

Der Karikaturenstreit und die Pressefreiheit

Wert- und Normenkonflikte in der globalen Medienkultur

The Cartoon Debate and the Freedom of the Press

Conflicting Norms and Values in the Global Media Culture

Bernhard Debatin (Hrsg.)

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Vorwort

Das vorliegende Buch ist im Zusammenhang mit meiner AlcatelSEL Fellowship am Internationalen Zentrum für Kultur- und Technikforschung (IZKT) an der Universität Stuttgart im Sommersemester 2006 entstanden. Als Kommunikationswissenschaftler und Medienethiker habe ich den Streit um die so genannten Mohammed Karikaturen von Anfang an mit grossem Interesse verfolgt. Im März 2006, als die weltweiten und drastischen Folgen des Karikaturenstreits offenkundig waren, habe ich einen *Call for Papers* an eine Reihe von akademischen Diskussionslisten zu medienethischen Themen geschickt, in dem ich um Beiträge bat, die ethische und interkulturelle Aspekte des Karikaturenstreits behandeln. Ursprünglich war geplant, vorwiegend kürzere Essays zu sammeln und diese rasch zu veröffentlichen. Aufgrund der überraschend grossen Resonanz zu meinem *Call* und dem Wunsch einiger Autoren, längere Artikel beizutragen, habe ich das Konzept entsprechend erweitert. Hinzu kamen einige Texte, die im Rahmen einer von mir organisierten Diskussionsveranstaltung am 18. Mai 2006 zu diesem Thema in Stuttgart entstanden sind; sowie andere Beiträge, die speziell eingeladen wurden, da die Autoren bereits einschlägige Texte veröffentlicht hatten. Das Buch enthält nun eine Mischung von kürzeren, pointierten Stellungnahmen zu Einzelaspekten des Themas und ausführlicheren, tiefer gehenden Studien. In seiner Gesamtheit enthält es eine umfassende Aufarbeitung des Karikaturenstreits aus vielen verschiedenen Perspektiven.

Angesichts der internationalen Dimension des Karikaturenstreits und der quer über den Globus gestreuten Herkunft der Autoren ist die Mehrzahl der Beiträge in englischer Sprache verfasst. Um die internationale Zugänglichkeit des Buches zu erhöhen, wurden auch der Einführungsartikel und die Einleitungen mit den Artikelabstracts zu den drei Teilen des Buches auf Englisch geschrieben.

An der Entstehung und Fertigstellung dieses Buches waren viele Personen beteiligt, denen ich an dieser Stelle danken möchte. Zu nennen sind hier zunächst die Autoren, die mit ihren Beiträgen das Buch überhaupt erst ermöglicht haben und die meine redaktionellen Anregungen geduldig angenommen haben. Des Weiteren möchte ich der Alcatel-Lucent Stiftung danken, die im Rahmen ihres Verbundkollegs „Mensch und Technik“ und insbesondere ihrer Fellowship am IZKT meinen Wissenschaftsaufenthalt in Stuttgart ermöglicht hat. Mein besonderer Dank gilt auch Dr. Elke Uhl vom IZKT Stuttgart, die sowohl für meine Fellowship als auch für die Produktion des Buches die notwendige Infrastruktur bereit stellte. An meiner Heimatuniversität, der Ohio University in Athens, Ohio (U.S.A.), waren vor allem Tierra Palmer und Alexander Doletschek durch Korrekturlesen der englischen bzw. deutschen Texte eine wertvolle Unterstützung. Vor allem aber möchte ich meiner Frau Dr. Patricia Stokes danken für ihre Hilfe bei der Übersetzung von deutschen Beiträgen ins Englische und bei der Überarbeitung

von englischen Texten, die von Nicht-Muttersprachlern geschrieben wurden (so auch in meinem Fall).

Der Karikaturenstreit und die in dessen Verlauf deutlich gewordenen Grenzen der Verständigung mögen ein trauriger Anlass für ein Buch sein. Die Arbeit an diesem Buch und die Zusammenarbeit mit Menschen aus vielen verschiedenen Herkunftsländern gibt jedoch Grund zur Hoffnung. Die Eule der Minerva beginnt ihren Flug bekanntlich spät, aber auch in diesem Fall glücklicherweise nicht zu spät. Bei allen Differenzen verbindet die Autoren der Beiträge zu diesem Buch die Überzeugung, dass die Auseinandersetzung mit rationalen Argumenten, und nicht mit Borniertheit und Gewalt geführt werden soll. Der vernünftige Konsens über das Bestehen eines Dissenses und die *Anerkennung des Anderen* in seiner Verschiedenheit sind unverzichtbare Voraussetzungen für das Zusammenleben in der globalisierten und mediatisierten Welt.

Athens, Mai 2007,

Bernhard Debatin

Preface

This book was created in the context of my AlcatelSEL Fellowship with the International Center for Cultural and Technological Studies (IZKT) at the University of Stuttgart, Germany, during the Spring/Summer semester of 2006. As a communication researcher and media ethicist, I had been following the so-called Mohammed cartoon debate with great interest. In March 2006, when the global dimension and drastic consequences of the cartoon controversy had become obvious, I sent out a call for papers to a number of academic discussion lists on media ethical issues, in which I asked for contributions dealing with ethical and intercultural aspects of the controversy. The original plan was to collect short essays and publish them in a timely manner. However, the surprisingly strong response to my call and the desire of some authors to contribute longer articles made me expand the original concept. I then also added some texts that originated from a discussion panel that I organized on May 18, 2006, in Stuttgart. Some additional articles were invited because their authors had published relevant pieces in this field. The book now consists of a mix of brief, concise statements on particular aspects of the topic and more extensive, in-depth studies. In its entirety, this volume represents a comprehensive engagement with the cartoon debate from a multitude of perspectives.

Due to the international dimension of the cartoon debate and the fact that the authors in this volume come from around the globe, most contributions are written in English. The introductory essay to the book and the introductions to its three parts (with abstracts) are written in English, too, to increase its international accessibility.

Many people have contributed to the production of this book, all of whom I am very grateful to. First and foremost, I want to mention the authors, who made this book possible in the first place with their contributions, and who put up patiently with my editorial suggestions. I also want to thank the German Alcatel-Lucent Foundation, which made possible my research residency in Stuttgart through their „Verbundkolleg Mensch und Technik“ and particularly their fellowship at the IZKT. I am particularly thankful to Dr. Elke Uhl of the IZKT Stuttgart, who provided support and infrastructure for both my stay in Stuttgart and the production of the book. At my home institution, Ohio University in Athens, Ohio (U.S.A.), Tierra Palmer and Alexander Doletschek helped greatly with proofreading the English and German texts. Finally and most of all, I want to thank my wife, Dr. Patricia Stokes, for her help in translating German texts into English and editing English texts that were written by non-native speakers (like myself).

The cartoon debate and the limits of understanding that have become visible as it unfolded may be a sad occasion for a book. Working on this book and collaborating with people from all over the world, however, gives reason for hope.

As is well known, Minerva's Owl starts its flight late in the dusk, but even in this case, it was not too late. Despite all their differences, the authors of this book are connected by the firm conviction that debate should rely on rational arguments and not resort to prejudices and violence. Reasonable consensus about the existence of dissent and the *recognition of the Other* in his or her difference are indispensable preconditions for living and coexisting in a globalized and mass-mediated world.

Athens, May 2007,

Bernhard Debatin

The Cartoon Debate and the Pathologies of the Global Information Society

An Introduction

Bernhard Debatin

“The dramatic transformation of telecommunications has resulted in a tremendous connectivity and transparency: the cartoons from Jutland are becoming the subject of evening news – and of political mobilization – in Pakistan. Remote parts of the globe are moving closer, at least virtually.”¹

(Frankenberger 2006)

In September 2005 Flemming Rose, cultural editor of the Danish conservative daily newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, commissioned cartoons on the topic “Mohammed’s face.” He intended to draw attention to what he believed was an increase in self-censorship with regard to Islam. The twelve cartoons that were then published on September 30, 2005, contained anti-Islamic stereotypes and also violated the Islamic taboo on religious pictures. In his justification, Rose claimed that there had been “several incidents of self-censorship in Europe caused by widening fears and feelings of intimidation in dealing with issues related to Islam” (Rose 2006). He further asserted that the cartoons were intended to incite a discussion on the contradiction between democracy and freedom of speech on the one hand, and the “special position” allegedly claimed by Danish Muslims when “insisting on special consideration of their own religious feelings” (quoted in Wikipedia 2006).

From their inception, the cartoons were intended to provoke and offend. They were a kind of experiment to test the limits of the freedom of the press. What began as a not particularly tasteful provocation, following the motto “anything that’s not forbidden is allowed,” has escalated to an unforeseen degree: It started a worldwide controversy and resulted in violence and uproar. Thirty years ago such a provocation would hardly have made it beyond the local or regional press. Today, however, with an increasingly connected world, a global flow of information, and worldwide migration processes, this became an intercultural conflict of global dimensions.

In the media systems that emerged after World War II, national and international media attention was mostly determined by the news values of the Cold War. At that time, the cartoons would have received mostly regional attention and might have made it into national Danish news as a curiosity or a provincial farce. However, the decline of East Bloc socialism and especially the terror attacks

on September 11, 2001, and the ensuing “War on Terror” have changed the geopolitical and media-specific coordinates such that topics dealing with Islam and the Arab world are now objects of specific media frames. These frames predetermine and direct media attention, and subsume these topics under stereotypical categories such as terrorism, fundamentalism, and Islamophobic fears (Nacos 2002, Norris et al. 2003).

In addition to this, the agenda setting mechanism of the media has changed due to the competition from the Internet that conventional distributive media face today. Before the worldwide diffusion of the Internet, the controversial caricatures would have been reproduced and disseminated only through conventional mass media outlets. But the Internet has evolved from an esoteric medium of scholars to an interactive medium of mass communication with relatively low access and publication thresholds, which significantly impacts the established mechanism of agenda setting. Most notably, the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal was broken by the Internet-based Drudge Report after *Newsweek* did not want to publish the story because it was seen as too dicey. Since then cases of Internet-induced agenda setting are increasing. In particular bloggers have assumed an avant-garde position in audience-driven agenda setting, which reverses the usual agenda setting mechanism (Delwiche 2005). Much of the attention that the controversial cartoons received from the media and from Muslims is due to this shift in the *media environment*, and it is safe to say that modern information and communication technologies played a decisive role in the genesis and dynamics of the conflict surrounding the cartoons.

Telemobilization through micro media

This new media environment deserves a closer look. An important factor is certainly that the conventional mass media are globally connected and react to each other quickly and on a global scale, particularly when dealing with “hot topics” such as conflict, negativity, and threat. Due to their extreme sensitivity, the media tend to “infect” each other and thus create global “information epidemics” (Rötzer 2006), which can easily spin out of control and may sometimes even have deadly consequences, as the riots following the cartoons have shown. However, the escalation of the conflict and the ensuing riots cannot be explained by the influence of conventional mass media. The crucial point was that *micro media* – such as email, Internet discussion groups, blogs, and SMS messages – attracted and focused attention. These micro media have the potential to mobilize people quickly and strongly, building upon existing social networks and creating new ones on an ad-hoc basis. As Henner Kirchner has shown,² it was interpersonal and group communication through micro media, and not the mainstream media, that facilitated the information distribution in the Arab world and thus inflamed and intensified the conflict.

The power of micro media, which are sometimes also referred to as “small media” (Adams 2006) or “intimate media” (Kluitenberg 2000), has been observed by a number of researchers, most notably by Howard Rheingold. In his 2003 book “Smart Mobs,” Rheingold shows how people dedicated to a specific (political) cause spontaneously organize themselves via cell phones, hand-held computers, and the Internet. Well-known examples of massive telemobilization through micro media are the 1999 anti-corporate globalization protests in Seattle and the subsequent actions in cities such as Prague, Quebec, Genoa, Barcelona, and Porto Alegre; the mass demonstrations in the Philippines in 2000/01; and the French riots in 2005 and 2006 (Bennett 2003, Rheingold 2003, Streck 2005). Telemobilized people act more like “intelligent swarms” than like tightly knit social communities: They organize themselves spontaneously, are highly coordinated during their action, and dissipate quickly afterward, but can easily be remobilized as needed. Another important factor is cross-communication among micro media, middle media (such as high-traffic websites and web magazines), and the conventional mass media, which can have strong synergistic effects (Bennett 2003) and lead to a variety of unintended consequences.³

The ubiquity of handheld computers, smart phones, and other personal digital netmedia, and their impact on interpersonal, group, and mass communication, have quietly changed our media environment. This is as true for the developed countries as it is for the developing countries. According to a report on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region by the mobile phone company MTC, the cell phone penetration rate has increased dramatically from 15% in 2003 to almost 25% in 2005, with over 75 million cell phone service subscribers in the 18 MENA countries (MTC 2006). The long-term social impact of this change is hard to predict, but the power of micro media in aggregating and mobilizing people around certain issues is visible globally.

The role of new information and communication technologies in the cartoon debate cannot be overstated, and even its instrumentalization by local and regional power elites in the Islamic world must be understood in the context of media-based self-organization and telemobilization. While the smoldering conflict between the Western and Arab worlds has been an important catalyst for the cartoon controversy, it is not the much-touted “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996) but personalized telemobilization that accelerated and escalated the conflict. At the same time, rapidly changing media agendas and the swarm behavior of smart mobs make the actual content of telemobilized conflict almost secondary. Today’s cartoon controversy will be replaced easily by other issues with new lines of conflict, different coalitions of smart mobs, and different epicenters of outrage:

SMS campaigns, comments, and protest appeals on blogs and websites, which address a global audience, underscore the new dimension of conflicts. As the example of the cartoons shows, information and images can propagate with tremendous speed over the whole world and trigger global unrest in a form that did not exist only a few decades ago.

(Rötzer 2006)⁴

The fact that unlikely topics of actually marginal news value can get into the gravitation field of a media-driven self-reinforcement process is a pathological side effect of the global information society. A Copenhagen newspaper can be like the flutter of a butterfly's wing that triggers a socio-political storm in the Islamic world whose turbulence returns immediately to the Western world. This turbulence was severe enough that Denmark lost its first rank on the *Press Freedom Index 2006* and dropped to 19th place due to threats against reporters in the context of the cartoon conflict.⁵

The Fight for Dominant Influence over Public Opinion

The new interactive netmedia were initially expected to have inherent democratizing powers and were laden with euphoric hopes for a revitalization of the public sphere. And while the Internet and micro media have a potential for revitalizing public discourse, promoting audience-driven issues, and influencing the public agenda (Debatin 2007), one has to concede that personal digital netmedia are indifferent to the purpose and content of communication:

That swarm of eager adolescents in the streets of Tokyo or Stockholm chatting and texting on their cell phones could soon just as easily be a gang of toughs in Hamburg or New York City stalking potential victims to mug or rape. The same technology that helped Philippine crowds turn out en masse to topple a corrupt politician in 2001 also helped violent demonstrators evade police and coordinate acts of vandalism two years earlier in Seattle during protests against the World Trade Organization. The line between democracy in action and irresponsible disruption is unclear at best, and new technologies are never guaranteed to serve the public interest.

(Jennings 2003: 7f.)

The smart mobs protesting against the cartoons were well organized, but one may question their rationality, particularly when the protests turned violent. Indeed, anybody with Internet access or a mobile phone account can use the services and possibilities of these networks without any regard to the transmitted content. This is well understood by a variety of groups, ranging from Islamist terrorist organizations, which successfully use the Internet as a propaganda and recruitment tool with decapitation and bombing videos,⁶ to the non-violent Muslim hackers who launched the biggest cyber-attack ever carried out against a single country when overwriting Danish (and other European) websites with their protest messages (Rötzer 2006). The fight for influence over public opinion has reached the Internet.

This is true for the “other side,” too: The cartoon debate very quickly had a strong presence on blogs and websites of Western users. Even today, there are still plenty of sites that contain the cartoons in their entirety, such as *Perlentaucher.de* in Germany, *humanevents.com* in the U.S., and *NouvelObs.com* in France. In addition to websites whose main purpose is to document and comment on the cartoon controversy, such as the *Wikipedia* pages on it, there are also many sites whose main interest is to enflame the conflict in the fight for dominant influence over public opinion. In other words, this fight is no longer restricted to the op-ed columns of newspapers and comments of broadcast stations. Influencing opinion today can also mean how often a blog is read and how often it is referred to by other bloggers,⁷ how much it influences politicians and journalists, and how much a topic attracts the attention of mainstream media through the sheer number of occurrences in the blogosphere.

A Media Ethical Discussion of the Cartoon Controversy

The fight for dominant influence over public opinion has played a crucial role in the cartoon debate. The stubborn insistence that the cartoons needed to be republished is as good an example for this fight as the repeated death threats against the cartoonists.⁸ The adversaries in this controversy have grouped themselves around two conflicting areas, which function as gravitation fields and main frames of the debate: The question of the freedom of the press and its limits, and the accusation of blasphemous insults and injured religious feelings. Both areas are central fields of media ethical dilemmas because both deal with the relationship between freedom and autonomy on the one hand, and responsibility and self-restraint on the other.

To find meaningful, justifiable, and feasible answers in cases like this, media ethics must combine its function of moral orientation with its function of critical reflection (Debatin & Funiok 2003). In other words, it is not enough to provide an ethical compass if this compass does not include normative-critical standards of ethical reflection that allow us to evaluate and justify the norms and values in

question. Ethics that is limited to its orientational function while neglecting to reflect upon its own values can easily turn into know-it-all moralizing or moral panics and scapegoating. One could in fact argue that the “cartoon initiative” – as editor Juste (2006) called it – was an expression of *moral panic*, void of reflection and triggered by the dominant group’s perception of the menace allegedly posed by the deviant group.⁹ The violent reactions in the Islamic world then mirrored this moral panic with the dominant and deviant groups reversed.

Conversely, media ethics that limits itself only to criticism and reflection may remain a merely academic exercise without any practical impact on moral dilemmas. It may then be theoretically true, but does not necessarily apply to reality. Only through the combination of orientational and reflective functions can media ethics open up moral dilemmas and conflicts to ethical reflection and at the same time provide both normative standards and moral motivation for ethically informed decision making. In this sense, the contributions to this book use the power of arguments, reason, and skepticism to uncover the motives, interests, and charades of those who instigated and spread moral panic with the cartoons, and those who profited from the moral panic.

This book is the result of a call for papers that the editor of this volume issued in March 2006, asking for papers that would address ethical and intercultural aspects of the controversy. The articles selected for publication all have in common that they attempt to address both the orientational and reflective side of the ethical quandaries surrounding the cartoon debate. They focus on the two conflicting areas, freedom of the press and violation of religious feelings, and explore a broad variety of their ethical and socio-cultural aspects. It is the nature of any ethical debate that controversial positions and polarization on the subject level (i.e. the cartoon controversy itself) are reflected on the meta-level of the ethical discussion, and not surprisingly, this is the case in this book, too. However, ethical debate enjoys the advantage and the luxury that each position can unfold in the protected environment of a scholarly discourse. In their entirety, this book’s contributions provide a rich and differentiated assessment of the cartoon controversy from diverse perspectives and backgrounds. The authors of the articles live in or have ethnic roots in Europe, the Middle East, Australia, and North America. Some assume a religious point of view (with both Muslims and Christians represented), others a more secular one. Some are media practitioners, some are ethicists, and others are scholars with a focus on Middle Eastern issues, mass communication, theology, or cultural studies.

Overview of the Organization of the Book

The book is organized in three parts, addressing three different levels and contexts of the cartoon controversy:

Part 1 – *Freedom of the Press and of Speech* – deals with the conflicts between professional journalistic values on the one hand and general moral assumptions on the other hand. The articles in this part revolve around the principle of publicity (in the Kantian sense), its necessity for democratic societies, and its limits. In addition to general analyses of the cartoon controversy, this part also includes country-specific case studies and attempts to redefine the notion of the freedom of the press under conditions of multicultural mediasocieties.

The contributions to part 2 – *Cultural Contextualizations* – use the cartoon debate as a springboard to discuss differing mass-media practices and standards, cultural differences, and religious sensibilities, as well as the question of whether there are general maxims that allow these differences to be accommodated. The problems and possible pitfalls of intercultural communication in a globalized and mass-mediated world are examined from the viewpoint of basic values such as tolerance, respect, and self-restraint.

Based on rhetorical approaches, ideology critique, and mythology theory, the papers in part 3 – *Pragmatic Contextualizations* – analyze the cartoon controversy as a discourse that is dominated and characterized by specific frames, preconceptions, and categorizations. Particular attention is given to the issue of stereotyping and “otherization” of Muslims, and to the question of whether satire should be evaluated according to certain positive or negative criteria before publication. This also raises the question of responsibility and how, in this particular case, it applies to the different actors.

The volume closes with a brief chronology of the events during the “hot phase” of the cartoon controversy (September 2005 to March 2006) and with biographical information about the authors.

Notes

¹ My translation; the German version reads: “Die Umwälzungen der Telekommunikation haben zu einer ungeheuren Vernetzung und Transparenz geführt: Die Karikaturen in Jütland werden zum Gegenstand der Abendnachrichten - und der politischen Mobilisierung - in Pakistan. Ferne Teile der Welt rücken mindestens virtuell einander näher.”

² See the article by Kirchner in this volume (pp. 97-102).

³ A well known example is the case of the “Nike Media Adventure,” in which Jonah Peretti forwarded to a dozen friends an email exchange he had with the Nike Company over the issue of sweatshops. To his great surprise, the correspondence spread quickly all over the Internet, traveling through people’s email networks, then through websites like Slashdot, and was eventually picked up by the mass media (Peretti 2001).

- ⁴ My translation. The original reads: "SMS-Kampagnen, Kommentare und Protestaufrufe auf Blogs und Webseiten, die sich auf ein globales Publikum wenden, machen die neuen Dimensionen von Konflikten deutlich. Informationen oder Bilder können sich, wie das Beispiel der Karikaturen selbst zeigt, mit rasanter Geschwindigkeit über die ganze Welt verbreiten und globale Erregungen auslösen, die es vor wenigen Jahrzehnten in dieser Form noch nicht gegeben hat."
- ⁵ "Denmark (19th) dropped from joint first place because of serious threats against the authors of the Mohammed cartoons published there in autumn 2005. For the first time in recent years in a country that is very observant of civil liberties, journalists had to have police protection due to threats against them because of their work" (Reporters Without Borders 2006: 2).
- ⁶ "Images of masked terrorists standing behind Western hostages in Iraq and Saudi Arabia have become all too common on Arabic satellite stations such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Manar. Islamist websites such as Muntadiyat al-Mahdin go further, streaming video of their murder. The February 2002 decapitation of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, true to its intention, horrified the Western audience." (Furnish 2005: 51).
- ⁷ The technorati site at <http://www.technorati.com/pop/> allows for day-to day tracking of the popularity of blogs.
- ⁸ For details see Wikipedia (2006).
- ⁹ For details on the concept of moral panic and its application to public discourse see Victor 2006 and Critcher 2003.

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