although when Jyllands-Posten is compared with Dansk Folkeparti, it is clear that the newspaper’s comments were not remotely as rancorous.

6.1.3 The Jyllands-Posten Cartoons

On September 30, 2005, the twelve cartoons were published in Jyllands-Posten under the headline “Muhammeds Ansigt” (“Muhammad’s Face”). The cartoons are all very different and portray different messages. The most notorious cartoon, drawn by Kurt Westergaard,
shows a man, presumably Prophet Muhammad, wearing a turban containing a bomb with a lit fuse. Written over the turban is a famous Islamic verse in Arabic, “There is no god except Allah and Muhammad is Allah’s messenger.” This cartoon is often read as portraying a suicide bomber influenced by Islam or even that Prophet Muhammad himself was a suicide bomber (Alhassan, 2009: 40-1). It is this cartoon, and two others that are generally considered the most offensive.

Other cartoons also depict Prophet Muhammad but there is no obvious intention of ridiculing him; in one picture, for instance, he is simply portrayed in a desert landscape holding a walking stick without any caricatural features. Still other cartoons do not make any obvious reference to the prophet at all: instead, they mock Jyllands-Posten and make meta-commentaries about the publication (Alhassan, 2009: 47-9). One cartoon, for example, shows a schoolboy standing in front of a chalkboard with a text in Farsi, “Jyllands-Posten is a bunch of reactionary provocateurs” (Klausen, 2009: 21). This cartoon, seemingly, is a commentary about the situation of Muslims in Denmark, and the “Muhammad” in the picture is not the prophet but a Muslim kid. Most of the cartoons, Alhassan notes, might not have caused outrage alone, but coupled with Westergaard’s cartoon and a few others and together with the title, the overall message of the publication was interpreted by many Muslims as highly inflammatory (2009: 52). Written next to the cartoons was an explanation to why the newspaper had chosen to publish the pictures.

Some Muslims reject the modern, secular society. They demand a special position when they insist on special consideration for their religious feelings. This is incompatible with a secular democracy and freedom of expression in which one must be prepared to accept disdain, mockery and ridicule (Jyllands-Posten 2005, qtd. in Nørby Bonde, 2007: 35)

The motivation for publishing these pictures according to Editor Flemming Rose was to challenge a self-imposed censorship stemming from a fear of dealing with issues concerning Islam. When the cartoons received international attention, Rose defended the publication in Washington Post by mentioning several examples of what he perceives to constitute this self-censorship: for example, that some installations with Islamic motifs were removed from British and Swedish museums, and that a Danish children’s book writer could not find a cartoonist to draw Prophet Muhammad for one of his books. With the cartoons, he wanted to challenge “moderate Muslims to speak out” and defy this self-censorship (Rose, 2006).
6.2 Description: Initial Diplomatic Correspondence

Although Jylland-Posten is in Danish language and is only read within Denmark, news about the cartoons quickly travelled internationally and already on October 12, eleven diplomats\(^4\) from countries with predominantly Muslim populations (among them Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey) sent a formal letter to Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen (Klausen, 2009: 36-7). Although the cartoons undoubtedly triggered the writing of the letter,\(^5\) the diplomats took issue not only with the cartoons but also expressed four main points of concern: a worry over a discriminatory tendency against Muslims in Denmark and an “ongoing smearing campaign” against Islam as a religion; a concern that the conflict might escalate; an appeal “to take all those responsible to task under the law”; and, importantly, a request to meet with the Danish Prime Minister (Klausen, 2009: 36-7). Rather than being propelled by religious argument, the letter made an appeal to human rights and Danish values. The diplomats claimed to share with Denmark the same values of democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights, but they argued that cherishing those values was in contradiction with caricaturizing Prophet Muhammad.

We strongly feel that casting aspersions on Islam as a religion and publishing demeaning caricatures of Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) goes against the spirit of Danish values of tolerance and civil society. This is on the whole a very discriminatory tendency and does not bode well with the human rights standards of Denmark (Klausen, 2009: 36).

On October 21, nine days after receiving the letter, Rasmussen responded by explaining that although there were laws against discrimination and blasphemy in Denmark, legal action could only be taken on an individual, case-by-case basis; what was written in the newspaper was outside the control of the government and juridical action could only be initiated by citizens, not by the state. Surprisingly, he did not address the other points brought forward in the letter, and he ignored the request for a meeting, making no mention of it (Klausen, 2009: 66). When asked during a press conference why he had refused to meet the diplomats, Rasmussen spoke with particular candor, “This is a matter of principle. I won’t meet with them because it is so crystal clear what principles Danish democracy is built upon that there is no reason to do so” (qtd in. Rostbøll, 2011: 12). This remarkable lack of diplomatic decorum surprised many, and, with hindsight, both active Danish diplomats and representatives of the

\(^4\) Many sources use the term “Muslim diplomats,” but as Lene Hansen argues these diplomats cannot and do not represent all Muslims (2011: 364). Therefore, this essay refers to the diplomats in terms that are more neutral.

\(^5\) At a later point, it was admitted by the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, that the cartoons were the only reason why the ambassadors were tasked to write the letter (Klausen, 2009: 80).
OIC believe that the conflict could have been prevented if the Danish government had made at least some effort to discuss the issue (Klausen, 2009: 81; Sløk, 2009: 232).

In mid-December, as the conflict did to seem to go away, 22 former Danish diplomats openly criticized Rasmussen for his refusal to meet with the foreign diplomats. At the same time, the Foreign Affairs Spokesperson of the Social Democrats, the second largest party, called the refusal “absolutely incomprehensible” (Davidsen-Nielsen et al., 2005). In other words, both foreign and domestic pressure was mounting against Rasmussen. As if that was not enough, other European leaders were not sympathetic to Rasmussen’s stance and criticism was forwarded by powerful organizations such as the European Council and the United Nations (Sløk, 2009: 234). For instance, in January 2006, a UN special rapporteur condemned the initial handling of the crisis, stating that it revealed trivialization of islamophobia in the Danish government (Jensen, 2006: 1-2).

What many actors were at loss at, as Hervik notes, was that Ramussen’s portrayed the whole affair about concerning freedom of speech when could just as well have been about the treatment of the Muslim minority in Denmark, which many found to be the more important issue (Hervik, 2008: 66-7). Similarly, Jensen argues that Jylland-Posten succeeded well in framing the event as a matter of freedom of speech (Jensen, 2006: 4). This led to that those who successfully framed the controversy to be about freedom of speech placed themselves on an untouchable moral high ground, because to go in opposition would mean to advocate censorship, which, of course, not many were ready to do (Durham Peters, 2008: 276-7). A response to the diplomats’ letter that did not invoke freedom of speech as the central issue could have perhaps yielded other result and prevented the conflict from escalating early on (Jensen, 2006: 8). While Rasmussen was correct that his government does not have the power to micromanage what the press writes about, he could have distanced himself from the cartoons without sacrificing freedom of speech. Liberal values, after all, concern not only the right to free expression (Klausen, 2009: 81).

Importantly, the diplomats in their letter used the same language and values as the Danish and later Western counterparts used to defend their position, so while the two parties ostensibly shared the same values, there was a discrepancy in what they actually meant. The diplomats saw a conflict between the caricatures and the freedom of expression, but the Danish government considered the cartoons to be the result of freedom of expression, or perhaps even as a necessity of freedom of expression. A specific example of this contradiction is revealed in Jytte Klausen’s interview with the Secretary-General of the OIC, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu. He claims to support freedom of speech, but contends that there are lines that one
should not cross—that there is a difference between free speech and defamation, and that the cartoons were transgressions indeed. To the argument that the cartoons were protected under the freedom of speech, which is an important component of European values, İhsanoğlu responded that those European values then were in opposition to human rights (Klausen, 2009: 76-7). İhsanoğlu refers to both freedom of speech and human rights—and is an avid supporter of both—but his understanding of the terms is different from that of the cartoon supporters.

Indeed, these differences in understanding freedom of speech have been identified as one of the central themes of the crisis, but different interpretations of the term were not only forwarded “externally” by aggrieved Muslims because also within Denmark and Europe there were competing interpretations of how the cartoons should be read (Lægaard, 2009: 316; Lindekilde et al., 2009: 303). The cartoons, some of which allegedly resemble anti-Semitic cartoons from Europe’s dark past (Klausen, 2009: 22), are often criticized by non-Muslims for perpetuating racist stereotypes about a small, exposed Muslim minority (Levey & Modood, 2009: 439-443). Herein surfaces an interesting difference because there appears to be a discrepancy between what commentators found to be the most offensive. Western, non-Muslim, critics often found the inferred racism in the cartoons to be the most disturbing, while Muslims often saw the act of portraying Muhammad itself as the source of offense.

However, Alhassan notes that most of the people protesting against the cartoons had not seen them (2008: 39). For instance, neither the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, nor OIC’s Secretary-General, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, had seen the cartoons before discussing them with the Danish government (Klausen, 2009: 79-80). The actual content of the cartoons, therefore, should not be overstressed; more important, instead, was the idea that the cartoons were interpreted to represent: namely, the deliberate disrespect of Muslims and their beliefs by disregarding the well-known taboo many Muslims have against portraying the Prophet Muhammad (Levey & Modood, 2009: 430-1).

OIC’s summit in December 2005, which was originally intended to restore “the image of Islam” after the several Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in Europe and elsewhere, dedicated considerable attention to the Danish cartoons by condemning them and expressing “concern at rising hatred against Islam and Muslims” (Klausen, 2009: 74). This summit is often considered a turning point of the Cartoon Crisis because before it was held, few Muslims

6 “Allegedly” is the keyword here since there are numerous interpretations of the cartoons and many commentators do not view them as necessarily racist. For example, although they in largely agree with Klausen about the cartoons, Levey & Modood argue that “the overall image and message [does] not come close to the crude anti-Semitic, Der Stürmer cartoons of the Nazi-era” (2009: 339).
outside Denmark knew about the cartoons, but after the summit, knowledge of them became widespread and with it came the first talks about a trade boycott (Lægaard, 2009: 329; Klausen, 2009: 74). Before the cartoons, the organization was largely divided and pulled in different directions by its powerful members who found it hard to cooperate, but its members now united around the idea of combating islamophobia and worked actively to illegalize defamation of Islam and its values in international law as a form of racism (Klausen, 2009: 74-5). The organization’s lobbying for the United Nations was particularly successful (Hansen, 2011: 10).

6.2.1 Constructivist Analysis

Using Adler’s definition of power, that the authority to determine shared meanings of ideas is a form of power (Adler, 1997: 336), the conflict between the Danish government and the diplomats can be seen as a power struggle about freedom of speech and of what is acceptable to express in a newspaper. Indeed, Eide et al. (2008: 13) views the Cartoon Crisis as a struggle to “determine the meaning of events” and identifies judgments of what is reasonable to print in a newspaper as a form of power. Taking this a step further, when the diplomats, in their letter, claim that the cartoons go against Danish values (or, in essence, human rights), they tacitly impose their understanding of what those values are. Rasmussen, on the other hand, has a wholly different understanding of what Danish values are, and he, on the contrary, views the cartoons as an example of freedom of expression. When receiving the letter, Rasmussen’s understanding of Danish values is directly challenged by the view held by the diplomats. Rasmussen’s undiplomatic response to the letter was difficult to understand and it upset many of the persons involved in formulating the original letter. However, the response can be viewed in context of this power struggle to determine the meanings of Danish values because by not giving the diplomats the answer they, and many others, expected, he also ignored a discussion about values that could challenge his, and his government’s, understanding of them.

If one views the miscommunication between Rasmussen and the diplomats with Shannon’s (2001: 299-300) and Finnemore’s (1996: 23) discussion of universally accepted norms, it becomes apparent that Rasmussen and the diplomats have different interests even if they use the same language when describing the norms they appeal to—the norms have the same name but are different. The situation becomes even more complicated when these different norms are so highly institutionalized that they are unchallengeable. In Denmark, it is unthinkable to question the rights of a newspaper to print what it wants even if one does not agree exactly
with what it prints, so to apologize for the cartoons would be to accept that drawing Muhammad is not tolerable and Rasmussen refused to cross that line. The apology that eventually came from the Danish government, at the peak of the conflict, was about the “offence caused” and not that the cartoons were printed in the first place. At the same time, ridiculing Muhammad in cartoon form was unthinkable for the latter party and was seen only as a deliberate, direct insult. Rasmussen’s initial refusal to distance his government from the cartoons was interpreted as an insult not to the religion but to Muslim practitioners and their culture. Just as one cannot question freedom of speech in Denmark, one cannot publish Muhammad cartoons in Egypt or the other countries represented in the letter.

Consequently, the caricatures themselves were an exercise of power, an attempt to shape norms, because they were created to challenge intentionally a common Muslim understanding that Prophet Muhammad must not be depicted—a norm brought into Denmark with Muslim immigrants. By publishing caricatures that were offensive and blasphemous to some people, the editors of Jyllands-Posten asserted their understanding of freedom of speech, in contrast with Muslim opinion. So what this initial debacle was about, then, was not just about religion versus freedom of speech but also, on a more general level, a struggle for power, a struggle for control over the meaning of what can, and cannot, be printed. The conflict could escalate the way it did because there was, and still is, no global consensus whether it is acceptable to draw Prophet Muhammad, but what occurred during those months in 2005-2006 was a struggle to establish an agreement over it—or in Adler’s terms “to establish the rules of the game” (Adler, 1997: 336). At least initially, the Cartoon Crisis was a conflict about norms.

Furthermore, analyzing this with a constructivist understanding of identity, Rasmussen’s defense of free speech relies on a European identity that cherishes enlightenment values. As discussed earlier, the initial debacle could have been framed in several other ways, but by making this an issue about freedom of speech—a core value of European society—Rasmussen shifted the focus from being about the highly criticized treatment of Muslims to being about fundamental values that virtually all states want or pretend to conform to. This freedom of speech norm is universally agreed upon within Europe and Denmark, much in line with Finnemore’s and Shannon’s discussion of norms, so that this norm is already powerfully institutionalized makes it more difficult to challenge the Danish government. I am not trying to argue that Rasmussen calculated this and therefore acted the way he did. What I am saying is that an appeal to freedom of speech was possible because of the presence of highly established norms in support of it and that these norms were played out against the allegations made by the diplomats. While at this point in time (before the crisis had really escalated), the
EU was still split on the subject and Denmark was the target of much criticism from different EU states, the following pages will show how the EU slowly started to conform to Rasmussen’s framing of the event as the Cartoon Crisis took a more radical turn. That is, the EU states eventually fell back on their collective European identity as “free” and “democratic nations.”

On the other side of the conflict, the strengthening of the OIC seems to have been a result of the cartoons. This concurs with how Barnett, Wendt, and others describe how states identities form based on differentiating against other states or entities. In the OICs case, by uniting against a common goal, internal disputes were set aside. Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shiite Iran especially have historic rivalries, but with the cartoons the organization could unite its members by promoting a common cause. With a constructivist reading, we can see how the Islamic values that these countries converge around became a unifying force because those Islamic values differentiated the countries from the cartoons and the West.

Moreover, considering that the OIC countries adhered to this Islamic identity, it is not surprising that they mobilized to institutionalize those values in the United Nations and elsewhere. It is in the interest of the OIC countries to defend and promote Islamic values because they are an integral part of their identity. It does not matter that the various countries comprising the OIC normally are not on good terms (even as regards Islam) because they found a common enemy in Denmark during the Cartoon Crisis.

6.3 DESCRIPTION: ESCALATION OF THE CONFLICT
By December 2005, after the first few months of correspondence between the Danish government and various Muslim representatives, the conflict seemed to have settled down (notwithstanding the OIC summit), but in actuality the ugliest part had yet to come. In Rasmussen’s New Year’s Speech, he made some form of apology for the cartoons when stating, “I condemn any expression, action or indication that attempts to demonise groups of people on the basis of their religion or ethnic background” (Rasmussen, 2006: n.p). Within Denmark, the controversy had more or less calmed down (Klausen, 2009: 83). As Jensen notes, out of Denmark’s then roughly 200,000 Muslims, only 10-15% of Muslims regularly attend Friday prayers (Jensen, 2006: 7); that is, Danish Muslims tend to be as passive as ethnic Danes about religion (Nørby Bonde, 2007: 40). Although it is reasonable to believe that many of Denmark’s Muslims—regardless of devoutness—took offense at the cartoons, their reaction was not remotely as aggressive as in the Middle East and elsewhere. Their
opinion was largely put the periphery though, and they came to be represented by various Danish imams who claimed to speak on behalf of them (Feldt, 2009: 176).

In January 2006, it became known that, throughout the previous months, a group of radical Danish imams had met with the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, and other influential political Muslim leaders in an effort to make them condemn the cartoons and put pressure on the Danish government. Among other things, they had also been interviewed by Al-Jazeera and an influential Egyptian newspaper (Klausen, 2009: 87-9). On this tour, the imams not only brought the twelve cartoons and the editorials from Jyllands-Posten; they also included three highly inflammatory pictures—one in which Prophet Muhammad is being mounted by a dog. Although these pictures had nothing to do with Denmark or Jyllands-Posten, the imams did nothing to indicate that, so most political leaders in the Middle East came to think they were included in the original publication (Klausen, 2009: 91). When this was revealed, it caused great resentment in Denmark and Europe, and many commentators came to view this as one of the main reasons for the boycotts and violent demonstrations that took place (O’Leary, 2006: 25). It was shortly after this was discovered that boycotts were initiated and violent protests started (Klausen, 2009: 106).

In response to the pressure put against Denmark, many European newspapers (and to a lesser extent American newspapers) reprinted the cartoons as an act of solidarity (Klausen, 2009: 48; Hansen, 2006: 9-10). One newspaper that reprinted the cartoons was a small, Christian newspaper in Norway. The newspaper had only a circulation of about 5,000 copies and the Norwegian government quickly and clearly distanced itself from the republication, but this specific incident was still viewed by the OIC as part of a larger, planned campaign against Muslims (Klausen, 2009: 47). Even if some Moroccan, Egyptian, Russian, and Indian newspapers also printed cartoons, the European republications were one major incident that led people to theorize about a Clash of Civilizations between Islam and the West (Klausen, 2009: 55).

While Samuel Huntington’s description of the international system is highly contested, there is evidence to suggest that it had impact on how the Cartoon Crisis because many actors subscribed to its description of the international system. Amr Moussa (of the Arab League), who unarguably played a significant role in the conflict, could not have put it more clearly, “Make no mistake about it; the clash of civilizations is real” (Klausen, 2009: 79). Similarly, Nørby Bonde notes that previous tensions and grievances between Muslim dominated

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7 Radical also in the countries they toured: one of the imams could not enter Egypt because he had been expelled because of his earlier political activities (Klausen, 2009: 89).
countries and Western countries contributed to the conflict (Nørby Bonde, 2007: 33). All through the crisis, broad overarching labels such as “Western” or “Muslim” became legitimate to apply to different stakeholders in the conflict. For example, “Muslims” were reduced to being irrational, emotional, and opposed to democracy and freedom of speech, in contrast to rational “Westerners” (Hansen, 2011: 365-7). Also the conflict shifted focus from being only about the twelve cartoons to be more general about the “War on Terror” following the September 11 terrorist attacks (Hansen, 2011: 364). As a result, the West was understood by some as being a politically coherent force wanting to humiliate and dominate the Muslim world (Jensen, 2006: 4). Klausen notes, for instance, how the United States was accused of being anti-Islam in connection with the cartoons (Klausen, 2009: 169-70) even if only 4 out of the 110 American newspapers with a circulation of over 100,000 copies reprinted the cartoons (Craft & Oyedeji, 2007: 177) and even if the cartoons were denounced by the U.S government (Sløk, 2009: 234). “The cartoons,” Klausen notes, “became part of an anti-Western agenda” (2009: 82). Likewise, Elisabeth Eide notes that during the peak of the controversy, Pakistani media used broad categories such as “Europeans” or “the West” creating suspicion and mistrust. One editorial, for instance, talked about French secularism as being “theological” and having replaced Christianity. This argues Eide, highlights occidentalist notions of Europe as being completely secularized (Eide, 2009: 155-6).

From this “civilizational” perspective, on a state level, the Europeans side seemed to be less unified that was the Muslim side. While the state-level protests against Denmark were quite well planned, Europe never mobilized the same diplomatic force against the Middle Eastern countries. Although Rasmussen’s government succeeded in convincing many other European states that the controversy was about freedom of speech (as opposed to be about Islamophobia or racism), the EU did not do much more than a hint of retaliation a few times in response to the threats put to Denmark by various Middle Eastern states (Hansen, 2006: 10-3).

However, the escalation of the conflict seemed be propelled less by states and more by various non-state actors. A telling example of this Muslim-Western dichotomy took shape on a non-state level is how the Italian consulate in Benghazi, Libya, was raided and burned down by a mob following demonstrations against the cartoons. These protests were initiated by religious demagogues after an Italian minister expressed his intention of wearing a t-shirt with the cartoons (Hooper et al., 2006). What emerges is that the cartoons unleashed grievances about various issues that were not related to the actual cartoons and there are many examples of how mobs brought destruction upon entities that were sometimes only remotely related to
Jyllands-Posten and Denmark. A tentative speculation about the Benghazi case, for example, is that it had more to do about Italy being its former colonizer than about Danish cartoons. The Danes, consequently, had little control over what the cartoons came to mean as the conflict escalated.

Further, in Syria, the mobs were not formed spontaneously because of genuine outrage but through a conscious manipulation by the government, which saw it as opportunity to play on religious feelings and identities to reassert its own legitimacy and power. In February, violent protests erupted after a large demonstration, resulting in fire damage of the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian embassies, and the destruction of the Chilean embassy. The mobs appear to have been formed deliberately with text message chains and phone calls rather than spontaneously. While no one knows for sure who organized the protests, the government seems to have been involved (Klausen, 2009: 107-8; Hansen, 2006: 10). The Chargé d'Affaires of United States’ embassy in Syria, Stephen Seche, confirms in a telegram uncovered by Wikileaks that the Syrian government seems to have planned the demonstration but that it had spun out of control.

Despite any miscalculation loss of control, or embarrassment, the minority Alawite regime [The Assad regime] seems to have benefited from the rioting, enhancing its legitimacy in several ways. It offered its religious Sunni population an opportunity to vent on an issue of visceral populist concern and it put itself in the vanguard regionally, demonstrating to the Arab street that Syria can be counted on to defend Islamic dignity (Seche, 2006).

This speculation is given more credibility when recognizing that not all demonstrations were directed against the cartoons and Denmark; in fact, many of the demonstrations were primarily against the OIC and the Middle Eastern governments (Klausen, 2009: 82). Muslim groups outside the control of the Middle Eastern governments, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, used the cartoons to accuse governments of appeasing United States and Europe and being too lenient in their reaction toward the cartoons (Klausen, 2009: 104).

In other areas, some incidents that were reported in the media as protests against the cartoons were in reality not much more than targeted killings of Christians. In northern Nigeria, where Islam is the predominant religion, many demonstrations escalated and turned into pogroms against Christians living nearby, killing as many as 45 people in one single day (Klausen, 2009: 83).

Similarly, the boycotts were portrayed in the media to have been initiated spontaneously. However, Klausen notes that many of the state-controlled TV-stations in the Middle East, among them Saudi Arabia, broadcasted footage showing Danish products being taken of the
shelves and continuously broadcasted the cartoons, both the originals and the three others. This meant that the media in many countries effectively promoted the boycotts (Klausen, 2009: 102). On the same topic, Nørby Bonde points out that when comparing Arab states to Muslim populated countries in the Asia-Pacific region (many with a generally more pluralistic media) the attacks on West and the cartoons were more frequent in the Arab States (Nørby Bonde, 2007: 38-9). In this light, many of the supposed genuine expressions of anger, were, if not orchestrated, at least encouraged by various governments. Although there is no reason to doubt that the offense taken by the cartoons was genuine, state-controlled Arab media played a significant part in mobilizing the anger.

The intricacy of the Cartoon Crisis surfaces here yet again. Non-state actors caused the violence in virtually all situations, but at the same time, the governments in many Muslim dominated states tried to play on religious sentiments to establish themselves as anti-cartoon and anti-West in order to appease radical elements of their own constituency. In February when serious violence started to erupt, these governments seemed relatively powerless and unable to contain the violence. When the Syrian government, for example, tried to exploit the situation, it quickly got out of hand; this seems to be a general theme for many of the protests.

6.3.1 CONSTRUCTIVIST ANALYSIS

What is revealed above is that identity is a crucial concept for understanding the explosiveness of the Cartoon Crisis. The violence in Syria, Libya, and Nigeria demonstrates how religion—an already existing identity marker in the populations—became activated when the news of the cartoon spread. For example, in Syria the cartoons appear to have been used to mobilize people against a foreign entity as a means of governmentality. It did not matter that most people had not seen the cartoons because the sentiments the cartoons expressed were already felt in many people—the Europeans do not respect Islam or Muslims—so after hearing the news everybody understood their “position” or “role” in the drama. When viewing this with the theoretical perspective that identities form against some other entity (e.g. Barnett, 1996: 413-4), we can see how the Syrian government with the planned demonstrations pitted itself against the cartoons and by extension against Europe and thus established itself as a distinct counterforce against the West. The Arab Spring and the internal divisions in many Arab countries highlight the importance of state power and direct popular anger toward outside enemies. Assad’s government was given an opportunity to show to its own people and to its neighbors that it stood up for Islamic values. There was no question among its populace that the cartoons were wrong, which is why it was so easy to use the affair
to mobilize against the West and thereby strengthen internal bonds. However, as the protests spun out of control the event turned partly into an embarrassment for the government when it found itself unable to protect the foreign embassies.

We can also see that many actors seemed to identify themselves in terms of civilizational belonging. This could perhaps be because the Clash of Civilizations discourse is particularly suggestive in that it clearly outlines an enemy against which identity can be formed. An understanding of the international system in which Western states, the beacon of reason and modernity, are pitted against irrational, backward, and violent Muslims states might have functioned as a powder-keg making the Cartoon Crisis as protracted and severe as it was. The several reprints of the cartoons in European media are indicative of how defending freedom of speech against an alleged threat Muslim censorship became a central issue. This argument goes both ways, as adherents of the OIC, for example, too perceived this as a clash and even minor incidents were interpreted as being planned provocations. The example of the Norwegian newspaper is particularly telling; it did not matter that it was a small and insignificant newspaper or that the Norwegian government did everything it could to apologize; Norway was seen still as being anti-Islamic. The numerous scholarly remonstrations against the Clash of Civilizations theory are of little significance if central actors believe in, and act according to, its premises—as was demonstrated in that many actors took on civilizational identities.

What these broad civilizational identities did was to escalate the conflict. Among other things, the editors of the small Norwegian newspaper were given incredible influence. Under normal circumstances, a newspaper that is not read by even a fraction of the people does not set any important agenda and does nothing to affect how other states perceive the country. However, in the cartoon crisis, the actions of small non-state actors were perceived to represent whole states or geographic regions, and it was these actors (sometimes with help from the government) that caused most of the trouble on both sides. An important reason why governments found it so difficult to calm the conflict down was that they had very limited control over how these small actors behaved and that the governments were defined by what those small actors did.
7. CONCLUSION
This chapter discusses firstly the findings of the essay and relates them back to the research question. Secondly, it evaluates the thesis and discusses its strength and weaknesses, and suggests further research.

7.1 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
Let me first draw the attention back to the research question:

> How does a social constructivist understanding of identity and norms in IR further our understanding of the underlying forces at play in the Danish Muhammad Cartoon Controversy of 2005-2006?

What we can see in the Cartoon Crisis is that both identities and norms are central aspects of the conflict. To return to Finnemore’s statement that constructivists must substantiate how, where, and why norms matter (1996: 130) and relate it to the Cartoon Crisis, my answer is that the debate about liberal values, more specifically the freedom of speech and what it entails, lies at the very core of the Cartoon Crisis. Competing actors such as the Danish government and the OIC used the same norms to defend their positions and supply their arguments, so the fight was partly over norms *qua* norms. A constructivist understanding of norms does help to uncover these tensions and show that attempting to define norms is a form of power. In the initial phase of the crisis, this fight over norms was a crucial and contributed to the later escalation. Norm disputes did not cause direct violence, however, so most of its significance lies in the initial parts of the conflict.

Constructivism has not proven equally useful in understanding the very important role of non-state actors in the conflict. While, for example, Finnemore does give some attention to domestic opinion for identity formation, further theoretical elaboration of how the importance of domestic opinion is needed to account for what happened in the Cartoon Crisis. Identities among non-state actors too determine events in international relations. Nevertheless, the identity concept does uncover many of the actions taken by various states and IOs. The nature of the OIC in particular is understood by constructivism in seeing that internal fractures in the OIC were merged during the conflict by directing attention to the cartoons. The Islamic bond between these nations normally does not help them overcome their differences, but the cartoons were in such stark contrast to those values that the organization could take united action. What I argue is that explicit attention needs to be given non-state actors and their identities. Further, the descriptive part of the analysis clearly shows that religious identities
matter in every day international relations, but in the constructivist literature there is not much explicit attention to this. To claim that the religious discontent was merely manufactured on a state level and consider the numerous demonstrations and violence only as a result of that would be inaccurate, so to explain the importance of identity in the Cartoon Crisis a more explicit focus of domestic actors is needed. Perhaps Mona Kanwal Sheik is correct when she argues that IR needs to be “desecularized” and consider religion not only to be an identity but incorporate several other characteristics religion has (Sheik, 2011). A more specific attention to religion and religious actors could perhaps benefit the constructivist theory.

7.2 EVALUATION
This paper could have benefitted from a more detailed analysis about the escalation part of the conflict. It was difficult to establish in detail exactly how underlying identities operated during this second half of the Cartoon Crisis because most of the source material does not elaborate in detail about what took place in countries where there was violence. Consequently, the second half of my analysis is too sweeping. I think it is especially noteworthy that so little has been written about the violence in Nigeria, where more people died after the cartoons than in the rest of the world combined. Klausen, for example, mentions Nigeria only thrice in her book. I had originally hoped to include a more detailed discussion about exactly what happened there and investigate to what extent the violence was actually connected to Denmark and the cartoons (as opposed to be about domestic factors).

Most of the sources I have come across provide a very good description about the initial stages of the conflict. For instance, the role of Rasmussen, the diplomatic correspondence, and the controversy about freedom of speech are discussed in almost every analysis. The strength of the essay is that this part of the analysis is detailed enough to clearly demonstrate how and why norms mattered. A better essay would have the same level of detail also in the second part of the descriptive analysis and show exactly and in detail the role of identities.

7.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH
At some points in this paper, I contrasted constructivism with realism, but overall I did not explicitly engage with the latter theory. For further research, it could perhaps be interesting to investigate global media events, such as the Cartoon Crisis, to see how apt different theories are at explaining them, for example through a comparative case study (Yin, 2009: 176). Since a realist point of view on the Cartoon Crisis is lacking, even if the thesis can defend the proposition that constructivism sheds much light on the event, it does not show a direct
comparison between the two theories, and, therefore, it can only be argued through an implicit understanding of realism that constructivism explains the event better. I think it would be very interesting to perform a study that analyzes the Cartoon Crisis with several theories.

Additionally, several other events have clear parallels with the Danish Cartoon Crisis that are not discussed. The most prominent example of such a case is the debacle after Lars Vilks’s Muhammad drawing in Sweden in 2007, which should provide an interesting comparison with the Danish case. They have many similarities but the protests against the Swedish drawings were in not as protracted and the material destruction was negligible. Some has already been written with the intent of comparing explaining these two Cartoon Crises, for example Larsson & Lindekilde (2009), but I believe it could be interesting for further research to approach these two cases more theoretically with the intent of developing and refining theory.
8. BIBLIOGRAPHY


