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*Image and the right  
to ridicule*

**Quaderns del CAC** issue 27, January-April 2007

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# Introduction

Can the media circulate any image in the public sphere by invoking free speech? Are there no potentially offensive images that should be regulated or avoided, or even banned? Where should the limits to free speech be placed in the specific field of publicising images? The laws governing images of public interest, especially those regarding religion, cultures and the activities of politicians, go to make up one of the most controversial and complex issues in the world of global communication.

The controversy that arose on the publication in Denmark of the Mohammed cartoons continues to generate debate and concern. On the other hand, at a local level, television and Internet exploit political satire to the maximum. The aim of the *Quaderns del CAC* is to highlight the difficult relationship between "Image and the right to ridicule", borrowing the apt expression of legal philosopher Ronald Dworkin. This collection of articles focuses on the two areas mentioned: an analysis and reflection of the crisis of the Mohammed cartoons after two years, and a partial map of political ridicule on television in essentially European contexts.

Victòria Camps starts this edition with the article "Offence and free speech" and places the problem within the context of the ethics of responsibility. The first block of this edition is made up of four articles on the effects of the Mohammed images: Daniel Gamper Sachse reminds us of the origins of the controversy ("Free speech in tolerant society: the case of the Mohammed cartoons"); Alain Blomart investigates the effect in Europe and the Mediterranean ("The crisis of the Mohammed cartoons in the European Union and the Mediterranean: contexts, reactions and media"); José María Perceval provides us with the opposite view ("Between humour and uproar: satire and vision of the west in the media of the Arab-Muslim world"); and Mustafa Hussain dissects the debate in Denmark ("The controversy of the Mohammed cartoons and the media in Denmark"). The second block is dedicated to an analysis of political ridicule on television and includes the case studies by Jordi Balló ("The fiction of the mask: the case of *Polònia* in Catalonia"), by José Luis Valhondo ("Infosatire and democratisation on television: the Spanish case"), by Rossend Domènech ("Political satire in Italy: a successful television genre"), by Gemma Casadevall ("Political satire in Germany: from the political *Kabarett* of the thirties to Comedy TV") and by Vicent Partal ("*West Wing* or *Left Wing*? The pedagogy of politics in the masterly series of the United States"). Laura Díez Bueso closes the edition with a general legal study ("Free speech and its limits"). As a complement, we should also note the selection of websites related to this edition in the subsection "Journal of websites".

Finally, the section entitled "Observatory" includes three collaborations of great interest: Fiona Macmillan argues "The dysfunctional relationship between copyright and cultural diversity"; Carlos Scolari, Héctor Navarro, Hugo Pardo and Josep Lluís Micó summarise the study entitled "The new professional profiles and multiskilling of journalists in Catalonia"; and Mònika Jiménez presents "TV programming for consumers in miniature: advertising for young children that speaks the language of adults".

Josep Gifreu  
Director

# Offence and free speech

## Victòria Camps

- *Offence has become one of the fundamental causes of concern and discontentment regarding the content on radio, television and the media in general. In this article we discuss the difficulties of evaluating offence ethically, deriving both from the fact that it depends on the subjectivity of each person and also from the conflict arising when criticism and limitations to offence are perceived as censorship and a violation of the right to freedom of expression or free speech. The author believes that defending free speech cannot be separated from the demand for responsibility. Especially those who enjoy the right to express themselves freely more directly because they are media professionals are obliged to ensure that what they are saying also preserves the fundamental values of community life and public spirit.*

### Keywords

Ethics, political philosophy, free speech, responsibility.

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### Victòria Camps

*Member of the Catalonia Broadcasting Council*

## 1. The meaning of offence

Protests and complaints are increasingly more frequent from people and political or social groups due to expressions or images they consider to be offensive. The most notable number of complaints received by the Catalonia Broadcasting Council is categorised under the title of "Offensive content". Of note within this category, which is fundamentally not very precise, are those programmes, language and images perceived as discriminatory, generally for gender or ethnic reasons, inappropriate references to religions and anything that seems opposed to the principle of protecting children. Not only the Catalonia Broadcasting Council receives complaints from people and groups who feel offended for these reasons, but sections of the press that are open to citizen participation, such as letters to the editor or defence of the reader, also publicise constant reprimands of how people have expressed themselves when this is perceived to be lacking in respect and, in short, incorrect. It doesn't matter if the context is a news or chat programme, a debate or entertainment show, it doesn't matter whether the content is serious or fun... Whatever its nature, people are becoming increasingly intolerant of criticism, sarcasm or a sense of humour when they feel they are being directly or indirectly referred to and it touches their most sensitive spot. Or perhaps it's not a question of intolerance, perhaps it's that not even criticism, nor satire, nor witticisms are what they used to be and have become pure insult, lacking in the respect that anyone deserves.

Offence is an act that is almost impossible to objectify. In fact, we can only say that offence has occurred when someone feels offended. The dictionary does not define offence independently of the offended person: offending someone is to injure their feelings, their dignity. We know that feelings have always opposed reason and that they assign a per-

son's less controllable attitudes and reactions. We can have or no longer have feelings, but we cannot always master, control or prevent them. It's difficult, if not impossible, to convince a person who feels injured that they are wrong. We may adduce that there was no intention or will to offend, but we cannot deny that offence has occurred. Feelings are personal and non-transferable. With regard to dignity, which is also considered liable to be offended, we're talking about a value that is assumed for any person merely due to the fact of being a person, which does not mean that dignity is an objectifiable trait that can be summarised into a list of specific notes that define it. Values are not facts; they are ideals that are never completely realised. And dignity is one of a person's fundamental values. No matter how hard we try, it would be difficult for us to satisfactorily determine what human dignity consists of. Kant, who focuses his moral theory on the ideal of dignity, says that this lies in the fact that no person can use another as if he or she were only an instrument and not an end in his or herself. Put more simply, treating another like an object of my interests, using him or her, manipulating him or her is not taking into account his or her dignity. Whoever insults, reviles or offends is undervaluing the dignity of the other.

Whatever the case, the basic problem is that offence is subjective. The Anglo Saxons say that the concept of offence has ended up replacing that of taste and decency.<sup>1</sup> Regarding the first, scholastic thinkers used to say that *non disputanda est* - "there's no possible discussion" concerning taste. With regard to decency, the disuse of the word, especially referring to the sexual connotations it has always had among us, indicates that it is no longer the right word to describe the correct way either to behave or to relate to others. In fact, Anglo Saxon cultures have been characterised by their eagerness to pursue anything that attacks taste and decency. They have been able to do so while there are clear objective references of the general feeling about what is considered to be nice or ugly and with regard to how people should behave. Once these references have been lost, only personal or collective feeling remains that an offence has occurred. A sense of honour, to give an

example closer to our own traditions, had a clear and precise meaning four or five centuries ago. Today, perhaps, it only has meaning in the Sicilian Cosa Nostra. Outside closed and highly specific spheres, it would be very difficult for us to determine which facts or events make someone lose honour. In short, then, we may say that a series of circumstances have led to offence becoming more subjective, among others: social heterogeneity, pluralism of points of view, lack of stable references, lack of canonical criteria to distinguish between what is right and wrong and what injures and what doesn't. We no longer say that something is in bad taste or indecent, expressions that would only work if they were supported by a generalised feeling. We only say that this or that has offended.

Is this really the case? Is it legitimate to conclude that what might have been objectified in times when there were more established and indisputable norms of conduct and values has become subjective? I am not saying that the criteria of good taste and decency before were reasonable and that now they are no longer so. What I am saying is that they are a response to an increasingly inexistent social homogeneity. A lack of criteria that are accepted by the majority places us in a situation where everything is relative and disputable. Only fifty years ago, in our society, a woman who showed her thighs was indecent; blasphemy and *uncouth language* were a sign of little education and were banned in public places. Many people were victims of exclusion and social marginalisation, national Catholicism was an officially accepted reality and it set patterns that were taken on by the whole of society, if only in appearance. Now, however, everyone, men and women, enjoy much more freedom, there is a much wider range to choose from in terms of how to dress, how to live, how to have fun and how to express yourself. There are no clear parameters of what is permissible or censurable; it is said that everyone deserves to be treated equally, and religious beliefs, in western democracies, have become a private affair. The guarantee of individual freedoms has led to the elimination of many of the distinctions between good and bad that had seemed inalterable. So one of the few criteria remaining, beyond what is

1 See the study by Andrea Millwood Hargrave and Sonia Livingstone, *Harm and Offence in Media Content. A review of the evidence*. Bristol: Intellect, 2006.

specifically prohibited by the penal code, is that of personal offence. What we should ask ourselves is whether offence is a sufficient criterion to distinguish what should not be done. Is saying that someone "has offended us" a good enough reason to consider the motive for the offence ethically reproachable?

## 2. Offensive content or offended people?

Perhaps it's a mistake, straight off, to talk about offensive content. If offence is characterised by being subjective, then it's logical that there is no content that is offensive per se but rather people or groups of people who feel offended. Expressions that discriminate or exclude people offend those who are discriminated against or excluded. Immigrants are not happy when a delinquent is identified as Moroccan or Ecuadorian, nor when immigration, in general, is talked about as if all immigrants were identical. It was a few Muslims who felt attacked by the jokes about Mohammed that appeared in a Danish newspaper, not Christians or agnostics, nor even all those who believe in Mohammed. Gross language and too explicit sex bothers and offends older people but not the young. If television uses the image of a farmer, a taxi driver or a grandmother, it's easy for those referred to not to recognise themselves and to protest because their representation is stereotypical; but others don't perceive the allusion. Sexist language is rejected by women, not by men. Not to mention nationalism and its symbols. Any attempt to ridicule these will be understood by adamant nationalists as an insult and an unacceptable lack of consideration.

There is no such thing, therefore, as offensive content but rather offended people. People who, generally, belong to specific sectors, the weakest and most vulnerable sectors, the ones most susceptible to feeling offended. As Nietzsche said: superior man, the one he calls a "free spirit", is immune to offence and resentment, which is a defensive and reactive feeling. A powerful being does not react against anyone but only acts, does not need others, can do without them and therefore cannot be offended by anything. That's why

it's so absurd to think that a god or prophet may be offended by "human, too human" jokes. Only those with little or no power at all to make themselves felt and to assert themselves are victims of offence. As with most of Nietzsche's theories, this one must be used with caution. Nietzsche liked to provoke, sometimes being right, always brilliant and devastating in his criticism, but he was also exaggerated, over the top and wrong when diagnosing reality. Nothing he said can be taken on board without it being put into context. Victims of offence are, certainly, weak people or groups. Precisely because they are weak, we should ask ourselves whether the undervaluation they perceive is real or fictional, mere perception or a consequence of injustice. In other words, we should ask ourselves whether it is legitimate to use a right such as free speech to denigrate those who are often incapable or do not have the resources to defend themselves. In short, we should question whether offence must be considered one of the limits to free speech.

The great theories of freedom and liberalism, I'm thinking particularly of John S. Mill<sup>2</sup>, established a single limit to individual freedom: injury to the other. From their point of view, nothing justified intervening in people's freedom except to prevent others from being injured. To a certain extent, we may consider that article 20 of the Spanish Constitution, which recognises the right to free speech and its limits, is expressing this idea of freedom. Attacking people's image or honour and not safeguarding the protection of children, the two constitutional limits to freedom, constitute bad uses of freedom, as the fundamental rule of not injuring anyone has been broken. However, injury is not the same as offence. Injury is somewhat objectifiable and easy to prove, especially when talking about injury in the form of extortion, violence or physical assault. Injury understood in this way can be measured and quantified, but not offence. Very rarely can we empirically prove that free speech has physically injured someone. It's true that language can incite violence and hate, that there are images that can lead to conduct harmful to people (anorexia is the most current example), that personal aggravation, such as the ever more frequent harassment and bullying, lead to depression and even suicide; that, especially minors, particularly have to be

2 MILL, J. S. *Sobre la llibertat*. Barcelona: Editorial Laia.

protected from an environment that can lead to deviant behaviour. All this is true, but it is also true that no-one now defends the absolute causality of the media in people's behaviour. Television, video games, mobiles, the Internet are merely one factor, among many others, that influences people's education and socialisation and helps to form and modify tastes, habits and social norms.

However, given that audiovisual media are the most widespread and that they can exert considerable influence, the regulations governing them are more restrictive than those applied to the press. The European "Television Without Frontiers" Directive clearly states that all programmes must be avoided that are liable to physically, mentally or morally injure children. However, precisely due to the difficulty in determining the causes of possible injury, it is wise to talk not of harmful content but rather of "risk content".<sup>3</sup> There is indeed some content that *might* constitute a risk for the most vulnerable audience, such as children. We don't know exactly whether violent or gross programmes are harmful but it seems that they are very likely to be so. In the same way that there are populations considered at risk with a view to suffering certain diseases or becoming delinquents, the exposure of children, and even some poorly educated adults, to certain programmes is considered to be a situation of risk with regard to acquiring ethical values or simply the acquisition of criteria in order to orient oneself in life in cultural, social and ethical terms.

To summarise what I have said up to this point, firstly we find ourselves in a world where there is a lack of homogeneous references, perspectives or criteria. It is increasingly more difficult to say that something is in bad taste or indecent because we lack a unified canon of taste or decency. With the lack of objectivity that was possible in more hierarchical and stable societies, what counts today in distinguishing what is correct from what is not is people's subjectivity, the feeling of having been attacked or of having suffered offence. In post-modern times we do not enjoy the confidence and certainty instilled by enlightened modernity. Today, everything is much more relative. Secondly, we're talking about broadcasting and its effects, effects that, if they are harmful, harm in a way that can hardly be proved,

therefore liable to equally subjective, relative and variable opinions. It's not easy to prove whether broadcasting language, which is what we're talking about, actually harms an audience. What can be proved is that there are people whose dignity or principles have been injured. Given this situation, what should be done? What should organisations such as audiovisual councils do, whose function is to ensure that the media respect and protect people's rights? Must we prioritise free speech, understanding that there must be more tolerance with regard to what anyone might want to say? Or should we rather insist that freedom must be responsible and that responsibility entails setting limits and being more careful when speaking? Freedom, tolerance and responsibility, three values, perhaps the fundamental civic virtues in contemporary democracies. Three values that cannot be abandoned but must be balanced.

### 3. Arguments against limiting free speech

a) *Fear of censorship.* An initial reason for not putting limits to free speech is the fear of resorting to censorship. Our Francoist past makes us particularly sensitive to this fear and reticent to harm a right to a freedom that, for us, is still very new. It should be noted, however, that the word *censorship* is very strong and has connotations, deriving from very specific practices, that do not allow us to consider it in its more descriptive and neutral sense. In fact, to censor is to reprove or condemn something believed to be incorrect. Although I have mentioned above the lack of references that do not allow us to objectify criteria for what is correct or incorrect, it must be acknowledged that, at the same time as losing traditional references, we have gradually decreed the incorrectness of many expressions that are rooted in everyday language. Today there is a whole pile of words censored by politically correct language. As human rights have become more universal and are better defended, all those expressions considered as degrading or vexing for someone have been eliminated from the public sphere. *Gipsy*,

3 As stated by the *Llibre Blanc: L'educació en l'entorn audiovisual*, Audiovisual Council of Catalonia, 2002.

*black, lame, retarded* and *animal* are publicly vetoed words. So we cannot say, in a strict sense, that there is no censorship, that we don't even censor ourselves when we want to express ourselves correctly. We would not be intelligent beings, who think before speaking and who analyse what we are going to say and judge whether it is convenient or not to say it, if we did not do so. No, censorship is not what we should be afraid of, but rather arbitrary and interested censorship, applied without grounds, when it is inappropriate or not applicable. With regard to the area we are dealing with here, the question is: given people's increasing tendency to feel offended and to complain about offence, do we need to censure our way of speaking? Who is more wrong, the offender or the offended? I have just said that there are "offences" that are drastically forbidden by politically correct language. So must we say that, even in these limitations, we have gone too far? Do we exaggerate not being able to take language in its figurative sense? Have we condemned only those expressions that identified the most discriminated and vulnerable people or groups or, by extension, are we condemning that which upsets any susceptibility, wherever it may come from? In conclusion, far from censorship being a reason to reject any repression of free speech, we should be more specific and distinguish between legitimate censorship and non-legitimate censorship.

b) *The key value of freedom.* In fact, free speech was the great invention of modern liberal thought, the purpose of which was for subjects' voices to be able to express themselves and make themselves heard against those of the sovereigns and privileged classes. Civil liberties are the instrument held by people to criticise and ridicule power, be it political, religious or any another type. The bourgeoisie fought against the privileges of the aristocracy. The suffragettes claimed a right that no-one recognised for them. The black community in the United States rebelled against discrimination and the inhuman exclusion it was suffering. Workers unionised to fight against the interests of capital. In summary, civil society has gradually become aware as an area for free speech,

against the political power that represses it. These were the origins of liberalism but, in present-day liberal societies, the dynamic has changed. Civil liberties and, specifically, free speech were revolutionary until the mass media, which should have influenced these freedoms, placed more emphasis on the oligarchies maintaining them than on the needs of society. Habermas explained very well how the public sphere, which should be the place for expressing individual freedoms, has been colonised by a media that is merely the instrument of advertising and propaganda at the service of the dominant interests. Not everyone has the same access to the media nor can they express their opinion freely. There has been a "feudalisation of public space" that brings into doubt the original value of free speech.<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding this, freedom continues to be seen as an untouchable value, of greater interest than any other principle. Although everyone actually seems to assume that freedom is not an absolute right, the legal doctrine has not helped to strike a true balance between the right to free speech and people's other rights, such as the right to dignity or to their own image. In one way or another, what is imposed is the belief that, in the case of doubt, it's better for free speech not to be the loser. It's an old theory that we find reasonably supported by John S. Mill in the aforementioned book. What should be preserved above all else, he says, is the confrontation of different opposing ideas. Given that no-one owns the truth, all partial truths that may be expressed must be accepted, no matter how eccentric they may be. Out of all of these derives the only truth to which we may aspire.

The legal philosopher Ronald Dworkin, one of most prestigious and sensible liberals of our time, recently defended the "right to mock" as one of the legitimate forms of free speech. Referring to the issue of the cartoons against Mohammed, he made a distinction between the possible bloody consequences resulting from the publication of these jokes and the principle defending free speech. With regard to the first point, he celebrated the decision of the British press not to publish the

4 HABERMAS, J. *Historia y crítica de la opinión pública*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1981.



caricatures and not to give more motive to fanatics to encourage violence and disorder. He therefore judged self-censorship to be correct with regard to the consequences of publication. However, he did not have the same opinion regarding the setting of limits to free speech in the name of "the virtues of multiculturalism", as "in a democracy, no-one can have the right not to be insulted or offended". If minorities wish for legal recognition that does not discriminate against them, they must be prepared to accept insult from those who oppose their integration. Only in this way, letting fanatics and non-fanatics express themselves, can democratic decisions become legitimate. It would even be necessary, he said, to abolish the law concerning the rejection of the Holocaust and other similar laws. People must know everything in order to be able to make an informed decision.<sup>5</sup>

- c) *Subjectivity of points of view.* In theory, it's not difficult to understand and to make others understand that free speech must have some limits and that these should lie in the possible injury that might be caused to others. Hence we may deduce that a certain amount of censorship or self-censorship is reasonable, at least as an expression of personal self-discipline and self-control that are essential to being able to co-exist with others. However, what is truly difficult to justify is the wrongness or harm that may be contained in what is perceived as an offence. As explained by the great philosopher of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein, the meaning of language has a pragmatic aspect that makes it subsidiary to the context in which locutions are produced. It's not the same to say "good night" as a routine before going to bed as to say it aggressively to bring an argument to an end. What it means is different in each case. In other words, language is a game whose rules are not fixed or invariable but change according to the needs of the players. These only have to know these rules, implicitly or explicitly, and agree to follow them. When this doesn't happen, mutual communication or understanding becomes impossible.
- The rules of the linguistic game have also suffered from

the collapse of the characteristic fundamentals of post-modernity, where everything ends up relative. The "great stories" that used to add consistency to thought have disappeared. There are no longer ideologies, religions or visions of the world with enough force to impose them-selves and build the different social constructions of reality. However, this doesn't mean that beliefs have disappeared, without which it's very difficult to orient oneself in reality. Precisely because social homogeneity has been lost, because everyone can think what they want, beliefs have revealed themselves as what they are: mere beliefs, pure private opinions of a basis that makes them possible to universalise. It's this fragility that leads believers of all kinds to construct collective identities that, lacking a sufficient or shared justification of beliefs, are reinforced by means of reaction, defending themselves against adversaries. In this way, collective identities live off antagonism and injury and offence serve to nourish them and help them survive.

But we must not deviate from our subject. If the subjectivity of offence is due, above all, to the fact that it ridicules singular and non-universalisable beliefs, identities or ways of thinking, what we have to ask ourselves is whether beliefs, whatever their content, deserve to be respected or, as expressed by Dworkin, if we can talk, even in a figurative sense, of a right to ridicule the beliefs of others. Ortega y Gasset wrote a book entitled *Ideas y creencias* (Ideas and beliefs) where he extensively expresses his opinion with regard to this issue. Unlike ideas, which we can have and stop having, beliefs are more solid, at least for the person who professes to hold them ("*we have ideas but our beliefs are part of us*", says Ortega), they form part of how a person lives or what they are like. That's why, the philosopher thought, ideas must be discussed but beliefs must be respected.

But I'm not sure if we should agree with Ortega y Gasset's conclusion either. This was refuted recently by Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, also as a result of the discussion aroused by the cartoons against Mohammed. "Why" he wrote, "must I

5 DWORKIN, R. "El derecho a la burla". In: *El País*, 25 March 2006.

respect everyone's beliefs? Isn't it better to question them, to refute them, if necessary, to the extent of irreverence so that everyone may realise their weaknesses?". It's a similar point of view to another expressed by John S. Mill in the book already mentioned in this article. Mill distinguished between living and dead beliefs. The latter are accepted by people without discussion and are no stimulus for the evolution of thought. If, however, they are living beliefs, these must be defended against detractors, thereby forcing them to find reasons that support them. The respect demanded by Ortega, in principle, is silent, it shows no disagreement, it accepts everything without understanding, it's a kind of passive tolerance. A disrespectful attitude, on the other hand, although it may seem intolerant and morally reproachable, leads to controversy and to the expression of discrepancy: it is, ultimately, more dynamic and more enriching.

However, does a lack of respect for points of view or beliefs not shared by everyone have to give rise to offence? It's one thing to criticise and quite another to offend. We agree that what is offensive for some is not for those who do not share the points of view that are being satirised or ridiculed. Only Catholics, Islamics, nationalists, women or immigrants feel offended due to a lack of respect for each group's expressions of their identity or self-comprehension. If beliefs are subjective, so is offence. Is this conclusion legitimate? Or should we distinguish between "objective" offence and other offence that is not objective?

#### **4. Ethics and the aesthetics of free speech**

I have based my arguments on the idea that the development of a right to individual freedom has come about at the same time as the collapse of the points of reference that kept societies cohesive within a context of the same shared and generally unquestionable beliefs. It is increasingly more difficult to translate the distinction between good and bad into rules and values that everyone can subscribe to. First, we think that offending, by definition, is not a correct action. The word *per se* has a negative connotation: offence, insult, defamation, affront, in principle, cannot be good. But the problem is not the rule that says we must not offend. The problem is how to determine what an offence really is and

under what circumstances even offensive language can entail a greater good. Value-based concepts, and *offence* is one of them, do not assign facts but value them, that is why their meaning is inevitably indeterminate and imprecise. It depends on a point of view. This problem is not exclusive to offence. Seemingly clearer or more descriptive words such as *terrorist* do not have the same meaning for everyone. The member of a terrorist group rejects this denomination and may say that what they do is not murder but justice; terrorists, from their point of view, are the police and judges. Something similar happens with the concept of justice, clearly value-based. Social democrats do not understand justice in the same way as neo-liberals. The former define justice as freedom and equality, while the latter believe that any intervention in individual freedoms is unjust and that equal opportunity is a value that is incompatible with freedom. Everything is indeterminate in the moral sphere because moral is fed by value-based judgements. The problem, therefore, is not how to define offence but deciding what is actually a morally unacceptable offence.

It is therefore difficult for us to establish criteria such as a recipe or formula to distinguish unequivocally between unacceptable and acceptable offence. It is difficult and, further-more, inappropriate to attempt to do so. It's good that ethical rules are imprecise and sustained by abstract concepts. Abstraction is the price we must pay for accepting that the rule can be more general. It's not the same, for example, to defend sexual equality as to sanction homosexual marriages, nor does the rejection of the discrimination of women necessarily entail proposing policies of positive discrimination. Some people even say that the progress of liberal thought lies, among other things, in the penal code increasingly losing its influence and rules being increasingly more open to interpretation. What would not be legitimate is to deduce ethical anarchy from the plurality and subjectivity of perspectives, "anything goes". Quite the opposite, the other side of indeterminate rules can be no other than that of responsibility. Moral autonomy is a characteristic of people's moral maturity. Consequently, as freedoms grow, so must the responsibility of those who have more power to exercise freedom, such as those who have made the media their profession. We must remember that respecting people has always been a private issue, fomented and worked out in private. Because a lack of

respect or honour had public consequences. But the mass media have upset our notions of public and private. Gossip television and the gutter press play with this transmutation and take advantage of it. What is said in public has consequences, or can have them, which private communication would not. That is why we must direct the issue towards ethics of responsibility.

One philosopher that might help us today to think about responsibility is Hannah Arendt. The reality she had to live with under Nazi power led her to study totalitarianism in depth and to attend the trial against Eichmann, which she wrote about in one of her most commented books: *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. In this book, she develops the theory of the banality of evil, which scandalised more than one of her contemporaries. For Arendt, Eichmann is the perfect bureaucrat who only obeys orders without asking himself about the rectitude or correctness of what he has been told to do. It is a moral obligation to assume responsibility for the actions of the political community to which we belong. Not to disagree with "what must be done", "what everyone is doing" implies consent. The automatism of a person who acts like any other piece of the administrative machinery lies in the incapacity to distinguish between good and bad, which is merely the consequence of an incapacity to think and judge what is being done. So evil becomes "banal" when man abandons what distinguishes him from other animals, namely the capacity to judge or to discern between what must and what mustn't be done. The essence of moral thought lies in judgement.

In order to develop this idea, Arendt took her inspiration from Kant, but not from the Kant who founded practical morals or reason but from Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, a book aiming to establish aesthetic judgement. Without wishing to make comparisons between Nazi crimes and the issue we are dealing with here, I think that Arendt's comments on the incapacity to discern morally is a very suitable approach to apply to the problem of free speech and its limits, given, precisely, the subjectivity that seems to characterise any opinion or stance on the issue. Taste-based or aesthetic judgement is, in fact and by definition, subjective. However, Kant did not believe that this issue could be thought to be resolved by merely mentioning the known maxim of *de gustibus non disputanda est*. We cannot limit ourselves to admitting that aesthetic judgement is

subjective as, in fact, when we judge a work of art we do not only wish to express that we like it or don't like it but we also attempt a social recognition of aesthetic perception. So the judgement of taste requires the viewer of a work of art to be distanced and somewhat impartial, it requires the viewer to make an effort to consider points of view different from his or her own, to take into account other perspectives and opinions. In summary, it is not the individual alone who judges but a community individual searching for the community's acceptance.

Arendt transfers the ideas on taste-based judgement to moral judgement. This also presupposes distancing, an impartiality together with the desire to extend it to others. No-one who morally condemns gender-based violence, for example, believes they are making a purely subjective value judgement that cannot be generalised. Human social reality and the social reality of language do not allow us to consider moral judgements (nor aesthetic) as solitary pastimes. Public recognition is vital for our evaluations of reality to have meaning. Arendt gives the example of what happened with the French Revolution. What made the French Revolution an historic event was not the more or less glorious actions of the people involved but the opinions and enthusiastic applause of those viewing the Revolution.

The German philosopher's reasoning does not end there. At the same time, she also reveals, with disappointment, her great scepticism of people using their capacity to judge. She believes we are living in a world where judging is considered a bad activity. This she found when she tried to understand the Eichmann phenomenon. Who are you, they said, to judge what you haven't directly experienced? I think that Arendt was not mistaken when she came to this decision. Moral judgement is not well received in our era precisely for one of the reasons I have insisted on in my article. Those principles that had seemed fixed, permanent and untouchable are no longer so. We are only left with *mores*, customs, in the most descriptive and relative sense of the word. That is why we are condemned to "think without a banister", (once again an expression from Hannah Arendt), without metaphysics or ideologies to support thought and judgement. A condition, however, that should not relieve us from the obligation to think and judge in order to discern good or bad.<sup>6</sup>

It is this obligation to think, so ignored in the present-day

world, that forms the core of responsibility. The English have a word that, unfortunately, cannot be translated directly into Catalan: *accountability*. This is the obligation to answer for what is done, an obligation related to any position of power and from which the media should not be exempt. Being accountable is being answerable for what has been done. To answer one needs to think, value and judge, which is difficult to do from the interested position of someone who is involved. As Arendt says, it must be done from the disinterested and impartial position of a spectator. The figure of the impartial spectator has been a constant in moral philosophy and, more specifically, of the theories of justice. It is doubtful, however, whether the obligation of judging has been taken on board today by the different social agents. The division of work, on the one hand, and the ill will produced by judgement, especially when this is critical, has meant that this obligation is the exclusive task of judges.

Deciding whether judges are the only "spectators" of the public sphere, with the capacity to value, judge and reflect on public discourse, seems to me to be no more than setting up obstacles to democratic participation. All citizens are spectators who receive messages from politicians, from the media and different social agents. For some time now the media have stopped being strictly neutral "mediators" of what other people say, if they ever were. Neither do I believe that they should judge only the role of simple mediators or transmitters of alien messages. What is clear is that they are "involved" in a game and, being involved, they are not in a condition to judge impartially what they are doing. Someone from outside should do this, in a more or less organised way. Audiovisual councils have, among their functions, that of defending citizens and safeguarding their rights with regard to possible attack or transgressions by broadcasters. In this respect, we can see that they have been given the function of an "impartial spectator".

The media are not obliged to be edifying but they must avoid being harmful. In fact, this is declared by all the ins-

piring principles subscribed to by broadcasters in order to carry out their work. Beyond determining whether offensive content is a direct attack on people's rights or not, what programming undoubtedly does, fed by scandal and infamy, is to harm the audience and citizens. It harms citizens because it helps to distort people's moral sense and sense of taste. Systematic outcries, repeated aggression and offensive expressions contaminate the media environment, in the same way that pollution contaminates the natural environment. Verbal violence inevitably contaminates public discourse and at least affects and influences the behaviour of less educated people with fewer resources to judge what is happening. We should repeat here what has been said in the considerations made by the CAC on poor quality television: "Programming that violates or is about to violate fundamental rights, systematically and repeatedly, will probably harm the education of minors. Especially if it is characterised by resorting to language that is gross or virulent or lacking in respect and by dumbing down, as well as naturalising ignorance of the values of community and public spirit that inspire the educational system itself."<sup>7</sup> I believe these are sufficient reasons for us to watch out for the degradation of audiovisual content.

6 Cf. ARENDT, H. *Responsibility and Judgement*, edited by Jerome Kohn, Schocken Books, New York: 2003. Translated into Spanish, see "El pensar y las reflexiones morales". In: ARENDT, H. *De la historia a la acción*. Introducción de Manuel Cruz. Barcelona: Paidós, 1995.

7 CATALONIA BROADCASTING COUNCIL. *Consideracions i recomanacions del CAC sobre la teleporqueria*. Barcelona: Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya, 2006 <[www.cac.cat/pfw\\_files/cma/actuacions/Autorregulacio/recomteleporqueria.pfd](http://www.cac.cat/pfw_files/cma/actuacions/Autorregulacio/recomteleporqueria.pfd)>).

# Free speech in tolerant society: the case of the Mohammed cartoons

Daniel Gamper

- *In this article are set out the legal repercussions of the known as “the case of the Mohammed cartoons” and also the parliamentary discussions at the Danish Parliament about the articles in the Penal Code against blasphemy and racism. It is also analysed the subsequent debate focused in self-censorship of public opinion about the issues related with the Muslim immigration and, in the final section, it is proposed which should be the attitude of the media with regard to the integration of minorities from other cultural, ethnic and/or religious provenance.*

## Keywords

Public opinion, immigration, Islam, self-censorship, offence, integration.

“The media say what they wish about Islam because they can.”

Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam*

“Without empathetic participation in the feeling of outrage, and perhaps even privately deeming outrage in itself to be backward, a too-easy slide into self-serving emotionalism, yet out of a belief in the right of the other to take offense, and particularly out of conviction that underdogs should not have their subordination redoubled by having it prescribed to them in what form they should object to being subordinated, the intellectual is prepared to respect and perhaps even defend other people's taking offense, in much the same way that he or she might respect someone's refusal to eat pork, while privately feeling the taboo is benighted and superstitious”

J. M. Coetzee, *Giving offense*

## 1. The publication of the cartoons

On 30 September 2005, the most widely circulated newspaper in Denmark, *Jyllands-posten* (JP), published a three column article in its cultural supplement written by Flemming Rose, culture editor, entitled “Mohammed's face” (*Muhammeds ansigt*) in which he said that “modern secular society is rejected by some Muslims. They demand a special position when they insist that their religious feelings should be taken especially into account. This is irreconcilable with free speech and with a secular democracy, in which one must be prepared to be the object of offence, scorn and ridicule”.<sup>1</sup>

1 ROSE, F. “Muhammeds ansigt”, *Jyllands-Posten*, KulturWeekend (30/09/05): 3.

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The article was accompanied by 12 cartoons, some of which showed the prophet Mohammed. The most controversial was an image of the prophet with a turban in the form of a lit bomb on which the Islamic profession of faith could be read: "There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet".

The newspaper's editorial went further into the same issue. It said that the solemnity with which Muslims presented themselves in the Danish public sphere "is related to an exaggerated and almost infirm susceptibility to any contradiction, which is interpreted as provocation at the drop of a hat. Any provocation against one of these sanctified imams or crazy mullahs is interpreted as a provocation against the prophet himself and the sacred book, the Koran. [...] The world over there is satire in films, in the theatre and in literature but no-one dares laugh at Islam. And that's because a load of imams and mullahs, who feel justified to interpret the word of the prophet, can't stand the offence of being the object of an intelligent satire." According to the editor, this has meant that, in the West, the fashion of being politically correct forces us to understand and forgive "the threatening voices of a medieval darkness", forcing us to argue with "a conception of the world that the West gave up with the Enlightenment".<sup>2</sup>

So the aim explicitly pursued by the newspaper's editors was the growing self-censorship of creators when it comes to Islam. In this context, *self-censorship* is understood as the tacit acceptance of blackmail, threat or intimidation that makes someone stop saying, writing or drawing something they would say, write or draw if these conditioning factors did not apply. It therefore seems that free speech constitutes the thematic core of what has subsequently

become known as "the case of the Mohammed cartoons"<sup>3</sup> since, on the one hand, the JP editors stated that this freedom was being threatened surreptitiously and, on the other, they protected themselves behind the same free speech in order to start up a debate.<sup>4</sup>

As far as is possible, the following pages reconstruct the socio-political context of this controversy, paying particular attention to the legislative discussion and legal decisions, as well as to Danish public debate concerning new Muslim citizens. The debate has several facets including both foreign politics and Danish integration, as well as the clash between the West and Islam and also free speech. The presence of Muslim citizens, symbols and customs in a small-sized, ethnically and religiously homogeneous country constitutes a challenge, the consequences of which are still unknown. The resulting discussions tend to become radicalised, not only due to the worrying terrorist violence imposed by a culture of fear but also due to the fear of forgetting what had been learned from a past of European barbarism. The discourse of tolerance that prevails in the West's self-image naturally imposes discursive restrictions that, in one way or another, influence its concept of free speech. We begin by seeing tolerance as respect and continue with political correctness, which is no more than silencing some words that may be offensive and replacing them with others. Given this situation, some discourses and practices insist on the importance of maintaining this respect, while others claim that it constitutes a defeat for enlightened culture. The media form an essential part of this debate, which is why we need to reflect on the role they must play in the policy to integrate new citizens with non-Christian religious affiliations.

2 "Truslen fra mørket", *Jyllands-posten* (30/09/05): 10.

3 The case is not limited to the publication of the cartoons but also the international effects it led to: riotous protests in Afghanistan, Syria, the Lebanon and other countries, assaults on Scandinavian embassies, the boycott of Danish products, burning of flags and 139 deaths. This article does not deal with the responsibilities concerning these events, as nothing contained in the intention of the illustrators or writers justifies the subsequent acts of violence.

4 The Danish prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, in his letter replying to complaints about the cartoons from 11 ambassadors from Arab countries, also appealed to this free speech: "Free speech is the very foundation of Danish democracy. It has a wide range and the Danish government cannot exercise influence on the press", cited in Larsen and Seidenfaden (2006): 191-192.

## 2. The case: background and legal repercussions

### 2.1. Articles in the Danish Penal Code against blasphemy and racism

Shortly after the cartoons were published, several Muslim associations took the editors to court for having offended members of Islam, basing their arguments on articles 140 and 266b of the Danish Penal Code:

- 140. Whosoever mocks or ridicules the dogma or faith of any legal religious community shall be punished with a fine or a prison sentence of up to four months.
- 266b. Whosoever expresses declarations or other kinds of communication, publicly or with the intention of disseminating these in a wide circle, in which a group of people is threatened, mocked or degraded because of their race, skin colour, national or ethnic origin, beliefs or sexual orientation, shall be punished with a fine or a prison sentence of up to two years.

These articles, which were considered applicable in the case against the JP editors, have hardly been used in the last 100 years. Even during the 20th century, the aforementioned article on blasphemy (140) was the object of numerous legislative initiatives proposing it should be annulled. Even in 1930 the majority of a committee to modify the Penal Code proposed, unsuccessfully, to eliminate this article because “when the limits of free speech are violated indecently, the condemnation expressed by public opinion is a much more effective and a more natural reaction than the application of a punishment. We may suppose, in general, that people who value religious feelings do not wish punishment to be applied for blasphemous expressions or actions and that people who do not have religious feelings to protect will perceive, in general, the application of a punishment as a folly that merely incites contradiction”.<sup>5</sup> The key concept of the arguments offered more than 70 years ago is that of “indecenty”, which presupposes social

consensus regarding what is considered likely to be offensive; in other words, a tacit agreement that exercises its function of regulating society without judicial institutions needing to be involved. Moreover, a consensus that owes its existence to a certain social, economic, cultural and religious homogeneity. Once this consensus no longer exists, when what ideologically characterises society is the diversity of opinion and a degree of tolerance or even indifference towards another’s opinions, then there is once again a need to resort to judicial bodies to intercede in conflicts that cannot be arbitrated by a society in which informal agreement has disappeared regarding the hierarchy of values. This so-called “relativism” of values (an expression that has succeeded by labelling, not very precisely, what is actually a sometimes reasonable difference of opinion concerning the purpose of life<sup>6</sup>, more present in cities than in rural areas such as the west coast of Jutland, is not necessarily a symptom of the decadence of culture but of a lack of agreement on what is considered offensive, this being indicated, for example, by a term such as ‘decency’ falling into disuse. Or perhaps we should push our interpretation further and claim that, once tolerance towards unfamiliar ways of life has impregnated all the layers of society, and for good reason, it is the very concept of offence that has become obsolete.

In the 1970s, article 140 was applied to two cases of artists who had mocked God and Christ, setting them in sexually ambiguous situations. But in neither of these cases were the artists prosecuted. The maturity of Danish society to accept mockery, together with the gradual dissolution of religious and moral homogeneity and the liberalisation of sexual practices, counted as tacit sources of legal grounds for not applying this article.

The last time someone was condemned for violating the article in question was in 1938, in the midst of an anti-Semitic campaign. That is why this is normally referred to as the “forgotten article”. Such is the case that, on 18 March 2005, before the aforementioned affair of the cartoons, a motion was discussed in parliament to eliminate this article,

5 Rigsadvokaten, Bilag 1, J. nr. RA-2006-41-0151, Gennemgang af relevant retsregler mv., 15/03/2006.

6 According to the expression by I. Berlin ([1958] 1989: 187).

presented by the political party *Dansk Folkeparti*.<sup>7</sup> This motion was a result of some Muslim associations wishing to sue the Danish public television channel for broadcasting the film *Submission*, by Theo van Gogh, with a script by Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

Parliament ended up voting against the bill, as it only received the support of the *Dansk Folkeparti* MPs. The grounds for proposing this legislative amendment emphasised the difficulty of legislating on the ‘good tone’ of a conversation, as well as the censoring force of allegedly offended feelings on possible offenders, obliging the latter to keep quiet. Hence conservative politicians and those defending “Danishness” felt it was not necessary to keep this article. According to them, enlightened thought had opposed Christendom in the name of science since the time of Voltaire, and many of the works produced since then that go to make up the ambivalent identity of the enlightened West would have been prohibited if presumably offended religious feelings had been used as a criterion to measure free speech. They continued by claiming that, if the article in question were not removed, the problem would not be that some legal actions would end up being successful but that the police stations and courts would be inundated with suits because of “offended religious feelings”, when really these were matters “that should not be decided in a court but in free and open debate”.<sup>8</sup>

In the subsequent parliamentary discussion, the minister for Justice (*Det Konservative Folkeparti*) claimed that the article on blasphemy did not aim to silence those who

criticised religion but to prevent religion from being mocked: “in plain speech, the decisive aspect in applying the article on blasphemy is not that something has been criticised but how it has been criticised”.<sup>9</sup> The minister insisted that this legal limitation to the way in which criticism is carried out helps to ensure certain rules are respected in public debate, given that “for some people, religious issues form a part of what is most significant and fundamental in general”. Against the criticisms of those proposing the legislative initiative, who claimed that this law imposed a kind of tyranny in the public sphere, the minister stated that the article works “like a small elegant filter because you think twice before expressing yourself in the public sphere, to provide constructive criticism without ridiculing others”.

In his arguments in favour of the article, theologian Søren Krarup, member of *Dansk Folkeparti*, reasoned as follows: “On principle and in religious terms, an article of law that punishes blasphemy is a perfect misunderstanding in a Christian country.”<sup>10</sup> The idea that we must defend God’s honour with the law in our hands is almost blasphemy. Mohammed took arms to revenge, in 622, the mockery he had been subjected to in Mecca and, since then, mocking the prophet has carried a death sentence, which opposes the words of the New Testament by Jesus, as the king of peace, who even on the cross set himself up as a target for offence and ridicule. Jesus did not even hire a Roman lawyer when he was taken before his judge on earth, Pilate. On the contrary, he said that Pilate did not have any true power over him; the same as a group of people who, full of

7 The Danish Popular Party, led by Pia Kjaersgaard, is (in 2007) the third political force in the country with 24 members in Parliament (*Folketinget*). The principles of its political programme centre around “Danishness”, as shown by the following statements taken from their declaration of principles: “The country is constructed based on Danish cultural heritage and Danish culture must therefore be conserved and strengthened. [...] Denmark is not a country of immigrants and has never been one. That is why we will not accept a multi-ethnic transformation of the country. Denmark is the country of the Danish and citizens must have the opportunity to live under the rule of law, certain that it is evolving in accordance with Danish culture”.

<[http://www.danskfolkeparti.dk/sw/frontend/show.asp?parent=19185&menu\\_parent=22669&layout=0](http://www.danskfolkeparti.dk/sw/frontend/show.asp?parent=19185&menu_parent=22669&layout=0)>.

8 <[http://www.ft.dk/Samling/20042/lovforslag/L131/som\\_fremsat.htm](http://www.ft.dk/Samling/20042/lovforslag/L131/som_fremsat.htm)>

9 <[http://www.ft.dk/Samling/20042/salen/L131\\_BEH1\\_37\\_25\\_\(NB\).htm](http://www.ft.dk/Samling/20042/salen/L131_BEH1_37_25_(NB).htm)>. The rest of the citations from this section, if not otherwise specified, are in this reference.

10 Cf. article 4 of the fundamental Law of the Kingdom of Denmark: “The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the church of the Danish people and, as such, is sustained by the State”.



hatred, were mocking him. Only one had such power”.<sup>11</sup> Leaving to one side the paradox present in the statement that a law on blasphemy is “almost blasphemy”, the words of *Dansk Folkeparti* show the Christian roots of its arguments and, in short, the basis of Danish democracy. “We know that an absolute presupposition of Danish society is the separation that results from the Christian distinction between a spiritual and a secular regime, or between the kingdom of God and that of Caesar. And wherever this separation does not exist or is not known, what we call secular freedom or free speech is not possible, since the protection demanded by some citizens for their objectives and interests on account of their sacred nature leads to limiting a use of freedom that could result, for example, in them feeling offended”. The separation of these two orders, the origin of liberal tolerance, is argued here as being the core of Western freedoms and one that must be protected, if necessary, to the detriment of the rights of new minorities to see their beliefs respected.

This Christian argument was used strategically by the Social Democratic representative, Morten Bødskov, to state that “we do not believe that religious beliefs must constitute the basis of an amendment of the penal code. We think that the bill’s observations are too impregnated with this. If, according to the *Socialdemokratiet*, we must change the law we will do so based on political attitudes, such as the fact that the penal code must not hinder the path of free debate on the existence of religious orientations in Danish society”. In other words, the law must be based on political conceptions that are free from religious connotation to thereby comply with the requirement of liberal regimes for inclusiveness. As also claimed by the representative of another progressive party, the argument offered by *Dansk Folkeparti* did not use political reasons but “theological discussions and suppositions and statements about other religions”. In Rawls’ terms, the consensus on which legislation is based must be political and not metaphysical, so that all citizens can identify with it.

It’s true that the political motivations of the time stopped the presumably progressive parties from supporting any initiative by *Dansk Folkeparti* and that events obliged them to argue without openly presenting their true reasons, but this does not stop the parliamentary discussion from revealing a relevant displacement of free speech. In other words, while free speech, at its beginning, served to oppose power and thereby to ensure the right of minorities and individuals to dissent from the majority, now it was the minorities who were claiming the need to limit free speech to protect themselves from the criticism of the powerful majority. This is clear from the fact that it was the supposed “xenophobes” from *Dansk Folkeparti* who wanted the article on blasphemy to be annulled, while the parties on the left, whose ideology leads them to defend the country’s cultural and religious diversity, were in favour of maintaining an article that, as they themselves had stated time and time again, had last been used in a prosecution in 1938.

So, in the speeches by the socialist party (*Socialdemokratiet*) and the eco-socialist party (*Enhedslisten*), it was claimed that “various cultures coming to Denmark should not be a problem for free speech”. Moreover, in their turn to speak the representatives from these parties took the opportunity to label the generalisations implicit in the speeches by the members of *Dansk Folkeparti* as Islamophobic, seeing Islam as a religion linked to terror and Muslims as fundamentalists. Consequently, such positions related to what the conservative parties call multiculturalism,<sup>12</sup> defend a respectful use of free speech that does not encourage hatred of what is foreign or demagoguery against Muslims. That is why they argued in favour of limiting free speech or, more precisely, of a responsible use of this freedom, precisely to protect these minorities. As said by the member of the independent left-wing party: “Free speech sometimes comes into conflict with other human rights. Then we must weigh up which must predominate. For example, the possibility of protecting the minority in society is also an essential right. That’s why we believe it is

11 <[http://www.ft.dk/Samling/20042/lovforslag/L131/som\\_fremsat.htm](http://www.ft.dk/Samling/20042/lovforslag/L131/som_fremsat.htm)>.

12 On the political use of Islamophobia and multiculturalism, cf. Timothy Garton Ash, “Multiculturalismo en el Reino Unido” in *El País*, 04/02/07.

crucial for us to have the chance to protect people from abuse, threat or humiliation because of their belief, sexual orientation, ethnic origin or other reasons". The secular nature of this political party led it to consider that this protection was already offered by the so-called "article against racism" (*racismeparagraffen*, 266b).

So, in reality, both parties, those of the left and the right, defended the suppression of article 140 or the article on blasphemy, albeit for different reasons. The former for exclusively political reasons, to allow the true separation of State and Church that, in turn, would require an amendment of the Danish constitutional base, and the latter by virtue of the very Christian tolerance expressed not only in the words of Christ but also in the process of enlightenment that Lutheranism had exercised over the Christian doctrine.

## 2.2. The suit and the judicial decision

The action brought before the court in Viborg by several Muslim associations located in Denmark was rejected at the first trial and the Crown Prosecution then gave its decision, with a subsequent hearing by the court at Aarhus.

The reason provided by the ruling does not offer anything relevant from a legal point of view, as it restricts itself to stating that, as there was no will to offend or insult Muslims, the articles in question were not applicable: "Although the text by Flemming Rose can be read as incitement to mockery, scorn and ridicule, which may be necessary, according to the author, in order to highlight and deal with the problem of self-censorship, the drawings are not of this nature. One cannot rule out, with any certainty, that the drawings have offended honour of some Muslims but there are no grounds to suppose that the drawings were designed or created to be offensive or that their objective was to display manifestations that may demean Muslims in the eyes of their fellow citizens".<sup>13</sup> This justification therefore seems to support, *a posteriori*, a decision that has already been taken: not to allow the feeling of offence of a social minority to alter the uses and customs of a country in which irony and satirical tradition are well established. It is true that

this is not the argument given by the judge but we must suppose, and with good reason, that the precedent that would have resulted from punishment being given was an underlying reason for this legal ruling.

## 3. Multicultural reactions: self-censorship, political correctness and offence

### 3.1. A meta-debate?

One of the basic institutions of liberal democracies is the public debate carried out in society. However, the frontiers of public debate are not clearly defined. Jürgen Habermas claims that, in "political, scientific or literary controversies, [...] the public does not consist of an area of viewers and listeners but of an area of speakers and receivers parrying with each other. It is an exchange of reasons, not a convergence of views. Participants in discourses that are concentrated on a common thing turn their back, as it were, on their private lives. They do not need to talk about themselves. The public and private sphere are not mixed but enter into a complementary relationship".<sup>14</sup> These are dialogues or exchanges of opinion in which individuals form their own ideas and adopt a conception of the political and social reality of their surroundings that will allow them to exercise their political rights in an informed way and, in the best of cases, will strengthen the state's democratic life. These conversations usually deal with issues disseminated by the mass media, so that we may plausibly state that the mass media establish the agenda to be debated and that, therefore, they hold democratic responsibility.

In the case in point, the JP editors claim that public debate in Denmark is in bad shape, as some citizens wish to exclude certain issues from the public area claiming that they deserve special respect on the part of those citizens who do not share their way of life or their beliefs, because they affect issues that their religion considers to be taboo, as seems to be the case of the representation of Mohammed by Muslims.<sup>15</sup>

13 <<http://www.cfje.dk/cfje/lovbasen.nsf/ID/LB04926989>>.

14 HABERMAS (2006): 19.

They also state that complaints by these minorities are accompanied by veiled or explicit threats that have managed to intimidate creators and journalists to the extent of silencing them. The result is that press and media professionals avoid some issues out of fear and not out of respect.<sup>16</sup> So, as supported by the ruling from the court at Aarhus, the intention of the writers is not to mock Muslims or to ridicule them but to reflect on the health of public debate in Denmark. The illness diagnosed by these editors is the severe self-censorship caused by the fear of possible violent consequences of publishing controversial subjects. The debate, therefore, is rather a meta-debate, i.e. a debate about the state of public debate. In fact, all serious debate is meta-debate because, when there is serious but reasonable disagreement, it is necessary to talk about the very possibility of dialogue, about the capacity of the citizens involved to understand each other, as well as about the meaning of the very terms under which dialogue must be carried out. And it makes no sense to apply discursive limitations to serious meta-debate, as these very restrictions are the object of discussion.

The initial piece of the meta-debate is the text by Flemming Rose that accompanies the cartoons, as well as the editorial from the same day. The two pieces may be considered as contributions to a debate on self-censorship in public debate. Not only because of their content but also because, due to the way they are presented, they are liable to be considered as relevant, calm, reasonable and even moderate contributions, i.e. they meet some of the traits considered by John Stuart Mill as essential to the morality of public discussion ([1869] 1984: 122). So these two texts are not mere mockery or insult of religion nor do they wish to offend, but they are dealing with a matter of public interest and thereby help to form readers' opinions.

Notwithstanding this, Larsen and Seidenfaden's analysis denies the major premise: "If we observe the criticism submitted by ethnic minorities without forgetting the rhetoric used in this context, self-censorship seems to stand out more because of its absence rather than its obstructive influence on political debate".<sup>17</sup> These authors present numerous examples of speeches and articles, not only by representatives of the *Dansk Folkeparti*, in which Muslim immigration is classified as an "occupation force", as "colonisation" from an inferior level of society and the representation of an "ideology of evil". Islam is seen as a threat to the future of Denmark and Europe and it is claimed we must defend ourselves by sending them "back to their medieval countries". Even the minister of Culture, five days before the cartoons were published, claimed that it was necessary to "end decades of tyranny of politically correct opinion" and to accept that "a parallel society is developing in the midst of our country in which minorities observe their medieval rules and anti-democratic ideas. We cannot accept this. This is the new front of the cultural battle."<sup>18</sup> This reference to what is politically correct offers a rhetorical key to interpretation since, if there is a tyranny that restricts discourse, then such revelation appears subversive. It is "conservative discourse of subversive appearance"<sup>19</sup> that makes a great show of being shocked, claiming it has the courage to tell the truth, something not held by those subject to the tyranny of what is politically correct.

This discourse becomes something like the bastard child of a politically correct society, which gives way with "tremulous docility" before those who have been supposedly "offended" by cartoons<sup>20</sup> of the prophet of their religion. What fans this conservative discourse is the excesses of multiculturalism, of what is politically correct.

**15** On this ban and its origins, cf. Oleg Grabar (1981): 87-109. Rather than iconoclastic, it seems we should talk of an "aniconic" attitude (cf. Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar (1996): 28).

**16** "We have heard many people vehemently defend the sacrosanct free speech. And talk about the fact that this should not be used to disrespect one's fellow man. Why do they call it *respect* when they really mean *fear*?", Fernando Savater (2007): 236.

**17** Larsen and Seidenfaden (2006): 20.

**18** *Idem*, 18.

**19** Salvador Cardús, "De lo correcto a lo biempensante", *La Vanguardia*, 16/05/07.

This attitude, born in the North American university campuses in the eighties, arose out of respect for ethnic, cultural, religious and sexual minorities as a limitation to free speech and self-imposed due to multicultural belief and due to a radical interpretation of tolerance. Out of respect, voices remain silent that, not without condescension, may be offensive for a minority. This principle undoubtedly has a commendable intent, as demonstrated by the goal used to justify limiting free speech: namely, a conception of a 'good life' that includes respect for differences, expressed in how these differences are handled every day. Something that goes beyond co-existence and is more community spirit. Free speech is secondary to this conception of good and becomes an instrument to achieve this purpose. Contrary to considering free speech as an unlimited right, the mere mention of which serves as justification, Stanley Fish states that "free speech is never a value in and of itself but is always produced within the precincts of some assumed conception of the good, to which it must yield in the event of conflict".<sup>21</sup>

Notwithstanding this, good intentions do not always lead to actions in accordance with the circumstances. A couple of recent stories in West Yorkshire, an English county with a considerable number of inhabitants of non-British origin, illustrate the absurdity of a multiculturalism that respects based on condescending ignorance. In Batley, a town of 43,000 inhabitants, in a school for children under seven, books containing pigs were removed from classrooms. Ms. Barbara Harris, director of the Park Road Junior Infant and Nursery School, defended this measure because "we try to be sensitive to the fact that, for Muslims, talking about pigs is offensive".<sup>22</sup> Four years later, in Huddersfield, the organisers of a children's music festival changed the title of the "Three Little Pigs" to the "Three Little Puppies" because, as claimed by a teacher in a local school, "we must be sensitive

if we want to be multicultural. It was felt that it would be more responsible not to use the three little pigs. We were afraid that some Muslim children would not sing the words about pigs. We didn't want to run this risk. If changing a few words prevents offence, then we will change them".<sup>23</sup> These well-intentioned multiculturalists did not think of investigating whether the Koran merely prevents the eating of pigs or also singing about pigs or simply talking about them. After rever-sing the decision to modify the title one day later, a member of the local educational institution stated that "no complaints have been received from the allegedly offended people",<sup>24</sup> so that the proposal was overly sensitive, a case in which putting yourself in the place of another leads to becoming sensitive about a false fact, to creating an erroneous image of the other, treating them with a sensitivity they have neither demanded nor require.

In short, the JP editors showed themselves to oppose such abuses of what is politically correct, as they did not attribute such actions to reasonable self-restriction but to self-censorship provoked by intimidation on the part of Muslims. For their part, Larsen and Seidenfaden demonstrate that the discourse of what is politically correct does not govern Danish public debate, especially since the *Dansk Folkeparti* forms part of Anders Fogh Rasmussen's coalition government. If these authors' analysis is correct, then the supposed meta-debate is no more than an excuse to promote an Islamophobic discourse that sees Muslims as a danger for Denmark's individual freedoms. However, this political use of immigrants by JP does not stop a debate arising on what "Danishness" means and on citizenship. Indeed, this debate starts with decidedly gratuitous provocation (such as the cartoons) and may be offensive, which leads us to our last question: how should the media handle this multicultural phenomenon?

20 Savater (2007): 133.

21 Quoted in Vila-Sanjuán (2004): 415.

22 "School bans pigs stories", 4/03/03, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/england/2818809.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/2818809.stm)>.

23 "Church school renames *Three Little Pigs* to avoid offending Muslims", *Daily Mail*, 15/03/07.

24 "Comeback for 'non-offensive' pigs", 16/03/07, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/england/bradford/6456961.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/bradford/6456961.stm)>.

### 3.2. Otherness as perceived by the media: respect and information

It is not misguided to state that the Mohammed cartoons that accompanied the text mentioned in the previous section had a provocative intent, i.e. they were designed to provoke a negative reaction in those who would see them as violating a religious precept. Provocation does not always help public debate creatively but admitting it is a symptom of the good discursive health of a society. Public debate carried out without obstacles and without suspicion is one in which participants can live together with mockery, as they are sufficiently assured for mockery not to mean their rights as citizens are not respected. Hence, in confirming the hobbling and weakened state of public discussion, it is necessary, according to the illustrators, to assume a healthy appearance by provoking.

In all eras there have been forms of art or burlesque in which provocation was used to convey messages or to question the way in which certain issues were being handled in the public sphere. Traditionally, provocation did not form part of large-scale public debate and was confined to small, not very representative areas of public opinion, in general. For example, we should think of the Weimar Republic's tradition of political cabaret or of the later underground forms, fanzines, visual experiments that will never be seen on television or websites of small "groupuscules".

The free speech that, in principle, protected such provocation was not meant to protect majorities but minorities. The tradition of cabaret, for example, was opposed to 'good' customs in the name of liberating women and homosexuals and it criticised politicians and social hypocrisy. That's why a problem arises when it is the minorities who are being mocked. Benjamin Barber presented this question well in an article published while the conflict was still raging: "The original Danish provocation, together with the subsequent editorial arrogance of European directors who published the offensive cartoons again, actually reflects the West's incapacity to understand the meaning and purpose of its

much-publicised tradition of freedom of the press and to accept at least part of the responsibility for the consequences of the aforementioned incapacity, as this has affected Muslim societies the world over. [...] Free speech exists to offset power. The rule is simple: the law may insist on formal parity in order to protect free speech, but democratic freedom requires the scope of free speech to be restricted by the realities of power and by the responsibilities these entail. The more powerful the orator, the less need for an absolute right to free speech; the more vulnerable and weak, the greater the need. [...] Although laws protecting free speech apply a neutral criterion, those employing this right effectively, especially when the content is subversive or offensive, must ask themselves not only if they have a right to say what they are saying but whether, when they do so, they are preventing or extending an abuse of power."<sup>25</sup>

Afterwards, when those who supposedly talk on behalf of the country's moral majority arrogate unlimited free speech, it is therefore logical to allude to the responsibility of journalists. What do they have to bear in mind with regard to their responsibility? It's unlikely they could take into account the possible offence that might be felt by those minorities suffering mockery. When all is said and done, offence depends on each person's degree of susceptibility and it is impossible to distinguish real from fake. So that, instead of using the presumable feeling of offence of others as a criterion to measure the appropriateness of publishing a text or cartoon that is likely to offend, mass media professionals should notice whether their work contributes to damaging the freedoms of the minority that is being mocked.

The problem becomes more complicated when we remember that what characterises these minorities is their religion and when, therefore, what they are demanding protection for is precisely religious dogma. What is at stake is whether religious beliefs must be respected. The initiative of JP, whether justified by the existence of self-censorship or not, is placed within the context of anti-religious secularity

25 Benjamin Barber, "¿Guerra cultural o mala interpretación de la libertad?", *El País*, 24/02/06.

26 Savater (2007): 150. However, this anti-religious feeling is not directed with the same animosity towards Protestantism, strongly established in Danish society, the supposed legacy and inspiration of European enlightenment.

that believes "religious beliefs and traditions should not enjoy special dispensation, as they often demand".<sup>26</sup> There are numerous voices against the increase in religions or the so-called "return of religiousness"<sup>27</sup> that are calling for a secularity that focuses respect on people and not on religion, as if the latter were the primordial source of personal identity and should therefore be protected against criticism.

A. C. Grayling states that the respect due to religion is the same as that due to issues chosen by individuals. So "the respect due our fellow humans must be based on their humanity, irrespective of the things they cannot choose (ethnic group, age, sexuality, natural talents, presence or absence of a handicap) and must be conditioned (i.e. not for intrinsic reasons) by the things that are chosen (political affiliation, belief system, lifestyle)".<sup>28</sup> If we accept that religion is an option chosen by citizens,<sup>29</sup> then the use of free speech is justified to criticise them, as the act of silencing requires "people who do not accept the beliefs and practices of the believers to treat them in a way that implicitly accepts the value given to them by those who do believe",<sup>30</sup> ending up by annulling, in advance, all attempts at criticism.

This radical secularism defends an approach to religions or religiousness in general that is free from any complex. A society based on the permanent criticism of its very fundamentals, it is argued, does not have a reason to

consider some issues as immune. The question, however, is not purely intellectual or academic but also has political implications, as numerous stereotypes have penetrated the socially extended image of Islam, sometimes resulting from ignorance that, in turn, may help to weaken the freedoms of the Muslim minority.

Integration policies are the area in which both "conservatives" and "progressists" act out their differences. On the one hand, Denmark is seen as an archetypical nation state<sup>31</sup> that defends its identity as the last unionising element of a society threatened by the growing cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of its inhabitants. This presentation of the problem reflects a world view that has gradually stiffened since the beginning of this new century, according to which the West, enlightenment, the rule of law, the Christian legacy and democratic freedoms are all opposed to an East where darkness, totalitarianism, Islamic fundamentalism and the domination of people by a minority all prevail. A division that, in terms of immigration policy, is the equivalent of polarisation between integration and maintaining one's own identity, between unity and diversity, between a homogeneous secular nation and a variegated multicultural society.<sup>32</sup> A division that, in turn, is reproduced in the self-images of Denmark, on the one hand, that of those who defend Danishness at all cost and who see

**27** Cf. Corm (2007): chapters 1 and 2, stating that this return by religion is secondary to political or nationalist motivations.

**28** Grayling (2007): 18.

**29** "What power and what organisational force would a purely voluntary faith maintain?" wonders Michael Walzer (1998: 83). In other words, can we say that individuals choose their religion in the same way as they choose their aesthetic, political or consumer preferences, for example? Can religiousness survive "in a system where there is a network of free associations"? "What is certain is that we do not know to what extent "identity" and "faith" depend on coercion, nor whether they can occur under conditions of freedom" (Walzer (1995): 21).

**30** Grayling (2007): 19.

**31** The concept of cultural homogeneity is, in this way, the most important defining element in constructing the Danish nation", Ulla Holm, "Dinamarca: ¿el patito feo de la política internacional?", <<http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/932.asp>>.

**32** "On both sides, the radicals have tried to eliminate the middle ground, and this is extremely dangerous. The Muslims who vandalised embassies and brandished placards vowing to execute the cartoonists have fulfilled the stereotypical view of "Islam" in the west: a religion seen as violent, fanatical, self-destructive and atavistically opposed to freedom. At the same time, those who aggressively support the repeated publication of the cartoons embody the view many Muslims have of "the west": as arrogant, disdainful of religion, chronically Islamophobic, and guilty of double standards - proudly boasting of its tolerance, but not applying it to anything Islamic. When the dust has settled after the crisis, these negative stereotypes will be more entrenched, to the detriment of a final reconciliation", Karen Armstrong, "We can defuse this tension between competing conceptions of the sacred", *The Guardian*, 11/03/06.

foreigners as a potential long-term threat and, on the other hand, that of those who see Denmark as a country that welcomes foreigners, that defends tolerance and international respect for human rights. After the end of the golden age of Scandinavian social democracy, this confrontation has gradually shifted towards the former.

This perpetration of stereotypes may be considered as one of the lessons to be learned from the exercise that Flemming Rose proposed for the Danish cartoonists.<sup>33</sup> In the aforementioned message, the editor invited them to draw Mohammed “as they see him”. And how do they see him? Well, as presented by the western media, so that what is actually at stake in the cartoons is the very image of the Muslim religion disseminated by the western media, and more specifically the Danish media. We undoubtedly have to assess empirically which conception of Islam is being propagated via the media. However, it seems plausible to suggest that the news usually emphasises the link between Islam and violence, highlighting terrorists’ religious motives and presenting, ultimately, a west-oriented biased view of the Muslim religious phenomenon.<sup>34</sup> What is shown in the

cartoons and in the journalistic initiative is the “western perception of the Islamic phenomenon”.<sup>35</sup> Could it be otherwise? In other words, is an image possible without stereotypes? Can an image of the other be constructed that does not bring with it centuries and centuries of platitudes?<sup>36</sup>

It is plausible to claim that there is something of truth in these stereotypes. In any case, this hypothesis cannot be rejected *a priori*, as there are numerous examples that support it. However, the rhetoric behind these stereotypes of the “clash of civilisations”<sup>37</sup> does not take other factors into consideration (social, economic, demographic, geopolitical, etc.), such as the internal pluralism of Islam, essential for any exhaustive and informed view of the plural societies in Europe.

We are therefore faced with a *de facto* question<sup>38</sup> namely, can Islamist terrorist violence be attributed to Islam? Must journalists be thoroughly informed of the reasons for the violence? Must they read Islamic theologians and pay attention to all the versions of this religion? In short, can this question be resolved by describing the facts adequately,

**33** This is one of the conclusions reached by Anne Sofie Aanes in her thesis “Karikaturesagen – en diskursanalyse af fællesskabskonstruktioner i avisdebatten”. After an exhaustive analysis of the reactions during the “cartoon crisis” in the Danish press, she concludes that the discourse of culture clash became hegemonic, to such an extent that the radical counter-position between “them and us” providing its thematic structure was also adopted by discourses attempting to accentuate citizenship as a common feature of all those involved in the debate, both Christian and Muslim Danes.

**34** In this respect we should read the claim by Georges Corm on “the tranquil aplomb with which academic or journalistic discourses let us enter the most outdated platitudes without bothering to introduce the tiniest nuance”, thereby contributing to “the perverse omnipresence of the religiousness and religion”, in Corm (2007): 24.

**35** PHARES, W. “La Jihad viñetesca”, Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos (GEES). In: *Colaboraciones*, no. 833, 06/03/06 <<http://www.gees.org/articulo/2225>>.

**36** This same question was asked, not without a certain deceptive intent, by the people behind a float that took place in the Düsseldorf carnival procession on 19 February 2007, showing two Islamic terrorists armed with explosives, guns and scimitars, both with signs saying “Reality” and “Cliché”. It is symptomatic of these cartoons’ strength to incite debate that the footnote of the paper that reproduced these signs added a question mark. This reveals that figures are not only seen as potentially offensive but are above all interpreted as public contributions to the debate on stereotypes that is inevitably generated by the mass media. Meanwhile, the Council of Muslims in Germany contributed to the debate with a new reactive stereotype, saying that this was “provocation for provocation’s sake” (*La Vanguardia*, 20/02/07).

**37** So, according to Henry Kamen, what is settled in this conflict is “whether our century is to be that of enlightenment or darkening”, “Los enemigos de la libertad humana”, *El Mundo*, 07/04/06.

**38** “The maxim of argument that there may be in the discussion of a moral problem is the establishment of facts but when the facts have been established, diverging opinions may still be presented regarding questions of value. So it is not possible to do any more than accept the disagreement, try to persuade the other using non-rational means or, in the last resort, fight against him” (Hare [1997] 2000: 51).

clarifying the diverse trends of Islam and doing justice to this religion's more tolerant versions? If this requirement is not met, there is the risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, i.e. Islam and the citizens who believe in it with those who hide behind it in order to commit violent acts.

Instructive in this instance is the debate initiated by the German TV channel, ZDF, on broadcasting a programme about Islam entitled "Friday's word" (*Wort zum Freitag*), echoing its "Sunday's word" (*Wort zum Sonntag*), dedicated to Christianity. This new programme was not aimed at Muslims but at all German society that did not know much about Islam, as stated by the chief editor of ZDF, Nikolaus Brenner. He then added, "That's why society has the right to get to know this religion better via questions. Hence I imagine a dialogue format".<sup>39</sup> To this, the secretary general of the Central Council of Muslims, Aiman Mazyek, answered that it did not make sense to use this programme as a forum in which to tackle Islam. He postulated that "it is more a question of creating, according to the constitutional principle of the German constitution and in a similar way to "Sunday's word", a forum for sermons by representatives from other religious communities". So that, according to Mazyek, Islamic associations should be responsible for the content of the broadcast, although he did not specify how to contrive a "tranquil and open debate" with these groups. This is something that was finally carried out with the first broadcast, in this case on an SWR radio station, of "Friday's word" on 20 April 2007, precisely by the aforementioned Aiman Mazyek. This initiative supposes the recognition of the existence of 3.5 million Muslims, putting Islam on a more normal footing by increasing people's knowledge of this not only on the part of Muslims but also the rest of society, as this programme will be the same as those already being broadcast for Christianity and Judaism. In fact, the broadcasting of "Friday's word" merely implements the German

constitutional mandate that obliges the state media to offer a space for religious beliefs, to meet the demands of all taxpayers. As mentioned by one of the directors of the radio station, Peter Voß, it was a question of offering Muslims the chance to preach their faith, so it is not designed for Muslims to talk about Islam but for them to publicly profess their faith via a state channel, although the idea was for the editorial office to monitor the programme's content, something that does not happen with the programme dedicated to Christianity. As a result of the debate that arose on announcing this broadcast, it was discussed whether more radical Islamists might use the programme to disseminate their faith, something which Peter Voß had not even contemplated, as he trusted that "there are quite a few Muslims who follow the liberal tradition and wish to live in Germany according to the country's customs and, therefore, who can take charge of the programme".<sup>40</sup>

This is a more advanced debate than the Danish one, something which can be attributed to Islam being more on a normal footing rather than its incipient state in Denmark. This sociological trend was revealed in the words of the Home Secretary, Wolfgang Schäuble, for the Conference on Islam held in Berlin, "Islam forms part of Germany and of Europe; it forms part of our present and our future. Muslims are welcome in Germany and we are therefore asking ourselves who should represent Islam, who is authorised to do so, who is representative, as well as the difference there must be between informing and proselytising".<sup>41</sup>

This is a debate that, in the same way as in the case of the cartoons, is actually a meta-debate, i.e. a discourse in Habermas' terms, in which the new rules of debate are discussed, in which the claims to truth of those involved become problematic. What is discussed is who the programme should be aimed at, i.e. what purpose must it fulfil: can it aspire to inform without resorting to any kind of

39 "ZDF und Muslime streiten über 'Wort zum Freitag'", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19/02/07.

40 "Man muß einen Anfang wagen" at <<http://www.swr.de>>.

41 "Der Islam ist Teil Deutschlands", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25/09/06.



proselytising? What would be bad in that? We concede that proselytising would not be justified, as the media should not be responsible for carrying out the work befitting the different religions. But we might aspire to the media helping not only to cultivate the virtues of our world view per se or of the community but also to the cosmopolitan education of citizens. This is the aspiration of Martha Nussbaum, for example, who claims that “we will not know what we are judging until we see the meaning of an action according to the actions of the person who carries it out”.<sup>42</sup> This degree of understanding of otherness makes no sense without a correction of otherness that is not necessarily supported by the possible self-criticism carried out by others. In other words, not only on internal criticism but on external, i.e. based on the values of the western tradition per se.

This German example leads us to wonder whether media professionals should propitiate peaceful co-existence in diverse societies, encouraging social conciliation instead of aggravation. When all is said and done, information per se cannot be the ultimate purpose of journalists. Quite the reverse; they must facilitate public discussion, attending not only to issues that may lead to a negative response or mere morbidity, but especially to those that can help the coming-together of citizens, albeit with discrepancies.

As a normative proposal, we may therefore venture that the purpose of the work of mass media professionals should be to avoid the ill-will of serious disagreement and to propitiate an understanding of otherness that is shown to be reasonable and prepared to respect the basic institutions of the host country. But this aim has a *petitio principii*, i.e. as in Rawls' terms, the reasonableness or decency of the other is precisely what is in question. So debate must not presuppose the desirability of reaching an understanding with the other but must be started in order to clarify whether the other deserves to be understood under his or her own terms. In short, whether the link between Islam and violence is real or is an excuse used by fanatics. And here we find ourselves back at the beginning, namely the urgent need to resolve the issue of Islamic theology and traditions. In this

respect, provocation and mockery allow us to diagnose the degree of modernity, in the European sense of the term (if there is any other) of Muslims located in the West. If they accept this, then they may be considered as sufficiently enlightened (and perhaps as decadent) as Europeans. If, on the other hand, they persist in their desire for unconditional respect for their religious precepts, then we will have to consider whether the unequal distribution of the duty of tolerance involved in these people living in a secular society does not constitute an excessive demand.

42 NUSSBAUM (2005): 30.

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# The crisis of the Mohammed cartoons in the European Union and the Mediterranean: contexts, reactions and media<sup>1</sup>

**Alain Blomart**

- *In September 2006, EuroMeSCo carried out a survey on the cartoon crisis in eighteen countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Association. This article contains the key findings highlighted by the report drawn up by the European Mediterranean Institute of Barcelona. The attitudes of these countries are described concerning various factors (government reaction, the role of the media, the reaction of foreign communities, political, religious, cultural and academic debates, the role of the European Union and of the Euro-Mediterranean Association, etc.)*

## **Keywords**

Caricatures, Euro-Mediterranean Association, European Institute of the Mediterranean, governments, media, foreign communities, religion, Islam, Mohammed, religious communities, cultural and academic debate, European Union, free speech, religious freedom, blasphemy, censorship, Denmark, discrimination, racism.

In September 2006, EuroMeSCo carried out a survey on the cartoon crisis in eighteen countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Association (France, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Spain, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Turkey, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, the Palestine Authority, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Israel). The European Mediterranean Institute was responsible for drawing up a report summarising the reactions of the different countries according to various aspects (government reaction, the role of the media, the reaction of foreign communities, political, religious, cultural and academic debates, the role of the European Union and of the Euro-Mediterranean Association, etc.).<sup>2</sup> Before summarising the findings of this report, we should describe the context of the different countries before the cartoon crisis.

## **1. Political and social context of the different countries**

The aim here is not to be exhaustive, as this is not the purpose of the article, but to present some of the most representative political and social characteristics of the countries examined in order to understand what led them to react in one way or another at the time of the cartoon crisis. Here we have the main countries, classified according to whether they belong to the European Union or to the south of the Euro-Mediterranean Association and, within these cate-

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1 This article, which contains an extensive reflection on the media, is a development of the article published in *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*, 2007.

2 The complete text of this report is available at: <http://www.euromesco.net/images//57caricaturesdemohammed.pdf>.

gories, according to their number of Muslims. Denmark appears first as it is where the crisis originated:

1. **Denmark:** there was a general climate of hostility and discrimination against foreigners (at work, in leisure, etc.). This xenophobic and particularly Islamophobic atmosphere must be related to the influence of the Party of the Danish People, nationalist and racist in nature, in the government: some members of this party had compared Muslims to "cancerous cells"!
2. **France:** at the end of 2005, this country had just gone through its serious riots in suburbs involving people of foreign extraction, mainly Muslims. This event, added to the presence of a large Muslim community (the largest in western Europe), encouraged the government to take a cautious approach to avoid an even greater crisis.
3. **Germany:** also has a very large Muslim community (three million) that is discriminated against in education and work, a fact that led to great debate on the failure of its integration policy before the cartoon crisis. On the other hand, Germany had recently taken on the role of mediator in the Palestinian conflict and, for this reason, wanted to maintain good relations with the Muslim countries neighbouring Israel and support moderate Muslim voices.
4. **Belgium:** was going through an electoral pre-campaign period, as the municipal elections were to be held in October 2006. For this reason, no party was interested in entering into controversial debates. On the other hand, a significant part of the Muslim population has Belgian nationality and it can be said that there is strong integration in Belgian institutions (schools, etc.) and Belgian politics, so radical postures tended to be avoided.
5. **Italy:** was also going through an electoral pre-campaign as well as organising the Winter Olympic Games at Turin (starting on 10 February 2006). These national and international interests might suggest a prudent attitude on the part of Berlusconi's government in the cartoon crisis, although mistrust towards Muslims is relatively widespread.
6. **Spain:** a bad image of Islam was also seen to be spreading, as well as less politically correct discourses than previously. This trend was reinforced during the years the Partido Popular was in government, as it associates growing immigration with insecurity and delinquency.

However, the current socialist government, which handled the cartoon crisis, has made dialogue its constant theme and the Alliance of Civilisations its international project, attempting to build bridges with the Muslim world.

7. **Estonia:** has a historical relationship of exchanging political favours with Denmark, explained by Danish support for Estonia in political, financial and social spheres during the last decade. This situation, combined with a very small Muslim community, made it likely that Estonia, as well as Lithuania, would support the Danish position and the European position in general in the cartoon crisis.
8. **Hungary:** is a country that has recently joined the European Union and, for this reason and also due to its lack of a large foreign community, was interested in aligning itself with the European position at the time of the cartoon crisis.
9. **Turkey:** more than 98% of its population is Muslim and the party in government, sympathetic towards Muslims, is the co-promoter, together with the Spanish government, of the Alliance of Civilisations.
10. **The countries of North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia), as well as Egypt:** all have a Muslim majority and hold religion and its symbols sacred, making it very difficult for the media to disseminate points of view that question these spiritual values. On the other hand, religious authority depends on the political power (either in the king of Morocco or whoever is in government in Tunisia or Egypt).
11. **Lebanon:** since October 2004, it has undergone a wave of attacks attributed to Syria by the parliamentary majority. The country is in fact divided between pro-Syrians (Hezbollah, Palestinian organisations, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad) and anti-Syrians (close to the "Future" trend of the prime minister, Rafic Hariri).

## 2. Summary of the reactions of the different countries

Based on the survey carried out by EuroMeSCo, we can summarise the reactions and attitudes of the different countries with regard to the ten aspects covered:

## 2.1. Official reactions

Denmark showed a radical position of free speech, influenced by the Party of the Danish People, presenting the cartoon crisis as a threat to Danish values and identifying Muslims (not a specific group of radical Muslims) as enemies.

The other countries in the European Union also defended free speech but with many more distinctions: France added the need for responsibility and prudence (motivated by the fear of radicalisation in its numerous Muslim communities but also of this leading to national revolts and of it upsetting their international relations). Germany, as well as Estonia and Hungary, gave the same importance to religious freedom as free speech. Italy and Spain, for the aforementioned political reasons, demanded moderation and dialogue. With regard to the Belgian government, it preferred not to adopt any official position as the elections were approaching and the Muslim vote was starting to have a certain influence.

The countries from the south of the Euro-Mediterranean Association (Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, etc.) condemned all the cartoons and prioritised respect and moderation, defending that free speech has its limits. The Moroccan government even organised a protest with the slogan: "Yes to free speech, no to disrespect for religion". On the other hand, we should pay particular attention to Turkey and its committed attitude to non-violent dialogue, explained by its role as a co-promoter of the Alliance of Civilisations.

The Israeli government opted for prudence and avoided any official reaction so as not to get involved in the crisis.

## 2.2. Political debate

The same priorities are to be found in the political debate as in the official reactions.

We can see consensus concerning free speech among all the parties in the European Union, but each country could also have other priorities. Respect for religion in France and Estonia, responsibility and tolerance in Italy and Lithuania, etc. We have also sometimes observed different priorities within the same country, for political or religious reasons. For example, in Germany and Hungary, the non-secular parties emphasised respect for religious freedom more than free speech. In Spain, the conservative party in opposition (the Partido Popular) presented itself as a defender of wes-

tern values (i.e. free speech without concessions to Islam), while the government (socialist) was more moderate and sensitive to the limits of free speech. This same political debate occurred in Italy and those in favour of open discourse concerning Islam opposed those defending a closed discourse.

With regard to the countries in the south of the Euro-Mediterranean Association (Turkey, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, etc.), all parties agreed concerning their condemnation of the cartoons, respect for religion and limits to free speech. The only difference lay in its political possibilities, such as in the Lebanon, where the cartoon crisis led to opposition between pro-Syrians and anti-Syrians. We also find other differences, as in Egypt: e.g. the call to boycott Danish products demanded by the conservatives.

One important element, valid for all countries without exception, was that the cartoon crisis did not have any impact on party programmes nor any kind of influence on political debate after the crisis.

## 2.3. Religious debate

Firstly, we should note that, without exception, Muslim authorities in all the countries condemned the cartoons. It should also be noted that, even in those countries from the Association with a Muslim majority (Turkey, Tunisia, etc.), this condemnation was almost always accompanied by an attitude of moderation and rejection of violence on the part of religious authorities, although in some cases there were groups, such as in Egypt, that wished to toughen relations with Denmark and spread radical rhetoric. The protests organised in Europe (in London, Brussels, Paris, Berlin, Düsseldorf, Bern, Barcelona, etc.), on the initiative of Muslim communities, were peaceful and did not give rise to large demonstrations, unlike those organised in countries with a Muslim majority in the month of February 2006.

Other religious communities (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish) from all countries, including Israel, joined the Muslim position, demanding respect, sensitivity towards beliefs and a responsible use of free speech.

We can also observe a consensus concerning condemnation of violence on the part of religious authorities, principally in Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Turkey, Tunisia and Israel.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the country where the controversy occurred (Denmark) underwent a debate in the heart of its Muslim community: numerous Danish Muslims considered that the debate was being monopolised by the Imams and, as they did not feel represented, created a new organisation: "Democratic Muslims".

#### **2.4. Attitude of the population**

Within the European Union, we could say that the population of some countries (such as France) disapproved quite generally of the cartoons, considering them to be aggressive, but public opinion in many countries (such as Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania and Spain) was quite mitigated, not to say divided, between people (especially Catholics) who opposed the debasing of religion on the one hand, and those in favour of free speech on the other. Often these feelings were combined, more than might be necessary, with a bad image of Islam, extended throughout society (as in the case of Denmark, Italy and Spain, where reticent attitudes have developed given the huge arrival of foreigners).

In the other Association countries (Turkey, Algeria, Tunisia, etc.), the general feeling was one of an offence to religion, although the tone of this reaction differed, sometimes depending on the level of education, social level or political leanings. This indignation led to demonstrations (in Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan and the Lebanon), sometimes accompanied by violent acts against the embassies of Denmark and Norway.

#### **2.5. Foreign communities**

In those countries of the European Union where there are Muslim communities, condemnation of the cartoons and the lack of respect for Islam were unanimous by these communities (of Northern African origin or other).

On the other hand, we must also take into account the fact that, in a lot of countries (France, Germany, Denmark, Italy and Spain), foreign communities are or feel they are victims of social discrimination and prejudice. On the other hand, in Belgium it seems that the fact that Muslims are more integrated within the country's structures explains, in part, the moderate stances shown during the crisis.

Finally, in most cases the controversy of the cartoons did not lead to any political measure regarding these commu-

nities, except in Italy, where the Muslim Council was created during the crisis.

#### **2.6. Media debate**

The first finding is that, while the newspapers from some countries (naturally from Denmark, but also from France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Hungary, etc.) decided to publish the cartoons, or at least some of them, in the name of free speech and freedom of information, the newspapers from other countries expressly refused to reproduce them (Estonia, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, etc.). There was also the case of countries where the government banned their publication but where some newspapers defied the ban, as in the case of Jordan and especially Algeria, where the directors or editors in chief were imprisoned, based on an article in the penal code that prohibits offending the Prophet.

The second finding is that, in some countries (for example in France, Germany, Denmark and Spain), there was a difference between how television and radio handled the crisis and its handling by the press. The former were generally more sensationalist (insisting on the violence in countries with a Muslim majority, often making an analogy between the radicals and all Muslims). On the other hand, the press was, on the whole, more prudent, for example with more emphasis on analysing the crisis. It should be noted that, on occasions, any differences in media resided more in those associated with the government (as in Italy and Algeria) and the independent media. In other countries there was no kind of difference in the media (Estonia, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, Israel, etc.).

Thirdly, with regard to the themes tackled by the media, the most frequent (no matter which country) were free speech and its limits, respect for religion, Middle East conflict, the theory of the clash of civilisations or dialogue between civilisations and also, in some countries with a Muslim majority such as Egypt, how the West does not understand Islam. More rarely, as in the Lebanon, the themes of the political use of religion or of the racist nature of the cartoons were mentioned. In Jordan mention was also made of the "new anti-Muslim crusade".

## 2.7. Cultural debate

A debate between artists and writers only occurred in some countries such as France (concerning free speech and blasphemy), Germany (on free speech), Morocco (on the inappropriate violent reaction), Turkey, Egypt and Jordan (on limits to free speech and respect for religious beliefs), etc. In Denmark, writers were very active and they reminded people, in a protest, that ethnic minorities had been discriminated against for years.

On the other hand, in numerous countries (Italy, Spain, Lithuania, Algeria, Palestine, etc.), there was no kind of debate in artistic circles, or at least artists were not invited to participate in the media debate (as in the case of Tunisia).

## 2.8. Academic debate

Those countries where academic debate had an influence on public opinion were very rare: Germany (for the objective and international view of its experts), Spain (where they were widely publicised in the media) and Egypt (where lecturers from the University of Al-Azhar were very active in this crisis). But academic debate had very little influence in most countries.

With regard to the themes tackled by academic debate, we may cite, among others, blasphemy, freedom, the limits to free speech, the representation of Mohammed, secularism, the theory of the clash of civilisations and violence in the Middle East.

## 2.9. Function of the Euro-Mediterranean Association and of the European Union

We can state that almost no country in the European Union or from the Euro-Mediterranean Association made any reference to this Association.

The European Union was perceived by the countries as a whole as weak, divided and absent in the cartoon crisis.

## 2.10. Implications and solutions for the future

Here are some of the conclusions deduced from the crisis and some suggestions proposed by experts interviewed for this report:

- need for more efficacy and unity in European Union foreign policy;
- need for larger presence of institutions and more trans-

parent management of this kind of crisis;

- need for reflection on the part of the European Union on the notion of free speech and on its possible limits;
- need for interreligious dialogue between the "West" and the Muslim world;
- need to combat racism and stereotypes;
- preparation of televised school programmes to combat stereotypes, aimed at raising awareness of the Arab world;
- need for ethical accountability on the part of the media and politicians;
- preparation of crisis communication plans for the media;
- better integration policies for Muslim communities in European countries;
- need for or ineffectiveness of censorship and legal restrictions to protect religious beliefs.

## 3. The media

Although the media debate has been summarised in the above paragraph, in a journal dedicated to the media it is worth analysing in detail the media's reaction in the eighteen countries interviewed from the European Union and the Mediterranean.

### 3.1. Denmark

As the cartoon crisis originated in Denmark, it appeared in the headlines of the media. News items on Muslims were often treated with a conflictive focus, as "them against us". With regard to the themes tackled, most of all was the anger against Denmark, the safety of Danish citizens in the Arab world and the consequences of the boycott of Danish products.

The television news tended to show more sensationalist events (burning the Danish flag and setting fire to Danish embassies) rather than really explaining what was happening. For this reason, many Danes continued to think after the crisis that it was the Middle East that had risen up and become an enemy of Denmark.

In the press, which often had editorials on the front page, the crisis led to a great diversity of points of view. Various newspapers mentioned the errors committed in handling the crisis, while others insisted on Denmark's image in the

Middle East. The newspaper *Jyllands-posten* was particularly prominent, as it had published the cartoons that started the controversy. Throughout the crisis, this newspaper defended the argument of free speech but, on 30 January 2006, the editor in chief published a statement apologising for having published the cartoons, which had been perceived as an insult. The government, for its part, did not react towards the media coverage.

### 3.2. France

The media supported the cartoonists in the name of free speech. Many of them reproduced the cartoons and were highly critical of politicians who condemned publication.

We should point out a difference in how the crisis was handled between television and radio, on the one hand, and the press on the other. In the first case, coverage focused on Muslims' reactions in the world, while the newspapers dedicated themselves more to analysing this reaction and defending the cartoonists.

The media took into account the point of view of the president of the Republic, who had personally called "for maximum spirit of responsibility, of respect and of measure to avoid anything that might hurt another's beliefs". As from this moment, the media debate revolved around two main themes: not only free speech but also respect for religion.

Behind the generalised caution (the newspaper *Libération* did not publish the cartoons, *France-Soir* published them but its director was fired) a fear could be detected of the consequences of free speech in the area of national security.

### 3.3. Germany

The German newspapers that published the cartoons were *Taz*, *Der Tagesspiegel* and *Die Berliner Zeitung*, which may be considered as the quality papers, and the newspaper *Die Welt*, which is more sensationalist in nature. With regard to weeklies, *Focus* and *Der Spiegel* reproduced a part of the drawings. Most of the rest of the newspapers refused to publish the cartoons, as they felt they deliberately injured religious beliefs. On the other hand, the editor in chief of *Taz* saw a need to inform in publishing them.

There was a big difference in how the sensationalist media treated the issue, insisting a great deal on the violence

against Danish or western institutions in Muslim countries and, on the other hand, the "quality" media, which analysed the political and cultural reasons for the crisis.

With regard to the arguments used by the media, the theory of the clash of civilisations was rejected by most. It was more likely to be the link between violence in Muslim countries, in particular Iraq and Palestine, that was emphasised. Publications more aimed at the economy widely covered the Iranian boycott of German goods.

### 3.4. Belgium

All the quality media covered the cartoon crisis and various daily and weekly newspapers published the cartoons, but more to inform rather than to express a controversial position.

On the other hand, the press differed little from the television or radio. Their attitude particularly consisted of: 1) providing information; 2) highlighting the extremes reached in some countries; 3) informing quite discretely about the Belgian situation, undoubtedly for fear of causing controversy. For this reason, the government did not have to react concerning how the media handled the issue.

### 3.5. Italy

All the media covered the cartoon crisis, without any great differences in how they treated the issue, and some newspapers such as *La Stampa* published them, but there was also a difference in how the sensationalist newspapers and "quality" press handled the issue, or more precisely between the press associated with the parties in power, tending to analyse the crisis through prejudices towards Islam, and the press associated with the opposition. In any case, there was no kind of conflict between the media and the government.

With regard to the arguments used by the media, the most frequent was that of associating the crisis with conflict in the Middle East.

### 3.6. Spain

The large majority of the Spanish press covered the cartoon crisis and some newspapers such as *El País*, *El Periódico de Catalunya* and *ABC* reproduced them. The press handled this controversy as an international crisis in which



Spain was indirectly affected as a member of the European Union, but also because it has troops in Afghanistan and a Muslim community. With regard to differences in how the press and television and radio handled the issue, we can say that the latter insisted on the violent episodes, tending to present them as a reaction of all Muslims and not a few radicals, while newspapers offered a more critical and global analysis.

With regard to the arguments used by the media, we can principally cite free speech, the theory of the clash of civilisations (or the need to avoid it) and the international context in the Middle East.

In addition to this, the cartoon crisis was also used by Spanish newspapers to position themselves with respect to the government. *El País* showed the virtues of the Alliance of Civilisations, while conservative and Catholic newspapers used the crisis to show how the socialist focus had eroded the areas of foreign policy and religious affairs.

The government did not react to the media, apart from a call for caution and dialogue aimed at all society.

### 3.7. Estonia

There was no significant difference between the quality and sensationalist press in how they handled the cartoon crisis. The press avoided publishing them, except for one small magazine, *KesKus*, which published them after the crisis. With regard to how different media handled the issue, the press took a more cautious approach than television and did not reproduce the cartoons.

The arguments used in the media debate were essentially the need for religious respect, the preservation of free speech and the independence of the press.

### 3.8. Lithuania

The press' reactions were varied. While most of the media adopted the line of free speech and defended European values, i.e. they mentioned the theory of the clash of civilisations, some expressed the need for self-regulation of the country's press.

### 3.9. Hungary

The crisis was broadly covered by the media, although no great difference was detected in how it was handled by the press.

Two newspapers, *Népszabadság* (associated with the Socialist Party, the large party in the coalition), and *Magyar Hírlap* (associated with the Liberal Party, the smaller party in the coalition), published two cartoons. They did so in the name of free speech and in sympathy for their colleagues in Western Europe, rather than for the cartoons per se.

The debate in the media insisted on two main themes: free speech and a refusal to be sarcastic about religious symbols, as well as the impression of growing Muslim hostility with regard to the west.

### 3.10. Turkey

No Turkish medium reproduced the cartoons, which were only available on the Internet.

The main media, press, television and radio, were generally critical towards the cartoons and considered that they insulted religious beliefs and that free speech is not absolute. However, the violence occurring in other Muslim countries was severely criticised and placed within the broader context of the Middle East conflict.

The government did not react at all to the attitude of the media, seeing as it did not differ from its own attitude.

### 3.11. Algeria

The press and the broadcasting media, of any leaning, refused to publish the cartoons. The only distinction was that the public media, such as radio and television, controlled by the government, reacted much more moderately and in a controlled manner than the press, mostly in private hands.

The government condemned two newspapers (*Emissala* and *Essafir*) which, in spite of denouncing the cartoons, published some of them. The directors of these two weeklies were imprisoned for one month based on an article in the penal code that punishes anyone offending the Prophet with three to five months' imprisonment.

With regard to the arguments used in the debate, the government made sure the prevalent thesis was that of the dialogue of civilisations.

### 3.12. Morocco

The cartoons were not reproduced in the broadcasting media. In fact, the judicial police interrogated two journalists from the pro-Arab newspaper *Annahar Almaghribia* for

having published one of the cartoons. Moreover, the minister of Communication officially banned the circulation of the newspaper *France-Soir*, which reproduced the dozen cartoons, and also refused the request by another French newspaper, *Le Monde*, stating that it was impossible to permit the distribution of any publication in Morocco likely to offend "the sacred nature of the nation and its spiritual values". However, two Moroccan newspapers started up a debate by asking why Jesus could be caricatured and not Mohammed.

The press as a whole condemned the publication of the cartoons and the act was defined as provocative and irresponsible, the main arguments being limits to free speech and the dialogue of civilisations, as well as the international context.

### 3.13. Tunisia

The Tunisian media did not have any attitude of their own: they were merely spokespeople for the government's position and insisted on censorship or closing down western newspapers as a consequence of the cartoons being published. This attitude was general throughout the broadcasting media.

Various newspapers, principally Francophone, paid tribute by inviting some intellectuals to react to the event, but the intention was fundamentally one of responding to Robert Ménard (secretary general of "Reporters without borders"), a critic of the Tunisian regime and firm defender of free speech, that "insult is not a form of speech".

### 3.14. Palestinian Authority

There was no debate on the official television channel in Palestine. The three newspapers that represent the "quality" press reflected the protests and the Danish boycott. One of the other themes mentioned was the theory of the clash of civilisations.

### 3.15. Egypt

All broadcasting media covered the crisis, both television and radio, and we should particularly note the newspaper *Al Fagr*, which published six cartoons in the middle of October 2005. The sensationalist press talked of a conspiracy against Islam and made repeated references to the clash of civilisations.

The quality press abstained from any sensationalism and asked intellectuals for their opinion on how to end the crisis. Most of the solutions insisted on the need for dialogue with the west.

### 3.16. Jordan

The media all had the same reaction as the population and the political and religious classes in Jordan: they presented the publication of the cartoons as an attack on the Prophet and therefore an unacceptable offence. For this reason the cartoons were not reproduced in the media, except by the editors from two newspapers (*Shihane* and *Al-Mehwar*) who were condemned and imprisoned for offending religious feeling.

With regard to the arguments cited to explain the crisis, mention was made of the international context, as well as the theory of the clash of civilisations and the idea that it was a new anti-Muslim crusade.

### 3.17. Lebanon

In the "quality press", principally *Safir* and *Nahar*, analytical articles did not appear that were sufficiently critical of Muslims' reactions in the world until after the violent demonstration of 5 February.

In one article, a journalist considered that the condemnation should have highlighted the racist nature of the cartoons and not the argument of offending the person of the Prophet. Another article insinuated that the anger of the masses had been manipulated by some political regimes.

### 3.18. Israel

The broadcasting media were the most active in the Israeli debate of the cartoons.

The arguments of the debate present in the media were as follows:

- Many Muslims in Europe and in the world had reacted to the insult with violence, against Jews;
- The Muslim world had adopted a dual discourse and hypocritical attitude, as the media in Arab countries and Iran are slanderous towards Islam (as was a cartoon that showed Anna Frank in bed with Hitler!);

- The message of the cartoons simply meant that some Muslims invoked the name of the Prophet to kill;
- Free European societies showed weakness towards the violent intimidation of an intolerant Islam;
- The clash of cultures or civilisations is not a threat but already present.

#### 4. Conclusions

To summarise the Mohammed cartoon crisis we can highlight the main features that characterised the behaviour of the different countries in the Euro-Mediterranean Association:

- Free speech was the key word in political debate in all countries of the European Union but, although this position was defended without concession by the Danish government, the governments from other countries defended it with more nuances, combining it with other priorities such as respect for others, religious freedom and dialogue (depending on the political trends of the different parties and especially religious beliefs). With regard to the attitudes of the populations of Europe, these were divided between those in favour of respect for religion and those in favour of unlimited free speech. This last point of view could be related to the prejudices towards Muslims in various European countries that have a significant minority of Muslims (between 1% and 10%).
- Limits to free speech and respect for religion were the key words in all countries in the southern Mediterranean. Both governments as well as Muslim authorities expressed this point of view, as well as refusing to publish the cartoons (apart from the odd exception) and condemning violence. With regard to the attitudes of Mediterranean populations, these were generally also in favour of respect for religion (with more or less indifference or indignation).
- A third point to make is the dominant role of the political class and the media in the crisis, with a big difference between the quality and sensationalist press in Europe, the latter tending to insist on the violence and to put radical Muslims and Muslims as a whole into the same

box. On the other hand, the academic and cultural world generally had very little influence on the debate.

- Fourthly, it should be made very clear that, in all the countries consulted, the European Union and the instruments of the Euro-Mediterranean Association were hardly noticed in the controversy of the cartoons and were not considered capable of playing any role in handling the crisis.
- Finally, since the cartoon crisis it seems that hostility towards Muslims has increased in Europe. In Denmark, 45% of the population say they are less sympathetic towards Muslims since this controversy. The European Observatory on Racism has recently confirmed that Muslims feel threatened and misunderstood, they suffer from continual attacks and have difficulties in finding rented accommodation, employment or a place in education.

# Between humour and uproar: satire and the view of the west in the media of the Arab-Muslim world

**José Maria Perceval**

- *The author describes the development of the public communication arena in the Arab-Muslim world and the incidence of humour and satire in the broadcasting media. Firstly, he notes the differences between Arab-Muslim humour of oriental tradition and western humour. He centres his analysis on the humorists and series broadcast during Ramadan, criticising social customs belonging to the legacy of an agrarian society, patriarchy and religious hypocrisy. In addition to this, a field of criticism is also developed of the west between reflection and insult, creating a complex image of an "other" that is both appealing and dangerous for the Arab-Muslim identity.*

## **Keywords**

Arab humour, Arab-Muslim public arena, Ramadan TV series, Internet in the Arab world.

## **1. Introduction**

The Tunisian minister of public works is visiting his Egyptian counterpart and admiring the richness of his apartment. "Come to the window and look," says the Egyptian minister. "You see the motorway coming into Cairo? There should be two motorways". Months later, the Egyptian minister for public works is visiting his Tunisian counterpart and admiring the fatuous sumptuousness of his apartment. "Come to the window and look," says the Tunisian minister. Over there, there should be two motorways that would make it easier to enter the Tunisian capital. There isn't even one".

This is an old joke, already used in the so-called real socialism countries of Eastern Europe and still valid, for example, in the Ukraine or the Asian republics of the former USSR. The variation, both in these countries and in the Arab-Muslim media system, is that this kind of humour is no longer oral but is gradually entering entertainment programmes on local television channels, radio commentaries, internet blogs, etc. as an example of the appearance of a new public sphere<sup>1</sup> that encourages debate and reflection of the managers of political and social power.<sup>2</sup>

**1** The most interesting series of studies on this birth of the public sphere in the Arab-Muslim world has been that gathered by EICKELMAN, D. and ANDERSON, J. W. eds. *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. It contains articles by NORTON, A. R. "The new media, civic pluralism and the slowly retreating state", pp. 19-28; EICKELMAN, D. "Communication and control in the Middle East: Publication and its discontents", pp. 29-40; ANDERSON, J. W. "The internet and Islam's new interpreters" pp. 41-56; ARMBRUST, W. "Bourgeois Leisure and Egyptian Media Fantasies." pp. 106-132.

**2** On this modern Arab state, see the work by MARTÍN, G. *El Estado Árabe*, Barcelona: Bellaterra, 1999.

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Humour, satirical comment and very often direct insult are linked to information, are their ironic or fun correlate, although, in most cases, learned people forget this. Humour and satire are ambiguous and play with words<sup>3</sup> (and if it is graphic material, with images),<sup>4</sup> they channel a wide range of tensions and trends, leading both to dialogue and violence, resulting in laughter that liberates or insult that excludes, expressing the concerns of an endangered identity or leading to the exclusion of other identities by means of disrespecting or ridiculing certain characteristics considered to be negative. Humour, therefore, is neither positive nor negative per se but due to the content that carries it.

In the case of the Arab-Muslim world we have a huge amount of evidence of the presence of humour and irony in everyday life and as a key element in the communication of people and groups. Most issues are treated with a strong dose of humour and ironic arguments, especially in small business, due to the still well-established custom of haggling.

The problem when analysing this lies in the fact that studies of Arab humour are focused on the forms and practices of a classic type (work on literature and tradition, such as the humoristic genre of Adab<sup>5</sup>) or anthropological works, not relating this field with that of the media or reducing it exclusively to oral communication, where evidently they are a fundamental factor but not the only one. Together with this absence, or due to it, there is a perverse ignorance on the part of certain authors, such as that displayed recently by the writer Martin Amis, who invent a supposed characteristic of ethnocentric western leisure self-criticism and contrast this to an even more supposed absence of humour in eastern culture.

Can we analyse this space of humour and insult, of direct exclamation and citizen comment in the Arab world? Yes,

although it is very difficult to grasp. The new media panorama offers us this possibility, eliminating mediations and filters of the professionals that used to manage, channel and censor opinion. The advantage, or danger, depending on how you look at it, of the new media system is how these comments emerge immediately in the new public sphere where the action-reaction effect can be carried out thanks to comments from Internet users. Humour and insult, previously reduced to oral situations, can appear in an audiovisual programme with the participation of the public or directly in blogs, or in comments to blogs permitted by the internet tool, due to the figure of the reader-writer, "the user who reads and answers the article he or she has read by contributing a reflection that constructs a new text".<sup>6</sup> Jokes circulate in text messages or are sold on CDs in markets throughout the Arab-Islamic world, almost all of a classic tradition but with new stories introduced or new versions of the same stories with themes such as the Iraqi war or the problem of Palestine, with the reflective stories of the wicked hero Doha or the idiocies of the emblematic Mullah Nasrudin,<sup>7</sup> representative protagonists by antonomasia of jokes in the Arab world.

A radical change in the field of public opinion has resulted from the emergence of a new, constantly active media system that goes beyond the classic media, either press or broadcasting, fossilised in already endangered models which have had to adapt given the dynamism of the new broadcasting media, led by the presence of Al-Jazeera and other satellite channels. The counterpart of traditional broadcast channels has been the investment in humour and entertainment programmes that makes up for the fact that it is impossible to offer information as attractive or dangerous as that of the news channels. The increase in information

3 On synecdoche, see TODOROV, T. *Investigaciones retóricas*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Buenos Aires, 1970.

4 MORIN, V. "El dibujo humorístico". In Various Authors: *Análisis de las imágenes*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1972, pp.137-187.

5 SCHMIDT, J. J. *Li livre de l'humour arabe*. París: Sindbad, 2005.

6 PERCEVAL, J. M., SIMELIO, N. "La narratividad digital ante la lecto-escritura esquizofrénica: un desplazamiento hermenéutico", Huesca: Congreso de Periodismo digital de Huesca, 2006.

7 SHAH, I. *Las ocurrencias del increíble Mulá Nasrudin*, Barcelona: Paidós, 2000.

offered by satellite is therefore coordinated with an increase in fiction (TV series) and a reflective derivation (debates on social issues) with greater participation and involvement on the part of users (audience surveys, rehearsals with direct or indirect participation). At the same time, the news broadcast by Al-Jazeera is immediately reflected online in the Arab blogosphere, or on new media such as text messages, showing that they have become the object of everyday conversation.

Everything is discussed in the Arab-Muslim world. The lack of information that was evident just one decade ago, the possibility of the Saudi Arabian government at that time to hide the start of the Gulf War for three days, no longer exists. And, within this whole, a common novel Arab-Muslim identity has been constructed that involves the parallel presence of an imaginary construct: the west of the Arab-Muslim media, the west (or rather, the western or westernised Arab) of comedy programmes and the terrible west or that satirised by blogs or text messages, that constitute the other face of the 'Orientalist' mirror dissected by Professor Edward Said in his classic book.<sup>8</sup>

Now we have two views, both 'western' and interconnected, by the way: the construction from orient to occident, always present,<sup>9</sup> but which has been rebuilt very aggressively and with new nuances since the attack on the twin towers;<sup>10</sup> a view that is perceived as bothersome and uncomfortable in the Arab-Muslim world. And, at the same time, in line with this, the view of the west in the Arab-Muslim world formed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and successive Gulf Wars<sup>11</sup> given by the new Arab-Muslim media. The disappearance of nuances, the unification of stereotypes and the adoption of discrediting clichés have increased considerably.

## 2. The notion of insult and humour in the eastern Arab-Islamic world: notable differences

Unlike other societies where insult is ritual and ordered by structured codes, in the Arab-Muslim world permissiveness with insult is minimal as it affects the honour of the group even above that of the person (better represented by the notion of ridicule).<sup>12</sup> In narrative terms, the model of humorous stories is in line with the circular story or parabola, more usual in eastern oral discourse, resulting in the short story or joke, than the western lineal story that gave rise to the novel. The parabola is based on a prior presupposition that is demonstrated subsequently throughout the story. It is narration that aims to educate and can mix the serious with the funny, a tragic and satirical description of a certain situation. Even in the modern Arab novel, introduced by westernised intellectual ambiances, this system continues in the small stories inserted in the general text or emerging in comments made by the protagonists. The fable, tale, apologue and joke derive from this system of stories as short stories, all hugely developed in the Arab-Muslim world.

Jokes or short tales are the other side of the educational or religious parabola, of the short educational or proverbial story. The variation in the joke is that the conclusion obtained at the end of the story, although an apparently logical consequence of the presuppositions proposed at the beginning, is grotesque or ridiculous due to the consequences it provokes. Jokes had been limited to the oral world, where they are still impressively vital, but had been reflected little in the public literary world (although this was not the case with transferred series of stories) until comedy programmes

8 SAID, E. *Orientalism* (1969), Catalan translation: *Orientalisme: identitat, negoció i violència*, Barcelona: Eumo Editorial, 1991.

9 SAID, E. *Covering Islam* (1981), Spanish translation: *Cubriendo el Islam. Cómo los medios de comunicación y los expertos determinan nuestra visión del resto del mundo*, Barcelona: Debate, 2005.

10 ELLIOT, D. "Terrorists we like and terrorists we don't like." In MARTIN LESTER, P.; DENTE ROSS, S. *Images that injure: pictorial stereotypes in the media*, Westport: Conn, Praeger, 2003.

11 SLYOMOVICS, S. "Sex, lies, and television: Algerian and Moroccan caricatures of the Gulf war". In JOSEPH, S.; SLYOMOVICS, S. (ed.), *Women and power in the Middle East*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, pp. 72-98.

12 See the two specials: L'injure, la Société, L'Islam. Une Anthropologie de l'Injure. *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, No. 103-104, June 2004; L'humour dans l'Orient. *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, No. 77-78, October 1996.

were broadcast and there was an explosion of free production on the internet. Now this genre is experiencing full exponential geometric growth.

The presence of this style of eastern humour in the west has been linked with a long tradition of Jewish humour (from Charlie Chaplin to Woody Allen, from Adel Imam or Ahmad Snoussi, better known as 'Bziz'<sup>13</sup> to Nabila Ben Youssef in the Arab setting<sup>14</sup>) where the humorist is strongly self-critical (laughs at himself) or gives off a strong social sense (laughs at the society that represses him). Many of these humorists, as Bziz himself, have suffered from cruel political persecution in their home countries and have had to exile themselves on entering the field of political irony.

Contrasting this regenerating humour, and related to the debates required for the internal renewal of society, we find another humour that channels social and ethnic clichés and stereotypes of a strong segregating and excluding nature. Social criticism often walks on the edge of the insulting abyss when dealing with physical defects or those supposedly belonging to a specific group in society. In the Arab world, Moroccans make jokes about Algerians, Lebanese about Syrians and Tunisians about Libyans... In Egypt, the inhabitants of Upper Egypt are portrayed as workmen (also reflected in their particular way of speaking in TV series or humorist monologues); in Saudi Arabia they laugh at the Pakistani immigrants who form the basis of their domestic service... In countries with strong social control, because of this censorship humour results in jokes about weak groups and people (due to their physical defects, their social or ethnic origins) rather than criticism of society, religion or governmental policy which, on the other hand, is expressed in the street and is still oral. The battle between both types of humoristic content is carried out in the new media contexts and the progressive or backward evolution of the new area of Arab-Muslim public opinion will depend to quite a large extent on how this develops.

### 3. New spaces of public communication for a renewed humour

In the Arab world, the absence of images and theatre has historically concentrated functions in narration that place it between mime and storytelling, between theatrical monologue and clowning, with great complexity and variety. The question of image, and of the absence of image, has been widely covered as a particularity but it is paradoxical that it was Saudi Arabia in 1960 that launched itself into the field of television, breaking all kinds of resistance from religious authorities, to offset the influence of the powerful and dangerous Nasserite radio, 'the voice of the Arabs' (Sawt al-Arab). Once again, now, the presence of anti-Wahhabi TV preachers has led to the appearance of religious programmes on Saudi television, overcoming the latest resistance of religious people to the use of the powerful medium to enter Saudi homes.

All these phenomena, contradictory and controversial, show how television provides a new context in the public sphere in the Arab-Islamic world that was previously limited to readers of newspapers, the most educated and westernised sector of society. This is the fundamental reason for television's permissiveness on the part of neo-traditional religious sectors, i.e. not exactly traditional but re-inventors of tradition in the best sense of Hobswan.

Precisely, radio had had notable influence in the Arab-Muslim world due to the little development of the press which is still at a ratio of 1 to 6 compared with industrialised countries and also due to the bilingual nature of printed communication (in Arabic and English or French), leading to a filter of colonial origin with the spoken language. The success of Egyptian radio station Sawt al-Arab<sup>15</sup> (1952) served as an opening for an area of common opinion in the Arab world with greater depth than the Arabic press.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, radio started a progressive and inevitable destruction of the oral culture on introducing into homes and in the fields, thanks to the transistor, an authorised voice

13 Talk by Beatriz Soto Aranda, "Marruecos a través del humor: Una aproximación lingüística a la obra de Ahmed Snoussi Bziz", Murcia: Universidad del Mar, 17 May 2006.

14 Programme *Les humoristes* which, from 1989 to 2000, was presented by Alia Kdeih on RMC.MO with a large selection of humorists from the Arab world.

removed from the family and local hierarchies. Currently, radio has become the greatest disseminator of fashions and behaviours, of expressions and ways of talking, of new rhythms and has encouraged a musical syncretism that affects the whole Arab-Muslim world with evident loans between countries but with powerful local figures. Radio started to change by offsetting the language of the Friday sermons with a direct colloquial expression typical of the North American disk jockeys, which it also imitated at the same time as renovating the success of European radio stations between the wars employing dedications and dedicated records. These DJs use a language full of humoristic and ironic twists, with jokes and short stories that often have an effect on social criticism but also deepen social or ethnic stereotypes. The radio has been "guilty" of introducing hip-hop that reaches from Morocco to Palestine, with strong resistance from radical Islamist and Arab nationalist sectors but with evident success among the young. Very interesting in this respect was the congress in 2003 held by the Goethe Institute in Dakar, where the mass media in Senegal were analysed, from radio to local press, and the penetration of external models and the intervention of power.<sup>17</sup> Since the beginning up to the present day, radio has been strongly controlled and censored by the powers that be, its commentators follow very specific instructions and, for this reason, the music field has been the freest, although certain groups are vetoed because their words criticise the system. Rap and its varieties break with the tradition of love songs and introduce social themes, irony and sometimes direct insult of corrupt leaders, false religious and pious people and exploitative entrepreneurs.

For its part, television radically changed the panorama at the time, increasing media influence with its enormous capacity to seduce and, culturally, adopting clearly western models (the appearance of presenters, an unheard of representation of females in many cases, interviewee fashions, the constant presence of western guests and images, ad-

vertising for western products in a clearly western context, etc.). The presence of the west increased due to pressure from films broadcast on television (Anglophone or Franco-phone, depending on the area of colonisation) and to the agency images, absolutely dominated by the west.

The second revolution occurred with the emergence of Arab channels, since the beginning of the eighties, which increased their own production and started to develop the regional market, at the beginning competing weakly with western products.

Their fields of development will be:

- Fictional series
- Comedy series
- News
- Debates
- The appearance of star presenters that can change country due to their use of literary Arabic.

The media situation underwent a radical change in the nineties with the expansion of transmission by satellite. The state-based model has been shattered with the appearance of 124 satellite channels in the Arab world. It was a crucial time in which the war of parabolic antenna reached almost grotesque extremes with quick-witted salesmen offering, at the same time, both the parabolic aerial and its disguise, for a modest price, with, in certain countries, the setting up of police specialised in persecuting and discovering hidden aerials.

Local television broadcast on Hertz frequencies innovated by using a Berlusconi-type stage, a place where there is a constant party. Television channels opened up a particular world, specific, where men and women wear western clothes and women don't cover their faces. Western forms and manners have been constantly introduced, advertising (translated but western in origin) introduces new behaviours and attitudes together with novel products.<sup>18</sup> The powers that be have found a magnificent system for diverting critical

15 JAMES, L. M. *Whose Voice? Nasser, the Arabs, and "Sawt al-Arab" Radio*, <<http://www.tbsjournal.com/James.html>>.

16 LABIDI, K. "The Voice of the Arabs is Speechless at 50", *The Daily Star*, 7/10/03.

17 TAUREG, M.; WITTMAN, F. (ed.) *Entre tradition orale et nouvelles technologies: où vont les mass média au Sénégal?* Dakar: Enda Tiers Monde, 2005.



content in this new media space by promoting programmes such as 'Big Brother' or 'Fame Academy', which are evidently enjoying success. However, talk shows dealing with family issues, and where insult could find an appropriate stage, have come up against a boundary in the official Puritanism of these regimes. There is no setting of gossip press to provide space for this gossip that, however, is expressed freely in the street on the growing world of show business and its celebrities. The powers that be are, however, increasing investment in this field and in sport, to compete with the satellite news channels that are critical of the hierarchical structure of these regimes.

Internet has been the great revolving platform where a whole series of novel media movements have come about. The world of the Internet has penetrated the East with unusual speed. In 2002, the street Chafic Rcheidat, in Irbid, in the north of Jordan, asked to be entered in the Guinness Book of Records as it had 105 internet cafés in less than one kilometre. The impressive development of blogs in Iran,<sup>19</sup> forming the fourth language in use by blogs according to the *Times* (13 November 2004), or among the top 10 according to Technorati, has led to intervention by the authorities, which accept the phenomenon and try to influence it. President Ahmadineyad himself has a frequently visited blog. On the internet, information alternates with urban gossip, the most incredible rumours and the most radical criticisms, denouncing specific situations and inventing others, irony and jokes together with vulgar insult or terrorist threats. Videos circulate on the Internet of the assassination of hostages, proclamations by the leaders of Al-Qaeda and instructions for making homemade bombs. Also the best texts in favour of peace, dialogue and an end to sectarian violence.

#### **4. The construction of the Western image in news and humorous TV series broadcast during Ramadan: dialogue, criticism, envy, competition and satire**

During Ramadan 2006, Saudi Arabia broadcast new social comedies with local plots and criticising aspects of fundamentalism (the comedy *Tash ma Tash* – 'what's happening'– attacked fundamentalist teaching in school) or the segregation of women<sup>20</sup> (criticising the Mahram or male tutor, essential by law for the public activities of any Saudi woman), as well as criticising hypocritical Puritanism, state corruption, police brutality, bureaucracy or traces of patronage-based tribalism that affects Saudi society. This programme, created in 1993 and banned in 1996 and condemned by the Ulema in 2000, by Abdallah al-Sudhan and Nasser al-Qassabi, has the greatest success today (although criticised so much by Islamists and also by opponents, and by Islamists who feel it is tolerated escapism or who criticise its xenophobic portrait of the minorities in the south by ridiculously showing their linguistic defects).

The paradoxical permissiveness employed with this locally produced programme is a consequence of the fall in audience of Saudi public television after the scandal of hiding the invasion of Kuwait that devalued the two official channels and competition with constant presence of Al-Jazeera. In response the Saudi state has also created a sports channel and the news channel Al-Ekhbariya via satellite. Parabolic antennas are spreading in spite of some official fatwas banning them. The unanimous panorama has been broken not only on the political plane but also the religious, as Saudis form a novel audience for the religious programmes of Al-Jazeera, Abu Dhabi TV and Sharjah, some strongly anti-Wahhabi.

But this is a small local example compared with the development of big Syrian and Egyptian productions spreading throughout the Arab-Muslim world with little competition

18 ENISBET, EC., NISBET, MC., SCHEUFELE, SHANAHAN, DJ. *Public diplomacy, television news, and Muslim opinion*, Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, 2004, 9 (2), 11-37.

19 *We Are Iran: The Persian Blogs* by Nasrin Alavi (Soft Skull Press /November 28, 2005).

20 GRESH, A. "Balbutiements de l'opinion publique en Arabie saoudite", *Le Monde diplomatique*, May 2002.

from local studios. The search for an audience of a billion viewers means that their scripts work with a global consensus without excessive localism and bland humour criticising society and the family (like the Moroccan series 'Lalla Fatima' by 2M or 'Andak Amilud' by the popular humorist Fahid). The humoristic themes already covered by Egyptian films<sup>21</sup> have gone on to television: criticism of Puritanism, the patriarchal system<sup>22</sup> and the segregation of women are themes present in these series, coinciding with those of larger audiences.

At the same time, historical themes of confrontation with colonial powers or those affirming identity are becoming stronger. Fundamentalism and terrorism are introduced from a humorous point of view (along the lines of the famous tape starring Adel Imam, al-Irhabi – "the terrorist" - who tells of the adventures of a radical reactionary who, for reasons of security, ends up living with a westernised family).

These series must present a conflict due to the intrinsic nature of the script and the search for themes of social debate, to capture audience, give an interesting list of conflictive social issues in the Arab-Muslim world. Those problems are analysed that concern people in the street, both the hopes and nightmares of the average citizen. Inevitably, they result in a criticism of stagnation and promote greater space for freedom, although this may only be in the small space of the family lounge.<sup>23</sup> They also promote new social and sexual conducts that are conflictive, as is the case of the character Ranad, in the series "Adeel Al-Rouh" ("Soul Mate"), where there is a slight hint of lesbianism, or in the series *72 virgins* presented as a radical critique of fundamentalist terrorism.

But not all series are humorous or critical and socially progressive series. The series *Gargiyan* led to a campaign of

bloggers against its strongly racist content. Attacks on Israel have been habitual in these series, as in the case of *Knight without a Horse* which, produced by the Egyptian television channel Dream, is a soap opera taken up by twenty-two channels in 2002, leading to a number of protests by international Jewish organisms due to its vulgar anti-Semitism.<sup>24</sup> A more serious case was the series broadcast on 18 November 2003 (Arabsat, Hotbird and Nile Sat) and denounced by the Simon Wiesenthal centre, given the provocative title of *Al-Shatat* (Diaspora) where the actors played two Jewish characters who carried out a ritual murder on a young Christian at Easter,<sup>25</sup> using his blood afterwards to make *matz*, the unleavened bread for this festival. This fact has coincided with attempts to film the story of the Protocols of Zion by Iran, a Nazi pamphlet published widely in the Arab-Muslim world. In this respect, and in the area of children, the Palestinian government of Mahmud Abbás has attempted to ban, without success, the presence in children's programmes of the channel Al-Aqsa, now dominated by Hamas, of Jihad Mickey who invites children to fight against Israel, against the west and anything western, a true paradox with the character chosen, and the conquering of the world with a terrible simplistic populism in child indoctrination.

In 1990, Saudi Arabia was able to hide from its population for three days the annexing of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein. Today it is not possible to hide news that has happened in the morning for fear of leaving fundamental control in the hands of other channels: the control of interpretation. We have gone from the monopolising of information to attempting to monopolise interpretation, leading to a search for novel images and original statements (a reason for founding the channel Al-Arabiyya and for the active media action of

21 ARMBRUST, W. "The Golden Age before the Golden Age: Commercial Egyptian Cinema before the 1960s", in *Mass Mediations*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

22 ARMBRUST, W. "Transgressing Patriarchy: Sex and Marriage in Egyptian Film" *Middle East Report (MERIP)* 206 (Spring), 1998, pp. 29-31.

23 ABU-LUGHOD, L. "The objects of soap opera: Egyptian television and the cultural politics of modernity". In: MILLER, D. (ed.) *Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local*. Routledge, 1995.

24 MOSAAD, M. "Knight without a Horse: The Lesson is Over Stupid! Racism versus rationality in Egyptian society", *Viewpoints/PeaceWatch*, December 5, 2002.

25 PERCEVAL, J. M. *Un crimen sin cadáver: el Santo Niño de la Guardia*. Historia 16, 202, pp.44-58, 1993. Available on the Internet, Wikipedia article.

the Saudi princes Salman and Sultan). On the other hand, counter-programming involves putting comedy series or sports programmes on at conflictive times.

To offset the dual front of anti-western Arab nationalists and anti-western Islamic fundamentalists, a dual media network has been formed, interconnected in reality, of Saudi and North American cities, with Lebanese and Egyptian participation in some cases, developing new newspapers (such as Asharq Al-Awsat and Al-Hayat), new radio stations and new television channels (the satellite channel corporations ART, MBC, Orbit)<sup>26</sup> and which are now trying to penetrate the internet. This attempt to occupy the field of communication has, however, its limits. In the press, this is due to the little influence of these London elite newspapers. On television, it is due to the excessive ideological intoxication affecting Al-Hurra that has led to profound changes in the structure of Al-Arabiyya in order to be able to maintain a minimal image of independence (on this Saudi channel, although it broadcasts in Dubai).

Al-Jazeera provokes debate on themes that are conflictive and internal to countries comprising its TV audience, such as crimes of honour (in Jordan), ablation (in Sahel and the Horn of Africa), the consumption of certain drugs (controversy of the Yemen *qat*). This means that the television stations from those countries involved react to the statements or reports by Al-Jazeera, leading to an internal movement of debate. Al-Jazeera tries to provoke people in the street and laments, very often publicly, the traditional passiveness of an Arab world that won't wake up (an old and dangerous theme of nationalist Arabism).

Al-Jazeera does not have comedy programmes nor does it cultivate insult. It shows an ambiguous populism particularly through its debate programmes, and a proud nationalism of the Arab past through its historical interpretations. But its effect is immediate on comments in the street that can be followed on the Internet. Anti-western comments and victimism alternate with direct insult and a call to violence against the "invasion of the crusades", "the new Mongols of Hugalú, the destroyer of Baghdad", etc.

## 5. The world of blogs: anonymous satire and insult

This conglomerate of victimism and desire for revenge is shown much more clearly in the world of blogs, as well as Arab nationalist concerns and irate responses to American or Israeli declarations. The west of the east is the sum of western fears in each field plus the fear of the west brought about by these changes. The war of words is established with clear appropriation by all parties of terms such as democracy, freedom and human rights.

Pro Al-Qaeda feeling has been falsified by the polls, starting with Al-Jazeera itself. Being an absolutely modern phenomenon,<sup>27</sup> of the media and opposed to traditional forces, journalists are the most fascinated by the terrorist environment and those who most increase their data. What is true is that, in media terms, Al-Qaeda is the most powerful and well-known of what it represents.

## 6. Conclusions: Liberating humour and excluding humour, between socio-political satire and nationalist satire of exaltation or xenophobia

A toaster breaks down in an Egyptian TV series. The smell of burning floods the house. The character, a fundamentalist conservative who is about to go to the mosque for morning prayer, looks at the appliance and smiles at the commotion created: "Western material!" he exclaims. Fundamentalism has won a small battle against the machine that doesn't work but also against a non-traditional way of organising breakfast, against a new way of life that does not respect good tradition "where there are no toasters to break down".

The humour reflects the profound debate that affects the Arab-Muslim world; satire and direct insult are, at the moment, limited to very small areas or freely roam the Internet. Regimes find themselves caught in a fundamental media trap: to increase audience, and therefore the influence of

26 KRAIDY, M. M. "Arab Satellite Television Between Regionalization and Globalization", *Global Media Journal* 1.1, 2002. ISSN: 1550-7521.

27 GRAY, J. *Al-Qaeda y lo que significa ser moderno*, Barcelona: Paidós, 2004.

their audiovisual channels, they must increase the humour content, the new populist areas of 'dumbed down' TV, including talk shows, overcoming the resistance of the Puritan sectors.

In addition to this diversion, a greater permissiveness can be observed in humorists, also the result of this need to gain audience, which permits criticism that was unthinkable a few years ago on rigid official television channels. Social humour is starting to investigate not only the mother-in-law, the goody-goody hypocrite or patriarchal excess, but is also starting to talk about the 'buddy system' and corruption of state officials, the manipulation of politicians and economic scandals. But, on the other hand, perverse content is introduced of nationalist exaltation, of xenophobic satire and the temptation of falling into a simplification of the West and of what is western is spreading, creating an archetype that would concentrate all evils, diverting criticism of the internal powers that be.

Is Westernism the opposite of Easternism or an animated creation of progressive western academic circles, as claimed by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit?<sup>28</sup> The Arab-Muslim world moves between Arab nationalism, liberal or fundamentalist Islamism and the secular versions of social democracy. The media network contains elements of these three trends where Al-Jazeera is an emblematic example.

The West, some sectors of the West, continues to recreate images of an exotic, confrontational, aggressive East, as show by the peplum 300,<sup>29</sup> close to the clash of civilisations or, simply, subject to its own area of fanaticism. The western world carries this out by devaluing Arab-Muslim media production or, even worse, spreading fears and predictions that almost equate it with a cradle of fanaticism or terrorism.

Humour and uproar are not good companions but go together in this media scenario. In the Arab-Muslim world, the re-creation of the West, be it real or invented, and the reflection of the East, come from a dual interpretation. It's true that lack of understanding and insult are advancing, especially in the world of the internet and the blogosphere but, even in

these fields, a public can be seen that maintains two rich and complex views of the West (which they admire or hate, wish to imitate or deeply despise) and the East, which may be established or analysed in more detail but of which they are strongly self-critical.

**28** BURUMA, I.; MARGALIT, A. *Occidentalismo, Breve historia del sentimiento antioccidental*, Barcelona: Península, 2005.

**29** Unpublished article by the working group made up of FIGUEROLA, C.; FORNIELES, J.; PERCEVAL, J. M.; TEJEDOR, S., "Comunicación y cómic filmado: La defensa de Occidente en 300 y la construcción mediática de Oriente".

# The Cartoons Controversy and the Danish Press

Mustafa Hussain

- *On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2005, the largest newspaper of Denmark, Jyllands-posten, published 12 defaming cartoons of the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, which triggered worldwide Muslim protests against the paper and the government of Denmark for not openly condemning the symbolic vandalising of the holy icon of the second largest faith of the world after Christianity. By the end of January 2006 the protests turned into violent confrontations between the police and the angry mobs in many a Muslim countries in Asia and the Middle East resulting in the loss of life, attracting international media attention. This essay probes into the ensuing media coverage of the cartoons crisis in Denmark with the argument that the Muslims and their faith have been under attack by the Danish press long before the events of 9/11 and the international campaigns against the terrorist organisations. Both the spokespersons of the government and the press in general supported the free-speech rights of the newspaper, but undermined the emotional harm done to the Muslim sensitivities by blaming the protesting Muslims themselves of being irrational and ignorant of the values of an open society. The essay claims further that contrary to the rhetoric of the press, there is no absolute free expression as the values of free speech are often balanced against some other values to avoid harm to religious sensitivities of various faith communities. But the press applies different standards, when the targets of hate-speech are the Muslim communities.*

## Keywords

The press freedom, civic values, emotional harm, satire and vandalism, Islam, rationalism.

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The publication of caricature of Islam's prophet Mohammed on September the 30<sup>th</sup> 2005 by the largest Danish daily *Jyllands-posten* resulted in widespread Muslim protests across the Muslim countries with burning of Danish flag and attacks on Danish embassies. The Muslims world over were outraged with seeing one of the holiest icons of their faith being represented, among other degrading attributions, as a terrorist.

The ensuing debate in Denmark as elsewhere in the West remained mainly locked into a single issue of the Western values of free-speech versus lack of democratic values among the Muslims. It is interesting to note that after the eruption of street protests against the degrading and ridiculing cartoons of the prophet in January 2006, followed by a boycott of Danish consumer goods in some Arab countries, the Danish press and TV continued showing the infamous cartoons with their reportage of the story.

Ridiculing of the vulnerable Muslim minorities in the Danish visual media and the press, however, predates the internationally known cartoons controversy. Already about 9 years ago, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, the licence-financed public-service TV, Radio and Internet media of Denmark, launched an interactive game for the youth on its website calling it *Perker Play*.

Several descent circles of society and the migrant organisations reacted promptly for its racist overtones and the name of the game itself. *Perker* is an expression of hate-speech in Denmark which is used mostly against the Muslims and it can be juxtaposed to expressions such as "Nigger" in the USA or "Wog" or "Paki" in Britain. Moreover, the theme of the play itself was highly racialised stereotype of the Arab youth, who drives in a BMW automobile and chases blond women. Defending the launch of this game based on racist humour, the then Director general of Danish Broadcasting Corporation, Christian Nissen, argued

that the immigrants ought to be open-minded and tolerant for humour and satire, for as he saw it, it helps to bring the Danes and the migrant community together. A similar argument was provided by the cultural editor of the paper, *Jyllands-posten*, Fleming Rose, in the accompanying article with the publications of the cartoons, in which he advised the Muslims to be ready for the taunt and ridicule. (*Jyllands-posten* 30.09.2005)

Thus the racist humour and defaming of the holiest icons of a marginalised faith community in the mainstream media was regarded as a step forward to social integration of the Muslim minorities.

Whether racist humour, satire and blasphemy in a multi-ethnic setting of asymmetrical social structures and power relations leads to more integration remains a big puzzle for the social scientists. However, this is the way the media managers often defend their unethical practice as a second argument, the first being the fetish of free-expression, which the backwards Muslims are unable to understand while living in a free society.

At the outset, it may appear as two individual media events quite incidental of which one became internationally known because of some violent protests across the Muslim countries and communities.

In this essay, I will argue, however, that hate-mongering against Muslims in Danish mass media has become a routine practice since the late 1980s and the trend has been cumulative ever since.

The publication of the cartoons, as some domestic observers have noted, was the last straw on the camels back in these anti-Muslim media campaigns (Hervik & Berg, 2007). On this account, Denmark has attracted a good deal of inter-national criticism from various European human-rights organisations such as EUMC<sup>1</sup> (2002); (ECRI<sup>2</sup>, 2000; 2006); (ENAR<sup>3</sup>, 2004); (OSCE<sup>4</sup>, 2006) which the successive governments have either denied the authenticity of such reports or have simply ignored them arrogantly. For instance,

1 European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.

2 European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.

3 European Network Against Racism.

4 The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

commenting on the latest country report by the Council of Europe (ECRI, 2006) the Liberal Prime Minister, Anders Rasmussen, called it a sub-standard work worth throwing in a dustbin.

The same fate is met by critical scholarly research of the academic institutions. Such publications are either totally ignored by the press and TV, or if reported, they are effectively ridiculed by the press reviews. This has become a set pattern for many years parallel to the increasing number of critical assessments of institutionalised media practice on ethnic affairs in Denmark.

### **Free-speech, the values-clash and the 'crash' of values**

By taking point of departure from the infamous cartoons controversy, it is interesting to note, that none of the major newspapers, nor any audiovisual mainstream media during the intensive debates over the issue ever questioned the very legitimacy or the moral righteousness of hurting the sentiment of over a billion Muslims of the world. Some intellectuals from the Danish elite, however, did raise the question and became themselves a target of ridicule in the media.

In a rigorous analysis of the 232 articles from seven major dailies of Denmark, from the period when the diplomatic crisis and the Muslim protest were at their height in February and March, 2006, Hervik & Berg (2007) have noted that none of the media denied the constitutional right of free-speech of *Jyllands-posten* to print the defaming cartoons. Only one liberal daily, *Politiken*, and the conservative *Berlingske Tidende*, took a rather different strand on the issue, though not concerning the harm or injuries to the Muslims as such but an open criticism of the government for its non-professional way of handling the crisis.

Almost all the mainstream media outlets aligned with the Prime Minister's views on the issue from the day one which emphasised on "free-speech and the Press' right to provoke political and religious authorities". (Interview in *Jyllands-posten*, 30.10.2005, cf. Hervik & Berg, 2007 )

First of all, one may ask, was it a religious or political authority the newspapers was provoking to, or the ordinary believers of the second largest faith of the world? What does it mean to portray a religious icon as a terrorist whose name is part of the rituals of passage of life for all the believers from the birth of a child to the funerals of the mortals. When the Tsunami struck the Southeast Asia, the same Prime Minister who prides on the secular values of his country, and who has publicly denounced the creeping of too much religion in the public debates, was seen on television praying in church for the Danish tourists who lost their life in the tragedy alongside the rest of elite of the country. The majority of the victims, as we know, were the Muslims of Indonesia. In their collective funerals, the name which provided solace to the families was not Jesus but Muhammad.

If the sanctity of Jesus is holy and sacred to the secularised Christians of Denmark, not necessarily because of the Christian dogmas, but the psychological function it performs for upholding a collective solidarity in the time of crisis and tragedies, why then the things should been seen in a different perspective when it comes to the psychological needs of Muslims?

The classification between the sacred and profane of the world's objects is a universal human phenomena that has existed even in the primitive religions long before the advent of monotheistic or the Abrahamic religions of the world. (Durkeim, 1915). This distinction is equally important to Hindus and Buddhists as it is to Christians, Jews or the Muslims, regardless of their degree of affiliation with the religious dogmas and myths.

When the Talibans in Afghanistan destroyed two old statues of Buddha in the mountains about 270 kilometres northeast of Kabul, all the Muslim nations condemned this act of sheer ignorance and intolerance of another faith. The press in the neighbouring Muslim country, Pakistan, wrote editorials and columns up and columns down condemning the act. On the other hand, not only the Danish government but as the analysis by Hervik & Berg mentioned above has shown, the media in general supported the symbolic vanda-

lism of the sacred object for the Muslims by *Jyllands-posten* by referring to free-speech, and by blaming the protesting Muslims as backward, irrational, fanatics and threat to our democratic values.

Values such as free-speech as Hussain, Z. (2007) has so succinctly expressed are by their nature never absolute but very often are balanced against some the other conflicting values either for maintaining the cohesion or solidarity in the society or for avoiding disturbance and disorder.

*"As is so often the case, pushing any value, however virtuous, to an extreme begins to yield perverse results. So it is with free speech. Demands of free speech and those of other desirable values have interacted and made accommodations with each other. One of those other values, for example, is human survival, and for that reason shouting "fire" in a crowded theater is not permitted as justifiable exercise of free speech, since we do not wish to be trampled to death. We know of too many other instances in which we would want to give priority, or at least some or equal weight, to other values as much as we do to free speech".*

The unwritten but implicit values of a civilised society aside, even the formal Danish constitution stipulates freedom of speech with personal responsibility and which is often upheld also by the mass media through voluntary constraints when it comes the sacred objects of any other faith or religion. It is perhaps a mere coincidence that prior to the publication of cartoons defaming the prophet, the same newspaper had received some defaming material on Jesus, which the paper refused to publish on the grounds that it may be a source of harm for our Christian readership.

Then we have also another case of blasphemy which never evoked any discussion of clash of values, our secular values, or the free expression. A huge retail store in Denmark, Foetex, attempted to sell summer sandals with the Jesus' portrait on the inner sole of the foot-wears. Some priests and many concerned citizens complained about it through the same press that is bent on hurting the Muslims by providing one or another good excuse for it. It did not take much time before the store took off the sandals from their shelves all over in the country.

During the 1980s an eccentric artist, Jens Thorsen, painted a naked portrait of Jesus which was hanged in the halls

of Copenhagen's main railway station. The painting depicted a huge male organ of the holy icon and thus caught the attention of the public as well as the minister of the railways, Arne Melchior. He immediately ordered to take this painting down from the railway station.

These examples illustrate that freedom of expression is by no means absolute. When it comes to the reality and out of the realm of rhetoric, there are many examples to testify that the government intervenes, the newspaper apply self-censor, and the consumer chain stores refrain from hurting the public sentiment by paying attention to the sacred in an otherwise overwhelmingly secularised society. In other words, there are mechanisms which check for time and again that a crash of basic civic values does not occur to the harm of a religious minority or to the overall cohesion of the society. The problem, seen from a sociological level of analysis, is that all those institutional mechanisms fail to catch up with the civilised values when the target of harm are the Muslim only.

And it has a causal link to the institutionalised practice of the mass media which exerts a significant influence in shaping the public and political consensus on issues concerning the ethnic minorities of this country. (see, for example, Hansen, 1992; Shierup, 1993; Togeby and Gaasholdt, 1995; Hussain et al., 1997; Hussain, 2000, Hervik, 1999; Hervik, 2002; Andreassen, 2005; Yilmaz, 2006 among others).

This situation is not unique to the Danish context only. Other international research from societies in which face-to-face social interaction between minorities and the majority population is limited has shown the similar results (see, for instance, van Dijk 1987; 1991; Hartmann & Husband, 1974).

A stark difference comparing to other European societies is that on the issue of Islam or the Muslim migrants, there is no significant ideological nuances or the Right-Left divide any-more between the various media outlets, a tendency that has emerged in the Danish media landscape after the fall of the Berlin wall. The frame analysis of the cartoons controversy in the seven major news dailies (Hervik & Berg, 2007) is itself a case in the point; an almost unanimous strand in all the media supporting *Jyllands-posten*.

For the sake of illustration, I shall present, with reference to the analysis above, a few excerpts from the editorials of three newspapers<sup>5</sup> on the issue to underline that regardless of their otherwise position in the Danish political spectrum, their views on Muslims or Islam are equally simplified.

The first one is from a popular daily with quite a diverse readership, especially among the strata with low level of formal education.

*"It is simply abuse of language to expect that Danish Christians, Jews or pagans have to show respect towards a religion which practice goes against that of human rights. In Islamic model societies such as the Saudi Arabian, women are held in herds as veiled slaves. People are decapitated on the main square. Whipping is an ordinary penalty. Stoning of infidel women an accepted sanction. Other religions are banned. A free press does not exist". (Ekstra Bladet, editorial, 1.3.2006).*

This paper is the largest tabloid in terms of daily circulation and is administered by a chief-editor who has been the Conservative Justice Minister of Denmark in the early 1990s. This simplified version of Islam based on Wahabi ideology is *the* Islam par excellence for all the Muslims, according to its editors. During 1997, the paper in response to the declaration of the year by the EU as Year Against Racism, launched its own focused campaigns against the immigrants. As to make it clear for the public, which immigrants it was campaigning against, the add of the article series was displayed across the billboards of the country also in the Arabic language.

Prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the then left-leaning newspaper, *Information*, a favorite of socialists and other leftist intellectuals used to attack the racist slant of *Ekstra Bladet* in its editorials. Times have changed. Following is an excerpt from *Information* on the cartoons issue and concomitant diplomatic crisis, which saw it as fight against the global threat posed by the islamists. No mention of a perspective that the ordinary Muslims themselves feel threatened and harmed because their faith has been ridiculed by these cartoons, or they have also the right to express their frustrations and objections.

5 Translations: Hervik & Berg, 2007.



*"(...) the point is that the fight against totalitarianism in the current context has to be conducted as a fight against the special forms of repressions of the totalitarian thinking rather than against a diffuse "Islamism". The, fight has to include the repression of women, of speech-faith and freedom of assembly, of other human rights". (Information, 4.3.2006).*

The *Berlingske Tidende* has traditionally been as conservative Right-wing paper.

It did criticize the very idea of publishing these provocative cartoons, however, supported the newspapers freedom of speech at the same time in the same editorial. Apart from this ambiguity, its editor-in-chief reflects also his vision of Islam;

*"Islam is the opposite of Christianity. Islam is almighty and infallible, a religion of law, a system, where faith and the law are connected, where the answers to all existential questions are to be found in the holy book. They are not to be discussed and they are definitely not to be mocked. We must understand that some Muslims also in this country have a fundamentally different way of thinking than us and some of them simply will not accept our way of life and our democratic values". (Berlingske Tidende, editorial, 5.2.2006).*

Again, as one may read, it is a vision that simplifies a complex phenomenon, and ignores that Islam has gone through many historical changes depending upon on which Muslim sate, or which historical period you put your focus on. To quote an accredited British political philosopher, Bhikhu Parekh (2006, p. 2001), "Contrary to popular misconception, Islam has undergone more drastic changes than almost any other religion. Turkey under Ata Turk underwent extensive secularization including even changes in dress, script etc. Libya under Gadaffi broke the hold of the Ulema (the Islamic literati) ... Nasser proclaimed a socialist interpretation of Islam and nationalized Al-Azhar University in 1961". One may also notice that there is lively debate and cultural criticism going on in almost all the Muslim countries and among the Muslim Diaspora in the West about various issue of human and women rights along with the new interpretations of the holy scriptures.

But let us come back to Denmark and examine what are these "our democratic values" which allegedly some of the Muslims in this country do not accept.

Only a month ago in March the Ministry of Integration (2007) released a survey based report based on 4.500 interviews among the Danes and various national groups of immigrants – mainly Muslims.

Translated into English, 'Values of the Danes and Immigrants' this report over 500 pages, prepared under supervision of a respected professor of Sociology at Copenhagen University, Peter Gundelach, reveals that the ethnic Danes tend to be far less democratic when it comes to fundamental democratic values such as freedom of speech, right of assembly and association, right to exercise one's faith etc. Only 40% Danes consented to the latter, compared to 76% of immigrants and 86% of their descendents.

On the question of everyone's democratic right to hold meetings and to put forward one's political claims, only 39% Danes agreed to it against about 59% of the immigrants.

One may also put this hypothetical question by the principal of abduction (that is, putting the same issue in an other context, time and space): is it a value in it self to vandalize deities or holy icons of people belonging to another faith and reduce it to a mere question of testing the state of free-speech in the society as many editors of the Danish press have been emphasizing?

What if in India, the USA or in Malaysia the newspapers and the government use the same argument and let the press get loose on each other's faith and religion to test the status of free speech or the muscles of political islamists? Will it strengthen the democratic values and social integration of these democracies? Freedom of speech is indeed an inalienable value of an open and democratic society, not the freedom of abuse and emotional harm, whatever the purpose might be.

During the turn of the millennium, the former Social Democrat Prime Minister, Poul Rasmussen, addressing the nation on TV complained that some residential areas in Danish cities have been turned into immigrant ghettos, such that the Danes feel strangers in their own neighborhood. And thereafter he advised, "Everyone should learn the Danish values". (*DR-TV*, 01.01.2000)

This rhetoric on “our values” versus “their values” has only replaced the previous emphasis on “our culture” versus “their culture”, especially after the 9/11, in almost all the Western societies with explicit reference to Islam and the Muslims. This is one of the core themes around which the Danish media and the highly vocal politicians have debated the cartoon crisis, blaming the Muslims for not accepting our values to criticize any religious dogmas and authorities. Criticizing the religious dogmas, however, is one thing, which the Muslims have been engaged with throughout the centuries, but it is beyond comprehension why vandalizing a holy icon of any faith community that provide solace to millions of souls in times of despair and grief can be considered as part of “our values”. The Reformation of the Christian Church after all did not take place by defaming the Christ, but by rational argument against the prevailing dogmas and their absolutism.

And what are the Danish, British or Egyptian values other than the social constructions contingent upon the political and economic needs of an historical era and circumstances. One of the lessons of post-Enlightenment rationalism which the present Western rhetoric of values has gone oblivion to was rejection of the idea that vice or virtue is something essential to a particular ethnicity. In the context of the British debate on values and culture, writes Terry Eagleton (*The Guardian*, 21.02.07);

*“There is an insuperable problem about introducing immigrants to British values. There are no British values. Nor are there any Serbian or Peruvian values. No nation has a monopoly on fairness and decency, justice and humanity. Some cultures cherish one kind of value more than others do (Arabs and hospitality, for example, or the British and emotional self-discipline), but there is nothing inherently Arab about hospitality, or inherently British about not throwing a hysterical fit. Tolerance and compassion, like sadism and supremacism, can be found anywhere on the planet.”*

Freedom of speech is as dear to Muslims as it is to any other faith community, despite the fact that majority of the Muslims live under undemocratic post-colonial political systems.

## The Pretext of printing the cartoons

The very argument for defaming the prophet, or excuse is perhaps a better word, which was given before and after the event has been that a writer, Kåre Bluitgen, had written a children book on Islam but could not find any cartoonists to illustrate the text through drawings of the prophet, because they feared the extremist Muslims.

For the first, this is not the whole truth as the media wanted to have us. Larsen and Seidenfaden (2006) have documented through their research that he consulted only 3 persons, but they declined to undertake the job. Which it self should not be something surprising. Bluitgen through his earlier anti-Muslim and anti-Islam writings has earned a certain reputation in the press and publication circles. The manuscript for the children’s book is no exception. It is any artist’s own free choice and judgment whether one wants to be associated with a hate-mongering manuscript. If the three cartoonist declined to go ahead with his subversive enterprise, one can not deduce from it that no cartoonist in the country dared to use his free speech under the threat of extremist. The 12 cartoons in *Jyllands-posten* testify that it was possible, had he searched further in the market.

A week earlier to the date of publication of the caricature, the literary section of a Danish elite weekly, *Weekendavisen*, which in many views has become a mouth-piece of the Neo-Conservatives of Danish format, carried a precursory column written by Klaus Rothstein, a former information officer of the Danish Refugees Council, but now a writer and columnist with the weekly. It was perhaps the first article in the press as whole through which I got information about the existing of a new manuscript by Kåre Bluitgen. What surprised me, however, was not his book on Islam, but Rothstein’s column defending his freedom of speech to publish his book with illustration of the prophet, which Muslims consider blasphemy, highlighting a threat to the potential artists which was only a supposition at that stage. The column itself was not a provocation to any Muslim, but on the other hand it was not even a token support to their sensitivity or concerns either. The message was rather a wakeup call for publication community and artists that our freedom of free speech is being threatened. What surprised me was the fact

that Rothstein knew very well what kind of stuff Bluitgen had written previously about the Muslims, and yet this aspect of the story was not touched at all in his column.

Following is a quote from his earlier book from 2002;

*“Leftwing should start an offensive by parading through Norrebrogade<sup>6</sup> in Copenhagen, wearing Burkhas, Chadors and long coats, pushing a sea of folding prams and baby carriages and in the end, throw all this in a container at Blaagaard square as well as splash the Koran with menstruation’s blood.” (From his book: For the benefit of the blacks, 2002, p.70).<sup>7</sup>*

So here I found a Rothstein who until yesterday was advocate of human-rights had turned into a devil’s advocate endorsing freedom of unlimited hate-speech as long as it hurts only the Muslims.

A week later, on September the 30<sup>th</sup>, the 12 cartoons appeared in the *Jyllands-posten*.

## Why only the Muslims?

As mentioned earlier the cartoon controversy, apart from the violent protests, triggered a heated debate on free speech vis-à-vis Islam across the European countries and in the Americas, including the USA. In a forthcoming anthology, Hussain, Z. (2007) analyses these debates through a frame analysis in which he quotes the cultural editor of *Jyllands-posten* for having written several months after the publication of cartoons that it had a point to integrate and include the Muslims into the Danish tradition of satire because the Muslims are part of the society, not strangers.

For the first this explanation does not fit well into his previous *raison d’être* which he offered in his accompanying article with the cartoons on 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2005, namely the threat to the artists’ freedom of speech, and in which he challenged to the Muslim populace that they better get ready for taunt and ridicule. And secondly his newspapers has been from the late 1980s a megaphone for extreme Right and anti-immigrant discourse and rhetoric and still is.

Thirdly, the same newspapers in the proximity of the same period, when the cartoon crisis went on is on the record to have refused to publish material that was harmful for both the Christian and the Jews.

And fourthly, about the editor’s claim that the ‘satire’ will enhance the Muslim integration, an argument that surfaced also the USA, writes Hussain, Z (2007);

*“But, “Muslims are being insulted and ridiculed, Islam is being ruthlessly analyzed. Since 9/11, Muslims are the only group about which derogatory comments can be made on a regular basis from a variety of arenas – churches, comedy shows, op-ed pieces, editorials, journal articles, books, movies, and Congress and state houses”.*

The ridiculing of the Muslims and their faith in Danish media of mass communication has been going on throughout the 1990s. Thus, Flemming Rose has not introduced something new, albeit he crossed the limits of journalistic ethic. Already in 1988, a pioneering researcher on mass media and ethnic minorities, Charles Husband, had noted in a conference paper, “ Also in Denmark the media have taken a racist perspective on the arrival of the new immigrants”

Perhaps no other broadsheet in Denmark has contributed to the ‘racist perspective’, having Muslims in the focus, than Rose’s newspaper, according to a number of scientific analyses in Denmark. The publication of the cartoons as a strategy of Muslim integration seems far from any sense of rationality, but only a culmination of the ongoing subtle campaign of Muslim-bashing.

Has taunting, hurting religious sensitivities, ridiculing and mocking ever been applied in the history of post-War-II states anywhere in the world to integrate any excluded minorities? Never, because such a strategy creates more schisms and fractions, especially in a socioeconomic context characterized by extreme asymmetrical ethnic relations and unequal access to channels of communication.

It is a great myth, contributed partly by the Danish media itself, that Muslims residing in Denmark are more religious than any other faith community e.g. Buddhist, Hindus, Sikhs and Jews.

6 A sub-district in Copenhagen with a large share of Muslim immigrants.

7 Source and translation, (Larsen, 2006).

Critique of religious dogmas are as widespread among the Muslims as in any other community, yet the media and opinion-makers and part of other influential elite, who have relatively easy access to the channels of mass persuasion target only the Muslims, a fairly diverse group of people, for being irrational which in Denmark as elsewhere in the West are portrayed as a monolithic entity (see, for instance, Said 1989).

At the doctrinal level of analysis neither Christianity, Judaism or Islam can stand the test of post-Enlightenment rationalism of the West, yet the media focus only on Islam and the Muslims as irrational, backward and too religious. The American communication scholar, Carlin Romano (1987) provides quite a plausible explanation for this skewed media focus in the American context, which resembles very much the Danish one;

*“The Press does not critically examine privileged cultural beliefs (...) Although the foundational beliefs of the major traditional religions in the United States - Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic – all fly in the face of modern scientific knowledge, the American press avoids any critical examination of their doctrines (...) They are taboo, in part, because they are the religions of the editors and their readers.”*

### **The Muslim’s access to the Media and dissenting Danish voices**

It has been now for more than a decade become a common practice in the Danish television and the pictorial representations in the press, that whenever a news or debate about the Muslim immigrants gets coverage, either the bearded men or women covered with traditional Arabic head-scarf are brought forth as *the representation* of Muslims in Denmark. The majority of Muslims living in Denmark do not look like the media picture. Women without headgears, if they seldom appear in the pictures then the context often is not Islam, but very often as a representation of integrated “new-Danes”. The media semiotic leaves no doubt for the audience that either you are Muslim or you are a Dane. You cannot be both. The farthest your physical appearance, dress etc. from an average in the population the closest you are to a Muslim identity in the media representations.

This odd logic was displayed also during the media coverage of the cartoon crisis in Denmark during February and March 2006, and it determined for the journalists whom to interview, or quote, in connection with the news, features and debates.

According to the survey of the press by Hervik & Beg (2007), the most prominent voices and faces in the coverage were first and foremost two Muslim prayer-leaders, or imams, from the Islamic Society of Denmark, Imam Abu-Laban and Imam Akari, both with an Arabic background. They were from the day one of the crisis presented as extremists and were held responsible for violent reactions by the protesting mobs in the Middle East, because prior to the outburst of violent protests, they had traveled to some Arab countries to put pressure on the governments there to do something about the anti-Muslim climate in Denmark. They were also accused of spreading false propaganda about the anti-Muslim campaigns in the country.

Another figure that was given a prominent space in the media was the member of the Parliament representing a center liberal party, *RadikalVenstre*, Nasar Khaddar, also from Arabic background. He was mainly quoted for criticizing the allegedly extremist imams, who were advised by him to leave the country “if they don’t like the smell of the bakery”. (Hervik & Berg, 2007).

In addition to it, there were a few other Muslim voices, but by any standard not many in proportion to the volume of ongoing coverage. To the best of my knowledge no Turkish, Pakistani, Bosnian, Somali or Iranian imam was presented in the daily reportage on the crisis, although the number of Muslims from these countries constitutes the much largest share of the Muslim community living in Denmark. To listen to their opinion, it seems, was not deemed necessary to elicit a Muslim point of view, for example, how they feel seeing their prophet being repeatedly portrayed as a terrorist.

Thus the main actors in the coverage from the Muslim community were two opposite fronts from the Arabic background in a continuous verbal battle against each other.

No sociologist, cultural anthropologist, Islam specialist, area studies expert or the like with a Muslim background, male or female, from the academia was on the media scene to put the Muslim outrage in perspective on the background of their research or scientific knowledge about Muslim societies or the Muslim communities residing in Denmark.

Also absent in the coverage was the typical vox-pop, a genre especially used by the TV media on controversial issues, for instance, asking a random Muslim man or woman on the street, what he or she means about the cartoons. But, in the press, of course, there was a stream of letter-to editors by the readers who were either tired or afraid of the Muslim presence in their country. It is difficult to ascertain, how was the radio coverage as no data are available as yet. However, some previous research had shown that the public-service radio broadcast in Denmark is far less biased, less sensational and often balanced - notwithstanding the fact there are anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim private radio outlets and Internet media which are run by various types of anti-Muslim associations.

A range of dissenting voices over the publication of the cartoons from various intellectual and professional quarters could be heard to some degree in the Public-service TV, but mostly as op-eds and opinion-columns in the press, mainly in the liberal daily, *Politiken*. These included former Danish diplomats who resented over the Prime Minister's refusal to have a dialogue with the 12 Muslim ambassadors on their request to resolve the issue of the cartoons. And moreover, some lawyers, priests, medical professionals, writers and artists etc. Generally they did not follow the dominant media discourse on freedom of speech, but appealed for dialogue between the cultures, diplomacy and consideration for the marginalized groups. Following is an excerpt from such voices, which probably is one of the most accurate pictures of the Muslim situation in Denmark, presented by a solicitor of profession.

*"Islam is under attack in Denmark and has been for some time, especially after September 11. Muslims have been prevented from building Mosques, from making burial places, from wearing scarves and holding meetings. Muslims have been pestered in the streets with words and with slaps. Muslim stores and clubs are vandalized. Muslims are kept under surveillance, are being arrested and are being portrayed in the press as uncivilized and "abnormal", if not terrorists. The cartoons were the last straw. Let us kick those who are already lying down. Islamophobia is*

*raging. Muslims in Denmark must react; anything else would be unnatural". (Politiken, Sune Skadegaard Thorsen, 9.2.2006).<sup>8</sup>*

## Concluding remarks

In Denmark, like in many other Western countries, the media discourse and political rhetoric is saturated with anti-Muslim sentiment, subtle fear-mongering by media and ideologically charged propaganda by Danish People's Party continues.

There are sufficient indications in the national and international research that Muslims are victims of hate and marginalization in Denmark. The idea of multiculturalism and acceptance of diversity has become under sever attack in some of the most liberal western societies after the 9/11 (Modood et al, 2006).

In Denmark, however, multiculturalism has never been promoted in the Danish political culture as way ahead to face the challenges of increasing cultural diversity (Mouritsen, 2006).

During the late 1980s and up till the mid 1990s it was their different culture which was difficult to integrate in Danish welfare state, today it is Danish values that has become a buzz word in the media and political discourse. But the overall discourse remains the same.

Just like any other ideology, the racist ideologies have also their inherent contradictions. Take for instance this political rhetoric that comes into play each time a Muslim individual or a group is reported to have committed a crime, that they better learn the Danish values. But, Danish values are unable to explain, why the Danes brought up in a typical Danish family, schooled in typical Danish institutions, day after day, years after years, commit all sorts of crimes and indulge into illegalities and immoralities from corporate tax evasion, sexual abuse of children, domestic violence, mistreatment of the elders and mentally distorted people, embezzlements with the public funds and planting of hoax into the serious sections of the press and TV to stir up hatred against ethnic minorities.

<sup>8</sup> Source and translation, Hervik & Berg (2007).

In 2004, the department of research at the Ministry of Justice released a report, based on court-decisions data that followed the whole cohort of Danish population born in the 1960s. It revealed that among this group of Danes every third citizen has been convicted for one or another type of legal offence. Add to this all those resourceful Danes who were able to evade the grip of law and the courts and you can have an idea about the shallowness of the concept, Danish values.

It has become a routine in the Western press, as in Danish, to associate Islam with terrorism. Few from the average populace of the Western countries would know that this ghost of Bin Laden is a creation of the American foreign policy in the Muslim world rather than the Koran, which the largest majority of Muslims do not understand and cannot read. Neither the seculars, atheists, nor the adherent of faiths such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism or even Buddhism can escape the blame for having used their ideologies or the good name of their faith to have killed thousands and millions of civilians alone in the past century.<sup>9</sup>

Returning back to the overwhelmingly anti-Muslim journalism in the Danish media, one might wonder how could it go on unchecked in an otherwise civilized, democratic, and a liberal society, although the Muslim in other western countries are facing the same problem, albeit not of the same intensity.

My explanation is somehow like this, readers can draw their own conclusions.

Compared to other western nations it is a small country with a language that hardly any one understands out of Scandinavia. This smallness, or the sense of it, cultivates a specific tribal or provincial mentality leading to a national consensus on major political issues. This smallness also means that the elite that runs the media is also a small clique which rotates from one media outlet to another, from the commercial to the public-service and vice versa. It is the ideology of this clique that is reflected in the media practice. The media coverage of Muslims and Islam on issues, which are formulated and set on agenda by the media themselves,

generates fear and anxieties in a subtle manner and it ultimately helps reproduce a negative consensus. The coverage of cartoon crisis is quite illustrative; first an influential weekly of elite urges the journalists and artists to do something as our freedom of speech is being threatened. Then the largest daily of the country publishes provocative cartoons that stirs up the Muslim anger to a point that it becomes an issue of national and diplomatic crisis for Denmark. Consequently it becomes a source of news, debate and analyses in all the national media. The way in which the issue is covered demonstrate that the entire press stands firm behind the *Jyllands-posten's* constitutional right of free speech, and it is the Muslims they are irrational, fanatics, a threat to our democratic values. If an average Muslim is hurt by the whole trouble, initiated by the media, it is an other story, perhaps interesting for a moral philosopher, but not 'our' headache.

6 See on this an excellent article by Swaminathan S. Anklesaria Aiyar in *Times of India*, 23.07.2006, "Terrorism is certainly not a Muslim monopoly".

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# Mask-based fiction: the case of *Polònia* in Catalonia

Jordi Balló

- *Mask-based fiction has found in television serials a unique spreading format of a transgressor and carnival-like humour. The author goes briefly through the main satirical programmes of television history, such as Spitting Image or Les guignols de l'Info, up to Polònia, a television show directed by Toni Soler and broadcasted by Televisió de Catalunya. Throughout the text it is examined the formula for success and the main characteristics of this programme of the Catalan television schedule, according to the following variables: the transference, the presence of the double, the pact of silence, and the mutating body.*

## Key words

Television serials, fiction, satire, mask, puppet, *Polònia*, Televisió de Catalunya.

Why is mask-based fiction so supremely important on television? Probably because television serials have provided carnival-type fiction with continuity and repetition that constantly encourage the audience to become an active part. And that's not very normal on most television, determined not to leave any gaps that invite people to exercise one of the genuine pleasures of the spectator, that of feeling you are watching an incomplete work that calls upon you to act, that cannot exist without you. This explains the success, in the past, of the great programmes of reference in comedy, in which one body replaces another, collecting attributes but transforming them, creating a new, mutating personality that appears irreversible. Mask-based programmes propose the creation of a character that the public interprets as the reincarnation of another real figure, which is the initial person but without actually becoming the person, which moves and speaks like the initial person but in a different register that the public can interpret as such, to the point of achieving autonomy, and ultimately with the ominous capacity to replace the initial person. It's as if the activism of the jester, the man who dresses as a king, has found a highly productive format in television serials, because repetition means that the receiver becomes involved in the device, thereby recreating the multidirectional nature inherent in carnival, which plays with all registers: the initial figure, its replacement and the audience that manipulates and dominates it.

The idea of translating carnival-like sarcasm from humorous graphic series to television we owe to British television we owe. Hence the founding nature of the programme *That Was the Week that Was* (1962), with irreverent parodies led by David Frost, who embodied a news presenter with all the tics of news programmes, giving way to news that was zany but, ultimately, not so far removed from reality. On the extensive payroll of scriptwriters for this programme we find two pillars of humorous television of the future, Dennis

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Potter and John Cleese. Potter would forge his own path based on a hallucination of his autobiographical roots that allowed him to provide a priceless caustic portrait of a decaying society. Cleese, on the other hand, created *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, a milestone that seemed insuperable on the path of comical transgression, showing the stupidity of government bureaucracy and also the conservative sentiment rooted in extensive layers of the British population. But it was when *Spitting Image*, was created, in 1984, that the carnival device acquired all its primal weight. The puppets of *Spitting Image*, the genius creation of Peter Fluck and Roger Law, said what the personalities they were replacing didn't dare say, perhaps because a trend was starting to impose itself on international politics (presided over by Reagan, Thatcher and Begin) in which lying, or hiding the truth, was becoming a totally accepted state practice. Given this strategic hypocrisy, the *Spitting Image* puppets became the evidence of this dual morality and their success was a result of this. Any exaggeration was welcome, because it all formed part of a resistance to a ruling power that was both obscure and barefaced. The natural extension of this visionary programme was *Le Bébête Show*, on TF1, and later *Les guignols de l'info* (1988) created by Alain de Greef for Canal+ and which, subsequently, would travel around the chain's different European channels, particularly the Spanish one. In this case, political events were followed more immediately than its British predecessors: the puppets on Canal+ commented on recent political events but completely maintained the blatant force of splitting personalities, so typical of carnival. The programme's acceptance and influence among the public was proverbial, to such an extent that the puppet was increasingly seen as a real mutant of the main figure, not only as its carnival-like inversion. Accusations of unfair influence on the public have accompanied the series to the present day: from blaming them for Chirac's victory to accusing them of having helped to discredit politics at a time when there were huge waves of abstentions. The puppet's function as a substitute reached its peak when, in the Spanish elections of 2004, there was an "electoral debate" between the candidates Rajoy and Zapatero, embodied by their puppets, something which filled a gap left by the candidates themselves, who had not reached an agreement to hold a debate.

## The case of *Polònia*

This is the basic path that leads to *Polònia*, a programme directed by Toni Soler on TV3 that represents a new variation in mask-based fiction. Given its proximity and proven capacity to penetrate the Catalan cultural fabric, it's interesting to analyse some of its variables within the general context of the attributes of carnival-type fiction.

### 1. Transference

In its satirical device, *Polònia* presents a fusion between the puppet and the actor, because actors with masks play the celebrities in question. This presence of an actor's body eliminates some of the transgressing powers of animated puppets who, as they have a different register, can intensify their more carnival-like character: when a puppet acts it can appear autonomous, without editorial control, almost contradicting the moderate will of those in charge of the channel. It's difficult to imagine how the last great scandal affecting *Les guignols de l'info*, in its broadcast on 11 May 2005, where the puppet of the new Pope elect made a gesture from the Third Reich, might be conceivable using the device of an actor playing the Pope. At the moment, it seems clear that puppets have a greater capacity to transgress, both in the political sense and also in the moral sense. The hardcore scenes of the feature film *Team America: World Police* (2004), made by the creator of *South Park*, Trey Parker, who re-used the hitherto innocent puppets of Thunderbirds to transform them into radical transgressors, supposes a significant raising of permissiveness in satirical cinema. Therefore, *Polònia*'s decision to keep the body of a masked actor as a vehicle for its double entails a self-imposed ceiling to the degree of freedom these personalities can re-embodiment. An actor playing a celebrity supposes a closer, more immediate and less "strategic" view, more like the direct opposite of the imitated figure. What is gained in proximity is probably lost in autonomy.

## 2. The presence of the double

The evolution of the founding team of *Polònia* up to its current format is highly significant. Very rarely can we directly witness an experimental process of reflection on the choices made and, in some way, the productivity of mistakes. After taking part in more general programmes, this journey actually started in the programme *7 de notícies* and *Set de nit* (2001), where masks did not yet play an essential role, beyond the register already experienced in *That Was the Week that Was*: actors pretending to be presenters, although one of the presenters (Queco Novell) had really been one, and this change in register could be frankly interesting from the point of view of the public's uncertainty. The programme, made for TV3, was a healthy counterweight to the dumbing down of the channel's humour, which seemed not to be able to raise the tone from mere entertainment or referring only to television itself as a framework for criticism. In this respect, *Set de nit* was an alternative that, albeit briefly, established a more critical horizon with regard to the dominant parameters. The next step for the team took place on a private local television channel, Citytv, where they attempted to transfer to television the device of the radio programme *Minoria absoluta*, which the team had produced on RAC 1. This presented the essential core that would later become *Polònia*, with some of the actors that had taken part in the previous programme and other new actors, coinciding with an electoral pre-campaign. This immediacy, and the desire for visibility on the part of politicians, produced a strange effect with few precedents in television: that of directly confronting the politician and his or her double in the same space, or even the politician and the double of another politician, creating constant tension between the supposedly real register and the carnival-like register. This proved to be uncomfortable from the start, to the point that, when the programme was first broadcast, it was announced that a politician would attend who was at that time immersed in a controversy, and it was necessary to make it clear in the publicity that this famous person would actually be there, that it wouldn't merely be a parody with the politician's double. Curiously, what had not caused any particular problems on the radio, having the personality and his or her imitator coinciding in the same register, eliminated a large part of the transgressing effect on television with the physical presence

of both bodies. The transference from one to the other being so close and being so obvious, the critical effect dissipated, because ultimately the bonhomie of the invited personality would end up imposing itself, against the efforts of the double to make him or her change register. The lesson learned from this error was extremely interesting: in the same way that a puppet of a celebrity acquires the freedom of a critical voice, putting the personality and his or her mask together makes the device too obvious and ends up annulling it. Successive broadcasts demonstrated this paradigm and the programme eventually disappeared after inviting different politicians who did their best to avoid showing their discomfort, which a large part of the public must have also shared because the fight was too one-sided, where the mask had become the centre of attention because it held the power in media terms.

It's interesting to note how, in *Polònia*, this device has been much more controlled and in some way reinterpreted. The "studio visit" by some personalities that have been "carnivalised" is always carried out in a different spatial register to that of the actor playing them, either using a kind of "split screen" dividing them or because the guest only has a slight contact with his or her personality, when the latter, in fact, has apparently stopped acting as such. This learning has been essential in perfecting the format and is a very good reference for the issue in question, namely not forcing the relationship with the double because, although we may have thought otherwise, it is the double who is at a disadvantage as it tends to be criticised more strongly.

## 3. The pact of silence

Is there a relationship between a satirical programme and the political times in which it is made? We have seen how, in the case of the emergence of *Spitting Image*, there was a coinciding perception between the conservative wave in the United Kingdom and the United States and the role played by state lying, making the zaniness of a carnival-like double more necessary and understandable. In the case of *Polònia*, the explosion coincides with the appearance of the tripartite Catalan government, a political moment when the public might feel that, once again, the whole truth was not being told, and might also feel there was a sarcastic

distance between the formality with which agreements were made and the real, not so fraternal feelings that might preside over the life of the parties. This relationship between the programme and the government pact, and also of the pact of silence resulting from this, has greatly influenced the distance with which *Polònia* treats political life, reduced almost to a domestic and internal issue, as a closed world with its own rules where no intrusion can be imagined. This 'closed group' quality has also led to Catalan television programmes in general giving up a certain possibility: that programmes can be exported or at least adapted to an international sphere. As is almost standard in TV3's production, a programme's measure of success only takes into account its effect on the immediate sphere of action, without the slightest requirement concerning the ability to export a satirical model. This limitation has a direct effect on the programme's structure, accelerating more direct humour, referring to events that everyone must be aware of, with the television medium itself almost becoming an area for political action. But it must be said that something of *Polònia* transcends this limitation of surrendering to the everyday, as shown by the success of its collectible DVD, this being a sign that the public has understood the programme beyond the absorption of the present continuous.

#### **4. The mutating body, an early mirror**

The positive reception of *Polònia* is also closely related to the growing importance of the argument of mutation. In fact, this argument replaces that of the double, which had characterised narration concerning the splitting of identities since the times of Victorian morals. A mutant is not exactly a double but a personality who, by splitting off, has created a new figure with attributes of the former personality but constructing a new one that is, unlike a double, irreversible. From this perspective, a programme like *Polònia* provides new ways of appreciating the relationship between the real personality and his or her mask, because the satirical personality has been able to absorb, with greater or lesser success, the attributes of the real personality, to the point of being able to be like him or her, or rather, being like him or her with a different appearance. In such a time of mutant beings, the

creative team of *Polònia* has found a decisive and balanced formula between order and disorder, between the real personality and his or her mask, as a credible fluctuation between the original body and its mutation, a typical variation in terms of 21st century argument: the mutant cannot go back because it has taken on, in its essence, the personality of the other, for which it will always be a kind of early mirror.

# 'Infosatire' and democratisation on television

José Luis Valhondo Crego

- *This study investigates the possible democratising features that a new television genre would contain, which I have called “infosátira” in Spanish. “Infosatire” mainly deals with political matters, is aimed at a young-adult target and uses humour to empathise with the audience. Its beginnings on Spanish television date back to the late nineties and its appearance has increased significantly since that time. Through a content and discourse analysis applied to three different topics from the media and political arena (the Iraqi Invasion, The Prestige disaster and the General Elections in 2004), the research concludes that ‘infosatire’ promotes the brand image of the television station over and above the genre’s intention to democratise.*

## Keywords

Infosatire, parody, democratisation, dumbing-down, television.

Since the middle of the 90s, infosatire has been a novel infotainment formula on television. With this new genre, journalists take a parodying and satirical approach to public issues. The question we are asking ourselves about this new format is whether it has helped to create new relations between television stations and their audiences with regard to the democratisation of this relationship. There are two opposing stands that attempt to answer this question.

On the one hand, defenders of the genre claim that infosatire balances out audiences, in the democratic sense of the term. In other words, it provides a complicit relationship with the viewer in which the latter is benefited, both in news terms as well as in terms of involvement and entertainment. According to its supporters, infosatire creates a kind of trust with viewers where they can feel more comfortable with tackling daily issues. It reproduces aspects that are reminiscent and remind us of the private world of each individual, as it uses not so much the cold and distant language of the classic news genre but the warmth of humour that connects more deeply with most people.

On the other hand, those against infosatire claim that the genre is merely another television product created to reach specific *niche audiences* in order to rationalise costs and promote channels' *brand image*. In spite of the fact that the genre may hold democratising intentions, its opponents believe it trivialises public debate and encourages political cynicism among audiences.

The research I have carried out considers that the infosatire shown on Spanish television creates complicity more closely linked to the *brand image* of the channels than with a possible *democratising dimension* of the genre. This study was carried out on infosatire broadcast over a specific period of time and with regard to some specific themes. For this reason, the conclusion does not mean that, in theory, this genre cannot be used for what its supporters predict. In

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fact, it is likely that the problem lies in the characteristic form taken by this genre within the Spanish political and media context.

First I'll focus on defining and highlighting the relevance of the new genre, appearing on Spanish television during the last decade of the 20th century. Secondly, I'll look at what I understand by the democratisation of television and will explain the methodology adopted for the study. As no reception study was available, I chose Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodology in order to focus on social involvement and the questioning of hegemonic discourses carried by television. Finally, I'll present the study's findings and their interpretation, in other words what the genre currently means within the sphere of public television.

## 1. Infosatire as a new television genre in Spain

2005 saw the tenth anniversary of the first broadcast of *Las noticias del Guiñol* on Canal +. This programme covered the daily news via representations in which the protagonists were puppets of popular public figures. Instead of providing the customary news programme, this satire employed the caricature of famous politicians to entertain and inform its audiences. Its promoters claimed that *El Guiñol* expressed what political correctness prevented people from seeing in ordinary forums. Consequently, for its promoters, the programme represented the world of politics stripped of the hypocrisy that the population accused it of having. This programme was on a private subscriber channel (although this programme specifically was broadcast unscrambled) and went out after the evening news. Other satirical journalistic programmes appeared after the successful experience of *El Guiñol*, such as *Caiga Quien Caiga* and *El Informal*.

These three programmes and other subsequent ones had common characteristics that meant they could be classified within the same category, as an independent genre. I coined the term of infosatire to characterise this genre in relation to the rest of infotainment. Its main features are as follows:

- In Spain, infosatire appeared on television at the end of

the 20th century as an evolution of the dumbing-down of information, present since the 80s.

- Viewers were provided with a satirical and parodying view of political information.
- Its programmes were aimed at a young and young-adult target.
- The aim of infosatire was to create an area of compli-city with viewers to catch their attention.
- Infosatire programmes are usually broadcast after the news and as a counterpoint to this.
- Their effect on the public can be controversial. Some believe that they encourage the political cynicism that already exists among citizens, others claim they democratise the news genre.

I will develop these points below.

With the appearance of private competition on Spanish television towards the beginning of the 90s, channels tried to increase their audience share in order to take over the advertising market. To achieve this, programmers followed a process of dumbing-down the traditional news genres, resulting in a hybrid of information and entertainment. Until this time, information on television had been mainly made up of hard news. Bennet (2003) claims that the journalistic discourse of *hard news* aimed to keep citizens informed of the activities of the government, the candidates in electoral campaigns, the foreign politics that might affect us, the internal policies that might change our lives, emerging social problems or threats to the environment.

The dumbing down of this news stemmed from changes in how items were handled and their form.

- With regard to formal issues, the production setting and personal image of presenters took on particular relevance in the staging of news. The pace of news programmes tended to become more frenetic. Each news item had less time dedicated to it. The number of shots used increased, although their duration was cut, as happened with soundbites<sup>1</sup> (Dahlgren, 1995).
- With regard to how content was handled, news programmes looked for types of narrative that were more

<sup>1</sup> Term originating on the radio but equally applicable to television. It describes a segment of video and/or audio within a news item containing declarations by a source, be it a politician or witness of a newsworthy event (Watson and Hill, 2003).

familiar to the viewer, with recognisable emotions and people, avoiding "boring" data and figures and aiming to entertain audiences.

The evolution of infotainment per se led, in the middle of the 90s in Spain, to the emergence of infosatire, where political issues received a kind of specific dumbing-down: humorous. The humorous treatment focused on the power relations of the public sphere. In general, satire and parody devalued and humanised respectable public figures, as well as reducing their charisma. The emotion of laughter arose from the difference in power that the viewer could perceive between the pretended image of the figure and their image given by the satirical programme. On the one hand, the satire helped the channels to connect with the political cynicism existing among the young audience. On the other, the parody appealed to the television-based memory of the young target.

Market surveys of television channels showed that young people were the segment of society least keen on conventional news (GECA, 1998). The television channels looked for young, urban, middle or middle-high class audience niches, viewers sceptical of politics and who had been educated in the language of television. *Caiga Quien Caiga* started broadcasting in May 1996 and its successive programming changes looked for and found the attention of its young target.<sup>2</sup> With regard to *El Informal*, "the audience profile for this satirical news programme showed a majority of female viewers and, by age, notable support from viewers under 45" (GECA, 2002:191). These data coincide with Telecinco's target, which was the first option among the 25

to 44 age group at that time. The data for *Pecado Original*<sup>3</sup> with the so-called commercial target (the young urban audience), achieved an average of 25.2% share" during its first year on the air.

Another significant fact with regard to infosatire is the rating given by viewers for this kind of programme. This rating provides information on the quality perceived by audiences in different programmes. Out of more than one hundred and twenty programmes, those of infosatire rank among the top 30 in terms of ratings. Out of a total of ten points, *El Guiñol* ranked tenth (7.11), *CQC* ranked nineteenth (6.64) and *El Informal* 28 (6.47). By age, the viewers who rated *El Guiñol* most highly were in the 24 to 44 age group. Those aged between 14 and 24 rated *CQC* most highly. For its part, *El Informal* was rated more highly among the 14 to 21 age group. If we look at social class, both *El Guiñol* and *CQC* were rated higher by high-class viewers, while *El Informal* was rated more highly by the middle class segment.<sup>4</sup>

To complete our characterisation of this new genre, we need to examine its possible effects on audiences. Debate still goes on as to the possible impact of television infotainment and, consequently, on the effects of infosatire. Essentially, the dilemma is between considering it as a genre that promotes the democratisation of television or as a series of programmes that only encourage TV business by attracting the attention of specific niche audiences. To decide on this issue, first we must clarify what we understand by democratisation and, second, we must prepare a study methodology to draw conclusions. These two tasks are covered below.

- 2 "Its course [that of *CQC*] started in May 1996 with eight programmes broadcast on Friday evenings, with an approximate average of 18% share. Telecinco and Globo Media then decided to change it to the night-time slot on Sundays in an attempt to capture a greater share among the young, who *a priori* are at home in higher proportions than on Friday [...] After a short and discrete voyage on prime time, this satirical news programme (*CQC*) has found its ideal slot after lunch on Sundays, directly competing with its rival news programmes. In this time slot its average share is 21.7%. It manages to attract... the young sector of the audience, although it also has significant support among the adult public" (GECA, 1998). When it reappeared in 2004, "the programme obtained an average audience of 3,197,000 viewers and 21.4% share, with 27.8% in the profile of 13 to 24 years, and 28.9% in the age group of 25 to 34. With regard to its commercial target, screen share has risen by 4.2 points compared with the national average and totals 25.6%" (<http://www.cqc.telecinco.es>, 23/05/05).
- 3 *Pecado Original* was another infosatire programme that replaced *El Informal* in 2002 and was broadcast until 2005.
- 4 To highlight a fact that distinguishes quality from quantity, a programme such as *Big Brother* has the highest audience figures of any programme but its ratings have fallen, now ranked at 80 on the list.

## 2. The concept of democratisation and the methodology employed

Dahl, one of the most important theorists today of democracy, pointed out two basic questions in the whole democratic process that are directly linked to the freedoms of expression and information guaranteed since the first illustrated Constitutions. With regard to the right to expression, Dahl noted that, throughout the whole process of taking obligatory decisions, citizens must have appropriate and fair opportunities to express their preferences with regard to the final solution. They must have appropriate and fair opportunities to include new themes to the action programme and to express the reasons behind them supporting one solution instead of another.

With regard to the right to information, which is directly related to the formation of opinion, Dahl observes that each citizen must have appropriate and fair opportunities to discover and verify (within a period of time allowed by the urgency of the decision) the choice of the issues to be debated that best serve the interests of citizens.

In order for the concept of infosatire's democratising potential to become operative, four normative conditions need to coincide in these programmes, which I shall detail below. Two of these are related to the aspects noted by Dahl (plurality of discourse in competition and participation of different identities). The other two are related to specific aspects of communication on television (audience ratings and the popularisation of information). I shall now discuss these in detail:

1. Infosatire should strengthen the thematic function<sup>5</sup> of journalism. The themes covered should be clarified so that they can be understood by the public. Journalists are responsible for defining the problem clearly, explaining its causes and concluding what can be done in this respect, as well as how and who can do it. In most cases, different actors and groups with conflicting interests usually construct social problems differently in terms of

their definition, consequences and solutions, as well as wrapping them up indifferent persuasive strategies. It is usual for the social position of some agents to result in their discourse predominating the rest. Infosatire should provide audiences with tools to be able to criticise hegemonic positions with regard to the themes covered.

2. Programmes should guarantee the effective participation of different social groups with regard to their social identities and demands. In this research I aim to show how citizens or groups are represented in these infosatire programmes or, in other words, to examine the role these genres give to citizens. The research question I ask is as follows: Do these genres allow citizens to be positioned in the texts as political agents capable of taking part and altering the situations that arise?
3. The audiences of these genres should be broad. Although this condition is not enough, it does seem to be necessary.
4. The genres should take care of the pragmatic function of communication to connect as far as possible with the expressive style of the *world of life* (in Habermas's terms). Humour, satire or the narrative treatment of issues play a fundamental role in communicative pragmatics.

In order to carry out the research and to compare these issues noted above, I used Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA; Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 1992) on a sample of television programmes. First, I shall explain briefly what CDA consists of and afterwards describe the sample. I analysed the discourse of infosatire pieces, assuming that, in these pieces, a discourse of the themes covered should be recognised. A discourse includes a frames and discursive strategies. I define discursive frames (Entman, 1993) as mental schema that organise a large amount of information about a social issue

- indicating its causes,
- proposing its solutions,

5 Fiske distinguishes between the thematic and pragmatic dimensions of journalism. The former is identified with content and the "referential functions of journalism, with its representation of social reality". The pragmatic dimension, for its part, is concerned with "the relationship between journalism and audience, although also with promoting interaction among the audience itself... Journalism can be described as a factor that promotes or paralyzes communication between citizens" (Dalhgren, 1995:50).



- identifying the agents who must carry these out and
- issuing a moral opinion on the theme.

The promoters<sup>6</sup> of information try to present frames using strategies that persuade the public. I am talking about strategies as the variety of possibilities for proposing the same *discursive frame* with persuasive intentions, to influence public opinion. All *discursive strategies* contain an underlying frame maintained by institutions with regard to the theme. Discursive strategies use ways of naming and operations with genres to articulate the frames they refer to.

The universe of the sample consisted of all the pieces<sup>7</sup> of all news programmes on the general Spanish channels (TVE-1, La 2, Antena 3 TV, unscrambled Canal + and Tele-5) and two infosatire<sup>8</sup> programmes (*Pecado Original*, broadcast on Tele 5 and *Las Noticias del Guñol*, broadcast on Canal +) on workdays<sup>9</sup> for a period of nine months (from 1 October 2003 to 30 June 2004). This period is key for our aim of understanding how infosatire might affect the democratisation of the public sphere. During this time citizens had to chance to take part in public life conventionally via general elections (14 March 2004) and, less controlled, via the extensive involvement of civil society in the issues of the Iraq War and the consequences of the Prestige disaster. I chose the three workdays that contained infosatire pieces dealing with the war in Iraq, the Prestige disaster and the General Elections of March 2004.

### 3. Research findings

In order to make the concept of democratisation operational, I have explained four conditions that must be fulfilled by the pieces:

- a) attend to the thematic function,
- b) provide participation for civil society,
- c) belong to programmes with notable audience ratings and
- d) encourage the pragmatic function of journalism.

I present the findings below following this order.

#### 3.1. Infosatire journalists did not construct their own frames for the issues they covered nor did they set frames against each other with regard to theme

- They did not establish causes that explain the problems or clarify the responsibility of the agents involved in them. For example, in the case of the Iraqi war, journalists limited themselves to trivialising the confrontation between police and social activists when Bush visited London in November 2003, without specifying the frames defended by each agent. Taking the Prestige disaster as a case in point, the probable conclusion that might be reached by a viewer watching the pieces is that the sinking of the petrol tanker was an accidental disaster, an uncontrollable and unpredictable catastrophe.
- Neither did they offer any kind of solution nor specify the agents that should carry these out. For example, regarding the Prestige disaster, the only solution possible for the problem seemed to consist of the solidarity-based resignation of civil society and the recovery of the zone

6 Following Molotch and Lester (1974), I make a distinction between promoters and sources. Promoters deploy activities around the issues that concern them in order for these to be covered by the media. Sources provide information on these issues. For example, an ecologist group might demonstrate publicly to demand responsibilities are assigned concerning an ecological disaster. However, the media information on this theme may be provided by other social agents and not by the ecologists. In this case, the promoters are not the same as the sources.

7 I've excluded pieces from the sports sections in news programmes and pieces of gossip or society news in infosatire as they are not related to political life and even has their own sections within the programmes examined.

8 The only two infosatire programmes broadcast that could have been seen by any Spanish viewer during these nine months on general television channels.

9 Individual days have been chosen and not the whole week as the two infosatire programmes chosen were not broadcast at the weekend.

devastated after the oil spill, releasing the government of the time from any political responsibility.

- The infosatire did create an implicit frame concerning the functioning of public debate. Within this frame, political themes are eclipsed by the media aim of providing a show, where the most important thing is to ridicule public figures above any rational explanation of the issues under debate. For example, on *El Guiñol* and concerning the war in Iraq, the representation of the conflict between the positions of governments and public opinion removed civil society from the story. The pieces were focused on the figures of the political leaders of the nations involved and, specifically, on their personality traits. The issue was therefore not proposed in terms of public debate but rather around situations related to more intimate spheres. Setting this up in private terms had the advantage of humanising politicians and connecting with the interpersonal communication forms of the *world of life*. However, firstly the scriptwriters ridiculed all the politicians rather than humanising them and, secondly *El Guiñol* did not take advantage of this toning down of the issue and its expressions (humour, irony, parody...) to accompany viewers on an itinerary of burning public issues. Instead of this, it showed a conflict between the vanities of the leaders, in which Aznar tried very hard to win Bush and Blair's friendship, while they looked down on or did not acknowledge him.

### **3.2. The infosatire analysed did not offer access to civil society**

The involvement of civil society in the pieces was practically inexistent. In the anti-war demonstrations, activists were presented as clowns or gregarious anti-globalisation tourists. In the pieces on the *Prestige*, "Nunca Mais" was ridiculed without allowing it to contextualise its discursive frame. Something similar happened with the groups of artists who did not agree with the government's handling of the issue. On other occasions the satirical journalists erased civil society from the scene in themes such as immigration, territorial debate or democratic regeneration. In this way the positioning of viewers in the texts as agents capable of talking on problems became complicated.

### **3.3. The screen shares of the genre were considerable**

Between 1997 and 2002, the viewing figures for *CQC* remained stable, around 2,500,000 viewers, while *El Guiñol* stood at around half a million and *El Informal* achieved numbers close to 3,000,000. The average for the most widely seen news programmes during this period was close to 3,750,000 viewers. So the viewers of infosatire totalled approximately three quarters of the audience for the most popular news programme.

### **3.4. Infosatire deployed strategies to seduce viewers' attention**

The genre caught the attention of audiences by emulating the very characteristics of interpersonal communication in spaces where individuals maintain their close and private relations (unlike the public space, where it is more likely that anonymity reigns supreme). Infosatire took on these characteristics to recreate the complicity inherent in this kind of relationship. Below I list the most common strategies used to simulate "intimate communication":

- Use of colloquial words and expressions in contrast with the formal language of news programmes.
- Construction of narrative based on public figures taking on well-known archetypes in popular culture, creating a perception of familiarity among the audience.
- Characterisation of politicians to appeal to the emotion of the audience. This mechanism works when the viewer perceives the *power differences* between the image politicians wish to give and how they are represented in satire.
- Infosatire invites viewers to share a political reality without seriousness. It is a reality that viewers can devalue and thereby feel symbolically powerful compared with those who hold authority.
- It exploits two kinds of implicit social knowledge (Dahlgren, 1995):
  - The widespread stereotype of the cynicism of politicians. The target for this genre has grown up on a political culture of scepticism with regard to the institutions that govern society. Infosatire limits itself to reaffirm this mistrust by ridiculing those in government.

- The collective memory of television and cinema. Infosatire operates with the conventions of audiovisual genres to connect with a segment of the population whose common cultural references come mainly from television.
- Infosatire causes humorous effects by decontextualising statements made by the ridiculed figures. Employing different combinations of image, sound, music and text, infosatire breaks with the audience's expectations.

#### 4. Conclusions

It is highly likely that the infosatire analysed promotes a demobilising idea of politics. Its representations do not encourage citizens to get involved in issues that concern them as, since it does not construct any clear discursive frames, the themes being covered are not clarified for viewers. If we add to this the limited involvement of civil society in this kind of programme, viewers might find it complicated to place themselves symbolically against the power in these narratives. And it is even more complicated to feel motivated enough to change the course of events.

Some infosatire programmes have become a channel's brand image. The clearest example is *CQC* on Tele-5. As in the advertising genre, infosatire attracts audiences using strategies that work as in commercial advertising, with irony and humour, devaluing and taking seriousness away from public issues and its key figures. However, it does not employ this power to guide the viewer within public debate, in spite of the fact that it has the guaranteed attention of a significant sector of the audience, principally young people, precisely the segment that values traditional news programmes the least. It is clear that the audience ratings and rating given by the targets for these programmes confirm the appeal of the genre. However, in spite of making use of implicit knowledge and popular narratives where celebrities are key, its impact on public involvement and on the extent of agents and themes present in the public sphere is minimal.

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# Political satire in Italy: a successful television genre

Rossend Domènech

- *Political satire is present in every Italian media, specially on television. The author examine in this article the most outstanding satirical scheduled programmes and analyses its evolution. He ends claiming that politics has been transferred to the television stage, instead of any Parliament, and it has also assumed the television language, even satire.*

## Keywords

Political satire, television, Italy, Berlusconi, *Le Iene*, *Blob*, *Striscia la notizia*, *Parla con me*, *RaiOt*, *Che tempo che fa*, *Crozza Italia*.

There's a lot of political satire on Italian television: two daily programmes on national channels and four weekly programmes, not to mention the doses of satire dotted throughout many programmes that are not specifically satirical. During the last season (2006), there were five exclusive daily programmes and, in previous seasons, from 1994 to 2006, half a dozen appeared and disappeared. Since spring 2007, and in addition to these programmes, broadcasters have started to show new comedy and satire programmes in general that sometimes include political sketches.

At the same time there has also been a proliferation in the country of satirical cartoons in the press, and every year one or two books appear on this area. But, where the genre is most abundant is on the Internet, principally since Silvio Berlusconi entered politics (1994), when satire on the ruling classes was more difficult to carry out by means of traditional public and private instruments. This was due to relentless censorship of this category. We can therefore say that satire has become fashionable. What is not so clear is for what reason or reasons.

"The history of Italian satire is made up of great explosions, followed by great silences" wrote Adolfo Chiesa<sup>1</sup>. But satire, at least the sharpest satire, has always been thus because it usually proliferates when it has strong adversaries who inspire it. As happened under the fascism of Benito Mussolini and, afterwards, during what was a practically immobile political system with 40 years of government by the Christian Democrats (DC). Mussolini, the DC and Berlusconi have been, or are, the three great inspirations for creators of satire.

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1 CHIESA, A. *La satira politica in Italia*. Ed. Laterza, 1990

## 1. The programmes

The most aggressive satirical programme this season is *Le Iene* ('Hyenas') on the channel Italia-1 (Mediaset group), for which Berlusconi is the main shareholder. The oldest, just having celebrated its 18th anniversary, is *Blob*, on RAI-3, although its paradoxical content is close to satire. The most strident is *Striscia la notizia* ('Scratch the news') on Canale-5, also owned by Mediaset, with the subtitle of "the voice of turbulence". *Glob*, on RAI-3, is defined as "the obscene person of the village". On *Che tempo che fa*, on RAI-3, the subjects are more reasoned. *Parla con me*, also on RAI-3, delivers constant irony on contemporary issues, including political.

Four of the six totally or fundamentally satirical programmes are broadcast on RAI's channel 3. It's probably a result of the history of Italian politics and its relationship with television. During the period incorrectly called the First Republic (1948-1993), which started when the DC won an absolute majority in the country and ended with the 'Clean Hands' trials that finished off the traditional parties, the three channels on public television (RAI) were distributed among the areas of influence: RAI-1, for the Christian Democrats; RAI-2, for the Socialist Party (PSI), and RAI-3, for the Communist Party (PCI). As the PCI was always in opposition, "its" television channel (RAI-3) is the one that most cultivated political satire. Studies on this genre say that satire is an instrument against those in power. "Satire must goad the powerful", says Sabina Guzzanti<sup>2</sup>, author of the film *Viva Zapatero!* and behind various satirical programmes, such as the present-day *Parla con me* and the previous *RaiOt* (2004), censored and suspended after just one episode. Neither is the Italians' overall disinterest in politics in general strange<sup>3</sup>. Curiously, in the period 1996-1998 and as from 2006, when the centre-left has governed or is governing

together with the communists from the PCI of RAI-3, which are now "ex", political satire has become diluted and embraces everyday life in its entirety. By strict logic, with a now progressive government, in Italy there should be more right-wing satire, but there isn't. On the other hand, the broadening of satire to the whole of everyday life has been influenced by the Europeanisation of politics and the globalisation of the national economy. An example of this internationalisation is the turmoil started in Denmark because of the Mohammed cartoons, which then spread all over the world. An Italian minister<sup>4</sup> helped to keep the fires burning by printing one of these images on a tee shirt that was shown on television, helping to inspire the creators of satire.

The actors or presenters only dress up physically as the figures they are satirising on one of the programmes already mentioned and, even in this case, it's only insinuated. Perhaps Giulio Andreotti's hump, Berlusconi's baldness or Romano Prodi's village priest air. The only exceptions are Sabina Guzzanti and her brother Corrado, who imitate the voice, tics and style of dress. With regard to swearwords and oaths, all the programmes mentioned bleep these out. Some make an exception for the word "cazzo", literally "prick", which in Italian usage is the equivalent of "shit!" or "bloody hell!" in English.

### *Le Iene*

For Aldo Grasso, the most popular television critic in the country<sup>5</sup>, this programme "is the only true investigative journalism" existing in Italy, although he attributes to it "a moralising vein" that, in his opinion, gives it a negative connotation.

The writers dedicate themselves to denouncing facts of ordinary illegality or misery at the speed of lightning, documenting these with images. The current Pope is one of the frequent themes, as he is for many of the other programmes

2 Interview published in the newspaper *Il Manifesto* (09/02/2006).

3 See, among others, the analysis of the Italian electoral campaign in 2001 in *La posta in gioco*, by Paolo Mancini and other authors. Ed. Carocci, 2003.

4 Roberto Calderoli, minister for Institutional Reform for the Northern League, in Silvio Berlusconi's second government (2001-2006).

5 Collaborates regularly for the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* and has written several books and encyclopaedia on Italian television.

mentioned. One professional category often attacked by the writers is politicians, to show up their ignorance, hypocrisy or deals. They dedicated one number to showing that a third of politicians had consumed drugs in the 48 hours before being interviewed on the state budget, which was only a pretext. During the conversation, a make-up artist rubbed their foreheads with wetted cotton wool that was actually a chemical kit to detect drugs.

The writers were denounced for violating private life. Another day they surveyed the level of culture of Italian politicians as these were leaving Congress. One of them answered that Olmert<sup>6</sup> was the president of Portugal; another that the current president of Venezuela was called Gómez and another explained that the "greenhouse effect" is caused by the Earth cooling. One placed Dafur<sup>7</sup> in the Lebanon; another admitted that he didn't know what CONSOB was<sup>8</sup> and another said that Mandela<sup>9</sup> was the president of Brazil. One answered that ETA operated in Ireland and that the father of Cain and Abel was Isaac. In another programme, an accomplice approached the MPs, pretending to be a "close business friend" inviting them to "an important meeting" that same evening. More than one, and without even asking who he was (in fact, they didn't know), accepted the invitation. "It's a friend I've done a favour for," they explained afterwards to the TV cameras. This episode brought them several complaints from some MPs, who were offended by the kind of false complicity implied by the invented relationship. In another episode, to investigate what Italians were thinking about, seeing as they weren't interested in politics, they went and asked people for their opinions at a film set where they were making a hard porn movie. The actors and actresses, naked and occupied in all kinds of sexual

activities, both alone and in pairs or groups, gave their opinions with all the comic ambiguities that can be imagined. "Each person finds his own path," answered one who was masturbating; "politicians should be more inventive," said one who was doing it with three women at the same time; "citizens should be pushed more", said another who was taking a young woman from behind. "I don't know who to vote for," added a girl who also didn't know who to choose from the three who were attending to her. They dedicated another space to parliamentary turncoats, who were defined as "buffoons on loan to politics", who were asked insistently about "how much they had charged to change allegiance".

Paolo Kessisoglu, one of the programme's four writers, has explained. "We get requests for help from all over Italy and we're stopped on the street to hear complaints about anything"<sup>10</sup>.

### **Blob**

This programme takes its name from the horror film of the same title (1958), made by Irving S. Yeaworth Jr., and has the subtitle of "Fuori strada" ('off track', or 'wrong track' and also 'it's not that') and "Di tutto di più" ('About everything and more', a well-known advertising slogan for RAI). It lasts twenty minutes and starts with a threatening blob of magma that expands from the cinema screen to the streets like a strange beast, while the audience run away, terrified. It's made via a montage of both famous and unknown fragments of films, documentaries, adverts and TV news, in order to express that, on television, everything is manipulated. The voice of Enrico Ghezzi, one of the programme's two writers<sup>11</sup>, is not synchronised with the lip movements. The

6 Ehud Olmert, the Israeli prime minister.

7 Region in the south of the Sudan, in the news because of the particularly violent war being fought there.

8 The Italian equivalent of the Securities Board that supervises shares quoted on the stock exchange.

9 Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, who had previously been considered a terrorist and had been sentenced to life imprisonment for opposing apartheid.

10 Interview published in the *Venerdì* supplement to the newspaper *La Repubblica* (30/03/2007).

11 The other is Marco Giusti.

asynchronic effect, added to the fragmented montage, thereby attracts our attention to the content of the images. The resulting political satire is due to the paradoxical combination of the images, always related to contemporary themes and always actually broadcast.

An example: On 18/04/2007, television around the world gave air time to the demonstrations against Vladimir Putin in Saint Petersburg and the fact that, according to the Russian president, few people had taken part. The small number of demonstrators was also highlighted on Italian television channels by Silvio Berlusconi, Putin's personal friend, who was accompanying him at the Saint Petersburg festival. That evening, *Blob* placed TV news images within the montage from Italia-1 (owned by the Mediaset group, Berlusconi's TV company), with the voice of the presenter<sup>12</sup> as he was saying that hardly anyone had demonstrated and that nothing important had happened. Having said this, the channel connected with a special correspondent sent to the Russian city, who started to talk about the outrageous violence used by the police to suppress the demonstrations. The channel also continued broadcasting, be it knowingly or not, the sound and images from the studio, where the presenter, who didn't know he was on air, first showed his incredulity and then his anger and, later, his rage, with oaths and swearwords. "Images always seem exaggerated" he justified at the end to the viewers. In another case, after showing a montage of fragments of images about various themes, *Blob* went back that evening to the same presenter from Italia-1<sup>13</sup>. It was night-time, in front of a fashionable club. A passer-by said something to him, the presenter spat

in his face saying he'd been insulted, the passer-by called the police and reproached the celebrity: "you insult half Italy every day from your half abusive news programme"<sup>14</sup>. You are the little friend of Silviuccio (Berlusconi); all of you are made from the same stuff, from the same money, the same games. Aside from Viagra there is dignity! You are the embarrassment of Italian television!" The image continued to show another presenter and commentator from the Media-set group<sup>15</sup>, while he said: "On what basis can it be ruled out that the present-day world has got worse?"

Another day (10/04/2007), in the context of passing an act on common law couples and the kidnapping of an Italian journalist in Afghanistan, the series of images included: a right-wing leader painted as Julius Caesar in the middle of a lot of women, while saying "I want to marry whomever I want"; images of the leader of the government, Romano Prodi, edited in parallel to those of an ice dancer and those of Berlusconi talking about "humanitarian reasons".

Images then appear of the former president of the Republic, Francesco Cossiga, talking about God and man, while one of the writers of *Blob* imitated the politician trying to put on a pad (used for incontinence).

When celebrating its 18th anniversary, *Blob* broadcast an hour's programme in blocks, with the best montages of its history. In one of them, there was Ciciolina<sup>16</sup>, who offered to allow herself to be raped by Saddam Hussein if he would let all the hostages go free. There was also the execution of Saddam mixed with images of a disabled person in a wheelchair; a scene from the programme *Castaway* and another of the news presenter from Italia-1 wheezing. Another block

**12** Emilio Fede, a self-proclaimed defender of Berlusconi, for whom he reserves affectionate words in the TV news programme. A very popular person with satirical programmes.

**13** Italia-1, since it has been broadcast, should have been switched to the satellite channel because this was the ruling given by the Constitutional Court, as it considered that Mediaset (owned by Berlusconi) already occupied too many national frequencies. But, inexplicably, the ruling has never been enforced.

**14** Beppe Grillo, a comedian who performs monologues in Italian theatres. His block is the most famous abroad. His work focuses on illustrating events that the public and private media have not announced, principally those related to multinationals, which are afraid of him.

**15** Giuliano Ferrara, director of the newspaper *Il Foglio*, whose shareholder is Veronica Lario, Berlusconi's wife.

**16** Ilona Stalher, erotic and pornographic actress famous in the seventies and eighties, who was an MP for the Radical Party.



was about Osama bin Laden: the famous images of the Taliban walking in the mountains were underscored with the music from *Heidi* ("Your nest is in the mountains / in the city you were sad [...]"), followed by images from the film *Apocalypse Now* and *Apocalypse Show*, a RAI programme that had been a disaster.

### **Striscia la notizia**

The setting is always the same: a TV news presenter's desk, two journalists, two dancers moving their hips and who, from time to time, dance on the presenters' desk, and a puppet dressed up as some kind of animal. Every evening the programme gives real but alternative news, a kind of counter-information about things that have not appeared on the official TV news bulletins.

"Good night, citizens" started a broadcast a short time ago, before announcing that, because of the impending municipal elections, it would not deal with any political themes<sup>17</sup>. "We don't usually send politicians to hell nor do we let them do the same to us", they explained. They then repeated a series of surveys on false sickness claims, a false machine for medical diagnoses and another on the real possibility of buying drugs from chemists without a prescription when one was actually required by law.

Another evening, one of the initial headlines for the news stories they were going to talk about said, literally, "Berlusconi has been invited to the conference of the Left Democrats (DS) party and has reserved five seats... for his companions". A few days earlier, a weekly publication had published photos of the former head of government in the company of four young ladies entitled "Berlusconi's harem". Another headline informed that, according to data from the parliament, Prodi (head of the centre-left government) was the poorest politician of all. For this reason Prodi, they said, had declared that this "is the fault of the current government and, next time, I'll vote centre-right". During the last period

of "political silence" due to elections, the programme decided to dedicate two minutes to politicians from the two coalitions, using the system of asking one leader and then editing an answer out of context, selected from archive images. This day they asked Alessandra Mussolini, from the right wing, what Francesco Rutelli, leader of the progressive centre, should do with the Democratic Party he had just set up. The paradoxical answer was: "He should make it work and become trans or transsexual". After they asked Berlusconi how the right would react to the new Democratic Party: "We will lie, we will demonstrate in the streets, we will boycott everything they do. Because, what can you do when faced with intimidation, destruction of political offices and the fires we are suffering from?".

### **Parla con me**

This programme is produced from a stage in a theatre, where there is a sofa and an orchestra. The presenter, Serena Dandini, who collaborates with Sabina Guzzanti, coordinates the appearances and the orchestra underlines the best witticisms. This programme by person behind the film *Viva Zapatero!* usually uses some Iberian elements, such as a Spanish-Italian accent, music or castanets<sup>18</sup>.

One of the episodes this year, made after a series of fatal accidents on building sites, started with a monologue. "I am in front of the window to see builders falling / my wife has another illness because she supports the left / I'm not interested in politics, I prefer fatal work accidents / the dead don't exist today in the newspapers either / they are the most beautiful deaths of the week, they are slowed-up deaths / the more that die, the more the bosses take on / the rich can travel to see the dead in the refugee boats / they can get indigestion like a hunt in the zoo / you can always find a builder that falls". Then the titles introducing the programme start immediately. Afterwards there was an interview with the author of a book on the family that, in reality,

<sup>17</sup> An act known as *de par conditio* rules that, a few weeks before an election, the length of time depending on the kind of election, no political programmes can be made except those agreed by the parties and a parliamentary committee. These programmes must grant identical time to each party.

<sup>18</sup> The left political base in Italy shows a lot of sympathy for the president of the Spanish government, while the progressive leaders fear him, never inviting him to any event, not even electoral, because of the problems that Spanish socialist politicians have created with the Catholic church. In Italy, the Vatican is closer than in Madrid.

was about the different types of families existing in today's society. Given this fact, the presenter underlined that politicians live "distanced from reality. Let's stop talking about politics and go on to reality", interrupted the interviewer. "Politics are twenty years behind and 30 have already passed" the other said. "Children grow up and leave but politicians always stay the same" the first answered.

A usual guest on the programme commented after the main news of the week: "The Pope has written a book about Jesus. Who does he think he is? Corrado Augias?<sup>19</sup> We haven't voted for a year now and, after one year, we still don't understand Prodi when he talks, while there are children who, at one year old, already talk and walk". After announcing the positive fact that, since the current progressive government had been in power, taxpayers declare more profits and that has given an economic margin to the government, the personality of the day sang: "We're living in hard times, at the end of the week or the month it's difficult to find, in the words of those who represent us, anything that helps us to look to the future". Then the orchestra played a lullaby that ended by calling for the help of the "*Vaticano...e poi non ho più niente in mano*" ('and after I'm left with nothing'). On another occasion, one part of the programme was dedicated to finding out who was responsible for everything that was going wrong. They explained that, when a dentist looks at your teeth, he's concerned about "what the previous one had one" and this was also the case with mechanics, locksmiths and everyone. They continued by saying that "the new government arrives and says that the previous one has left a hole of one billion in the budget. All the country is moving forward like that, in a series of frauds carried out by those who were there before and before and before, like a 'chain of Saint Anthony'<sup>20</sup> that's tying up the whole nation, developed with errors committed by others. The true miracle is the chain itself".

### ***Che tempo che fa***

This programme was actually created to talk about the weather but, little by little, the weather concepts took on another meaning. Like those of the "weather man", the Radio Nacional de España (RNE) presenter, who during Franco's reign decided one day to read out that "*a fresh one* (wind or person) *from Galicia is spreading throughout the whole mainland*". He was sacked, while his Italian peers on this programme were given more space and now have good ratings. The programme lasts just a few minutes and has an interview like the fragment below. The national context on that day was a mini-crisis in Prodi's government, having failed to get enough votes to pass its foreign policy and having to depend on the votes of life peers: "- What has the government crisis shown us? - That political professionals are mere amateurs. Look at D'Alema. He's a relapsed Machiavellian. He had said: "And if we don't get the necessary votes, we'll all go home!" And they didn't get them! How can that be? Incredible. They're doing their utmost so that (life peer) senator Pininfarina can come to Rome from Turin in enough time to vote, but they haven't bothered to find out who he'll vote for (in effect, he voted against the government). They said they had also counted on Giulio Andreotti's vote in favour of the government (he voted against). How can it be that, in 2007, there's still someone who relies on the word of an Andreotti!"

### ***Crozza Italia***

One of the most daring programmes has been *Crozza Italia*, a name taken from the surname of Maurizio Crozza, its inventor and promoter<sup>21</sup>. Every day he would have a go, in addition to politicians, at the current Pope, to the point that *Avvenire*, the newspaper for bishops, dedicated an extensive article criticising him. The secretary of Benedict XVI also made a public appearance to censure it. *Crozza* ended the programme as was planned, but never again spoke of

19 A TV presenter who runs programmes on mysterious events and people and unresolved cases.

20 This is the name given, in Italy, to the chains of messages of all kinds that must go from one person to another, sometimes with serious threats for anyone who dares interrupt the chain. Lately this also takes place on the internet.

21 Broadcast on La7, a channel created as a possible third alternative to overcome the duopoly of RAI and Mediaset.

the Pope, to whom it dedicated an ending in which Benedict XVI came out of the famous window of his office and spoke via handwritten bills hanging on the window, which afterwards flew up into the air. "See you in two thousand years' time" said more or less the last of these phrases.

In another programme, the presenter interviewed the at that time conservative minister for Telecommunications<sup>22</sup>, represented by an actor dressed up. The politician answered regarding the act that he had drawn up on the new plan for the whole area of telecommunications, of particular interest for Berlusconi, who occupies a pre-eminent and conflictive position in the country that has never been resolved. Concerning the act in question, which aimed to resolve the conflict, the minister replied: "Look, I didn't write the act. In fact, I haven't read it either. Want to do me a favour? Make me a 20-page summary and write a few questions and answers for me, easy and difficult, so that, when I'm asked, I'll know how to answer. Y'know what? Write it in Spanish". Then there was a sketch about the anniversary of the election of Benedict XVI, who was getting confused with the dove of "peace" (pax), which didn't want to fly from fear of bird flu, and the "PACS" or act putting homosexual couples on a par with heterosexual couples. Then *Crozza* talked about the "candid" sexually transmitted disease... But also of the white tunic or "càndida", from which the word "candidate" comes from. The monologue continued: "I wonder, when I go to vote, is that a candidate or does he have a criminal record? It's just that, in the last parliament, there were 26 people who had been given a definitive sentence and 16 in the current parliament, one out of every ten MPs." Suddenly, we hear the melody, famous in Italy, of "*Zapatero, Zapatera / one per cent of your charisma is enough here / the people want a strong and passionate leader / Prodi grumbles like a prelude / like this song is sad / we dreamed of Che Guevara and we have a Borbón / One day I'll find a true leader for me / there should be at least one in humanity*".

Things were worse for *RaiOt* (RAI-3), by Guzzanti, than for *Crozza*: Mediaset (owned by Berlusconi) took RAI to court.

22 Maurizio Gasparri.

23 Interview included in the aforementioned book, *La satira politica in Italia*.

24 GRASSO, A. "La politica nel salone televisivo". In: *Il Mulino*, núm. 3 (2006).

The public body took fright of the compensation being demanded from it and suspended the programme after the first episode. The courts found for the writer, saying, "she did not defame but exercised the right to criticise and satirise".

In the spring of 2007 there was an explosion of satire on the TV channels. They replaced game and quiz shows. They are easygoing programmes on RAI-2, like *Piloti* and *La grande notte*; and *Glob* on RAI-3, from the sitcom genre, that include specific political references. They make jokes like "Bush and the Pope have decided to make war on gays by bombarding them with hormones", "electoral silence can be avoided by talking about elections to Second Life... but afterwards the results that count will be those, not the ones in real life".

## 2. Final comments

In the sixties the newspapers *La Stampa* and *Il Giorno* asked their cartoonists not to draw caricatures of politicians. For this "offence", in 1951 Carlo Manzoni and Giovannino Guareschi were sentenced to eight months in prison. But, with the fresh winds of 1968, there was an explosion of cartoons and satire that, until then, and probably due to the effects of Fascism, had been considered a genre of the right-wing. However, creators of satire continued to be considered the minstrels of the powers that be. "Present-day satire does not touch the true interests of people", lamented the writer Tullio Pericoli in 1990. In his opinion, the genre had become a "boring and repellent" stereotype<sup>23</sup>. The country's great *viveur*, Ennio Flaiano, wrote, "with the arrival of wellbeing in Italy, the drawn caricature has died".

But television had also arrived and, many years later, when Berlusconi arrived in politics, this was transferred to television. Principally, "almost all politics is carried out on television", wrote Aldo Grasso<sup>24</sup>. In the electoral campaign of 2001, Berlusconi decided to sign a famous contract with

electors in front of the cameras of *Porta a Porta*, on RAI-1, a programme by presenter Bruno Vespa. This is a programme with the participation of three to eight people who are usually politicians, journalists, actors or *soubrettes*. It's not a simple chat show. Proceedings are held there that are similar to those held in the courts and world exclusives are reserved for it, such as the death of John Paul II.

All the other channels have created a similar programme so that, in order to know what a government is doing or where it's going, you have to watch television, because it's the most direct and updated source. Parliament isn't, neither are the newspapers. Angelo Agostini has written that "politics has been transferred to television because it had no other place to develop, as all places had lost their legitimacy. The only place (to go) was television, which naturally imposed its own toll: the reality show... It's not *Vespa* that has changed politics but politics that has deliberately become *Vesperised*<sup>25</sup>. Television does not have more political debates but has a lot of talk shows in which politicians take part", so that "politics is trying to take over the rhetoric of the media"<sup>26</sup>. The Italian comedian, Pippo Fanco, said one day to politicians: "Up to now we have laughed at you, now make us laugh" and, according to Agostini, "politics is one of the most successful television genres"<sup>27</sup>.

We can better understand the joke by Daniele Luttazzi, presenter of *Satyricon*, an old programme of scathing satire, who was forced to leave by the head of the government, Berlusconi. Referring to the programme, the president of the Congress<sup>28</sup> said: "Italy does not resemble you, Mr. Luttazzi". His answer was: "I know. Italy resembles you, Casini, that's the problem". Politics having therefore gone to television to explain itself, it has had to modernise itself in television terms, with all its consequences. This is made clear by some characteristics of the aforementioned programmes.

One of these is the fact that politics has taken to using, or has had to use television language, including that of satire. Another is that, at a time when citizens are more distanced from active politics, this has gone to find them wherever they are, thereby leading to a new popular kind of participation. A third consequence is that, due to the poor politics on offer and, moreover, whose reputation has been lost through constant scandals, television channels and the satire they produce are acquiring a replacement role: they are changing the concept of participation. Luca Bizzarri, co-writer of *Le Iene*, says that "people don't trust the state and we all end up talking about the moralising role that seems to increasingly belong to comedy programmes".

By definition, because satire "ridicules defects", politics comes out of this quite badly and only becomes important because it can be ridiculed. So it becomes banal and uninteresting. Dandini goes further: "Today there is no politics; therefore, there is no satire". Thanks to television satire, citizens can laugh at politics or take part in mocking it, but they can also get involved, especially in the case of satire on the internet. According to sociologist Sara Bentivegna, with this last form of presenting satire "the established power relations alter and central importance is returned to citizens, situated under the condition of freely exercising criticism and disseminating irreverent opinions"<sup>29</sup>. But there are still a lot of questions, which can be summarised in the question asked by the writers of *Le Iene*: "Why do people call us and not the fire brigade?"

25 AGOSTINI, Angelo. "Lo spettacolo nella politica". In: *Il Mulino*, núm. 2 (2006).

26 Aldo Grasso, *op. cit.*

27 Angelo Agostini, *op. cit.*

28 Pier Ferdinando Casini, from the centrist party UDC.

29 BENTIVEGNA, S. *Campagne elettorali in rete*. Ed. Laterza, 2006.

# Political satire in Germany: from the political *Kabarett* of the thirties to Comedy TV

Gemma Casadevall

- *Political satire in Germany is related to a tradition inherited from French cabaret but taken on as their own by a handful of intellectuals, principally left-wing, in the twenties and thirties of the last century: the so-called political Kabarett. Its roots in the political avant garde give it a prestige that survives to the present day as well as a certain immunity to the media impact of other mass TV products, such as Comedy TV. Hitler made Kabarett the “political enemy” of the Third Reich, but the capitulation of Nazism also saw the rebirth of the genre, stronger than ever. Cabarets sprung up like mushrooms throughout Germany, although mainly in the two cities that had been the cradle for the genre, Berlin and Munich. A good cabaret artist knows no taboos: everything is allowed, provided the subject is handled with talent and they do not resort to silliness. This would be the line taken by the masters of the genre from Germany of the seventies, eighties and up to the present day, such as Dieter Hildebrandt and Gerhard Polt. Television has not damaged these Kabarett classics but has included them in its programming. There are those who say that Comedy, as a more crude form of political satire, threatens the cabaret tradition in Germany, but there are also those who have used it as their example, halfway between the two styles, proving that it is possible for both to coexist: namely Harald Schmidt, the most widely broadcast of all present-day cabaret artists.*

## Keywords

*Kabarett*, cabaret, political cabaret, humour, satire, parody, Germany, Berlin, Munich, Kaiser, Weimar republic, Nazism, Third Reich, exile, capitulation, allied occupation, post-war, comedy, television

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## 1. Introduction

In Germany, talking about political humour means referring to a past quite a time before the birth of television and, essentially, to one word: *Kabarett*. This is a term adopted from the original French word *cabaret*, also with connotations of a subculture, bohemian life and musicals but which in Germany, more than in other countries where this genre has also been taken on board, has a political aspect and is related to intellectuality, whether it takes place at night or not.

The formula is the same: a small stage, an equally small company with just a few actors, often monologue experts, and a mix of humour and satire with a certain *carte blanche* to say what would be pure hard criticism in serious terms.

This worked in the twenties and thirties, when renowned journalists and writers such as Kurt Tucholsky, Erich Kästner and, albeit in passing, Bertolt Brecht placed themselves at the service of political *Kabarett*. In exile, it was also the political humour, with a more decadent touch, of Erika and Klaus Mann, the children of Thomas Mann, once Nazism had swept aside any criticism. And it existed once again after the Second World War, in a Germany occupied by the allied forces, where the victors and the defeated allowed themselves to be captivated by the rebirth of cabaret.

*Goodbye to Berlin*, by Christopher Isherwood, is probably the most accurate literary summary of what the arrival of Nazism meant for German cabaret of all kinds, not only political. The writer's fascination with the Berlin ambiances of the time also reflects the link of *Kabarett* with German intellectuality and particularly left-wing intellectuals or, as in the case of the Mann family, the intellectuality of those who went by the name of frivolous *enfants terribles*. But Berlin was not the only key city of *Kabarett*. As with the political

power, the Prussian capital had a domestic rival in Munich.

Berlin to the north, Munich to the south, with the consequent differences between the Prussian and Bavarian world. But in both cases there was a common core. It was essentially political humour, betrayal performed at night before a small theatre audience: this was the essence of *Kabarett* at the beginning. From this setting in the thirties or the post-war period, *Kabarett* went on to humorists, impersonators and *Show Meister* on public and private television with record audiences. Evidently, there has been a change in format, not only technical, which is also related to another German tradition, also beginning with a K, namely *Karneval*, the festival where anything goes until Ash Wednesday, the start of the 40 days of lent in Christianity. More multitudinous and noisier, less intellectual than political cabaret but equally rooted in the German tradition of political satire, serving as a prelude to the genuine settlement of scores between "real" politicians. In Bavaria, the meaning of *Ash Wednesday* now has little to do with going hungry, or thirsty, and a lot to do with meetings between politicians who, on this day, turn the monumental beer tents into a battleground where anything goes. Politicians exchange blows dialectically but at a distance, each in his or her own party's tent, in the same way that, throughout the carnival, his or her impersonators have gone onto the stage to parody them pitilessly, generally in the presence of the "victim", be it Chancellor Angela Merkel or the local political leader. This was the case in the time of the Bavarian patriarch, Franz Joseph Strauss, and is still the case with the heir to power in the most prosperous *land* in the country, Edmund Stoiber. The politician has no other option than to laugh, in amongst the audience, aware that all eyes and now also TV cameras are looking for the smallest sign of irritation that reveals a lack of a sense of humour.

Present-day TV cabaret and Comedy have both been nourished by two traditions: that of political and literary *Kabarett* and that of the tents at the popular *Karneval*, where political satire strips off its artifice to reach the people. As used to happen in the cabarets of the twenties and thirties, the master or *Meister* is the one who is the fastest, with the sharpest tongue and the greatest capacity to go the furthest.

But behind TV comedy there are not the great writers of that time or the masters of improvisation of carnival but teams of scriptwriters who closely study the daily comings

and goings of politics, a minister's slip-up or the reaction of opponents, and who bind the programme together. Part of the work of good humorists is precisely to make people believe that they have personally thought up what they have just said, perhaps spontaneously.

Political *Kabarett* did not die with the arrival of television, at least not in Germany. Cabaret artists are professionals of renown, and good impersonators of today's politicians, be it Merkel or Stoiber, have a full schedule. Television hasn't killed it but it did provide a substitute, Comedy, which is not always of the same quality as that required by German tradition. Although it is more or less reminiscent of the same structure, behind it are scriptwriters addicted to excess and obsessed with audience ratings. While the private channels fight to have the most audacious comedy, public broadcasters keep to their long-standing masters of political cabaret and fight over the master of masters, for decades, one of the few examples that prove that harmony between *Kabarett* and Comedy is possible: Harald Schmidt, the solitary hero of the eponymous programme, although new formulas are regularly searched for. He does not need any other references. Anarchic, in the tradition of the historic Karl Valentin; irreverent with the left wing, right wing or whatever suits his purpose, as was Kurt Tucholsky in the thirties, and faster than Dieter Hildebrandt and his colleagues from the post-war period onwards. Schmidt will not go down in the history of literature. His sphere is television, but he has been able to win the game over gross Comedy and keep up the tradition of *Kabarett* on television.

The following sections recount some legendary names in the tradition of political *Kabarett*, exponents of the phases this has passed through in its little more than one hundred years of history, up to television parody and Comedy, split between masters and sappers.

## 2. The origins: Valentin, Tucholsky and *Die Weltbühne*

It all started with Karl Valentin (1882-1948) and the collapse of the *Kaisertum*, the empire. Not only the empire of Wilhelm II ended after the First World War but also the rigid censorship that had pacified the work of political satire until

then. The Weimar republic opened the door wide to political *Kabarett*. It was even a promising victim, both due to its political weakness as well as its arbitrary nature.

From Munich, Valentin imposed a new style of theatre, allegedly for the left-wing, onto the image of the traditional 'pushing and pulling' between a Prussian Berlin and a Bavaria that knows how to laugh. Theatre with a beer, capable of reaching both the common people and intellectuals. Such was the Valentin who, in 1911 and throughout the twenties, in tandem with Liesl Karlstadt, came out of the Bavarian bars to achieve renown throughout the country, even in the still Prussian Berlin.

Valentin understood what, years later, Jürgen Hennig would explain in his book *Theorie des Kabarett*s as a summary of political *Kabarett*: namely a game of complicity with an audience that, right from the start, shares certain knowledge with the cabaret artist. In other words, in order to create generalised laughter at the expense of a specific blunder and not of the character in question, it is necessary for the audience to be au fait with this blunder. Something that is relatively easy in our era of television with the repetition, even sometimes to the extreme, of recurring images of politicians but which, at that time, did not focus so much on a particular in appropriate phrase but on more firmly established and less particular attitudes.

Valentin embodied the start of political *Kabarett* whereas Kurt Tucholsky (1890-1935) was its consolidation. Valentin was a kind of clown, cabaret artist, mimic and intelligent political rebel, in the same way that Tucholsky, in addition to writing scripts for cabaret, became the most irreverent disseminator of political satire using the journalistic medium that became his *Die Weltbühne* (world stage). A sensual magazine, a paradigm of social criticism against everything and, in some way, the forebear of what are still the most firmly established magazines of political humour in Germany, *Titanic* and *Eulenspiegel*, clearly more accustomed to caricature and witticisms than *Die Weltbühne* was but nonetheless connected with this tradition. Tucholsky was a journalist, cabaret writer, poet, satirist and, ultimately, politically persecuted, as was inevitable.

His initial success started in the time of the Kaiser, between 1907 and 1911, as a social democratic party member. Also dating from this time was his idea of opening, in Berlin, what would now be a cocktail bar and bookshop,

where each person buying one of his books would be given a glass of schnapps. Tucholsky family background was Jewish but he gave up this religion during this decade, a long time before the Nazis came to power. He had even been labelled anti-Semitic because his texts also attacked what he called "Jewish meanness".

But Tucholsky cannot be put into a single critical box. His writings, his satires, disparaged both the military nature of the time of the Kaiser, before and after the empire had collapsed and the defeat of the First World War, as well as the political hypocrisy and legal apparatus of the Weimar republic, shaken by attacks against colleagues in the profession, on the left, democrats or simply editors, such as himself. Tucholsky scorned the Weimar republic in the same way he had scorned the Kaiser's empire, and *Die Weltbühne* became his means of criticism. He combined it with his work as a cabaret author, under his own name as well as the many pseudonyms he employed, both to hide his identity and also to conceal a lack of personnel. *Die Weltbühne* had other directors, such as Siegfried Jacobsohn and Carl von Ossietzky, before and after Tucholsky respectively, but he was its heart and soul.

Because of this, and in spite of having separated himself from the Jewish community, he could not survive under Nazism. Like so many other intellectuals of the time, such as Bertolt Brecht and Thomas Mann and family, Tucholsky emigrated. He did so at the beginning of the thirties, tired of increasing pressure against him and his *Die Weltbühne*. His destination was not France or the United States but Switzerland and afterwards Scandinavia, a meeting point of social democratic and also communist exile. From there he tried to continue with the magazine, with Ossietzky still in Germany, until the latter ended up in prison and, immediately after Hitler came to power in 1933, *Die Weltbühne* was banned. In exile Tucholsky continued his work as best he could, while the Nazis added his name to the list of "degenerate" authors whose books were burned as a ritual prior to their being banned.

Political cabaret, not only that of Tucholsky, disappeared under the Third Reich, albeit only in German territory. Some of those who stayed behind, such as Werner Fink, ended up in concentration camps. Tucholsky did not end up like this but neither did he live long enough to enjoy Germany's surrender. In 1935 he died from an overdose of sleeping ta-

blets at a hospital in Göteborg, Sweden. According to some biographers, it was suicide, although others believe it was an accident.

Tucholsky was considered to be one of the most prestigious journalists of the thirties and he represented, not only in how he lived but also in how he died, what characterises German political *Kabarett* of his time: acidic criticism, mental agility and also the stereotype that sarcasm is the delight of sad people. He did not have a happy existence nor was his end happy. In Germany, one of his most famous sayings, "Soldiers are assassins", is still a slogan on tee shirts and banners at anti-war demonstrations today.

### 3. The *Kabarett* in exile of the Mann family

Tucholsky departed and Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel left Germany some years later, just in 1933, after the fire at the Reichstag was used by Hitler's followers to take it out on communists, social democrats and other enemies of the regime. Their books also ended up on the bonfire and *Die Dreigröschener* (the Threepenny Opera), with music by Kurt Weill and its fantastic king of the bandits and brothels, Mack the Knife, took a long holiday.

With so many intellectuals in exile, the Nazis need not have bothered banning political cabaret. But they did. From the array of locales in the twenties and early thirties it became a politically controlled *Kabarett*, as was the whole country. This didn't kill the profession but it did force it to choose, as with many other branches, between exile or political persecution.

Tucholsky, Brecht and Thomas Mann were among the group who fled in time. Two of Mann's children were also with them, Erika (1905-1969) and Klaus (1906-1949), both writers like their father, but keen to shock on their own account. With them, *Kabarett* took up its path in exile. The Mann brother and sister decided to found what has gone down in history as a synonym for political *Kabarett* in exile, "Die Pfeffermühle" (pepper mill) in 1933. They founded it in Munich, up to then a place with quite a tradition in political *Kabarett*. They didn't only include satire but also a decadent lifestyle and passion for exhibitionism and sexual ambiguity, especially on the part of Erika.

The experiment in Munich didn't last long with the birth of

the Third Reich and the family left. Starting with the parents and then the whole company of Die Pfeffermühle, namely the brother and sister, plus her friend and lover, Therese Giehse, a pianist and a composer. The Mann *Kabarett* went on tour in Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands and other places, while the authorities of the Third Reich classified it as "the enemy of Germany" and stripped Erika of her German citizenship. She completed her "degenerate" persona both publicly and privately by marrying the renowned homosexual Wystan Hugh Auden, friend of Christopher Isherwood. Die Pfeffermühle thereby forged itself a terrible reputation among Nazi officials and also the rest of "sensible" society. With all this, the company disembarked in the United States and made their debut with their *Kabarett* in New York.

Somewhat the same happened as with Bertolt Brecht: the label of enemy of the Third Reich helped the company get into the United States but did not win them an audience. At first curious, they eventually foundered on the indifference and hostility of North American authorities, who saw them (and watched them) as potential enemies.

Erika put the *Kabarett* to one side and, when her parents followed them into exile in the United States, she became her father's secretary and interpreter. Die Pfeffermühle expired, as did the political *Kabarett* that had remained inside the Third Reich. The company of the Mann brother and sister was not revived after the Second World War. For Erika, as for Thomas Mann, return to her country of origin was unthinkable. Finally, the suicide of her partner in arms, brother and soul mate, Klaus, in 1949, was such a profound watershed in her life that it became impossible to look back.

Erika and Klaus' Die Pfeffermühle could not be exported outside the Germanic sphere, as usually happens with all political satire, perhaps because of the old rule of complicity with the audience that was so well-known and practised by Valentin. Germany would therefore have to wait for *Zero Hour* (1945) to see this form of *Kabarett* triumph once again in the territory that had expelled it.

### 4. From allied occupation to television *Kabarett*

"If all the plans come to fruition, soon there will be more cabarets here than houses still standing". This sentence is



by Erich Kästner (1899-1974), probably the most successful German author of his time, and the time and place were symptomatic: 1945 in Munich. One of the cities most closely related to the history of Nazism and one of the many throughout the country where the Zero Hour landscape was made up of ruins.

With this phrase, Kästner summed up the rebirth of locales dedicated to cabaret, political or artistic, of the post-war period. On any corner, eaten away by bombs, a *Kabarett* poster would appear, as if spontaneously generated. In spite of the scarcities of the post-war period, or perhaps because of the Germans' need to feel alive again, Munich and Berlin once again, and in a short period of time, became the seats of this supposedly minor art. The country was being rebuilt from its ruins and *Kabarett* was also revitalised, as if it were part of a kind of common strategy of the allies and survivors to overcome the past.

Kästner was also among those who practised this kind of reconstruction. In 1951 he founded a bar in Munich, whose name said it all: Die kleine Freiheit ('the little freedom'). The author was basically known for his absolute bestseller of the time, *Emil und der Detektiv*, a book written in 1928 that crossed the barriers of so-called children's literature, was translated into more than 50 languages and also filmed back in the time of the Weimar republic. He was a collaborator on Jacobsohn and Tucholsky's *Weltbühne*, his books were burned by the Nazis, as were others, but the Gestapo came to get him at his house to interrogate him. However, in spite of it all he didn't go into exile nor was he deported. He survived Nazism in silence and, once the war was over, he saw that the time had come to retrieve *Kabarett*. His was a more literary than political variant but, nonetheless, on the stage of *Die kleine Freiheit* they spoke of Nazi Germany, the war and the destruction left behind by the Third Reich.

Probably nowhere has seen such a development of this genre that can be compared with the German case. The double capacity for cabaret in Berlin and Munich gave way to a multiplicity scattered throughout the country and particularly in the Ruhr basin, around what would, after the Second World War, become the provisional federal capital of Bonn, a statute that remained in place until the country was reunified. The Ruhr basin is also the domestic seat of the noisiest and most popular *Karnevals*, the other source that has nourished present-day mass TV cabaret.

Those artists totally related to literature or journalism gave way to a new generation of political cabaret artists who took maximum advantage of everything. If it was the cold war, well the cold war; if it was the time of student protests, in 1968 and even well into the seventies, well that then. If Helmut Kohl was in power, they dunked slices of bread in a characterisation of the provincial nature of this apparently not very brilliant politician who, for 16 years, dominated the most powerful country in Europe.

There are no restraints in German political *Kabarett*: the whole political spectrum of the time can be satirised in five minutes, from right to left, from top to bottom. Everything can be turned on its head but form is maintained when entering the private terrain. German political cabaret artists are people with a certain reputation, to some extent inheriting the tradition of great names dedicated to the genre. Some things are below them.

Dieter Hildebrandt (1927-) belongs to this family of cabaret artists arising and growing as public celebrities in the post-war period, as well as his troop of the *Scheibenwischer* (literally windscreen wipers). They are the best example of a cabaret artist's style with regard to the country and with a more than loyal public. Trained in Kästner's school of cabaret, Hildebrandt is the most classic of all political cabaret artists of the last few decades. Alone or accompanied by other professionals like himself, since the mid-seventies he has combined political cabaret in the theatre, in its own sphere, with television.

*Notizen aus der Provinz*, the programme where he would act as presenter and scriptwriter, erupted on the second public channel, ZDF, at the beginning of the seventies and, in just a few years, became an unquestionable audience success, with ratings of 30 and 45 percent. In this programme, Hildebrandt played with his image of feigned provincial innocence, so familiar to TV viewers and, therefore, with an almost innate capacity to place the audience within his complicit game.

It wasn't always easy. In 1980 the programme was suspended as this was an electoral year and it could have influenced the electorate. The programme was deemed to be identified with and influence citizens to such an extent. Hildebrandt looked 100% like the man in the street, apart from his talent for turning his witticisms into political bombs and, by extension, politicians into outright enemies of his talent.

Having overcome the impasse of the eighties, he returned to the screen with *Scheibenwischer*. This programme didn't have any clear schedule, was broadcast between four and six times a year in the eighties and ended up on the first public channel, ARD, turning its stars (Hildebrandt and his collaborators Bruno Jonas, Mathias Richling and Georg Schramm) into the most popular faces on television. Between 1980 and 2003, 144 programmes of this series were shown on public television, with its usual masters and special guests, generally colleagues from the same profession. Retired and having just reached 80 years of age, Hildebrandt continues to be a point of reference for German television and political satire that shifts between the popular element and the finesse of criticism, always avoiding cynicism. He is a true dinosaur of political *Kabarett*, with a good constellation of equally good peers on similar programmes, such as Gerhard Polt, who, far from becoming bloody rivals, side with and complete the panorama of the best tradition of political *Kabarett*.

## 5. Comedy TV, preying on audiences

Historians and those studying political *Kabarett* cannot agree as to whether political *Kabarett* is endangered by Comedy TV or whether, simply, it has changed in format and we are observing a new dimension of the same phenomenon. In his study entitled *Politisches Kabarett - Definition, Geschichte und Stellung*, Martin Siegordner warns that Comedy TV has pushed political *Kabarett* to one side. Another person studying the area, Eckhard Schumacher, states in the book entitled *Konkurrenzloses Lachen* that there are simply barriers between professionals. In other words, not everything we see as distortion of the tradition of political satire is necessarily a betrayal.

What seems to be true is that the dividing line between the more or less transmuted heirs of political *Kabarett* and the figures of Comedy do not lie so much in the television or stage format but in one word: talent. As mentioned in the introduction, in Germany there is one example that acts as a bridge between the two concepts, *Kabarett* and Comedy: Harald Schmidt. Not even those who are most sceptical or hostile towards Comedy deny that Schmidt has an exceptional talent that brings him close to the tradition of the best.

In the antipodes of this situation we find others such as Stefan Raab and a very long list of professional colleagues, generally on private channels, that are synonymous with gross humour and elbow each other out the way for ratings.

In the German region, Schmidt is a phenomenon comparable to Hildebrandt both on the stages that are so traditional for cabaret as well as on television. In other words, a continued success, in spite of generational differences and also differences in character and clientele. He is an exponent of the generation born with the "economic miracle" already underway (August 1957), three decades younger than Hildebrandt, and represents the Germany of today that has not gone through war or even the immediate post-war. Irreverent, released from a past that belongs to his parents but not to him, he allows himself to go much further than his predecessors in the iconoclastic panorama of the Germany of today or of the past.

Like Hildebrandt, Schmidt started on Berlin public television, at the end of the eighties, but became a "TV animal" par excellence on the private channel, SAT1, with his *Late Night Show*. A programme practically tailor-made for him as the star, interviewing guests who were actually extras. He was christened Dirty Harry because of his corrosive humour and has been the unbeatable soul of the late night slot, where more is permitted than usual. The programme format was easy: himself behind a desk, a band playing intros and outros for different people, an audience ready to comply with his mission to laugh and a seat where the interviewee, whether a star or not, would fade into the background and be subjected to an avalanche of ill-timed questions. A Comedy format known and well-established in other countries.

Schmidt is a TV phenomenon and, therefore, no matter how much his programmes may appear to be an exclusive product of his talent, he has a good scriptwriting team behind him. He has his own personality to distinguish himself from his rivals who, by the way, are also supported by their own scriptwriting teams. Moreover, Harald Schmidt never looks stressed, afraid of losing his audience ratings. Another difference to most of his Comedy rivals.

In 2003 he decided to take a "creative break". His reappearance one year later on public television's leading channel was something of a media event. And he measured up to expectations: reappearing with a long beard and hair, as if to demonstrate that he had thought long and hard

during his retreat, and picked up the thread he had left hanging, once again on the public channel of his early days and without any kind of regard towards the politicians of today and even less towards the ghosts of the past. He is one of the few cabaret artists who can allow themselves to step on historic taboos or politically incorrect themes of the present in his parodies, be they Jews, Turkish immigration, without resorting to silliness.

He's fast, in a couple of minutes capable of covering Nazism, the history of the Red Army Faction or RAF, the terrorist group founded by Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof, and the bad times being had by Bayern Munich in the German league. He has a particular instinct for knowing where the limit is between irreverence and hitting below the belt, something that allows him to place himself, without any hesitation, in politically incorrect terrain, including somewhat ridiculous jokes about Turkish immigration, and to get away with it, without anyone really being able to feel defamed or insulted.

At the other extreme, as we have already mentioned, is Stefan Raab, a paradigm of the Comedy moderator who does display a panic of losing ratings. Raab is not the only case and he has many colleagues on private channels in the same situation, but the issue here is not to provide a list of names but to give a general overview.

One example of the distance between a Schmidt and a Raab, related to a recent delicate debate in German politics and public opinion: namely whether it was appropriate to pardon the last prisoners from RAF, the group that had killed 34 people until it ended in 1998. It should be noted that the relatives of some of these victims still do not know who had actually committed the murder in each specific case, because there was a law of silence and collective action within the organisation. While the history of the RAF was being reviewed and the political weeklies offered new versions of the deaths of attorneys, bankers and heads of companies in the so-called "German autumn of '77", the bloodiest time of the terrorist group, Schmidt and his scriptwriters set a trap for the audience. In answer to the question "who do we relate with Nazism and who with the RAF?", using a series of photographs of people such as Hitler, Meinhof and others, Schmidt finally managed to get the audience to doubt when placing figures, such as the writer Günter Grass, whose biographical episodes were related with both the Third Reich

and with the radical left. All this, with an air of frivolous elegance that characterises him and without going below the belt.

Raab really put his foot in it with a photo montage, inspired by the photograph of the former head of the employers' association, Hanns Martin Schleyer, published by the RAF during the kidnapping, also in 1977. He "played" with the image of this kidnapping, enveloped in symbols of the armed group, replacing it with one of the candidates for the German version of Fame Academy, who had been expelled after "196 days of being kidnapped" he had said.

"That has nothing to do with satire or humour", said Jörg Schleyer, the son of this RAF victim, murdered by three shots a little after Baader and two of the earliest members of the group had appeared dead in their cells at the Stammheim prison. Once again, it was clear that the difference lies not so much in the definition between Comedy and *Kabarett* but between talent and stupidity.

## 6. To be continued

To finish, we might say that, of all the current generation, namely that of the post-war period and of today, Hildebrandt is a kind of dinosaur of *Kabarett*, capable of touching all the buttons on stage or on television. Schmidt represents the TV animal par excellence and Raab the degeneration of the tradition of political satire. But there is one last name to mention, who for many has been the best cabaret artist in modern Germany: Gerhard Polt.

He has not had the media presence of a Hildebrandt or a Schmidt but he's an example of an ongoing career, influenced by his loyalty to the principles of German *Kabarett*. To him belong some of the most legendary episodes of the genre, such as a historical parody of the Bavarian world and its hegemonic party, the Social Christian Union of Bavaria, in which an ineffable teacher from the German embassy in an African country tries to explain, in a mix of English and other languages, the peculiarities of the "regional" democracy of the world of Stoiber and of the current *Kaiser*, Franz Beckenbauer.

German television recently remembered this wonderful performance (*Democracy today*, from 1993), on the occasion of Polt's 65th birthday. This occasion served to reflect

on whether *Kabarett*, as such, has a future, whether it will die devoured by the impact of Comedy and whether it is possible to continue parodying politicians who are basically so ridiculous they make satire or caricature almost impossible. In other words, whether the everyday reality exceeds the fiction of *Kabarett*.

While there is politics, there will be lying, corrupt or simply inept politicians whose dirty laundry needs to be aired. And while there are talented cabaret artists, there will be *Kabarett*, was Polt's reply.

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# West Wing or Left Wing? The pedagogy of politics in the masterly series of the United States

Vicent Partal

- *For seven seasons, American viewers have had the chance to follow a series that showed, as fiction but very meticulously, internal life at the summit of power in the White House. Directed by Aaron Sorkin, The West Wing series has set trends. Never before had North American political life been portrayed with such meticulousness. The reactions of critics and the public have been highly favourable towards this non-humorous parody of the American presidency but some right-wing groups have accused it of creating a "parallel reality" comparable with the country's real presidency, that of George Bush.*

## Keywords

White House, Bartlet, Bush, Washington, NBC, politics, presidency, *The West Wing*.

There are very few buildings in the world that arouse the curiosity, attention and interest generated by 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington. The White House is a key setting for world politics, one of the leading centres of intrigue in any terrain, the most absolute seat of power. It must be one of the few buildings that can be recognised the world over, one of the few houses that leaves no-one indifferent when they see it. Consequently it is, and must be, also a privileged setting for fiction. It has all the right conditions.

The White House has been portrayed on many occasions in film and on television. It is believed that *Wilson*, a film from 1945 directed by Henry King, was the first to reconstruct life at the White House with detailed sets. Since then, a whole range of films and TV series have attempted to draw back a little the curtain that obscures the most secret area of the White House from the view of the public at large. But the portrait constructed had never managed the quality and dimension achieved with *The West Wing*.

*The West Wing* is a true masterpiece, a description that is difficult to beat of how politics works, of how politicians work and how the strings of high politics are moved. Evidently, seven seasons and 156 episodes are a lot of hours of plot and images and there are some sublime moments but also some that could be done without. In general, however, it can be said that people are unanimous in that *The West Wing* is an extraordinary production. It's not a parody, it's not really a portrait but anyone who has followed it closely will have learned a lot about the leading political institution of the United States, about politics in general and about the complicated and difficult North American political process in particular. As a mural of life at the political centre of the United States, it can be said that this is simply an unbeatable production.

*The West Wing* manages all this and is also an appealing TV production for the public at large, with scripts written

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Vicent Partal

Director of Vilaweb

down to the last detail, simply perfectionist stage design and surprising and quite particular production. From the long travelling shots (known as *walk and talk* shots) that regularly mark the passing of the days, to the detailed lighting in each scene, the episodes of *The West Wing* are a compendium of cinematographic quality. A central part of the merit goes undoubtedly to Aaron Sorkin, the main scriptwriter and producer of the series. Sorkin is a young writer who started to shine as a scriptwriter for films such as *A Few Good Men* and who also achieved certain success in his first television series, *Sports Night*. But *The West Wing* has been the series that has catapulted him to fame and with which he has managed to place himself among the elite of Emmy award-winners. Sorkin personally wrote the scripts for the first four seasons and supervised those of the other three. In just its first season it won nine Emmys, followed by a further twenty or so throughout the seven seasons that NBC broadcast the series, specifically from 22 September 1999 to 14 May 2006.

One of the key aspects that Sorkin has known how to take advantage of is that several frontline politicians have worked on the series as advisors, giving it a hitherto unheard of amount of detail with regard to the situations, settings and dialogues. This is the case, most particularly, of Dee Dee Myers, former press secretary for Bill Clinton, who has polished and reviewed the episodes of the series, providing not only her knowledge of politics but especially her knowledge of how the White House works from within and on the cycles for creating news. Perhaps this is why the character of the press secretary for the White House, C. J. Cregg, played during most of the series by Allison Janney, is one of the most successful and interesting.

## 1. Seven seasons on air

*The West Wing* was first aired on 22 September 1999. The initial proposal for the series was to follow the life of Sam Seaborn (played by Rob Lowe), one of the advisors to the new Democrat president Josiah *Jed* Bartlet (played superbly in the series by Martin Sheen). However, as the episodes passed, it became clear that limiting the action to Seaborn's adventures was not such a good idea, given the huge galaxy of characters inserted into the dance by the producers

and scriptwriters. This annoyed the actor, who disappeared from the series, although afterwards he returned sporadically.

However, it was evident that the decision to portray all the members of the West Wing and their interrelations was much more interesting and established a very strong choral image, full of resources. A set-up was therefore gradually created where each of the main actors was capable of shining with their own light without interfering with the others. And the main characters in the series emerged. The first, President Bartlet (Martin Sheen), who enthused some of the viewers so much that a public campaign was organised calling for the actor to attempt to get to the White House in real life. At his side shone the most specific and intimate circle of power, the summit of the White House, with the Chief of Staff, the methodical Leo McGarry (played by John Spencer); the Communications Director, the worrying Toby Ziegler (Richard Schiff); the deputy Chief of Staff, the impulsive Josh Lyman (Bradley Whitford); the Press Secretary, C. J. Cregg; the First Lady, Abbey (Stockard Channing), and an extensive series of civil servants, members of Congress, military, diplomats and foreign figures that appear very often throughout the seven seasons.

Following the reality of American politics, a president can only hold the position twice so, in the seventh season, the scriptwriters were forced to prepare his replacement. An exhaustion of themes, surely inevitable, and the difficulty of bringing in a new character as a successor, in this case the future president Matt Santos (played by Jimmy Smits) ended up finishing the series amidst the disappointment of a great many followers, who protested vehemently. However, it should be recognised that this was possibly the best decision, as the seven complete seasons broadcast had drawn a mosaic of the presidency of the United States that would have been very difficult to beat and that will become more valuable as the years pass.

Precisely during the last season, and probably once the series' audience difficulties had been noted, some of the most audacious television experiments were carried out on *The West Wing*. Particularly the famous TV debate between Santos and the Republican candidate, Arnold Vinick, paradoxically played by Alan Alda, one of the most progressive actors on the North American scene.

The episode dedicated to the debate is a unique experiment. It was broadcast live, with the actors even improvising some of the answers, using the logo of MSNBC, the information channel continuously compared with the NBC, and the word "Live" constantly superimposed on the screen. Even Forrest Sawyer, one of the NBC journalists who, on various occasions, had led debates between real presidential candidates in the United States, accepted to chair this debate. In the end it led to criticism from some viewers, who felt that crossing the boundary between reality and fiction was going too far.

The debate was broadcast on 6 November 2005 and it was highly controversial in the United States since, in the series, the two actors aspiring for the presidency agreed to break the strict rules for this kind of debate and met face to face, talking about any subject, interrupting and not avoiding any kind of challenge. For some political commentators, the broadcasting of this episode made it clear to what extent real official debates are insipid due to the excess of precautions on the part of campaign teams.

This was not the only, nor the first, occasion when *The West Wing* crossed boundaries. Two seasons previously, in episode 518, they had simulated the broadcast of a special report on the work by the Press Secretary of the White House, C. J. Cregg. The report, which pretended to be part of the Access programme, was recorded with a clearly different visual texture, including interviews with C. J. Cregg's main colleagues, where they talked with a naturalness reserved for real interviews and where a voice in off narrated the key events.

*The West Wing* had previously included a documentary, at the start of the third season, in which former presidents such as Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford, and famous politicians such as Henry Kissinger and Leon Panetta had agreed to comment on the resemblance between the real and fictional White House.

## 2. After 9/11

However, on one previous occasion that was very special, *The West Wing* had already broken with the programme's schema. It was after the attack by Al-Qaeda on New York and Washington in 2001. The whole team worked against

the clock to record an episode considered exceptional, as Martin Sheen himself announced in a prior recording, broad-cast on 3 October 2001, one week before the start of the second season proper. The episode, entitled "Isaac and Ishmael", actually dealt with the story of the persecution of an Arab American working in the White House, something that made him a suspect for the intelligence services, although there were no reasons to doubt him, except for some coincidences in name. Seen in perspective, this singular episode became certainly complicated to be broadcast a few weeks after the Al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington, with emotions still running high. But, without doubt, its broadcast and the controversy that followed right at the start of the third season helped extraordinarily to consolidate the image of *The West Wing* as a "liberal" series that, in American political language, means "left-wing". Some newspapers were indignant by the episode's content but, in general, the more progressive media applauded the episode and compared it with the view of the "war against terror" that President Bush had started to make explicit. *The Washington Post* even said that *The West Wing* had taken on the role of compass for American politics. The episode was very successful in terms of ratings.

It certainly cannot be denied that the manner in which the political themes were focused in *The West Wing* was highly influenced by liberal approaches. President Bartlet is a Democrat, from New England, a Nobel prize-winner who is surrounded by characters that belong, for one reason or another, to circles considered to be most liberal in American politics. There is no doubt about this, nor is it hidden at any time. Bartlet also has an impressive array of personal characteristics: he is truly brilliant and well educated, he has a sense of humour and is also very thoughtful, he is always concerned about people in the most difficult of situations and, in general, has huge personal and moral integrity, only broken by hiding a serious degenerative disease and, on occasion, an action as president that takes him beyond tolerable limits, surely so that the scriptwriters can exemplify even more how the White House works, where things are almost never black and white

### 3. *The West Wing* against the White House?

Is Bartlet anti-Bush? It has been speculated that part of the series' success is due to the fact that many viewers enjoy, during the forty-two minutes of each episode, thinking that the real occupants of the White House are not George Bush and his troop of *neocons*. Here the legend of "*The Left Wing*" was born, the name given by the *neocons* in an attempt to discredit the production and place it in the centre of political combat. Some right-wing propagandists were particularly aggressive against the series, among these of note being Chris Lehmann, who stated that it was actually a "revisionist" series that attempted to establish an ideal Democrat presidency in the minds of Americans after the scandals of Clinton's presidency.

But *The West Wing* is not and has almost never been a Manichean series. At no time does it avoid explaining the complex nature of politics and power and this is key to understanding its value. A liberal President, more liberal than Clinton, manages to authorise the clandestine assassination of a foreign leader, the minister of defence of a fictitious country Kumar, who is accused of trying to provoke attacks against the United States. This happens at the end of the third season and the succession of episodes during which this story unfolds is one of the most intense points in the whole series. Seeing a President like Bartlet, first debating with himself in amidst huge and incredibly important moral doubts and then, afterwards, ending up by bloodying his hands is a tremendous lesson in *realpolitik*, which at the time caused a notable impact among viewers. And which, surely, is closer to the reality of the White House than many would like to imagine.

The whole process that leads to this attack is a good example of how problems appear in cycles throughout the series. There are even characters, like the eccentric expert, first, and the ambassador of Great Britain, afterwards, Lord John Marbury (played by Roger Rees) who appear with enormous gaps between each appearance but always maintaining coherence with the political events being unfolded. Lord John Marbury is, by the way, one of the few characters who represent at some time a role close to humour. It cannot be said that he is humorous but the caricature of a British expert involved (both affectionate as well as direct), is so powerful and so well played that it's difficult not

to let out a giggle every now and again, especially in view of the misery shown by Leo McGarry, always so circumspect, given the discomfort of having to talk, or worse still negotiate with him. Lord John Marbury, however, is a special protagonist in another episode full of *realpolitik*. Being ambassador, he is sent to protest to the White House for an invitation given to a Sinn Féin leader, and manages to express the formal protest while, at the same time, hinting that the invitation is good for the peace process underway in Ireland.

As happens with so many other characters in the series, Lord John Marbury does not say anything stupid, not at all. From the perspective of international politics, *The West Wing* is a perfectly documented series that deals with a whole range of situations that American foreign policy must deal with. The Middle East is obviously the inevitable centre of most of the situations. But throughout the seven seasons we also experience conflicts with the European Union (with tractors in the streets of Brussels waiting for the United States delegation), conflicts with Latin American guerrillas and drug smugglers, episodes of crisis with unstable Russian leaders, etc. Perhaps China and Cuba are the two countries that do not come under the scrutinising gaze of *The West Wing* with the intensity that might be expected.

With regard to the Middle East, throughout the different seasons viewers have been faced with all kinds of situations. From negotiations at Camp David, tense and extraordinarily high quality in terms of narrative, to confinements of the Palestinian President, as well as bus explosions against Jewish citizens and relatively obvious pressure from some lobbies. Although Toby Ziegler is Jewish, it cannot be said that the series takes any particular side. In any case, it supports the view expressed by the Clinton administration, taken on board but with a lot of reservation by the Bush administration, according to which conflict can only be resolved by two independent states that share Jerusalem as a capital. The epicentre of the treatment of the Middle East crisis perhaps arrives at the end of the sixth season, when a delegation from Congress visits the Middle East and suffers a Palestinian attack that kills Admiral Percy Fitzwallace (played by John Amos), a great friend of President Bartlet, and Donna Moss is injured (played by Janel Moloney), one of the most powerful secondary characters in the series, who has an ongoing flirtatious but never resolved



relationship with her boss, Josh Lyman, which at the end of the seventh season is specified as one of the few sexual relations visible in the series.

The complications of domestic political life in the United States, generally more unknown and intricate, are also dealt with in great detail. The seven seasons cover practically all situations that might be expected to affect a President. And the dramatic resolution always follows the rules agreed by the Constitution and political practice, be it of the White House or of Congress.

Some particularly controversial points, such as impeaching the President, are dealt with at some time or other in the series. In some cases, specific parallelisms can be established between the series and reality, although generally the series attempts to escape the possibility of any details that might identify real presidents. However, throughout the controversy unleashed by making public the degenerative disease suffered by President Bartlet, which he had hidden from public opinion, are echoes of the lies given by President Clinton concerning his relations with Monica Lewinsky.

#### 4. Lessons from politics

When the situations are particularly complex, the script-writers take advantage and give real lessons of constitutionalism. This is what happens, for example, during the fourth season, when a terrorist group kidnaps the President's daughter and he temporarily resigns, as he feels he cannot carry out the affairs of the country with the equanimity required. To do so, he resorts to the 25th amendment of the Constitution. But as the Vice President has also resigned because of a scandal, the line of succession must be clarified, a line which, as explained by the episode, continues with the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The role of the characters on the staff who are not normally in the front line of public knowledge (as is the case of political pollsters and the combination of pollsters-assessors) is constantly highlighted throughout the series, in the case of pollsters, surely because one of the most well-known in real life, Patrick Caddell, is another of the top class advisors for *The West Wing*.

The number of small details that are typical of the White

House appearing from time to time in the content of *The West Wing* is spectacular. When the President is about to give the State of the Union address, one of his ministers must remain confined in an unknown location, precisely to stop any attack from completely destroying the line of command. In episode 39, the figure of a filibuster appears, a politician who talks non-stop for hours and hours only to stop a bill from being passed and thereby delay it. And there is also the final act of Bartlet's Presidency, consisting of giving a presidential pardon to Toby Ziegler, one of the best members of his staff, who had been forced to resign for having leaked highly confidential information (in an episode reminiscent in real life of the Valerie Plame affair) and who was sentenced for treason. The presidential pardon is usually one of the most complicated episodes in a President's life and, traditionally, is used to clean up part of his past.

In short, *The West Wing* is a series that is complicated to characterise. It is a parody, a drama, in fact, but it also has a manifest desire for political pedagogy and does so with great quality, without hardly resorting to humour. But, for this very reason, it is inevitable that Jed Bartlet's White House should be considered by George W. Bush's America as not always pleasant opposition. Its role as a mirror to a reality that does not please everyone is, in this respect, particularly remarkable, and gives it the value of criticism and truly significant confrontation. But, having said this, only through the greatest obfuscation can one possibly deny the quality of such a project that has raised the bar for political fiction on television forever.

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# Free speech and its limits

Laura Díez Bueso

- *This article reviews the regulatory status of the freedom of expression or free speech in the constitutional, legal and jurisprudential sphere in comparative law, sufficiently describing the doctrine of the European Court of Human Rights and of the Spanish Constitutional Court regarding this freedom. Within this doctrine, emphasis is placed on the fundamental connection between free speech and democratic society and the need to interpret the limits to this freedom in a restrictive manner. Based on this, the article analyses some specific areas of possible clashes between the freedom of expression and other rights. To begin with, it studies where the limit lies to ensure that opinions of a political nature cannot be considered harmful or slanderous and, in this area, the article also refers to playing with the freedom of artistic creation in cases of political criticism. To end, it studies how we should proceed in the event of exercising freedom of expression (artistic or not) when thoughts, ideas or opinions are disseminated that contain a direct or indirect criticism of non-political themes of general interest, analysing the limit supposed by prohibiting any so-called "discourse of hate" and insisting on the importance of the need for there to be incitement to hate on the part of the person expressing his or herself.*

## Keywords

Free speech, freedom of expression, freedom of artistic creation, essential content of laws, limit to law, right to honour, public figure, United States Supreme Court, Spanish Constitutional Court, European Court of Human Rights, United States Federal Constitution, European treaty on human rights, 1978 Spanish Constitution

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The recognition of freedom of expression or free speech was one of the first victories of the declarations of rights. A paradigm of this distant recognition was the incorporation in the First Amendment of the United States Federal Constitution, in 1791, specifically containing the protection of free speech and of the press.

A long time has passed since then but two of the most outstanding characteristics of this freedom have remained almost intact: its social relevance and the complexity of delimiting this. On the other hand, transformations in social and cultural contexts have led to its limits being formed. All these circumstances, early recognition, relevance and complex delimitation, as well as the arrival of modern societies, have meant that we are now faced with one of the freedoms most frequently tackled in the doctrinal and jurisprudential sphere and perhaps also one of the most debated in society. And, at the same time, we might say that we are facing one of the most shifting and adaptable freedoms recognised today in our catalogues of rights.

One of the most significant times in this evolution has been the recognition of the right to information as an separate right from free speech. This separation, not always recognised explicitly in constitutional texts, became inevitable with the appearance of the democratic state, when the creation of free public opinion was vital to enable participation in democratic debate. The addressee of expression-information became a relevant subject around which the right to information had to be conformed.

It's true that, very often, the concepts of expression and information are difficult to separate, given that the fundamental distinction between both lies in whether opinions or facts are being transmitted. It is evident that opinions and facts are sometimes related, so that an evaluation has to be made as to which of the two prevail, taking into account the context and purpose of the message.<sup>1</sup> However, in spite of the difficulty of distinguishing sometimes between ex-

pression and information, the more or less autonomous conception of the right to information means that, currently, we must consider that free speech concentrates its specific and differentiated sphere on the freedom of all individuals to express their thoughts, ideas and opinions freely without any outside interference. Moreover, neither does free speech have to comply with the requirement of truth, which is required by the right to information, so that the protected sphere of free speech is broader than that of information.<sup>2</sup>

The First Amendment of the Federal Constitution of the United States expresses itself in these terms<sup>3</sup> and, along the same lines, so does article 10 of the European Treaty to protect human rights and fundamental public freedoms (passed in 1950),<sup>4</sup> and section *a* of article 20.1 of the current Spanish Constitution (from 1978).<sup>5</sup>

Without doubt, and due to its relative youth, this last constitutional precept is the one that contains the most modern version of freedom of expression or free speech, to the point that not only does it recognise the right to information as separate but also creates an autonomous space for the freedom of literary, artistic, scientific and technical production and creation in section *b* of the same article 20.1. The specific aim of this section is to protect these freedoms from outside interference in the creative process itself and, although they are closely related to the freedom of expression, it should be noted that this constitutional precept intended to express this specifically and wished to recognise it explicitly.<sup>6</sup>

And these are the reference regulations available to us regarding the content of free speech or freedom of expression. Certainly, there is no regulatory development of these provisions in constitutions and treaties that details the specific place that must be given to this freedom or, in other words, which thoughts, ideas or opinions are sheltered under the umbrella of the protection of free speech via constitution or treaty.

What is the reason for this lack of regulatory development, this absence of legal or statutory regulation? To begin with, the difficulty involved in regulating freedom of expression beyond the description already given in the aforementioned regulatory texts is obvious, these texts fundamentally recognising the right. But, above all, the fact that we do not have regulations that legally specify these precepts is due to the fact that, traditionally, it has been considered counter-productive to pass regulatory laws for this freedom because, in practice, this would mean limiting it. The only exception lies in penal laws (of minimal intervention) which, as a general rule, are limited to preventing any offence or slander from being incurred with regard to third parties.

Beyond these arguments, there's another we must also bear in mind. We have already mentioned the necessary adaptation of free speech to existing social and cultural circumstances, in short, to the context in which it is exercised. Certainly, it is not the same to express certain opinions, thoughts or ideas in one geographical place or

1 An explanation of the distinction between freedom of expression and a right to information can be found in BASTIDA, F. *El régimen jurídico de la comunicación social*. Madrid: Institute of Economic Studies, 1994, page 7 and sub. On Spanish and European jurisprudence that insists on the difference between opinion and fact, see the Lingens case, 8 July 1986, and the rulings of the Spanish Constitutional Court (STCs) 6/1988, 4/1996 and 192/1999. On the difficulty in distinguishing between freedom of expression and the right to information and the consequences of this difficulty, see VILLAVERDE, I. *Estado democrático e información: el derecho a ser informado*. Oviedo: General Government of the Principality of Asturias, 1994, page 225 and sub.

2 Along these lines, see STC 107/1988.

3 The wording of the First Amendment is as follows: "Congress shall make no law [...] abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press".

4 Article 10.1 of the Treaty says: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions [...] without interference by public authority".

5 According to this precept, the Constitution recognises and protects the right "to freely express and disseminate thoughts, ideas and opinions by means of words, writing or any other means of reproduction".

6 In spite of the fact that article 10 of the ECHR does not independently contain this freedom, there are sentences by the ECHR that do recognise a separate place for it. See, for example, the case of Müller and others v. Switzerland, 24 May 1988.

another, in a society with certain customs or in another, regarding one specific group of people or another. This sort of 'flexibility' with which the specific content of expressions that may be covered by free speech must be interpreted does not go well with detailed legal regulations concerning its limits. Quite the opposite, free speech seems destined to necessary interpretation by jurisprudence that, case by case, can take into account the context in which the specific thought, idea or opinion has been expressed. That is why we find this freedom broadly configured in many sentences by the highest jurisdictional bodies.<sup>7</sup> And, in these very sentences, the need is explained to take into account the context in which such expressions are emitted.<sup>8</sup>

For this reason, we should review the jurisprudence that has directly tackled the juridical configuration of free speech based on specific cases that, throughout the decades, have been presented before the courts. This jurisdictional doctrine should provide us with the measure of the configuration of free speech. As we have seen, both the regulations of the Council of Europe and Spanish law have drunk from spring of the North American Constitution, as has the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and that of the Spanish Constitutional Court. For this reason, below we will refer to the jurisprudence of these last two courts, always bearing in mind that, in the case of European Court jurisprudence, only minimal common protection has been established for the rights that must be in force in all countries signing the European Treaty on human rights and public freedoms.

One of the main threads in the jurisprudential doctrine of these courts has been that of always starting with the close

relationship between free speech and the democratic state. It is difficult to find a sentence by these courts on this specific freedom that does not start by insisting on this connection, according to which free speech constitutes one of the essential elements for democratic society and one of the primordial conditions for it to progress.<sup>9</sup> We may therefore deduce that free speech is not only a right to freedom, as initially configured, i.e. a freedom that allows us to claim the non-interference of others when it is exercised, but that it also has a significant institutional dimension: beyond the importance it may have for the person expressing the thought, idea or opinion, and the guarantee of non-interference that may be claimed, the exercising of the freedom of expression or free speech is valuable in itself for democratic society as a whole.

And, when we speak of free speech as an essential freedom for a democratic society to exist, we are not only referring to expressions of a political nature but also to another kind of content. This freedom guarantees the existence of a democratic society where literature, art, science and technology, in the terms of section *b* of article 20.1 of the Spanish Constitution, must be able to be developed without impediment. Along the same lines as our Constitution, the European Court of Human Rights has maintained that those who believe, interpret, propagate or display their works of art contribute to the exchange of ideas and opinions that is essential in a democratic society.<sup>10</sup> This is of prime importance because the explicit recognition of these expressions in constitutional and jurisprudential terms means that they are given a degree of protection similar to opinions of a political nature, helping to shape a democratic society.<sup>11</sup>

7 A good selection of this jurisprudential configuration in the area of free speech in the United States, the Council of Europe and Spain can be found, respectively, in NIMMER, M. *Freedom of speech. A treatise on the theory of the first amendment*. New York: Matthew Bender, 1987; FERNÁNDEZ SEGADO, F. "La libertad de expresión en la doctrina del Tribunal Europeo de Derechos Humanos". In: *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, no. 70, 1990, pages 93-124; BASTIDA, F.; VILLAVARDE, I. *Libertades de expresión e información y medios de comunicación. Prontuario de jurisprudencia constitucional 1981-1998*. Pamplona: Cuadernos Aranzadi del Tribunal Constitucional 1, Aranzadi, 1998.

8 See the case Verein Alternatives Lokalradio Bern and others v. Switzerland, 16 October 1986, and STC 20/1990, FJ 1.

9 Apart from the many sentences containing this idea, the reference sentences are *Handyside v. United Kingdom*, 7 December 1976, and STC 6/1981, 16 March, FJ 3.

10 The case of *Müller v. Switzerland*, 24 May 1988.

11 In this respect, we can consult DÍEZ PICAZO, L. M. *Sistema de derechos fundamentales*. Civitas, 2nd edition, 2005, page 323.

This essential function of free speech in the democratic system involves an even more relevant consequence: this freedom's prevalence in terms of preference. Both the European Court and the Spanish Constitutional Court have derived this fundamental repercussion from the position of free speech in treaties and constitutions.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that this position of prevalence particularly occurs in cases where the thought, opinion or idea contributes, directly or indirectly, to shaping democratic society. However, at this point it's important to note that both courts tend to consider that there is a very broad range of themes that have this same purpose. Obviously, we have already seen that themes related to political life and artistic expression are included within this range.

When does this position of prevalence and preference of free speech come about? When this freedom enters into conflict with other legal rights or values.<sup>13</sup> Because, in effect, free speech can harm other legally protected areas and, as we know, there may be prevalent rights but there are no absolute rights and, therefore, free speech also has its limits.

Although clashes can occur between this freedom in many areas, both the European Treaty and the Spanish Constitution establish a series of possible limitations to free speech; i.e. they specify those areas that may most easily be harmed by expressing a thought, idea or opinion. Specifically, article 10.2 of the Treaty refers to public safety and order, health, moral or reputation, while the Constitution mentions, in article 20.4, the rights to honour, intimacy and self image, as well as protecting children and young people. Although

it's true that not all the possible areas of clashes are cited, it's also true that these may be considered to be particularly susceptible to conflict with free speech.

There is a large number of sentences that refer to cases of clashes between this freedom and the different limiting areas mentioned specifically in the regulations of the treaty and constitution. Each of these areas supposes a different limit to free speech, to a greater or lesser degree. Notwithstanding this, European and Spanish jurisprudence have always insisted that these limits must be interpreted restrictively, precisely because of the prevalent position of the free speech.<sup>14</sup> But this does not suggest an absolute prevalence over other legal rights or values but means that, in the event of a clash, we must weigh up which of the two prevails, taking into account the fact that free speech starts off with a certain advantage due to its social function. In short, we must attempt to maintain the right balance between this freedom and the other legal rights or values, always bearing in mind that free speech is a cornerstone in the system of rights due to its direct connection with the democratic process.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, the restrictions that may be applied to free speech must not only aim to safeguard the legal rights contained in article 10.2 of the Treaty or article 20.4 of the Spanish Constitution but, according to the European Court of Human Rights and the Constitutional Court, must be necessary restrictive measures in a democratic society. The fact that democratic society itself varies according to circumstances means that it is not possible to standardise clashes between free speech and other legal rights or values. This

**12** In the case of the Constitutional Court, this doctrine is made explicit in the sentences, as has been explained. In this respect, see STCs 20/1992 and 240/1992. In the case of the ECHR, this prevalence of expressions that contribute to the existence of a democratic society is not formulated specifically but results from the various specific cases settled by the European Court in its sentences. In this respect, see the cases of *Worm*, in 1997; *Karatas*, in 1990; *Sunday Times*, in 1979; *Handyside*, in 1976, and *Casado Coca*, in 1994, where the greater or lesser relevance of the subject with regard to shaping a democratic state leads to greater or lesser protection of free speech.

**13** Among many others, STC 214/1991, FJ 6.

**14** This necessarily restrictive interpretation, given the prevalent position of free speech, is contained, among others, in the case of *The Sunday Times*, 26 April 1979.

**15** The expression "cornerstone/essential foundation" has been used on several occasions by the ECHR, as in the case of *Lingens*, 8 July 1986, where it was sustained that free speech is the veritable "cornerstone of the principles of democracy and of the human rights protected by the Treaty").

means we must always weigh up the situation and, in short, leads to a judgement of proportionality that must take into account all the circumstances surrounding the case.<sup>16</sup>

If we look at the deliberations of both courts in their sentences over the years we can draw some conclusions that more clearly delimit the area of free speech. This is the case of opinions concerning public figures regarding their profession, especially when these are politicians exercising their public function. As has been made clear in many sentences,<sup>17</sup> the individual rights of people with a public persona have less resistance to free speech and cede more easily. This can be applied in all its intensity when they are people who occupy public positions precisely because of their connection with the democratic principle: they must accept opinions, even when these are adverse.

In this last sense, both European and Spanish jurisprudence has decided that the requirements of a democratic society mean that free speech protects not only thoughts, ideas or opinions that are favourable or considered inoffensive but also those that oppose, shock or disturb a state or sector of the population.<sup>18</sup> Free speech includes the freedom to criticise, even when this might upset, distress or disgust,<sup>19</sup> so it also protects wrong or dangerous opinions, even those that attack the democratic system itself.<sup>20</sup>

Obviously, and also as reminded by European and constitutional jurisprudence,<sup>21</sup> this does not mean that, given their public office, these people are deprived of their right to honour. And here those offences enter into play that are typi-

fied in the Penal Code as “slandorous or offensive”, with very specific profiles defined in penal law, which also takes into account the nature of the public office of the subject to which the opinion is referring.<sup>22</sup> What determines the existence or not of penal liability? Fundamentally, expressions that do are not directly related to the political criticism being made and insulting expressions that add nothing to the key idea one is trying to express.<sup>23</sup>

Based on this doctrine regarding the expression of thoughts, ideas or opinions related to public offices while exercising their function, courts need to decide *ad hoc* whether specific expressions, in the context in which they are emitted, may have a place within public discourse or must be considered as slanderous or offensive. The nature of political criticism of opinion reinforces the position of free speech. However, expressions not directly related to this political criticism or specific insults that are unrelated must be considered as clearly outside free speech's area of protection.

Having reached this point, and still within the so-called political criticism that is protected within the framework of free speech, something should be noted. The importance of the regulatory and jurisprudential recognition that must be given to the freedom of artistic creation has already been emphasised on several occasions. As can be seen, both the Spanish Constitution and the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights have created an area particularly for this manifestation of free speech. This is particularly rele-

**16** There are many sentences by the ECHR and the Spanish Constitutional Court that have developed this doctrine. The most outstanding are contained in the bibliographical citations mentioned in the above footnotes regarding the jurisprudential configuration of the freedom of expression in the Council of Europe and in Spain.

**17** See the Lingens case, 8 July 1986, and the clarifying STC 134/1999.

**18** This constant doctrine can be found in sentences as in the case of De Haes and Gijssels v. Belgium, 24 February 1997.

**19** STC 174/2006, 5 June, FJ 4.

**20** STC 176/1995, 11 December, FJ 2.

**21** See STC 336/1993, FJ 5.

**22** This last important point is contained in STC 78/1995.

**23** See STC78/1995, FJ 4.

vant for artistic expressions of all kinds that criticise in political terms, such as TV and radio programmes, comedians, comics, etc. Although it's true that they are also subject to the limits of penal laws under the terms described above, they are protected not only explicitly but also especially protected by European and Spanish law and jurisprudence on free speech.

What happens when these artistic expressions do not involve political criticism but criticise other areas of public interest? In this case, these expressions are also fully protected in terms of free speech, specifically by the freedom of artistic creation. However, in spite of its prevalence over other legal rights or values, it will not be as powerful as in the case of political criticism and these expressions also have a limit. How has European and Spanish jurisprudence specified this limit? Stating that free speech does not protect any so-called "discourse of hate", in other words, that developed under terms that suppose a direct incitement of violence against citizens or against specific races or beliefs.<sup>24</sup>

The term *incitement* is of prime importance in this point and this is ratified by other regulatory texts, such as article 22 of the international treaty on civil and political rights, which prohibits any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. Along these same lines, the recent Decision by the Council of Europe regarding the fight against racism and xenophobia determines that all member countries must punish the public incitement of violence or hatred exercised by means of distributing or disseminating pamphlets, drawings or other material aimed against a group of people or against a member of a group defined by its race, colour, religion, descent or ethnic or national origin.<sup>25</sup> In short, free speech will protect those artistic creations that criticise, even openly, things or people that have public relevance, provided they do not incite hatred. Any restriction to these creations violates free speech.

**24** The case of *Gündüz v. Turkey*, 4 December 2003, and *Erbakan v. Turkey*, 6 July 2006.

**25** It should be noted that article 607.1 of the current Penal Code has been contested before the Constitutional Court because it is felt that it violates the freedom of expression or free speech, since it sanctions that any medium may disseminate ideas or doctrines that deny or justify the crimes of genocide. This objection claims the need for incitation to violence to exist, so that expression is not covered by section *a* of article 20.1 of the Constitution.



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# The dysfunctional relationship between copyright and cultural diversity

Fiona Macmillan

- *This article argues that copyright's commodification of creativity has established a structure enabling the domination of cultural output by multinational media and entertainment corporations. The consequences of this are cultural filtering, homogenisation of cultural products, loss of the public domain, and failure of the development process. Thus, the international copyright system poses a direct, but apparently unacknowledged, threat to the aims of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity. The article concludes by calling for a more realistic approach in the Convention to the relationship between copyright and cultural diversity.*

## Keywords

Copyright, commodification of creativity, cultural diversity, World Trade Organization, UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of cultural Diversity.

## 1. The Convention on cultural diversity

The valorization of cultural diversity has been long suggested by the establishment of rights of cultural self-determination in various international treaty provisions.<sup>1</sup> Now the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity gives a degree of legal recognition to this concept. The idea of culture with which the Convention is concerned is laid down in its Article 4. In this Article the Convention defines its central notion of “cultural diversity” as “the manifold ways in which cultures and groups and societies find expression”, including “diverse modes of artistic creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment, whatever the means and technologies used”. “Cultural content” is “the symbolic meaning, artistic dimension, and cultural values that originate from or express cultural identities”. “Cultural expressions ... result from the creativity of individuals, groups and societies, and ... have cultural content”. Article 4 also deals with the more concrete aspects of cultural expressions. It defines “cultural activities, goods and services” as those that “embody or convey cultural expressions, irrespective of the commercial value they may have”. Cultural activities are, however, distinguished from cultural goods and services on the basis that they “may be an end in themselves, or they may contribute to the production of cultural goods and services”. The production and distribution of these cultural goods and services may be undertaken by “cultural industries”.

<sup>1</sup> See Charter of the United Nations, Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Arts 1, 19 and 27; Charter of the United Nations, Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Art 15, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art 27.

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The interest manifested by the Convention in the production of cultural goods and services by cultural industries suggests a clear, if unarticulated, link with copyright law. While it is clear that copyright would not apply to the full range of cultural expressions and activities with which the Convention is concerned, there is a reasonably marked overlap between those things that would appear to fall within the definition of cultural goods and services in the Convention and the range of works protected by copyright law. As is envisaged in the Convention, this also raises the question of the role of the “cultural industries” in the copyright arena. Of course, the cultural industries are not involved in the production of all the cultural goods and services protected by copyright. Indeed, on the creative side much production is done by individuals or groups that would hardly feel comfortable with the sobriquet “cultural industry”. On the other hand, there are some copyright cultural goods and services that are more obviously the product of the cultural industries, the clearest example of these being films and broadcasts, which rely on the collaboration of a wide range of creative activities under the auspices of a “cultural industry”. One might also argue that the production of a book or a CD in a commercially available form is a collaboration between the quintessential individual in the garret and a publisher, the latter of which might reasonably be described as being part of a cultural industry. Even where the cultural industries cannot be said to be involved in the production of copyright goods and services, they have a clear role in their distribution. These roles of the cultural industries in the production and distribution of certain types of cultural goods and services are subject to generous protection by copyright law. This protection sits alongside, often uncomfortably, the protection that copyright offers to individual creators. The ensuing tension between creative or cultural interests and business interests lies at the heart of copyright’s relationship with concepts such as cultural diversity and of self-determination.

Despite this suggested relationship between copyright and the Convention, the only (almost) explicit reference to copyright occurs in the Convention Preamble, which recognizes

“the importance of intellectual property rights in sustaining those involved in cultural creativity”. It seems, however, that the framers of the Convention may have underestimated the potential impact of copyright on cultural diversity and cultural self-determination.

## **2. Commodification and the acquisition of private power**

The international copyright system, which is now embedded in the international trading system as a consequence of the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects on Intellectual Property (TRIPs Agreement) (see Blakeney 1996), has operated at least in relation to some types of copyright protected “cultural goods and services” as a fetter on cultural diversity and self-determination. This effect has been produced by certain aspects of copyright law itself, allied with aspects of behaviour in the market for “cultural goods and services”.

So far as copyright law is concerned the threat that it poses to cultural diversity and self-determination is a consequence of the process by which it commodifies and instrumentalises the cultural outputs with which it is concerned. There are five interdependent aspects of copyright law that have been essential to this process (see, further, Macmillan 1998, Macmillan 2002a, Macmillan 2002b). The first and most basic tool of commodification is the alienability of the copyright interest. A second significant aspect of copyright law, making it an important tool of trade and investment, is its duration. The long period of copyright protection increases the asset value of individual copyright interests (Towse 1999). Thirdly, copyright’s horizontal expansion means that it is progressively covering more and more types of cultural production. Fourthly, the strong commercial distribution rights,<sup>2</sup> especially those which give the copyright holder control over imports and rental rights, have put copyright owners in a particularly strong market position, especially in the global context. Finally, the power of the owners of copyright in relation to all those wishing to use copyright material

2 See esp the TRIPs Agreement, Arts 11 & 14(4), which enshrine rental rights in relation to computer programmes, films and phonograms; WIPO Copyright Treaty 1996, Article 7; and WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty 1996, Articles 9 & 13.

has been bolstered by a contraction of some of the most significant user rights in relation to copyright works, in particular fair dealing/fair use and public interest rights. Allied to these characteristics of copyright law are the development of associated rights, in particular, the right to prevent measures designed to circumvent technological protection,<sup>3</sup> which has no fair dealing type exceptions and which, as we know now, is capable of a quite repressive application.<sup>4</sup>

Viewed in isolation from the market conditions that characterise the cultural industries, copyright's commodification of cultural output might appear, not only benign, but justified by both the need for creators to be remunerated in order to encourage them to create<sup>5</sup> and the need for cultural works to be disseminated in order to reap the social benefits of their creation (van Caenegem 1995; Netanel 1996). However, viewed in context the picture is somewhat different. Copyright law has contributed to, augmented, or created a range of market features that have resulted in a high degree of global concentration in the ownership of intellectual property in cultural goods and services. Five such market features, in particular, stand out (see, further, Macmillan 2006). First, is the internationally harmonized nature of the relevant intellectual property rights.<sup>6</sup> This dovetails nicely with the second dominant market feature, which is the multinational operation of the corporate actors who acquire these harmonized intellectual property rights while at the same time exploiting the boundaries of national law to partition and control markets. The third relevant feature of the market is the high degree of horizontal and vertical integration that characterises these corporations. Their horizontal integra-

tion gives them control over a range of different types of cultural products. Their vertical integration allows them to control distribution, thanks to the strong distribution rights conferred on them by copyright law.<sup>7</sup> The fourth feature is the progressive integration in the ownership of rights over content and the ownership of rights over content-carrying technology. Finally, there is the increasing tendency since the 1970s for acquisition and merger in the global market for cultural products and services (Bettig 1996, Smiers 2002). Besides being driven by the regular desires (both corporate and individual) for capital accumulation (Bettig 1996, 37), this last feature has been produced by the movements towards horizontal and vertical integration, and integration of the ownership of rights over content and content-carrying technology.

### 3. The significance of private power

#### 3.1. Cultural Filtering and Homogenisation

So far as cultural diversity and self-determination are concerned, the consequences of this copyright-facilitated aggregation of private power over cultural goods and services on the global level are not happy ones. Through their control of markets for cultural products the multimedia corporations have acquired the power to act as a cultural filter, controlling to some extent what we can see, hear and read. Closely associated with this is the tendency towards homogeneity in the character of available cultural goods and services (Bettig 1996).

3 See, eg: WIPO Copyright Treaty 1996, Art 11; EU Directive on Copyright in the Information Society (2001/29), Art 6; US Copyright Act of 1976, s 1201.

4 See, eg, *Universal City Studios, Inc v Corley*, US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, 28 November 2001, and the discussion of this case in Macmillan 2002b.

5 See, however, Towse 2001, esp chs.6 & 8, in which it is argued that copyright generates little income for most creative artists. Nevertheless, Towse suggests that copyright is valuable to creative artists for reasons of status and control of their work.

6 Through, eg, Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works of 1886, the TRIPs Agreement, Arts 9-14, the WIPO Copyright Treaty, and the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty.

7 For a discussion of the way in which the film entertainment industry conforms to these features, see Macmillan, "The Cruel ©", n 6 *supra*.

Towards the close of the last century, Ann Capling conducted a study of the operation of the contemporary music market in Australia (Capling 1996), which was then controlled by six<sup>8</sup> international entertainment corporations. The companies in question were CBS (Sony), WEA (Time Warner), Polygram (NV Philips), EMI (Thorn EMI), BMG (Bertelmanns Music Group) and Festival (News Limited). All of these corporations operated as international conglomerates, some with substantial media interests, and between them they then controlled 70 per cent of the world's recorded music market (Capling 1996, 22). Furthermore in Australia they also had, and continue to have, control of the distribution system (Capling 1996, 21). Despite their control of the global market for music, they only released around twenty per cent of their available repertoire in Australia. Not only does this mean that these corporations acted as a cultural filter, controlling what could be heard, it also meant that the music offered for retail sale had "about as much cultural diversity as a Macdonald's menu" (Capling 1996, 22):<sup>9</sup>

*The domination by these global entertainment corporations of the Australian market facilitates the globalisation of a mass culture of mediocrity in a number of ways. It ensures, for instance, the prevalence of the top sellers to the detriment of other less mainstream overseas music ... The import restrictions also make it much more difficult for local Australian performers and composers to get air-play within Australia. Pop and rock account for close to ninety per cent of the Australian music market and, with the exception of a handful of Australian acts which have won an international following, this market is overwhelmingly dominated by North American and British artists. (Capling 1996, 22)*

And, of course, Australia is hardly likely to be the only market where this happens. The processes that produce cultural homogeneity and mediocrity are global.<sup>10</sup> It makes good commercial sense in a globalized world to train taste along certain reliable routes, and the market for cultural goods and services is no different in this respect to any other (Levitt 1983). It is interesting to note that one of the arguments that is made on behalf of the activities of MP3 Internet music file trading services, such as Napster, is that they give exposure and airplay to smaller artists and small independent labels.<sup>11</sup> If this is so, then it is a benefit likely to be lost if the major labels gain a distribution grip over the online music providers (Macmillan 2002a).

It is not just the music industry where the corporate sector controls what filters through to the rest of us. For example, the control over film distribution that is enjoyed by the major media and entertainment corporations means that these corporations can control to some extent what films are made, what films we can see, and our perception of what films there are for us to see. The expense involved in film production and distribution means that without access to the deep pockets of the majors and their vertically integrated distribution networks, it is difficult, but not impossible, to finance independent film-making and distribution. This, naturally, reduces the volume of independent film-making. The high degree of vertical integration that characterises the film industry, especially the ownership of cinema chains, means that many independent films that are made find it difficult to make any impact on the film-going public. This is mainly because we don't know they exist. The control by the media and entertainment corporations of the films that are made is also a consequence of their habit of buying the film rights

8 Such is the process of merger and acquisition in this industry that in less than a decade the six are now three with most recent merger affecting this market being that between Sony & Bertelsmann.

9 The issue of release & promotion of recorded music is a big issue for many popular composers and performers. Eg, popular music composer Michael Penn is quoted as saying: "People disappear in this business not through drug abuse but because record companies sign them and then mess them around... They're very vengeful people. If you protest, like George Michael & Prince did, you're a whining rock star. In our case you're simply a loser... Epic put my album out but they won't spend a cent on promotion. The business is incredibly narrow now. The opportunities for flukes are zero. To escape this multinational hell, your only recourse is stuff like MP3": *The Evening Standard*, London, 12 July 2000.

10 Cf Moran 1998.

11 See, eg, n 9 *supra*.

attached to the copyright in novels, plays, biographies and so on. There is no obligation on the film corporations to use these rights once they have acquired them but, of course, no-one else can do so without their permission. Similarly, the film corporations may choose not to release certain films in which they own the exclusive distribution rights or only to release certain films in certain jurisdictions or through certain media. All these things mean that the media and entertainment corporations are acting as a cultural filter (see, further, Macmillan 2002b, 488-489). The problem of cultural filtering with respect to films appears to have received recent acknowledgement in the UK in the form of the UK Film Council's Digital Screen Network under which grants were made to cinemas for the installation of digital cinema technology on the condition that they show a wider variety of specialised films. It seems a pity that public money raised for good causes through the National Lottery must be used to remedy a privately created distortion.

A further example of the filtering function, if one is needed, is provided by the publishing industry. The economic power of publishers has, in its wake, conferred a broader power on publishers to determine what sort of things we are likely to read. Richard Abel is eloquent on this topic:

*Book publishers decide which manuscripts to accept; form contracts dictate terms to all but best-selling authors; editors 'suggest' changes; and marketing departments decide price, distribution and promotion. Sometimes publishers go further ... The Japanese publisher Hayakawa withdrew a translation of The Enigma of Japanese Power because the Dutch author had written that the Burakumin Liberation League 'has developed a method of self-asser-*

*tion through "denunciation" sessions with people and organizations it decides are guilty of discrimination'. Anticipating feminist criticism, Simon and Schuster cancelled publication of Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho a month before it was to appear. (Abel 1994a, 52).<sup>12</sup>*

There are a number of other examples of the same phenomenon in publishing. For example, it was reported that HarperCollins (UK), a member of the Murdoch Group, declined to publish Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten's memoirs in breach of contract because it was alleged the memoirs included commentary on the Beijing government that might threaten Murdoch's substantial business interests in China.<sup>13</sup> It has also been suggested that the takeover of the British publisher, Fourth Estate by HarperCollins (UK) was in some way related to a biography of Rupert Murdoch contracted to be published by Fourth Estate. The biography was not published by Fourth Estate.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, a development that may have the effect of breaking down some of the power of publishers is the advent of electronic self-publishing. It seems, however, that any inroads that this makes in the power of publishers will be confined to publications by the very few authors who command sufficient market power to dispense with the promotional services of the publishers.<sup>15</sup>

### 3.2. Loss of the Commons

So the media and entertainment industry controls and homogenises what we get to see, hear and read. In so doing it is likely that it also controls the way we construct images of our society and ourselves.<sup>16</sup> The scope of this power is

<sup>12</sup> Ironically, in attempting to publish the monograph in which this passage appears, Abel himself was to feel the brunt of his publisher's attempt at censorship. He has subsequently defined this as an attempted exercise of private power to control speech: see Abel 1994b, 380.

<sup>13</sup> Londoner's Diary, *The Evening Standard*, 11 July 2000.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> In 2000 Stephen King decided to by-pass the electronic publishing division of his publishers, Simon & Schuster, & self publish his novel, *The Plant*, on the Internet: see "King writes off the middleman", *The Weekend Australian*, 22-23 July 2000. King later abandoned this project: see *Metro* (London), 30 November 2000.

<sup>16</sup> See further, eg, Coombe 1998, pp.100-129, which demonstrates how even the creation of alternative identities on the basis of class, sexuality, gender and race is constrained & homogenised through the celebrity or star system.

reinforced by the industry's assertion of control over the use of material assumed by most people to be in the intellectual commons and, thus, in the public domain. The irony is that the reason people assume such material to be in the commons is that the copyright owners, in their relentless pursuit of ubiquity, have force-fed it to us as receivers of the mass culture disseminated by the mass media. The more powerful the copyright owner the more dominant the cultural image, but the more likely that the copyright owner will seek to protect the cultural power of the image through copyright enforcement. The result is that not only are individuals not able to use, develop or reflect upon dominant cultural images, they are also unable to challenge them by subverting them (Chon 1993, Koenig 1994, Macmillan Patfield 1996). This is certainly unlikely to reduce the power of those who own these images.

As an example of this type of concern Waldron (1993) uses the case of *Walt Disney Prods v Air Pirates*.<sup>17</sup> In this case the Walt Disney Corporation successfully prevented the use of Disney characters in *Air Pirates* comic books. The comic books were said to depict the characters as "active members of a free thinking, promiscuous, drug-ingesting counterculture" (Waldron 1993, 753, quoting Wheelwright 1976, 582). Note, however, that the copyright law upon which the case was based does not prevent this depiction only, it prevents their use altogether. Waldron comments:

*The whole point of the Mickey Mouse image is that it is thrust out into the cultural world to impinge on the consciousness of all of us. Its enormous popularity, consciously cultivated for decades by the Disney empire, means that it has become an instantly recognizable icon, in a real sense part of our lives. When Ralph Steadman paints the familiar mouse ears on a cartoon image of Ronald Reagan, or when someone on my faculty refers to some proposed syllabus as a "Mickey Mouse" idea, they attest to the fact that this is not just property without boundaries on which we might accidentally encroach ... but an artifact that has been deliberately set up as a more or less permanent feature of the environment all of us inhabit. (Waldron 1993, 883)*

Coombe describes this corporate control of the commons as monological and, accordingly, destroying the dialogical relationship between the individual and society:

*Legal theorists who emphasize the cultural construction of self and world –the central importance of shared cultural symbols in defining us and the realities we recognize– need to consider the legal constitution of symbols and the extent to which "we" can be said to "share" them. I fear that most legal theorists concerned with dialogue objectify, rarefy, and idealize "culture", abstracting "it" from the material and political practices in which meaning is made. Culture is not embedded in abstract concepts that we internalize, but in the materiality of signs and texts over which we struggle and the imprint of those struggles in consciousness. This ongoing negotiation and struggle over meaning is the essence of dialogic practice. Many interpretations of intellectual property laws quash dialogue by affirming the power of corporate actors to monologically control meaning by appealing to an abstract concept of property. Laws of intellectual property privilege monologic forms against dialogic practice and create significant power differentials between social actors engaged in hegemonic struggle. If both subjective and objective realities are constituted culturally –through signifying forms to which we give meaning– then we must critically consider the relationship between law, culture, and the politics of commodifying cultural forms. (Coombe 1998, 86)*

If copyright has any hope of answering a criticism this cogent then a key aspect of copyright law is the fair use/fair dealing defence. It is this aspect of copyright law that permits resistance and critique (Gaines 1991, 10). Yet the fair dealing defence is a weak tool for this purpose and becoming weaker (see, further, Macmillan 2006).

### 3.3. Copyright and Development?

The utilitarian/development justification for copyright is overwhelmingly familiar. The general idea underlying this rationale is that the grant of copyright encourages the

17 581 F 2d 751 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir, 1978), *cert denied*, 439 US 1132 (1979).

production of the cultural works, which is essential to the development process.<sup>18</sup> However, the consequences of copyright's commodification of creativity, as described above, seem to place some strain on this alleged relationship between copyright and development. This argument may be illustrated by reference to the World Commission on Development and Culture's concept of development as being about the enhancement of effective freedom of choice of individuals (World Commission on Culture and Development 1996).<sup>19</sup> Some of the things that matter to this concept of development are "access to the world's stock of knowledge, ... access to power, the right to participate in the cultural life of the community" (World Commission on Culture and Development 1996, Introduction: see, further, Macmillan 1998 and Macmillan 2002a). The edifice of private power that has been built upon a copyright law that seems to care more about money than about the intrinsic worth of the cultural product it is protecting, has deprived us all to some extent of the benefits of this type of development. As Waldron comments, "[t]he private appropriation of the public realm of cultural artifacts restricts and controls the moves that can be made therein by the rest of us" (Waldron 1993, 885). It seems worth noting briefly that increases in the duration of copyright protection, such as that which has occurred in the European Union countries<sup>20</sup> and in the United States<sup>21</sup> are hardly helping.

Things look no better if we focus on the World Commission on Culture and Development's fundamental approach to culture, which is the handmaiden of its wide concept of development. A fundamental approach to culture means valuing cultural output as an end in itself, a commitment to diversity

and multiculturalism, and the control of power in the form of cultural domination (World Commission on Culture and Development 1996, Analytical ch.9). Not only has copyright failed to effect these things in relation to cultural output, it is arguable that it has effected their opposite. Since copyright law dominates the production and distribution of many forms of creativity, its failure to take a fundamental approach to the cultural products that fall within its purview may be regarded as a factor in our failure to achieve development in the wide sense. What is more, the unaccountable and self-reinforcing power of the media and entertainment conglomerates suggests that this process of development failure is accelerating.

#### 4. Is cultural diversity just a nice idea?

Given the foregoing, it is somewhat of a mystery why the UNESCO Convention takes a largely positive attitude to the role of intellectual property rights in securing cultural diversity. This is particularly so since the evolution of the Convention seems to indicate that the framers had something of a change of heart in relation to this issue. The original UNESCO Declaration,<sup>22</sup> upon which the Convention was based, included in its action plan the need to ensure the protection of copyright but "at the same time upholding a public right of access to culture, in accordance with Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights".<sup>23</sup> The Declaration also drew a parallel in its Article 1 between biological diversity and cultural diversity. In the light of this, it is interesting to note that the framers of the Convention on

**18** For a good example of a statement of this rationale, see the Preface to World Intellectual Property Organization 1978. For discussion of this rationale, see, eg, Waldron 1993, 850ff; & Macmillan Patfield 1997.

**19** For a detailed and persuasive account of this approach to development, see Sen 1999.

**20** As a result of Council Directive 93/98/EEC, 1993 OJ L290/9.

**21** As a result of the Bono Copyright Term Extension Act 1998, recently held to be constitutionally valid in *Eldred v Ashcroft* 123 S Ct 769 (2003).

**22** UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, Adopted by the 31<sup>st</sup> Session of UNESCO's General Conference, Paris, 2 November 2001.

**23** Note 22 *supra*, Main Lines of an Action Plan for the Implementation of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, para 16.



Biological Diversity were far more anxious about the role of intellectual property in securing biological diversity. Its Article 16.5 provides:

*The Contracting Parties, recognizing that patents and other intellectual property rights may have an influence on the implementation of this Convention, shall cooperate in this regard subject to national legislation and international law in order to ensure that such rights are supportive of and do not run counter to its objectives.*

Various reasons might be postulated for the blinkered approach in the UNESCO Convention to the dangers that copyright poses to cultural diversity. Perhaps it is a consequence of a desire to appease the US. The hardline position taken by the US on the enforcement of intellectual property rights internationally seems to make it hypersensitive to the presence of any draft treaty provisions that it views as undercutting the enforcement of the provisions of the TRIPs Agreement. However, since the gestation and birth of the UNESCO Convention was motivated by the intention to compensate for the lack of a cultural exception in the WTO agreements generally it was always bound to fly in the face of US perceptions of national interest (Beat Graber 2006, 554-555; Hahn 2006, 515-520). It should have been obvious all along that a positive Convention position on intellectual property rights was hardly likely to be sufficient in US eyes to compensate for this counter-offensive to the WTO. In the end, this was proved to be the case since the US opposed the Convention and placed diplomatic pressure on other countries in an attempt to prevent it coming into force. Another possible explanation for the UNESCO Convention's positive view of intellectual property rights is that it is a consequence of the ascendancy of the argument (strongly asserted in some quarters) that copyright protection is essential to cultural diversity and self-determination. Indeed, the Preamble to the Convention embraces a version of this idea. However, as this article has sought to demonstrate, even if copyright is capable of serving this function, something has gone drastically awry and we need again to look at the shape of copyright law and consider whether there are parts that we might want to jettison or change dramatically in order to make it serve the objectives of cultural diversity and self-determination (see, further, Macmillan 2006).

Under the circumstances, the UNESCO Convention should adopt a more confrontational approach to the role of intellectual property rights in relation to cultural diversity. Even a version of the relatively inoffensive approach in the Convention on Biological Diversity would be a step in the right direction. Alone, such an approach cannot redeem the situation, but it can help to create a consensus around the need for reform, if not reconstitution, of the international copyright system. Without it, cultural diversity will remain nothing more than a nice idea.

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# The new professional profiles and multiskilling of journalists in Catalonia: a map of the situation

**Carlos Scolari, Héctor Navarro, Hugo Pardo and Josep Lluís Micó**

- *This research, funded by the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia (CAC), presents a map of the new professional profiles on the present-day Catalan journalistic scene as a consequence of digitalisation of the media production process and tools. The article also analyses the disappearance and transformation of professionals in the broadcasting media and multimedia field. The research also presents a panorama of the professional skills required by journalists, particularly from the perspective of digitalisation processes in producing information.*

## **Keywords**

New professional profiles, digitalisation, multiskilling, convergence, multimedia, digital journalism.

## **Introduction**

This report, drawn up by the Digital Interaction Research Group (GRID), connected to the Digital Communication Department of the Faculty of Business and Communication at Vic University (UVic), is the result of an annual research project funded by the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia (CAC). The study, which started in July 2005, forms part of the GRID's line of research initiated in 2003 with the project "Digital Communicators", of the Iberian-American Digital Communication Network (ICOD Network). The "Digital Communicators" project, coordinated by the UVic Digital Communication Department and funded by the ALFA Programme of the European Union and the Department of Universities, Research and Information Society (DURSI) of the Generalitat de Catalunya, aimed to draw up specific proposals to accelerate the adaptation of university communication courses to the new digital situation. Some of the most important proposals were to define the professional skills of "digital communicators", to design training plans in the field of digital communication and to debate the ideal pedagogical methodology in order to optimise the teaching of digital skills in graduate and postgraduate communication courses. The objective of all these projects, beyond the specific goals of each one, was to analyse the consequences of digitalisation processes in the media.

When we talk about digitalisation, this is a process that is characterised by the appearance of the following:

- Textual supports based on binary code (which, unlike traditional supports, mean that the text can be manipulated infinitely without losing information).
- Information production and distribution devices based on binary code (computer assisted publishing, non-linear video editing, etc.).

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- Information exchange via networks based on transmitting data packages (conceptual and technological basis of the internet).
- New ways of organising production (company-network) and new logics for creating and transmitting information (point-to-point network, open source code, etc.).
- Convergence of languages, media and companies.

Digitalisation has also altered the profile and work of professionals involved in the culture industry. The impact has been particularly felt in large production units where an industrial and Taylorist division of labour reigned supreme. Among other things, digitalisation has transformed the job descriptions for different areas, workers' competences and the quality of working life (Rintala and Soulanen, 2005).

## 1. Objectives and methodology

The overall objectives of this research were as follows:

- 1) detect changes in the functions of journalists;
- 2) define the new professional profiles in the present-day Catalan audiovisual and multimedia setting with the introduction of digital technology.

The research included work by agencies, radio, television and the online versions of newspapers and media specifically created for the Internet.

The following were among the specific objectives for the research:

- Analyse the consequences of the digitalisation of journalism in the audiovisual and multimedia sectors in Catalonia.
- Describe the structural changes in Catalan firms in the sector: new media, new products and new journalistic genres.
- Examine the new profiles, the disappearance and transformation of professional figures in the present-day communication context.
- Review the competences of these professionals and changes in their work routines.

This research is in line with the researchers who, over the last few years, have investigated the relationship between

new digital technologies and the journalistic profession. Within this context, references to the leading work of Armañanzas, Díaz Noci and Meso (1996) and to the initial attempts at defining the profile of the "digital journalist" are a must. With regard to Catalan scientific work, the main lines of research explored have been as follows:

- New professional profiles in the world of information (Micó, 2003, 2005).
- New routines and functions of journalists (Masip, 2003, 2005; Micó, 2003, 2005; Soriano, 2004; Domingo, 2005; Franquet et al., 2006; Xarxa ICOD, 2006).
- Use of the Internet as a source of information or of email at work (Luzón, 2003; Masip, 2003, 2005).
- Relationship between journalists at conventional offices and professionals at digital editions in the same medium (Domingo, 2006).

The research is qualitative in nature, prioritising unstructured interviews and personal observation as the main techniques for gathering information (see table 1).

Unlike other studies focusing on few media in order to investigate their production dynamics more deeply, such as Masip (2005), where three firms are analysed (TV3, Catalunya Ràdio and *La Vanguardia*), and Domingo (2005, 2006), with four firms (*laMalla.net*, *El Periódico de Catalunya*, *Telenotícies.com*, CCRTV in his work from 2006, and the *Diari de Tarragona Digital*), in this research we have opted to construct a national map comprising of the different types of media based on a notably larger sample. The research therefore covers 25 media from the present-day Catalan context, with a total of 35 interviews carried out during the first six months of 2006. The number of people interviewed exceeds the number of media because, in large companies, two interviews were carried out: the first with a journalist and the second with a media manager. These figures make it re-semble the study recently carried out by the College of Journalists of Catalonia, where 30 journalists were interviewed in depth after carrying out a telephone survey with 420 people (Soriano, 2004; Soriano and Cantón, 2005). In this case, in order to achieve the objectives established, qualitative research has been used in which non-structured interviews predominated as the technique for gathering data.

**Table 1. Research design**

Phases	Activities / tasks / characteristics
Methodological preparation	Methodological background / Research methodology
	Sampling. Defining, characterising and finding participants
	Drawing up and designing the guide and questionnaire to be applied
Fieldwork	Contacting participants
	Carrying out interviews
Data analysis	Analytical procedure / Category design

Source: in-house.

## 2. Summary of the research findings

This section presents the main findings from the research.<sup>1</sup> In order to improve how the findings are presented, we have used four diagrams. Table 2 shows the main figures that have disappeared since the arrival of digital technologies, the professions that have survived in the new environment (although their routines have undergone some changes) and the new professional profiles. Table 3 shows the skills taken on by journalists in the new work environment.

This research presents a diagram of the situation showing a scenario in total transformation: the media ecosystem is currently going through a phase where new technologies are appearing every day, new professional profiles are being defined and new narrative forms and production models are being experienced. For this reason, the conclusions are presented as "trends", some already almost established and others just beginning (which does not necessarily mean they will become established in the future). Media digitalisation is a recent process that must continue to be studied as it adopts its definitive form and reaches a point of socio-technical balance. The main trends detected by the re-search are as follows:

### 2.1. Digitalisation

Digitalisation is a process that affects information production, editing and distribution processes. Its main characteristic, in addition to transforming the material nature of information (from paper or electromagnetic tapes to bits), comes from the integration of the Internet and all its applications and services into the work of journalists. In other words, the digital network changes how journalism works and how it is seen. The digitalisation of the production of information is an ongoing process. Its consequences have therefore just started to be verified. The scale of the process is global but it takes on specific characteristics in each situation. Digitalisation is therefore experienced in one way by large media and in another by smaller media; it varies depending on whether companies are public or private, etc. There are experiences of the complete introduction of technology in which there has been no transition from an analogue to a digital system but the decision has been taken to directly incorporate the second formula. In many Catalan media, the digitalisation process has been started at the head office and has afterwards spread to the branches. In other words, the trend has been as follows: the formula has been tested in Barcelona and has gone on afterwards to other counties.

<sup>1</sup> The complete report can be consulted on the website of the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia ([http://www.cac.cat/pfw\\_files/cma/recerca/estudis\\_recerca/perfilsprofessionals.pdf](http://www.cac.cat/pfw_files/cma/recerca/estudis_recerca/perfilsprofessionals.pdf)) and of the Digital Interaction Research Group (<http://www.uvic.cat/fec/recerca/es/grid/presentacio.html>).

**Table 2. Transformations of professional profiles**

<b>Professional profiles that have disappeared</b>			
<b>Radio</b>	<b>TV</b>	<b>Agencies</b>	<b>Online media</b>
Teletypist	Teletypist	Teletypist	-
Documentalist / Archivist	Documentalist / Archivist	Documentalist / Archivist	-
Music editor	Image operator / editor	Editorial assistant	-
Head of record / audio library			-
Music coordinator			-

<b>Professional profiles that have remained and are changing</b>			
<b>Radio</b>	<b>TV</b>	<b>Agencies</b>	<b>Online media</b>
Writer / journalist	Writer / journalist	Writer / journalist	-
Broadcast technician	Presenter / Commentator		-
Content manager	Editor		-
Programme editor	Cameraman		-
Producer	Decorator		-
	Programmer		
	Computer graphics designer		

<b>New professional profiles</b>			
<b>Radio</b>	<b>TV</b>	<b>Agencies</b>	<b>Online media</b>
Multiskilled journalist	Multiskilled journalist	Multiskilled journalist	Multiskilled journalist
Webmaster	Webmaster	Webmaster	Graphic designer
Head of new formats	Head of production		Graphic designer / Programmer
	Media browser		Programmer
	Super-user / Content manager / Media manager		Interactive designer
	Technical system manager / System manager		Information architect
	Head of news digitalisation		Content director
			Comment manager
			Manager of websites and pages
			Computer graphics designer

Source: in-house.

**Table 3. Map of professional skills**

	<b>Agencies</b>	<b>Radio</b>	<b>TV</b>	<b>Online</b>
<b>AUDIO</b>				
Scriptwriting		•		
Music editing		•	•	
Audio recording and editing	•	•		•
Voiceover		•		
<b>GRAPHICS</b>				
Creating graphic designs				•
Modifying graphic designs				•
<b>PHOTOGRAPHY</b>				
Taking photographs	•			•
Retouching photographs	•			•
<b>VIDEO</b>				
Scriptwriting			•	
Recording and editing video	•		•	•
Voiceover			•	
<b>SOFTWARE AND PROGRAMMING</b>				
Office computing	•	•	•	•
Photoshop	•			•
CoolEdit (or similar)		•		
FinalCut (or similar)			•	
Dreamweaver				•
Flash				•
HTML				•
<b>OTHER SKILLS</b>				
CMS management			•	•
Remote work	•		•	•
Information management	•	•	•	•

Source: in-house.



Technological change has encouraged media networks to be managed in economic terms, something that favours a reduction in expenditure because the number of people required for work is lower. Moreover, management is simplified with this way of operating. Certain media outsource work as much as possible. If they can't meet their commitments within the firm, they hire external services without losing profitability. In this context, independent journalists, isolated, can write pieces both for the radio and television at the same time. These are more akin to individual experiences. The dynamic might even work in small agencies. However, it is much more complex to implement this way of working in large media, which contain all the production processes. Incorporating these new routines would entail a lot of effort.

The process of technological adaptation has sometimes been less traumatic than was supposed. The departments of new technologies and content management have tried to work with journalists as clients, to teach them how they must work in order to make the most of the technology in question. Digitalisation leads to a number of transformations in production routines and professional profiles. Professions change (for example, journalists, who become multiskilled) as well as relations between professions (for example, between journalists and computer programmers). Finally, according to the generalised view, the digitalisation of production processes leads to savings in time, but no-one has specified what is done with this "time gained".

## 2.2. Professional profiles

Throughout the whole process, figures that have existed in the media for a long time disappear, from the corrector to the music editor, including the image operator. If these disappearances are analysed from the point of view of the social history of technology, we might say that this is almost a natural step: each new technology reconfigures the media ecosystem and entails the disappearance of some of those involved. Moreover, digitalisation is also altering traditional professional profiles. For example, at some radio stations the person responsible for the record or audio library has become a content manager; the person in charge of sets on television now tends to create and develop virtual spaces, etc. Obviously the central figure in these transformations is the multiskilled journalist. As we can see, numerous pro-

fessional figures have undergone changes in those competences that, historically, had characterised them.

In general, these transformations can be reduced to two types:

- Technological, due to the incorporation of the necessary knowledge to work with digital tools.
- Functional, where the professional must take charge of new tasks or tasks that were previously carried out by other workers.

Whatever the case, both transformations are closely related. If the professional in television journalism is required to know how to edit video and the professional in radio journalism is asked to edit the programme, this is due to the fact that digital technologies have made handling content significantly easier thanks to the spread of user-friendly interfaces.

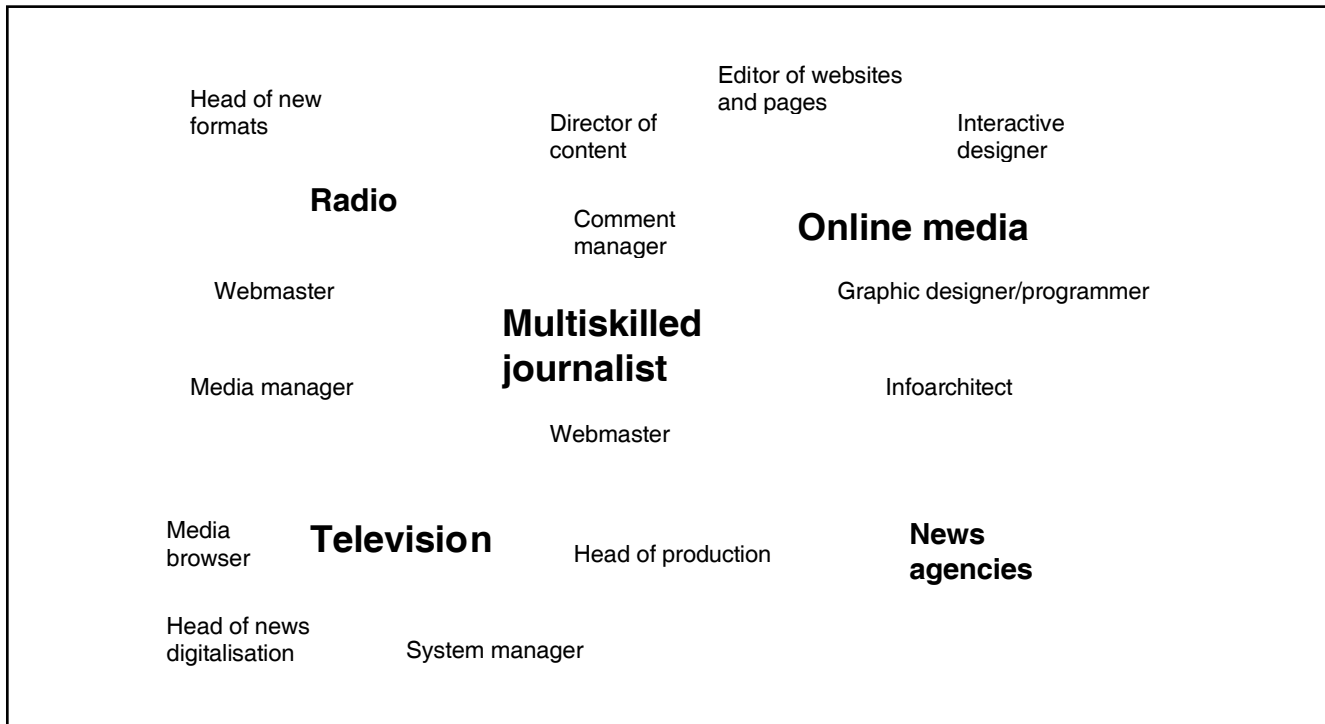
Digitalisation is also creating new professional profiles. However, the initial expectations of the research group in this area were not met one hundred percent, as not so many new figures as expected were detected. On radio and in agencies, the appearance of new profiles is minimal. The firms that have created most new figures based on digital technologies have been the large TV production structures. Given their youth, the new professional profiles have converged on online media (albeit with another dimension) (see table 4).

Of the important new profiles are media and system managers, in the area of television, and infoarchitects in online media. While a certain confusion has been observed among profiles and functions in companies with a long history, especially in larger firms, in small-scale internet media the basic profiles are perfectly defined: multimedia journalist, graphic designer (with basic programming skills) and programmer.

## 2.3. Multiskilling

There are different ways of seeing the multiskilled nature of journalists. In small media, this professional has always been multiskilled. Journalists working for the new online media have also taken on multiskilling naturally. But in large-scale traditional media this process (journalists accumulating an increasing number of functions) is still open and often conflictive. In others it is currently

**Table 4. Appearance of new professional profiles by medium**



Source: in-house.

characterised by its unstable nature. Some of the professionals interviewed in this research have expressed their concern because they are becoming increasingly more distant from the news event per se. Journalists increasingly tend to get their information without leaving the office. Very often, the work to verify data and compare sources is done online. *Native digital journalists* dominate the technology, adapt easily to the work environment and have the capacity to work for different media and in a variety of languages. *Migrant digital journalists* are professionals forced to retrain themselves, to learn how the new tools work and assimilate the production systems.

### 2.4. Convergence

The boundaries between media become blurred with digitalisation. Rather than competing, different platforms tend to complement each other. That's why traditional companies are encouraged to open various channels (any medium must now have news presence on the *World Wide Web*) and to create divisions that produce content in different lan-

guages and formats, including the new genres (such as Interactive CCRTV and the Catalan News Agency). With regard to content, except for the appearance of interactive graphic designers in digital media, the content via mobile channels (such as SMS) and some limited experiences (the Digital Agenda of the EFE Agency), digitalisation has still not generated all the new products or formats expected. Technology makes work easier and faster, it's true. It also means that communities of consumers can be created and consolidated. But, essentially, interactive content still need developing. In other words, digital is employed, above all, to produce the same as always.

### 3. Towards a conceptualisation of multiskilling

According to this research, the concept of the *multiskilled journalist* is the one that best adapts to the present-day professional situation providing the meaning and scope of the term 'multiskilled' is clarified. The concept of a multime-

dia journalist is not wrong. However, it only refers to those professionals who produce content for different media. In this study we have seen that, in some media, in addition to having to prepare information for their company's radio and television stations and website, journalists are also responsible for diverse events (sports, cultural, political, etc.) or have to develop diverse functions (writing, photography, editing, etc.). For this simple reason, the concept of *multimedia* does not cover all the new tasks of journalists in digitalised environments. With regard to *digital journalist*, its meaning loses specificity in the day to day work: all journalists are now digital, from professionals working on a newspaper to those working for a radio or television station. They all work on digital material, model it and adapt it to each medium. We must therefore return to the concept of 'multiskilling'. Just as different kinds of convergence have been detected (Salaverría, 2003), we can also accept the existence of various kinds of multiskilling.

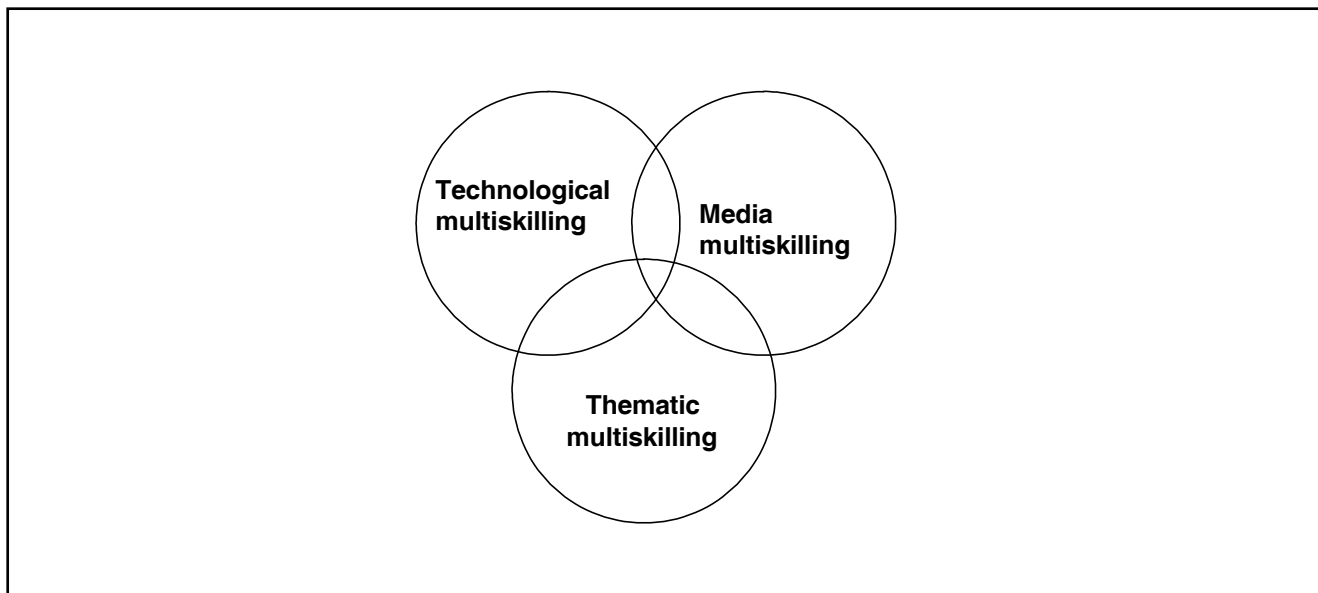
Based on the material gathered in this study, the *multi-skilled journalist* is understood as an information professional capable of carrying out different tasks with technological resources that, in many cases, were carried out previously

by other figures to produce content for different media.

The following classification of multiskilling is proposed (see table 5):

- **Technological:** information professionals use tools (programs and machines) to help them produce and manage content in different media. For example, journalists can now handle programs for writing, to retouch photographs, non-linear video editing systems, programs for network management, databases, etc.
- **Media:** information professionals design and produce content in some (or all) of the following formats: written, audio, graphic, video and interactive. For example, journalists, after covering an event, prepare a written text (for printed and/or online newspapers), a radio piece and edit the video for it to be broadcast on television. This range of skills requires technological competences (knowledge of technical tools) and semiotic competences (knowledge of the languages of the different media).
- **Thematic:** information professionals are responsible for drawing up information for different sections (sport, politics, cultures, etc.). For example, the same journalist covers highly diverse events, from a football match to a political event.

**Table 5. The different types of multiskilling for information professionals**



Source: in-house.

These forms of multiskilling are not mutually exclusive. Quite the opposite, as they go to make up different degrees of analysis. The same journalist may be capable of drawing up information for different media and, at the same time, of generating content on politics, culture and society (as happens in the Catalan News Agency and Diari de Barcelona). In other areas, journalists master the different media and languages but specialise in one theme (e.g. sport). This is the current situation of journalists working for the Catalan company CCRTV Interactiva.

This initial taxonomy of multiskilling should be tested in further research and should possibly be compared with the situation of other areas of production that have undergone digitalisation processes.

With these considerations of the concept of *multiskilling*, located at the heart of the present-day transformations suffered by the role of journalists in the media, this report concludes. New research is required, integrating other methodologies and focuses, to discover the transformations generated by digital technologies in the news media of Catalonia. On the other hand, these studies of the production process should be complemented with an analysis of the product (doubts as to information quality have appeared throughout the interviews) and the study of news consumption.

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# TV programming for consumers in miniature. Advertising for young children that speaks the language of adults

**Mònika Jiménez Morales**

- *Taking as our point of departure the fact that, increasingly, the line that separates the world of young children from that of adults is practically inexistent, this article investigates how advertising helps to turn young children into adults and, inversely, helps to infantilise those who have gone way beyond adolescence. The text analyses the parallelisms and divergences between the creative strategies used in advertisements aimed at young children and those aimed at an adult audience in order to discover how advertising uses resources to catch the attention of young children, who are actually the potential consumers of the future.*

## **Keywords**

Advertising, television, young children, consumption, effects.

## **1. Introduction**

In 1982, a lecturer from New York University suddenly shook up the consciences of millions of people around the world proclaiming the disappearance of childhood. By means of his book of the same name, Neil Postman launched a warning cry, pointing out the shortfalls in the dominant socialisation processes of young children at that time and the harmful effects of the progressive elimination of the frontiers between the infant and adult world.

Almost a quarter of a century later, reality has exceeded Postman's prophecy several times over. Although traditionally, in the words of the same author, young children were a group of people who did not know certain adult things, this statement has now become almost ridiculous, as children's free access to society through the media (particularly television and new technologies) has helped to totally eliminate any lack of knowledge of the world of "grown-ups".

The frontiers between the infant and adult world have therefore become increasingly more vague. We should not be surprised that the consumerist tendencies of the youngest pre-adolescents coincide substantially not only with those of adolescents but also with those of the adult target. Clothes, music, food... everything is for everyone. Multi-segmentation down to the minimum essence has given way to consumption in its maximum expression.

The competition between advertisers to reach the end consumer starts right at the time when, in addition to defining the core target, adjacent targets are also established, potential buyers to be reached by means of creative strategies that, although designed for a specific target group, end up having an impact on others. So while the discourse capable of seducing both young and old is growing non-stop, and with all the consequences this entails, advertising rhetoric aimed exclusively at young children is going through a slump.

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## 2. From child viewer to child consumer

Towards the end of the nineties, computers started to be installed in homes and shared with television the role of the nanny of the future: an apparently inanimate being that, after pressing a simple button, was capable of telling incredible stories, of transporting young viewers to the other side of the world, of connecting them with other people with the same concerns assaulting their infant universes and, in short, replacing the role of the primary mentor, reserved until now for parents and which, over a short period of time, has turned into an increasingly accelerated socialisation process.

In amidst all this replacement process, advertising took advantage of this gap to take up its place in this parallel world, taking on the role of advisory mother that, given the absence of a real mother, started to guide young children as to what was good for their growth, for their leisure time and even for their education. By means of repetition, animated characters and recreations of situations familiar to their young viewers, adverts transformed the "child viewer" into "child consumer" using a process that various authors have agreed to call the "corporate construction of childhood".<sup>1</sup>

In fact, as noted by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2003:438), studies on the effects of advertising on children are based on two differentiated paradigms: the paradigm of the *empowered child* and that of the *vulnerable child*.<sup>2</sup> In the first, the *empowered child*, the child is seen as a born consumer, capable of critically processing advertising messages. Research based on this paradigm is founded on aspects such as children's marketing, brand attitude, brand image and intention to buy. On the other hand, in research based on the paradigm of the *vulnerable child*, the effects of advertising assume that children lack the cognitive defences to protect themselves from adverts' messages.

Although based on the premise that children are particularly sensitive to certain stimuli, especially those with a high emotional content, the paradigm of the *vulnerable child* stu-

dies the disregarded effects of advertising, those ignored by communication theories. In other words the indirect effects, such as family conflict as a result of unsatisfied demands, an increase in materialism or unhappiness in children caused by these situations, among others.

Judith Van Evra (1990:229) talks, in this respect, of a kind of "unseen presence" that guides children in the most critical years. Coinciding with pre-adolescence and adolescence, advertising instils values, generates needs and ends up making children inexhaustible consumers:

*"As the child grows up she/he moves through several phases before eventually becoming an independent consumer. Each of these developmental stages is seen as critical for early learning and lays the foundation for life-long education. The advertiser, like the parent and the schoolteacher, can influence the entire process by which a child learns to establish consumption related values, sets priorities and develops aspirations. Like an unseen presence, advertising is always there, invisibly guiding the child in these critical, formative years. During infancy the child is principally an information receiver. Advertising selects the information and ideas which will promote a certain kind of consciousness in the child."*

To this fact we must also add children's growing buying power. In order for their children to learn how to handle money, many parents assign them a fixed amount of money, so they can buy directly without involving their parents. So the concept mentioned above of the child as viewer becoming the child as consumer becomes even more of an absolute reality.

As stated by Ana Isabel Romero (1991:3),<sup>3</sup> advertising, consumption and socialisation are three elements that cannot be taken separately today:

*"The process of initiation and consumption in children occurs, in our opinion, at the same time as the process of socialisation, being the first objects consumed by the infant, of an oral nature, and their request and enjoyment*

1 SCHOR, J. B. "Corporate Construction of Childhood" (CCC), 2004.

2 BUIJZEN M.; VALKENBURG, P. M. "Empowered child" and "vulnerable" child (2003: 438).

3 *Revista de consumo y sociedad*, no. 9, 1991.

*being directly related to the sequential phase in their parental relationship. Toys, originally of religious symbolism as a possessed object, are implanted later, and from here on they are introduced with access to what is symbolic of the value of money, as well as adapting group and generational codes in choosing the objects to be consumed."*

Based on the combination of these three aspects and the fact that young children have a certain buying power, their role in the commercial universe is therefore no longer limited to that of consumer but is multiplied by three, a diversification that is widely taken advantage of by advertising strategies.

From our point of view, therefore, children develop three differentiated roles that also converge in their immediate environment:

1. **Buyer:** using the small amount of money they have, children make certain purchases, on their own initiative or following advice from relatives.
2. **Influencer:** based on advertising, young children ask their parents for certain products. So children act as a direct influence on family purchases or on those for which they are the direct recipients. This role is particularly strong in food products, which end up being consumed by the whole family, as well as in toys or personal objects to be used by the child.
3. **Consumer:** a situation that occurs in concordance or not with the two previous roles. Children can become buyers and consumers, or influencers and consumers, or all three at the same time: buyers, influencers and consumers. It will all ultimately depend on their buying power.

Whatever the case, the reality is that advertising plays a fundamental part in any of these roles, so that adverts can have great influence on the formation of children as consumers.

As revealed in a study carried out by the French government in 2002,<sup>4</sup> there are few parents, or perhaps practically no parents, who recommend you should resist the demands of child consumption or the influence of children on family purchases (2002:53).

Connected to this idea, Norminanda Montoya (2007:12) uses an Anglo Saxon term to describe the detonator that, due to pure exhaustion, leads parents to buy what children ask for. "Finally, children [...] are not only voracious consumers of adverts but it is said that they also influence most of the family consumption via the technique of badgering their mother in the supermarket to get her to buy something. It's what North American experts call the *nag factor*." According to the author, although scientifically it's difficult to prove that advertising influences children to the point of their consumer behaviour being the result of seeing the adverts, advertising spend aimed at young children is rising non-stop, just in case

In this respect, it should be added that, coinciding with Jean Noël Kapferer (1985), advertising is not the only source to incite child consumption but other external influences also need to be taken into account, such as peer groups. Actually, these peer groups accentuate the effect of advertising. All friends have to do is say something positive about a product at school for it to become an object desired by the young consumer, irrespective of whether the advertising has been seen or not. This desire is also multiplied with the advertising stimulus, which merely reinforces the positive opinion the child already had of the product *a priori*.

As the child approaches the adolescent age group, demand by the child consumer decreases or rather evolves towards other, more subtle forms. We might say that requests to the parents, the influence exercised by the child on the adult purchasing process, either for own consumption or not, change their form. Verbal insistence on the acquisition of certain products becomes dialogue: the child tries to convince his or her parents of the benefits of buying or consuming the product. Kapferer (1985:118) explains this process as part of the cognitive evolution of children.

It should therefore be noted that, with age, consumerist desire does not disappear but becomes more balanced and evolves towards other products. So the frontiers between childhood and the adult world are increasingly less defined and young children's consumerist trends end up coinciding with those of adults. Advertisers, aware of this change, emit

4 *Les enfants et la publicité télévisée. Approche synthétique et perspectives critiques*. Paris: La documentation française, 2002.



their subjugating sirens' song in the form of a creative strategy capable of captivating, with their harmonies, the Ulysses of any age, sex or condition.

### 3. Young children and the language of advertising

With the collapse of the wall separating adult from child consumption, advertising discourse has become simplified in terms of form. Although the basis of the message aims to reach a specific target group, the creative formulas used are actually so universal, so intentionally simple, that they end up hitting the rest of the audience, the adjacent audiences. It is therefore not difficult for young children to know, word by word, the jingle for the latest campaign for a well-known beer brand or to describe to perfection the plan established by cereals for their consumers to lose weight before the summer arrives.

Music, colours, image movement, sex or humour, among others, are some of these elements that are recurrent and absolutely effective in reaching any kind of target. For this reason, and going back to the idea that "everything is for everyone", creative resources aimed exclusively at a child target are under-used at present.

A study carried out between January and June 2004<sup>5</sup> showed that adverts broadcast during advertising slots within the children's broadcasting band did not talk in children's language. Violence, adultification of very young children's behaviour and the use of resources often present in spots aimed at adults (rhymes, music, metaphors, etc.) have ended up distancing the possibility of developing a suitable discourse for minors.

This analysis led us to conclude that, currently, the creative resources of language for children's advertising that are used practically exclusively are as follows:

- Magic realism: the use of fantasy as a persuasive strategy
- Game as an argument: promotional gifts associated with the purchase

- The dual fragmentation of reality: a search for meaning in advertising discourse
- The exacerbated use of special effects

#### 3.1. Magic realism: the use of fantasy as a persuasive strategy

Since time immemorial, advertising and myth have gone together and have created their own language capable of catching the attention of the target and of seducing him or her. Myth constantly peppers the advertising of our days: Narcissus or the young man in love with his own image, Venus/Aphrodite or the goddess of beauty... Although myth is present throughout advertising, it is undoubtedly in adverts aimed at children and pre-adolescents where fantasy, magic and myth are shown more explicitly to awaken the target's curiosity.

In fact, unlike most advertising spots aimed at adults, a large part of the adverts whose target is children adopt a fable-like physiognomy, in which good actions are closely related to using the product and negative acts to not consuming the object being advertised. Curiously, in French, the fable genre is called *conte d'avisement*, with an extremely similar etymology to the English term *advertisement*.

Another point of contact between the fable genre and advertising aimed at young children is the use of repetition as a reminder which, on the one hand, allows recipients to assimilate all the information they receive about the fantastic story and, on the other hand, manages to fix the product in the children's minds so that it forms part of their particular *shortlist*.

Chalvon *et al.* agree on highlighting the importance of repetition, materialised in the slogan to penetrate young children (1982:174):

*"We know how children like advertisements. From the time they are very young, they sing them aloud and repeat the slogans. They are tailor-made to their preferences. The brevity of the intervention suits the child's attention span, not very inclined to be interested in extensive developments. The repetition of an advert day after day*

5 JIMÉNEZ MORALES, M. "De l'estereotip adult a la realitat preadolescent. Influència de la publicitat en els trastorns del comportament alimentari en nens i nenes de 8 a 12 anys". (Doctoral thesis, Barcelona 2006).

*soon becomes a game: the child plays at remembering the continuation of the story. The broadcast becomes a ritual and provides, every day, the same expected pleasure savoured in advance. The insistent rhythm stimulates their imagination and disconcerts them, proposing at the same time a story simplified in the extreme and one that is, therefore, very easy to understand.*"

The authors also point out how words are used for the images in advertising aimed at children, to make them believe the product will be capable of leading them to the magical world revealed by the multicolour scenes that invade television sets during the advertising break. On the other hand, in spots aimed at an adult target, the images are strong enough to take the viewer to fantastic worlds. The incursion of textual discourse in developing the iconic formula would be interpreted by adults as something implausible or, directly, as a total lack of credibility.

With regard to the language used in advertising aimed at preadolescents, Francesca Romana Puggelli (2002:92) highlights the animism of the discourse used, both at an iconic and textual level. For Puggelli, making inanimate objects come alive is the basis of fantasy, a totally necessary component in advertising spots for this sector of the population.

This incursion of animism in advertising aimed at children is clearly related to the fact that, as revealed by Jean Piaget<sup>6</sup> (1929), until they reach puberty, young children are not capable of differentiating living objects from inanimate things. According to Piaget, children's thought continues to be animist up to adolescence. Although adults explain that things cannot feel nor act, and no matter how hard they try to convince themselves of the truth of this statement in order to please adults, and to avoid ridicule, children are absolutely convinced of the validity of their own ideas.

It is precisely at this point where the figure of what we will call the "magic helper" appears with all intensity. As its name suggests, the "magic helper" is a fantastic element that helps the protagonists of the action to get out of a critical situation. This assistant can be the product itself,

which gives strength to the protagonist to achieve his or her goals or transforms him or her into what he/she has always wanted to be. Another possibility is that it is an animated element, such as a pet that talks or an object that infuses the hero with enough courage to achieve his goals. The "magic helper" actually becomes an example of *prosopopeia* taken to the extreme.

Along the lines of Piaget, Judith Van Evra (1990:28) highlights the dependence of children in preadolescence with regard to the fantasy that impregnates advertising spots. For the author, children are fascinated by the messages addressed to them by these objects that, during the advertising breaks of their favourite programmes, talk to them of fantastic worlds where they will find products that will turn them into heroes or princesses, into internationally famous sports people or actors. Far from causing incredulity, and thanks to the advertising, these animated objects reaffirm children's beliefs regarding their perception of objects.

### **3.2. Game as argument: promotional gifts associated with the purchase**

The relationship between advertisements and games is repeatedly taken advantage of by advertising creatives when structuring arguments in favour of the products they are promoting. The fun component is in the front line of the stimuli provided to children to incite them to buy or ask for different goods.

As we have already explained, mascots associated with the products and guaranteed or possible gifts linked to purchase are two persuasive elements that have grown significantly over the last few years.

In this way, in line with M. Alonso *et al.* (1995:111), we can say that, when the product is presented, evident dynamic, complicit and fun elements are included, as well as reinforcing the brand image by means of the mascot that represents it and the gift accompanying it:

*"In advertising aimed directly at children, as potential buyers, as requesters or advisors of the purchase, games, fun and competitiveness (being strong, being the best or having what others don't have) are the mechanisms most*

6 Piaget concedes different states to children's animist thought up to the adolescent stage in *The Child's Concept of the World*. New York: Brace, 1929.

*frequently employed. And a gift, additional but inseparable to the product (also related to the game in almost all cases) appears as a strong means of appeal."*

In fact, product as game is one of the persuasive arguments most frequently used in creative strategies. The product is usually a toy or is the means by which real toys can be achieved. For Alonso (1995:111), the presence of the game as an integral part of the emotional advertising strategy goes way beyond the twenty seconds the advert lasts, as it becomes present in the child's everyday life and is mixed in with his or her social routines.

Children play with the promotional games that accompany the products: they take them to school, they incorporate them into the family environment, they form part of their conversations, etc. In this respect, the authors also note the importance of the jingle repeated throughout the advert, as a hook that is closely linked to the emotional strategies used by adverts for preadolescents and, as we have explained, to children's fun-related routines:

*"With the advert-game, child action is provoked as a prolongation of the advertising message in space and time. The vehicle used for this effect is, in the great majority of cases, a very short and catchy song that includes a mention of a product brand. The song acts by animating and strengthening the message per se, its direct effectiveness, giving it appeal but also serving as a vehicle for an effect that extends its reach. The technique is not from today, of course. [...] but this technique, in addition to surviving, has become generalised and is currently included in more than 80 per cent of adverts aimed at children. Catchy songs appear continuously and are learned and chanted by children, who take them out onto the street and repeat them in homes. Children, protagonists and spokespeople, confuse the fun aspect with the indirect advertising activity, carried out as a spontaneous and free spokesperson. Sympathy towards the product comes from sympathy towards the corresponding song. Advantage is taken of the knowledge of the message by playing and comparing those who know the greatest number of them, those who remember them best or who associate songs and products most quickly. As it becomes more "modern", the most important variation of this technique is in condensing the message, becoming simpler and little more than a repeti-*

*tion of brands and synthetic slogans, far from developing an anecdote or from listing actions or behaviours."*

In fact, these elements that are complementary to the product per se, such as gifts or prizes, are no more than a notable part of all the emotional strategy supporting the advertising campaign. Often, when the emotional product/target links are not perfectly defined, they need something to accentuate the advertising.

Jean-Noël Kapferer (1985:105-106) notes, in this respect, that the gifts offered within the product packaging itself are those preferred by children over other formulas such as competitions or exchanging points for gifts. The author also points out that most young children ask their parents for the product via the accompanying gift and not via the product itself.

### **3.3. The dual fragmentation of reality: a search for meaning in advertising discourse**

Given the encapsulating properties of TV advertising discourse per se, it's true that any spot tends to systematically fragment reality. Advertising shows us specific scenes from an in-existent life in which the product is key to achieving the most hidden dreams.

Moments of intimacy, family scenes, memories, deliriums, fascinations... In short, moments or snippets of life captured in twenty seconds and repeated until we are sated in the midst of TV narration. Advertising never shows the whole story, there is never a proposal, a crisis and a denouement in accordance with the structures of traditional narrative. In a manner similar to epic novels, the stories told in adverts start under the cover of the concept of *in media res*; in other words, without a clear need for a logical beginning or ending. Most adverts actually become a metaphor for the *voyeur* who realises there is a hole in the wall when the scene being observed on the other side has already started and, on being discovered by the lovers, is suddenly deprived of his or her observation and must resort to imagination to complete the end of the story.

In this way, although fragmentation governs any advertising narrative, it's important to repeat here the fact that, in the case of advertising for young children, this restriction of the field of view occurs much more profusely. In other words, although the product being advertised is the key to a

triumph that can be shown to the audience, or left to the mercy of the imagination of the viewer, in advertising designed to persuade an adult public, in fact very rarely do children's adverts leave this outcome in suspense, as any possible story is delimited by what the images show.

So, the benefit or basic promise of the product advertised in spots aimed at children is always to be found in the present, in the fragment of reality shown during the advertising time. We can therefore say that the future does not exist, in advertising terms, for this audience. The products advertised are a means of improving the present situation, as any other supposition is systematically removed from the narration.

Dinosaurs that appear in the middle of the desert to calm the thirst of young children; girls that transform into footballers after eating a portion of cheese... There is no future in this fragment of reality constructed as a tool to persuade boys and girls, because showing or simply give cause to imagining the moment after the action shown would mean ending the fantastic and eminently phantasmagorical component used as a basic strategy in advertising aimed at this segment.

As stated by Joan Ferrés (1996:78-80), seduction via fragmentation is based on emotive hyper-stimulation and, according to the author, as emotion has a globalising effect, it tends to project the value of the part over the whole. That's why the adverts analysed show how buying a certain product will change the whole fragment of life that appears on the screen, but does not allow room to look for meaning beyond what is shown. Ferrés points out, in this respect, that "the process of seduction therefore has an initial fragmenting phase, decomposing reality, with the aim of eliminating the dimensions that are of interest to camouflage, and a second globalising phase, of reconstruction, consisting of transferring the values of the fascinating dimension selected to the whole".

We can therefore see that, similarly, advertising aimed at children selects a certain fragment of the possible world to avoid dispersion or interpretation of this pseudoreality beyond what is shown in the images. This formula clearly coincides with the distinction made by Carlos Lomas (1996: 67-69) between advertising that announces and that which enounces. For the author, the communicative ideologies of advertising follow two different orientations or ways of pro-

ducing discourse of persuasion: advertising that announces by means of referring to objects and representing the world alluded to in the discourse, and advertising that enounces, in which meaning is dispersed in the text in a thousand and one random signifieds with the aim of predicting other things, of constructing a spectacle around the brand or the object in order to place them in the centre of attention.

Advertising that announces is that used by creatives who aim their pieces mostly at the infant and pre-adolescent target. Although it is also used in the case of certain products aimed at adults, it's true that, in spots designed for the target we are discussing here, this is where advertising that announces finds its pride of place.

Based on the theories of David Ogilvy (1963), these spots aspire to inform about the product, in the words of Lomas himself, to propose a fragment of life hardly more veritable than truth; i.e. to reflect obvious things literally. On the other hand, there is advertising that enounces; those spots that aim to construct a reality beyond the referent.

In this respect, Jacques Séguéla (1985) points out that this kind of advertising aims to erase the boredom of everyday shopping, dressing up in dreams products that, without the-se advertisements, would be no more than they really are. We can therefore state that, while advertising aimed at young children fragments the world in a more generalist way, showing snippets of reality that are no more than everyday scenes where the product appears as the key element in the present action, most of the spots aimed at a target of adult age divide reality into ultimate consequences, showing its minimum expression, so that viewers produce their own reality based on the affective transfers resulting from a product presented as a key to future happiness. Fragmentation in advertising pieces for children is realistic; the fragmentation in adverts for adults is completely symbolic.

This differentiation is connected with the concepts of obvious and obtuse advertising proposed by Roland Barthes (1986). Obvious advertising is referential, denotative, that which alludes to people, objects and services that describe products' qualities. The type of advertising discourse mentioned is that which is usually applied to persuade a younger target because, as revealed by Carlos Lomas (1996:68):

*"The scenes, actions, things, gestures, characters or settings refer to other scenes, actions, things, gestures, characters or settings of everyday life, producing in the addressee a certain reality effect and, consequently, the certainty of it having been experienced and true. In terms of referential ideology, it is therefore a case of making seem true by means of narrative, figurative (and not abstract) and descriptive (never normative) discourses the things that are said (and predicted) of the objects in the adverts. In referential advertising, everything is aimed at deploying a communicative strategy that allows the discourse on the object to be presented as something true or at least likely. In what is enounced by referential advertising, the textual and narrative procedures help to create in the reader a certain sensation of reality (a certain reflection of life): the use of descriptive enunciates, the logical progress of the shots (without suspension or flashbacks) and the correspondence between the time of the narration and the time of what is narrated would be some of the discursive stratagems used in referential advertising [...]."*

This constant interest in showing a young audience a fragment of pseudo-reality with the aim of making it credible is perfectly palpable in any of the spots aimed at this target. In this fragmentation there is no kind of desire to complicate the stories narrated, to oblige the viewer to look beyond the signified of the audiovisual discourse that is unfolding before their eyes.

In clear contrast is oblique advertising which, in the words of Jean Marie Floch (1991 [1993:214-216]), became the negation of referential advertising, as it destroys its positivist ideology. Here, the meaning that must be constructed is not anything that existed before. The consumer being targeted is the subject of a cognitive fact, because his or her intelligence is constantly tested, as he or she must look for signifieds and signifiers that go way beyond that of the advertising enunciate.

Lomas (1996) points out that, while referential or denotative advertising require little decoding time and minimal cultural knowledge in order to be understood, those strategies based on connotation aim to reach a target that is presupposed to have a certain knowledge of the world and minimal experience.

This point is therefore related to something we have noted in this section: while advertising aimed at children shows fragments of pseudo-reality and does not aspire to note details that may be out of shot, advertising campaigns aimed at an adult public use, most of the time and always depending on the product being advertised and the target chosen, obtuse or connotative advertising; i.e. that which transgresses the fragment shown in the twenty seconds of the advert.

So, obtuse advertising aimed at young children, therefore, would not be very likely to succeed, as their cognitive abilities are limited to those elements they are capable of recognising and, by extension, of relating with the most immediate context.

### **3.4 The exacerbated use of special effects**

Clearly related to concepts such as fantasy, magic or the narrative nature of video games, to which we have referred in previous sections, we can observe that, unlike advertisements aimed at an adult target, advertising created for children does not disguise its special effects. In other words, while adult creative strategies are determined to show as natural facts that, in fact, contradict the laws of all logic, adverts designed for children have no problem in showing, and even exaggerate, certain aspects that, because they are incredible, help to feed the children's desire for the object being advertised.

Cartoon rabbits that come alive and explain to the protagonist of the advert and, at the same time, to the viewer, the benefits of a chocolate powder; children capable of flying, doing unimaginable flips after eating a portion of cheese, talkative dinosaurs that fall from the sky to inform viewers of the change in the name of a certain yoghurt... The benefit or basic promise of the product being advertised has double the potential impact thanks to a clever combination of stories that are appealing to young children and special effects that belong more to the latest intergalactic sagas than an everyday scene in the dining room of any home.

So special effects are often included in the plots of advertisements aimed at children. The frequency of this is such that, far from becoming ridiculous, the fact that special effects form part of the spot has become an added value with regard to the curiosity that the product in question can awaken in the viewer.

Cartoons, obviously related to the "magic helper" mentioned above, and computer enhanced images in order to achieve movements or shapes that do not exist in real film, are the most usual special effects in advertising aimed at children. Cartoons in the form of a mascot or pet are some of the most frequently used emotional arguments by publicists who, in their creative strategy, do not hesitate to transform these apparently innocent characters into firm endorsers of the product being advertised, as explained by Alonso M. *et al.*, (1995: 103):

*"[...] The mascots jump from the products' wrappers to the scenes in the adverts, maintaining their animated figure in contact and interrelation with the characters (usually in real images) in the scenes [...] in this way evident elements of dynamism, complicity and diversion are thereby incorporated into the product presentation, in addition to reinforcing the brand image through the mascot representing it."*

As stated by the same authors (Alonso M. *et al.*, 1995: 105), most publicists defend the use of emotive arguments in which product consumption is related to almost magical situations, believing that the mechanisms of the suggestive conventions unleashed "are known or easily noticed by the public". In other words, according to the opinion of a large part of advertising creatives, no child really believes that, by using or consuming a certain product, they might find themselves in situations equivalent to those experienced by the protagonists of the stories used to present the virtues of what is being advertised.

This hypothesis is reinforced by the study carried out by Anderson and Field<sup>7</sup> in 1983, mentioned by Lorenzo Vilches when alluding to the production and reception of TV formats by children (Vilches, 1993:79), stating that special effects don't actually have much effect on children's attention. This statement, added to the previous one, irremediably attacks reality, something which forces us to ask a question: if, really, children do not believe in the fantastic attributions of the product and if, at the same time, the special effects used in the plots are not very useful for catching their attention, why

is magical realism, emphasised by special effects, used so much as a sales argument?

Leaving to one side the opinions expressed beforehand, we can state that the special effects applied habitually to advertising aimed at children form part of the theory proposed by Jesús González Requena and Amaya Ortiz de Zárate (1995: 16-17), according to which an empirical object is never desirable but rather its image, in this case nothing more effective than digital technologies applied to advertising creativity, both to achieve a sufficiently appealing perception of the product and also to captivate children halfway between childhood and adolescence:

*"If the purpose of the empirical object is to deceive, it is because desire does not have, after all, anything to do with it: desire is always illusory (and therefore an illusion) because what we really desire are not empirical objects but a certain thing that has no equivalent in reality: i.e. pure images and, more than anything else, imaginary images."*

*In other words: the object of desire does not have a reality, it is purely imaginary, purely illusory... So, there is truly a specific of the images: that which only exists in them, that which, in spite of all illusions, does not exist anywhere: what is imagined, i.e. the mirage of desire.*

*So, if there is an exemplary image, an image that best shows what is specific of the images, that is the image perceived by the madman in his delirium, but also that which the lover forges of his desire for love and, finally, all those that mobilise our desire for objects that always, ultimately, must disappoint us. And all these imaginary images are delirious images. And that's why the whole area of seduction, including advertising seduction, must start with them."*

The concept of *delirious image* applied by the authors to the analysis of advertising discourse is, therefore, the reflection of the object, the result of hiding reality by applying special effects that provide the product with magical properties, that make the dreams of the advert's protagonists come true and transform the everyday into a veritable hallucinogenic paradise.

7 ANDERSON D. R; FIELD D. E. "Children's attention to television: implications for production". In: MEYER, M. (ed) *Children and the Formal Features of Television*. Munic: Saur, 1981.

As pointed out by González and Ortiz (1995:18), in advertising discourse, reality passes onto a secondary plane, as the rhetoric used and the application of techniques such as special effects merely strengthen the imaginary plane, i.e. the unreal world resulting from the everyday that, faced with the avalanche of fantasy, ends up become absolutely irrelevant for the viewer.

*“We are witnessing a seductive device aimed, obviously, at seducing and therefore located on the margin of all cognitive mechanisms such as belief, for example. It fundamentally works at the margin of sign, as it essentially occurs on the plane of what is imagined. Its basic tools are images in their delirious component, and its work consists of staging the desired object. It's important not to forget that this object is purely imaginary: it's staging must therefore be hallucinogenic, delirious. Therefore an amorous object.”*

So advertising designed for young children does not actually attempt to achieve the real Narcissus but his reflection on the surfaces of the lake, the image embellished by the reflection of the sun and the blue of the sky, the object in the mirror after a make-up session... and it's true that, in this respect, adverts for an adult audience are no different. The difference lies in that, contrary to advertising for an adult target, spots for children, far from hiding the supernatural nature of certain situations, strengthen them to the extent of making these advertising formats veritable discourses, in a brief format and with an evident commercial aim, of the fantastic genre that inundated television in the seventies.

#### **4. Final considerations**

The absence of audiovisual resources specifically for young children is something which, instead of being limited to advertising, is evident in the programming of most television channels in Spain.

As we have stated throughout this article, advertising creativity at the service of an exclusively young target has negatively affected other formulas that, capable of reaching several targets, are much more profitable for advertisers and agencies. The need for multiple and plural consumers relegates creative strategies to a language that has ended up not distinguishing between ages nor conditions, a code that young children have had to learn and that has actually become a secret key that has opened up, to millions of children the world over, the doors of a precocious consumption that had previously been limited to the adult world.

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# Critical Books Review

## **Al-Jazeera, defiant and ambiguous mirror of the Arab world**

LAMLOUM, O. *Al-Jazira, espejo rebelde y ambiguo del mundo árabe*. Barcelona: Editorial Hacer, 2006.

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As a result of the attacks on the 11th of September, the west started to see, on a regular basis, the dissemination of messages from Osama Bin Laden by means of a channel that had been unknown before then by the great majority of westerners, Al-Jazeera, "Bin Laden's channel", in the words of the Bush administration.

The work we are reviewing here, *Al-Jazira, espejo rebelde y ambiguo del mundo árabe*, written by the Tunisian sociologist from the Université de Paris 8, Olfa Lamloum, goes beyond an analysis of the station itself and places it within the geographical and political context of the Arab world, providing the necessary keys to understanding the role played by Al-Jazeera internationally.

Al-Jazeera ('the peninsula', referring to the Arab peninsula where it is based, Doha, Qatar) was inaugurated on the 1st of November 1996. Initially it broadcast in literary Arabic only six hours a day, although by 1997 this had reached twelve hours and, since 1999, it has become a twenty-four hour information channel.

Currently, the network of Al-Jazeera television channels includes: the 24-hour news channel in Arabic (Al-Jazeera, 1996); two sports channels in Arabic (Al-Jazeera Sports +1, +2, 2003 and 2004); a channel on political life that broadcasts conferences in real time without editing or comment

(Al-Jazeera Mobasher); a channel aimed at children (Al-Jazeera Children's Channel, 2005); a 24-hour news channel in English (Al-Jazeera English, 2006), and a documentary channel in Arabic (Al-Jazeera Documentary Channel, 2007). Among its future projects is the creation of a channel in Urdu in order to reach Southeast Asia, as well as a music channel.

Al-Jazeera has more than 1,400 employees worldwide, 450 journalists of fifteen different nationalities (only 20% of the staff are from Qatar), 23 branches abroad and 60 correspondents.

A top class producer of audiovisual and news content at a world level, it has 24 daily news bulletins, 7 live debate programmes plus 15 recorded debate programmes and two websites in Arabic and English. It also reaches an audience of 35 million in the Middle East and 15 million in Europe and America.

The book is divided into three large parts, which can be read separately:

1. Al-Jazeera or singularity in the Arab world.
2. Al-Jazeera, a counter-power in the Arab world.
3. Al-Jazeera, a challenge for the United States.

In the first part, Lamloum provides the keys to success for the Qatar channel, referring to the relationship between Osama Bin Laden and Taysseer Allouni, the only television correspondent in Kabul during the Taliban regime. Allouni met Bin Laden after 9/11 in 2001 and interviewed him. This exclusive interview opened the door to the channel's international status and questioned the media monopoly of the United States. Olfa Lamloum refers exhaustively to the appearances of the leader of Al-Qaeda on the Qatar channel since 1998, as well as the pressure received by the channel from the United States. Al-Jazeera is the window that allows Bin Laden to appear to the world and this makes

it the most controversial channel, at the same time as gaining it credibility among its Arab and Muslim public. Does this make Al-Jazeera an accomplice to the violent and reactionary attitude of political Islam? The author believes that the channel does not condescend to Bin Laden: the leader of Al-Qaeda is one of several agents in the conflict. Notwithstanding this, the journalist Taysser Allouni was charged and imprisoned in Spain on the 17th of September 2003 by Baltasar Garzón, accused of "complicity with terrorism". Allouni was the first Arab journalist to notice a war declared by the United States and to obtain the first video recording of Osama Bin Laden. His reports were strongly opposed in the United States. On the other hand, Al-Jazeera undertook Allouni's ongoing defence, giving voice to the authorities that demanded his release and publicising the numerous citizen demonstrations and condemnation by journalist associations, until he was finally released, under bail and for health reasons, on the 23rd of October 2003.

According to the author, the key to the channel's success is its pan-Arab editorial line. Al-Jazeera has broken the taboo of the single, incontestable and indisputable truth of Arab regimes. The silenced discourse of the Arab world has found a way to express itself. Al-Jazeera has made Islamic, nationalist and feminist opponents audible and visible and has allowed them to explain their ideas, denounce corruption and, according to the author, claim public freedoms. Al-Jazeera has broken the monopoly of political announcements. It has broken the monopoly held until recently by western media. Arab TV viewers no longer have to watch CNN to follow the elections in the United States, nor the BBC to understand the elections in Iran, nor read *Le Monde* to follow the debate on banning the Islamic veil in French schools, etc. Al-Jazeera has pushed aside the information flow from the north towards the Arab world.

The author also points out programmes on the channel such as '*Against the current*', a talk show run by the secular nationalist and populist Fayçal Al-Qassim, which includes the televised political face-to-face model, banned in any Arab regime (video recordings of this programme can sell for up to 100 dollars a copy on the black market), or '*Testimony of the century*', a programme that invites and interviews important Arab and Muslim figures and compares their accounts with other sources and testimonies, or with the testimony of the viewers themselves.

Al-Jazeera claims a dual Arab and Muslim identity. It provides political and social cover for every country in the region. Lamloum points out that the Qatar channel has therefore become the means to express and produce the reality and identity of the public it addresses (more than 73% of its journalistic work is focused on Arab countries).

Is this nationalism dangerous? As the author says, we are seeing a new Arabism, with a nationalism that serves to shape repressed democratic aspirations and including an open Islamism component, which sees religion as an element of unification and resistance.

The second part of the book weighs up the historical context, the ambiguity in its relationship with the State of Qatar and the role of counter-power in the Arab world. Here the author reviews the history of the Qatar channel since it started (beginning with the closing down of the BBC Arabic News channel), up to the present day.

There are two desires involved in the creation of Al-Jazeera: that of a small country trying to become a distinctive regional redoubt, and that of Arab journalism, which wants television to be set free from Saudi Arabia and other authoritarian regimes.

Lamloum also notes that the channel combines three different political trends: an Arab nationalist trend, whose main representative is the Syrian Fayçal Al-Qassim; a liberal Islamist trend, embodied in the Egyptian Ahmad Mansour, and a liberal trend, personified by the Palestinian Jamil Azir. These three agree to handle conflicts in the Arab world from a pan-Arab nationalist perspective, to denounce the policy implemented by the United States, to publicise democratic aspirations and opposition to current regimes and adherence to a neo-liberal economic policy as a model of development and modernising for the Arab world.

In short, Al-Jazeera has provided an area of pan-Arab public opinion where democratic aspirations, Islamist controversies and resentment of the United States all have their place.

The author also covers the channel's ambiguous relations with Qatar. The channel does not openly criticise the Qatar government, unlike that of Saudi Arabia (is this one of its main functions?), but it does cover national controversies, talking about the existence of North American bases in Qatar and interviewing representatives from Amnesty International who are critical of the Qatar government.

Regarding Islamism, the author highlights the fact that the Qatar broadcaster has an open approach to all expressions of political Islam and has become the leading platform for transnational opinion opposed to repressive policy against Islamism. To the question of whether the strong presence of Islamism on the channel eclipses secular or left-wing currents, Lamloum answers specifically: although rejecting the systematic exclusion practised almost entirely by the Arab media (printed and broadcast), Al-Jazeera manages to standardise Islamism.

The author underlines the role played by the channel when defending the rights of women in the country's public sphere, denouncing gender-based violence, as well as its critical position against Islamist currents that deny women this right, without sparing the reactionary position of Kuwaiti and Saudi Islamists from criticism. The channel has dedicated various programmes to women's involvement in the public and political sphere and has a programme entitled '*For women only*' (*Lilnissâit faqat*), dealing with issues such as the role of women in political life and their role in Islamist movements. Toujane Al-Fayçal, a great figure in Arab feminism, has appeared on the channel's programmes several times to denounce Islamists in favour of gender discrimination and who deny women the right to participate. On the other hand, Lamloum highlights the relevant role of women in the work structure of Al-Jazeera, projecting a dynamic and positive image of women and opposing their exclusion on the part of any religious or political power.

Other issues tackled by Lamloum in this chapter are the particular treatment given by the channel to contemporary conflicts: the civil war in Algeria (the channel raised doubts as to the official version of events and revealed murky incidents), how Hezbollah is treated (for Al-Jazeera, it's not a pro-Iranian Lebanese Shiite militia but a Lebanese party working for national freedom), the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Al-Jazeera gives voice to Israeli leaders both from the right and left wing and shows the map of Palestine and Israel with the borders of 1967; the Palestinian people do not only appear as victims or as a historical reality but also as a "resistance", it dedicates programmes to Palestinian refugees and, at the same time, shows a Palestinian scenario fragmented by battles for power and corruption).

In the third part of the book, Lamloum talks about the channel's defiance of imperialistic order. The channel has

rejected the centrality of the concept of terrorism present in the North American discourse and makes a distinction between terrorism and resistance. It also questions the consequences of the "war on terror" and constructs a discourse different to the world's media consensus on this issue. In this way, it has shown the negative consequences of the "war on terror" among the civil population in the Afghanistan war, has led the United States to lose its monopoly in controlling the image of a conflict in which it was partly involved and has managed to invert the north-south flow of information and to raise doubts as to the myth of a "surgical war". The patriotic stance of the North American channels has contributed to the Qatar channel's success, something which has created a gap in the world media panorama, taken advantage of by media that are not dependent on the White House or not inspired by the same patriotism.

With regard to the war in Iraq, the influence of Al-Jazeera on the Arab world was revealed at the time patriotic activism became evident on the channel Fox News. Al-Jazeera eliminated from its discourse any reference to the terms used by experts from the Pentagon, such as "coalition forces", "pacification zones", "neutralisation of pockets of resistance", instead talking of "invasion", "occupation" and "resistance". In addition to the words chosen, there are also the images broadcast, such as the corpses of North American soldiers (when the North American media decided not to show any) and interrogations of prisoners of war.

Given the hegemony of the United States in interpreting the conflict, Al-Jazeera creates an alternative discourse based on images that discredit the empire's version. All this has not been easy and the author mentions different pressures on the channel that range from intimidated journalists to the destruction of some of its offices (that of Kabul, in 2001, and that of Baghdad, in 2003) and the bombing of other offices (Fallujah, in 2004). But, at the same time, given the failure to set up media in Arabic that are financed and controlled by the United States, the Bush administration has always taken advantage of its chances to appear on the channel in order to disseminate its message and attempt to win over Arab viewers.

Lastly, Al-Jazeera has led to other channels appearing in the zone, such as Al-Arabiya (created at the beginning of 2003 with North American capital and a group of Saudi in-

vestors), Al-Hurra (created in 2004 by the North American administration), Al-Alam (created in 2003 by the Islamic Republic of Iran), Al-Manar (the channel by the Lebanese Hezbollah group), among others. And it should also be noted that Al-Jazeera has inspired other stations such as the news channel TeleSur, inaugurated at the end of 2005 and sponsored by Venezuela, Argentina, Cuba and Uruguay, which has signed a cooperation agreement with Al-Jazeera to exchange content, technical experience and journalist expertise.

In short, this is a thorough piece of work, agile and easy to read (141 pages documented with great precision), which provides the necessary tools to be able to understand the complexity and role played by Al-Jazeera both in the Arab world and internationally. This book is very useful for those who wish to have an intelligent balanced approach to the Qatar channel, destined to be an inexorable voice in the world of information.

## Related books

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## Harm and offence in media content. A review of the evidence

Andrea Millwood Hargrave and Sonia Livingstone  
1st edition in the United Kingdom: Intellect Books, 2006  
ISBN 1-84150-161-1

By Núria Fernández, Personal Assistant to CAC member.  
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What kind of influence do the media have? What content is considered acceptable according to today's criteria, norms and values? How can a line be drawn between harm and offence? Is the problem one of a certain kind of content? Of certain media? Of certain groups in society? What are the indications of offence for different sectors of the population? What kinds of harm or offence have been studied empirically?

This study, led by British researchers Andrea Millwood and Sonia Livingstone, aims to answer all these questions, carrying out a broad review of the existing media content research in the Anglo Saxon world as from 2000, from television to the mobile phone and including advertising and regulation. The authors have made a selection of the research carried out and focus on empirical evidence rather than descriptive data on the market and media use.

The report is divided into ten sections that can be consulted separately and correspond to different media (television, radio, press, film, video and DVD, video-games, Internet and mobile telephony). There is also a section dedicated to music, as well as two independent sections that deal with advertising and the regulation associated with each medium.

Firstly, the authors highlight the existing debate concerning the terms *harm* and *offence*, often used indistinctly and sometimes without differentiating between them. In the academic research, they are often little discussed or differentiated. *Harm* is conceived in more objective terms, taken as a measure that can be observed by others and therefore as formally appreciable. The term *offence*, however, is generally conceived in subjective terms: it's difficult to measure, as offence is experienced and denounced individually. Reaching conclusions about

*offence* is comparatively easier than reaching conclusions about *harm*. As these terms displace the terms of *taste* and *decency* in discussions on regulating media content, a degree of consensus becomes necessary in defining *harm* and *offence*.

## Television

The omnipresence of television has been sufficiently documented by the authors in the 50 pages that cover this section.

Existing research has focused on:

- How television can influence the audience's attitudes and behaviour
- The effects of violent content on television, especially on children and young people
- The effects of content on the sexuality of young people and other adolescent development processes (such as attitudes towards body image or substance abuse)
- The effects of stereotypes on different audiences
- Offence caused by the use of swear words and offensive language
- How facts and information are presented (especially in the news)

Millwood and Livingstone believe that practically all existing empirical research on harm and offence has been based on content broadcast by the main television channels and that many studies of other media have been based on studies carried out on television. Following this line, the authors have found little academic research on offence caused by exposure to television, given that a large part of the research is focused on harm. Neither have they found much research discussing the effects to which technological changes may lead.

The main subjects of the research are children and teenagers, although it is not ruled out that there might be other vulnerable adult groups that may be negatively affected by certain content (such as people with mental disorders).

Much of the research on the possible negative effects of media content has concentrated on violence and particularly children. Everyone recognises that the media do not operate in a vacuum and that, in general, children are affected. But there are diverging opinions as to what these

effects are, how direct they are and whether there is a causal relationship between watching television and violent behaviour. The authors point out that one of the problems facing researchers when carrying out research is to establish a definition of screen violence (studies by the Gulbenkian Foundation and Morrison in the United Kingdom, Sander in Germany, Wied, Anderson in the United States), of the levels of violence and of the effects of violence on children and young people.

Regarding sexual content, the authors have found a large amount of research that has studied the attitude of adults towards sexual material (Barnett and Thomson), and the attitudes and influence on young people (Buckingham and Bragg, Eyal and Kunkel, Pardun et al., L'Engle). In any case, the authors show that studies on pornography are limited because of ethical restrictions in analysing the attitudes of children and young people towards pornography.

Regarding language, there is a preoccupation about the use of swear words and offensive language (studies by the Australian Broadcasting Authority and Ofcom, fines by the Federal Communications Commission) and although evidence of harm is not clear in the use of swear words and offensive language on television, the authors state that, in the United Kingdom, there is a preoccupation about how considerable offence may be constituted, especially when children might be exposed to this language.

Other issues tackled by existing research are body image, substance abuse, suicide and self-harm, the effects of defining reality, the quality of news on television and informed consent (does everyone understand the potential consequences of the programmes in which they take part?).

## Radio

There is very little research on the issues of harm and offence on radio. The existing research is mainly focused on:

- The perception of offensive content on the part of the audience
- Interview or other programmes with audience participation by telephone or where content is generated by users
- Standardisation, the reduction in diversity and absence of minority groups (especially regarding music)

- Words of songs
- Information

The research analysed shows that radio has been offensive, on occasion, for a substantial minority of the audience, particularly regarding how presenters treat callers (importance of the presenter's response) and offensive and racist language (parents' concern for the content their children listen to).

In comparison with television, it's a fact that radio is less regulated and therefore less difficult to control.

## Music

Millwood and Livingstone find that there is very little research examining harm and offence related to music. The existing research is more analytical than based on audience reactions (the content of the words of songs is taken and the effects of listening to these words is analysed), and it is mainly focused on the words of commercial music (in the last few years particular attention has been paid to rap music due to its supposedly violent, racist and homophobic words).

The authors highlight the little attention paid to sound, although now there is a growing interest in the visual representation of music videos. They also point out the emergence of literature specialised in examining the cultural value of music (construction of culture and national identity, construction of local culture).

## Press

Regarding the press, the authors have found that research focuses on how readers interact with the media, as well as on the importance of the press in forming and framing public discourse on problems important to society, although the potential complicity of the media in terms of misinformation is questioned in many studies.

The authors also point out the acceptance of use of offensive language in the press because it is seen more privately or personally, as well as greater tolerance with magazines, especially those aimed at a specific audience.

The importance of the public or private nature of the press has not been analysed very much but evidence suggests

that how someone is affected by press content is closely related to this distinction.

Also interesting is the increase in new lines of research that study comics and *manga*, although the story is analysed more than their social or cultural role.

## Films, video and DVD

Millwood and Livingstone note that research related to cinema has been mainly based on "adult" content: pornography and sexual violence.

There is little research into the effects of stereotypes or how reality is represented. There is research on emotional responses, such as fear, although there are no longitudinal studies.

Pornography has had considerable attention, focusing on harm to those involved in its production, male consumers, children and society (attitudes towards women). The evidence of harm in men on watching non-violent pornography proves to be inconsistent or absent (the report says nothing of women who watch pornography). The evidence of harm in watching pornography with violent content is stronger, resulting in more negative or aggressive attitudes and behaviour towards women, as well as the desire to watch more extreme content. As we have already mentioned, evidence that watching pornography harms children continues to be scarce, given the ethical restrictions of exposing children to certain images. In this respect, if less regulated content became more accessible for children, researchers would need to find a way to overcome these methodological difficulties, due to the apparent growth in material combining sexual and violent content. The authors also point out that conditions for watching a film are changing and that we still do not know much about children's conditions of access to different kinds of harmful content.

Following this perspective, other vulnerable groups have been studied with evidence that the harmful effects of violent content are particularly greater in those who are already aggressive, in children with behavioural disorders, in young delinquents with a history of domestic violence and among sexual delinquents, in the case of pornographic content.

However, the authors state that it is not clear whether the potential victims of the violence or pornography portrayed

are those individuals directly exposed to this content or those around them. Whether children become more aggressive when surrounded by violent media: are they the victims or are those who attack and intimidate them the victims?

It should be noted that, at the same time, the public's attitude to film content is generally more tolerant than for television, although tolerance is lower with regard to the representation of sexual violence.

## Video games

Research on video games is relatively new and, in the words of the authors, strongly polarised between the psychological and experimental focus, which argues that electronic games have harmful effects, and a cultural and qualitative focus, which defends that games are only entertainment that is sometimes beneficial.

The authors criticise, on the one hand, that the approaches taken concerning psychological effects reveal weak evidence when examined more thoroughly and, on the other hand, cultural studies implicitly lose ground by assuming certain kinds of effects.

## Internet

There is very little empirical research studying the harmful impact of Internet content on the public, in contrast with the considerable volume of research on the harmful effects of more established media.

The authors have found that a lot of attention has been paid to researching the possible harm of pornography and other undesirable content. There is a growing interest in the risks of peer-to-peer, contacts, with paedophiles, cyber harassment and growth in content with racial hatred. Websites have also been studied on suicide, with violent content and those commercially exploiting children, and there are currently lines of research investigating the behaviour of children and adolescents regarding making friends online.

The authors find that, although there is proof that the Internet and mobile communications are involved in the practices of bullying, harassment and other malicious forms of sharing information, it is not clear whether these technologies are responsible for an increase in the incidence of these practices. This might be due to a lack of information

from previous years. But it is true that the conditions of access, privacy and anonymity suggest that cyber bullying, cyber harassment, etc. might introduce new problems for users and exacerbate others that already exist.

On the other hand, people's response to harmful content tends to be more tolerant, with the justification of free speech, although it may be found to be offensive. However, we still know little about how the target groups respond (especially ethnic minorities).

## Mobile telephony

With mobile phones becoming a part of everyday social interaction, this is the area that has grown fastest in terms of research.

There is a line of research that relates advertising and offence. This line takes into account the cultural variation within and between cultures in which content is considered offensive, as well as which people consider it to be offensive.

The authors find there is evidence of mobile telephony being able to cause harm by creating fear and humiliation via bullying. They have also found academic research on the potential risk of harm and offence caused by access to content produced professionally for mobiles.

Quite rightly, however, the authors also point out the pro-social effects of mobile telephony: a new form of social interaction, a creative tool, a form of entertainment, providing safety for parents, etc.

And, with a wider perspective, they question whether mobile technology is used in the same way as other media and whether, when carrying out research, it should be considered in the same way as non-mobile technology.

## Advertising

There is a moderate amount of research analysing the (modest) effects of intentional and incidental advertising messages, mainly examined with regard to stereotypes and, more recently, with regard to obesity and other products with health-related consequences.

With regard to children, there is evidence of the effect of advertising on children, although this research is sometimes refuted.

There is also extensive research on the development of advertising literacy, although the authors believe that it has not been clearly proven that consumers are less affected by advertising when they are media or advertising literate or that actions designed to increase literacy actually reduce the harm caused by the media.

The authors also point out that little is still known about how audiences (adult and child) recognise advertising, sponsorship, product placement, etc. in the new media.

## Regulation

A review of the existing research shows that users generally accept the regulation of content (parents more than other groups) and have particular areas of concern, such as violence in the media, although these are not necessarily translated into complaints or other active protests.

There is growing support for those interested in the importance of media literacy and in systems to label content and information, as well as increased awareness of the difficulty in ensuring this knowledge is distributed fairly among the population.

To end, Millwood and Livingstone point out some priorities for future research work:

- Research into marginalisation and/or vulnerable groups (including the elderly, homosexuals, ethnic minorities or people with mental difficulties).
- Research into new technologies (Internet, mobile and other interactive media) and new content (interactive content, new kinds of advertising and promotion or extreme content).
- Longitudinal or long-term studies on the effects of harm, following changes in the levels and types of offence and identifying changes in expectations and knowledge of the media among the public.
- Research into the definition of reality/stereotypes; research into the new themes presented by the new media, particularly regarding the generation of malicious content to be shared by users.
- Research that contextualises the effects of the media, aiming to understand the role they play in the multifactor explanation of a particular social phenomenon (e.g. violence, gender stereotypes, etc.).



- Research that directly compares the public's responses to the same content when accessed via different media (e.g. violence on television, in films, in computer games, online), and that helps to understand the differences in conditions of access to a medium.
- Research into the factors that potentially obstruct or exacerbate some effects of exposure to the media (e.g. level of media literacy, parents' mediation role, difference between accidental and deliberate exposure, etc.).

Really, this is an exhaustive review of the research carried out in English since 2000 in this academic field. In this book of 256 pages, published by Intellect Books (a publisher dedicated to academic works), we can find an extensive bibliographical repertory of the studies carried out on different media. This report shows the need for more exhaustive research in order to discover what makes some people more vulnerable than others and the long-term consequences of media use, especially in the case of the new media.

## Related books

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CURRAN, James (ed.). *Mass media and society*. A Hodder Arnold Publication, 2000. (416 pages)

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## True to life: why truth matters

LYNCH, M. P. La importancia de la verdad. Para una cultura pública decente. Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós, 2005

By Pablo Santcovsky, sociologist and Ph.D candidate, Faculty of Communications Studies, Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)

The best way to define what this eloquent book is about is by using the author's own words:

*"This book deals with why truth matters in our personal and political life." (p. 13)*

First of all, from a certain rationalist point of view, it may seem daring to place truth on a normative plane and this is one of the main themes running throughout Michael P. Lynch's work, a philosopher by profession. Here, in ten chapters grouped into three differentiated parts, he outlines a long argument with strong instruments from ethics and often from the philosophy of knowledge. Maintaining a tone that aims to distance itself from academism, Lynch gives us examples from everyday life to convince us of the importance of truth and, moreover, he does so without losing the necessary degree of depth that this requires. In this way, his programme also aims to be a kind of useful guide in tackling the everyday problems we might all come up against concerning the use of truth.

In the first chapter, Lynch assumes four *truisms* he defends throughout the argumentation: a) that truth is objective; b) that truth is good; c) that truth is a worthy goal of inquiry, and d) that truth is worth caring about for its own sake (pg. 34). For Lynch, truth is a *profoundly normative* truth based on the conception of what our *beliefs* are, those that are true and those that are not. Under this basic perception, he says that truth is worthy of interest but not of veneration. Truth is one value among many others and must matter to *us*, *real* human beings. Calling on the same common sense claimed by other philosophical simulations, such as Rawls' original position or Rousseau's state of nature, the author invites us to enter a machine where, once inside, we will enjoy a virtual reality designed according to our wishes, where we can even forget that we are there, and that the only condition would be that we could never leave. Lynch suggests that, in this situation, most of us would

refuse to enter the machine, as we would not like to spend the rest of our lives in a *virtual* world, we would prefer a life of truth, although sometimes this might be a harsh one. According to the author, the usual criticisms of the four truisms consist of associating them with the following "bad" ideas: that only one truth exists, that only "pure" reason can access truth, that truth is mysterious, that only some people can know the truth and that we should look for truth of all kinds. In the following chapters, he dedicates himself to demolishing these propositions.

In the second chapter, Lynch places the Kantian notion on the table that the experiences we perceive of the world are modelled by our own mental structures, i.e. there is an undeniable filter in the perception we have of what is real: our mind. But, immediately, he reminds us that, as we can be aware of this natural veil between reality as it is and our knowledge, we can both detect and become aware of our own errors in perception and also establish mechanisms of empirical comparison to help us give consistency and credibility to what we want to know, if it is true or not. The author of the book continues by defending that, although we cannot resolve problems with absolute certainty, certainty is a question of degree. The value of searching for truth does not lie in the possibility of achieving absolute certainty. He then reinforces his thesis by welcoming certain scepticism:

*"The possibility that we may be wrong means that truth is independent of our beliefs; and that the objectivity of truth entails, in turn, that we may always be wrong. Ultimately, what it shows is that, as long as we think that truth is not our responsibility, we must also contemplate the possibility of not finding it." (p. 46)*

One of the most exciting chapters in the book is where the author talks about relativism as a series of systems of thought that lead to doubts as to the possibility of truth being objective. The philosopher starts with a critique of simple relativism, a relativism that resembles solipsism and that, like the latter, is immediately contradictory and not at all convincing. He then decides to pursue post-modern relativism, for which truth would only be given by culture and the power system that governs a community. The author ends up retrieving the importance of context but marvellously rejects the remaining relativist presuppositions. On the other hand, in the next chapter he reminds

us that assuming that objective truth exists does not mean that it must be pursued without taking the consequences into account. From here on he proposes that, if truth is not always good, our objective must be relevant truths, as truth is not the only value we pursue, there are others. And the relevance of a true belief will therefore depend on context. Therefore, when we investigate, we don't only want the truth, we want a relevant truth and, at the same time, we often want to understand the relations, i.e. how different aspects of reality fit together.

In the second part of the book (chapters 5, 6 and 7), perhaps the most academic, the author discounts various theories of truth which he considers to be false. Firstly, he rejects pragmatism, starting with classic pragmatism, by means of basic arguments criticising utilitarianism; the theory of truth as coherence; and, finally, ends up stating that looking for true beliefs is not the same as looking for justified beliefs. He accepts that a well-justified belief is very useful for consolidating truthfulness but rejects that a true belief is the same thing as a justified belief in practical terms, as assumed by pragmatism. He then sets about examining causal realism and the theory of truth as correspondence. Lynch says that something happens here similar to what happens with verificationism that, as a theory of truth, is insufficient, because it does not manage to explain truth or falseness of all kinds of belief, only those resulting causally from some physical phenomenon. But truths of a normative kind are not compatible with verificationism, which means that many verificationists postulate that it is impossible to determine whether normative statements are true or false and that it's only a matter of opinion. Lynch raises doubts as to this conception and gets round it by presenting an ontological status of truth consisting of a plurality of forms, which mean it cannot be reduced to physics but neither can it be converted into metaphysics. It is an ethically desirable value.

The author enters the most ethical aspect of his argument in the third part of his book. First (ch. 8), he shows us the importance of having true beliefs about ourselves. For him, *acting freely* means that our actions are in accord with our desires. That is why it's important to know ourselves and to have good self-esteem, as well as being clear as to what we want and what concerns us. According to the philosopher, we follow an *authentic* life if we are true to ourselves, but

even this is a question of degree, he reveals, and, in short, he means that there are true beliefs worthy of interest not because of what they include but for what they form a part of: a happy and prosperous life. We come across one of the several interesting questions in the book when Lynch states that declaring that something may be *good for its own sake* can lead us to a *conversational block* since, in some way, it seems that there is nothing more to say. Considering self-knowledge as something *good for its own sake* can lead to a similar situation, but Lynch gets around this by saying that, if we consider self-knowledge as an essential part of a happy life, we reach a good destination, as saying that a happy life is *good for its own sake* can be taken on board by everyone. He then supports intellectual integrity, which is not a question of mere coherence but is the typical feature of people who consider truth important for its own sake and who are therefore prepared to change their beliefs if they are not true and even to look for truth and have the courage to defend it. Integrity would come before this authenticity we have already mentioned. When he talks of happiness, the philosopher says that the position is false that claims a good life is to achieve what you want. For him, it's more complex: he includes happiness in the whole series of fluid concepts, which are concepts that can expand and enrich themselves depending on circumstances (pg. 173) and, in summary, he concludes that there is a concept of a happy life with certain essential characteristics, although these are imprecise. This means that, although each person has a different concept of happiness, we would all possess a potential capacity in accordance with some basic principles concerning what happiness is. Consequently:

*"Being concerned about truth and believing the truth about what concerns us are necessary ingredients for happiness as they are necessary parts of integrity, authenticity and love itself. Implicitly, therefore, they form part of the concept of happiness." (p. 176)*

Chapter 9 is dedicated to the relationship between lies and the importance of truth. First, Lynch concludes that truth is a central aspect of human life, as although we have all lied at some time, the presumption of the truthfulness of the information around us forms part of the background of human life and we could not live with constant doubt as to this truthfulness. Along the same lines, being sincere with others

means respecting them and, for Lynch, respect between people is something approaching a universal value, which means that sincerity can be understood as a constitutive good reinforcing the idea that it is important to be concerned about truth itself.

In chapter 10, the last chapter, Lynch talks of the political importance of truth, of how the fact that truth matters to people makes them more attentive to the excesses of governments, a reason for which liberal democracy exists. Declaring himself to be a liberal (in the North American sense), specifically he defends liberalism (Rawlsian) based on the existence of fundamental rights, which uses the argument that the concept itself of *basic right* presupposes the concept of objective truth (pp. 203 and 204). For Lynch, political morality must be internally coherent and coherent with the empirical truths concerning the actions of humans. In summary, countering the deflationism of Rorty and, at the same time, the most extreme constructivism, he says that:

*“A belief is true if things are as this belief says they are and not because, for example, nine out of ten people recommend them. The decisive issue is simply that believing in something does not make something be like that.” (p. 212)*

In the same sense, the author concludes with a direct criticism of the current United States administration and its policies to control information, which contradict the principle that a democratic and liberal government must make truth prevail.

# Books Review

CLEMENTE, M. *Violencia y medios de comunicación. La socialización post-moderna*. Madrid: Eos, 2005  
ISBN: 978-84-9727-185-1

Based on the premise that the mass media are the nervous system by which society's information and values circulate, the author studies how new individuals shape their corpus of values and beliefs. With quite a literary style, Clemente tackles advertising as a behaviour model for minors through its fundamental role in social learning. Imitative behaviour, claims the author, is a basic element in child socialisation and cultural dissemination and, ultimately, it can lead to the reproduction of value constructs.

And it is within a context of post-modern society that the fragmented and ephemeral discourse of advertising truly stands out. We move within a paradigm of diversity and individualism, an almost nihilist relativism where the most important decision-making processes occur in the sphere of the market and consumption and not in the political sphere.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE. *La liberté d'expression en Europe. Jurisprudence relative à l'article 10 de la Convention européenne des Droits de l'Homme*  
Estrasburg: Editions du Conseil de l'Europe, 2006  
ISBN: 978-92-8716-087-4

The Council of Europe has published a collection of the European Court of Human Rights' jurisprudence regarding free speech during its almost 50 years of existence. The Supreme Court has always affirmed the essential role of free speech within the framework of democratic society. However, it has not considered free speech to be an absolute value and has imposed certain limits to exercising this freedom.

The cases heard concern how to combat racist and xenophobic discourse while respecting each individual's right to free speech, how to preserve presumed innocence without limiting the public's right to be informed, and the limit to media criticism of politicians.

VARIOUS AUTHORS. *La televisió i altres finestres de comunicació audiovisual*  
Barcelona: Parliament of Catalonia, 2007  
ISBN: 978-84-3937-349-0

The 7th parliamentary seminar on the broadcasting media, held at the Parliament of Catalonia on the 15 May 2006, analysed the new technological platforms for broadcasting. These systems, of recent appearance, mean that we can transmit and receive truly audiovisual content via broadband, such as television by Internet and by mobile phone.

These innovations will affect spheres of social life as diverse as productivity, consumption, communication, citizen involvement, the sociability of individuals and the construction of collective identity. From this point on, we need to see whether the multiplication in supply will lead to an increase in quality and pluralism in the programmes broadcast, or if the real possibility to choose content will help further the rights of citizens. And in the case of Catalonia, a key question that must be tackled for these new platforms is production in Catalan and from a Catalan perspective.

MANOVICH, L. *El lenguaje de los nuevos medios de comunicación. La imagen en la era digital*  
Barcelona: Paidós, 2005  
ISBN: 978-84-4931-769-9

In this book, Lev Manovich offers a systematic theory of the new media, placing them within the histories of visual and media cultures of the last few centuries. It deals with the reliance of these new media on old media and shows how discourses generated by new technologies address the viewer, represent symbolic space and create the illusion of reality. It also analyses the categories and forms unique to new media, such as interface and database, and their influence on the revision of conventions and the reformulation of new aesthetics.

Manovich uses already existing concepts from film theory, the history of literature and computing and also develops new theoretical concepts, such as cultural interface and spatial montage.

MONTORO FRAGUAS, A. *El derecho de acceso a la radiotelevisión pública*  
Madrid: Dykinson, SL, 2007  
ISBN: 978-84-9849-013-8

Legal analysis of the right to access public media, as well as the right for those affected by communication processes to be involved in them by means of the management, exploitation and programming of these media. Specifically, the author investigates section 3 of article 20 of the Spanish Constitution, which guarantees "significant social and political groups access to social media depending on the state or on any public organism". One of the points considered in this study refers to the liberalisation of the audiovisual sector and the end of public monopoly. According to Montoro, the possibility of plurality in access to and management of social media is not, strictly speaking, synonymous with pluralism. And, finally, the book compares the different European legislative situations, particularly the "émissions concédées" in Belgium, the "émissions d'expression directe" in France, the Italian "parità de condizioni" and the "de-reito de antena e de réplica política" in Portugal.

MONTOYA VILAR, N. *La influencia de la publicidad audiovisual en los niños: estudios y métodos de investigación*  
Barcelona: Bosch, 2007  
ISBN: 978-84-9790-292-2

In this work, the researcher analyses the new advertising formats filtered via children's programming that are present in the everyday lives of children. The audience of children is subjected to all kinds of persuasive messages but, in the opinion of the expert, it is advertising (via slogans, brands, logos, etc.) that exercises most influence on the infant population.

Thanks to a systemised explanation, information is provided on how advertising influences minors, what short-term and medium-term effects it has, what techniques are used by advertisers and what aspects of audiovisual advertising appeal to children, as well as those research methods and techniques whose main object of study is children.

# Journals Review

## **Communication Theory**

Malden, MA–US / Oxford: International Communication Association  
Volume 17, No. 2, May 2007  
ISSN 1050-3293

Among the articles of this latest edition of the journal, of note is the one entitled "Networks of Terror: Theoretical Assumptions and Pragmatic Consequences". The authors, Cynthia Stohl and Michael Stohl, from the University of Santa Barbara in California, believe that the world of the media have reflected very little on the use of the term *network* to describe terrorist organisations. However, they highlight how the United States administration has appropriated the concept in their discussions on terrorism. The authors believe that a more extensive theoretical and empirical analysis would avoid polysemy, improper use and would therefore help to provide more thorough information on a phenomenon which is a priority on the international political agenda, namely terrorism.

## **Comunicazione Politica**

Milà: Centro Interuniversitario di Comunicazione Politica  
Volume 7, No. 2, December 2006  
ISSN 1594-6061

This volume of the Italian journal exhaustively analyses the electoral campaign of April 2006, which it defines as "una campagna all'ultimo voto". This is a scientific dissection not only of the electoral campaign but also of a climate of opinion that has become widespread in Italy as from 2004. The face-to-face debate between Prodi and Berlusconi, the great *media event* of the campaign on television, is defined by one of the writers as "mezzogiorno di fuoco". Also of note is the influence of the Internet and public opinion polls on the result of the vote.

## **European Journal of Communication**

Londres: SAGE Publications  
Volume 22, No. 1, March 2007  
ISSN: 0267-3231

In this edition of the veteran journal, of note is the article "How States, Markets and Globalisation Shape the News", a broad study by Rodney Benson and Daniel C. Hallin, analysing the press in France and the United States between 1965 and 1997. They take the *New York Times* as their reference model, as well as *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* in France. Based on these, they observe how globalisation has not unified or standardised the concept of *news* between the two national and journalistic realities. On the other hand, the lecturer at URV in Tarragona, Enric Castelló, explains in his article entitled "The Production of Television Fiction and Nation Building; the Catalan Case" the importance of cultural policy and the dynamic of local television production in determining the type of nation represented. Nations, concludes Castelló, use fictional narrative to create their own image.

**Journal of Communication**

Norman, OK, Estats Units: University of Oklahoma Press  
Volume 50, No. 1, March 2007  
ISSN 0021-9916

This issue of the *Journal of Communication* focuses on a single theme, the comparative analysis of three fundamental models of study for news, the so-called *news framing*, *agenda setting* and *priming effects*. It examines whether these three epistemological models are related and to what extent. As its point of departure, the issue introduces each theoretical model and its conceptual roots. The journal's aim is to propose possible bridges between each of these disciplines (however, we might actually consider *priming* as a variation of *news framing*). What unites these three tendencies is understanding the reaction of news audiences, how one's own opinion is formed and, subsequently, the construction and justification of individual political decisions.

**Llengua i ús**

Barcelona: Secretaria de Política Lingüística, Generalitat de Catalunya  
No. 37, last third of 2006  
ISSN 1134-7724

This edition of the journal is basically dedicated to Catalan and the Internet. The different articles discuss the digital media, blogs, automatic translation, free programming in Catalan and linguistic usage in ICTs in small and medium-sized enterprises in Catalonia. It refers to the statistics on the presence of Catalan on the Internet, the situation of the language on websites and the characteristics that differentiate websites in Catalan.

**Media, Culture & Society**

Londres; SAGE Publications  
Volume 29, No. 1, March 2007  
ISSN: 0163-4437

This latest issue of the British journal offers a range of diverse experiences from different parts of the world. On the one hand, the Italians Bonini and Perrotta explain the experiences of radio reception in the prison of San Vittori, while Wu and Man Chan analyse the globalisation of martial art films with local and international production alliances for films such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Among other articles, Emily West investigates the prosperous American greetings card industry and how they reflect mass culture, as well as how they defend themselves against the general criticism of manipulating feelings.



# Webs Review

## Latex parody

### United Kingdom

#### *Spitting Image*

<<http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/S/htmlS/spittingimag/spittingimag.htm>>

*Spitting Image* was a satirical programme using rubber puppets, broadcast on ITV from 1984 to 1996. This programme created a genre that inspired other programmes parodying political and social events in many other countries. The arrival of *Have I got news for you* in 1990 brought strong competition that gradually displaced it. The programme was cancelled at the start of 1996.

In spite of its criticism of politicians of the time (Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan), *Spitting Image* did not cause too much of a dilemma between decency and free speech. However, BBC Radio refused to broadcast the programme's first hit song, with the puppet of Prince Andrew boasting, "I'm just a Prince who can't say No".

### Germany

#### *Hurra Deutschland*

<<http://www.hurra-deutschland.de/>>

*Hurra Deutschland* is one of the German equivalents of this genre, broadcast from 1987 to 1991 by ARD and RTL 2. In 2003 a new version appeared, *Hurra Deutschland - Jetzt erst recht!* ("Long live Germany - Now more than ever!"), but it was not as successful as its predecessor.

#### *Zak*

<<http://www.utekrafft.de/index.php?showkategorie=Produktionen%20Inland>>

*Zak* is a second version of the genre, broadcast from 1988 to 1996 by WDR, the regional channel of North Westphalia, and by ARD, the federation of German regional channels.

### Argentina

#### *Kanal K*

<<http://www.thefileroom.org/documents/dyn/DisplayCase.cfm/id/47>>

Until the beginning of the nineties, the channel Telefe broadcast the satirical programme *Kanal K*, starring rubber puppets. In one programme, the puppet of Pope John Paul II appeared, using gross language. At one time he used the Italian phrase "va fangullo" ("up yours"), which led to energetic protests by the Argentinean Catholic church. Telefe stopped broadcasting the programme as a consequence of this controversy.

### Australia

#### *Rubbery Figures*

<<http://www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au/rubbery.php>>

*Rubbery Figures* was the series of political and social parodies by the Australian TV channel ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation). It was broadcast for six years (1984-1990), during which time it received a lot of criticism and pressure, leading to production being stopped. One of the characteristics of *Rubbery Figures* was the characters' voices: all were done by the same actor, Paul Jennings.

### United States of America

#### *D.C. Follies*

<<http://www.tv.com/d.c.-follies/show/2840/summary.html>>

*D.C. Follies* was the North American equivalent, syndicated on various channels in the country between 1987 and 1989. In fact, it was a hybrid between *Spitting Image* and *Sesame Street* because its humour was much softer than its British peer. It was not as successful as expected and only lasted two years. The setting was a bar in Washington capital.

## Canada – Quebec

*Et Dieu créa... Laflaque!*

<[http://www.radio-canada.ca/television/et\\_dieu\\_crea\\_laflaque](http://www.radio-canada.ca/television/et_dieu_crea_laflaque)>

*Et Dieu créa... Laflaque!* is a sarcastic programme by Quebec Radio-Canada TV, conceived by comedian Serge Chapleau and broadcast once a week since 2004. Gérard D. Laflaque is the father of a typical Quebec family who comments on current affairs critically and irreverently. The character of Laflaque was born at the beginning of the eighties and was a latex puppet. Nowadays, like the rest of the characters, he is a computer-generated cartoon.

## Chile

*31 Minutos*

<<http://docs.tercera.cl/especiales/2003/31minutos/index.htm>>

*31 Minutos* is the comedy news programme broadcast since March 2003 by TVN in Chile and by Nickelodeon in the rest of Latin America. Produced by Aplapac, the programme has found an audience both among adults and children because of its strategy of intense merchandising, particularly the sale of CDs with music from the programme. As a result of this success, a film has been made entitled *La película*, shot in Santiago and Rio de Janeiro and based on the programme.

## Colombia

*Los Reencauchados*

<<http://www.cenpro.com.co>>

*Los Reencauchados*, a comedy programme on Cenpro TV, broadcast between 1995 and 1998.

## Spain

*Las Noticias del Guiñol*

<[http://www.cuatro.com/programas/programa.html?anchor=ctoproent&p=nochehache&s=entretenimiento&type=Tes&xref=20060912ctoulpro\\_1](http://www.cuatro.com/programas/programa.html?anchor=ctoproent&p=nochehache&s=entretenimiento&type=Tes&xref=20060912ctoulpro_1)>

*Las Noticias del Guiñol* is the Spanish equivalent of *Les Guignols de l'info* broadcast by Canal Plus of France (the Spanish channel is now called Cuatro).

*Txokolatex*

<<http://www.viravolta.es/venavernos/Diariodenoticias.htm>>

*Txokolatex* was the Basque version of the rubber puppets, although Euskal Telebista broadcast it for only a short time during the nineties.

## Finland

*Itse valtiat / Itsevaltiat*

<[http://www.filmiteollisuus.fi/ohjelma\\_en.jsp?id=100&f=0&flang=1/](http://www.filmiteollisuus.fi/ohjelma_en.jsp?id=100&f=0&flang=1/)>

The weekly show *Itse valtiat / Itsevaltiat* (*The autocrats*) is the Finnish satirical programme, produced by Filmiteollisuus and broadcast since 2001 by YLE. It is in 3D animation.

## France

*Le Bébête Show*

<[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Z9ZYvQDWDY&mode=related&search](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Z9ZYvQDWDY&mode=related&search)>

*Le Bébête Show* was the first programme of this genre in France, broadcast by TF1. At first, it formed part of the programme *Collaroshow*, before having its own slot on the daily programming. Most of the voices imitated were by actor Jean Roucas, who also took part as a "guest artist". The programme started to decline with the appearance of *Les Guignols de l'info*.

*Les Guignols de l'info*

<<http://www.canalplus.fr/pid20.htm>>

The French classic of satirical humour, work of Canal Plus (format which has been exported to the TV company's subsidiaries, as in the case of Spain). At the beginning, in 1988, it was part of the weekly programme *Nulle part ailleurs*, with the title *Les Arènes de l'info*. At that time it did not follow the news and was not very popular, until the first Gulf War (1990-91). It then started to parody the news of the day and began to eclipse its rival, *Le Bébête Show*.

*Nulle part ailleurs* is no longer broadcast and *Les Guignols* has its own slot. Since the beginning of the year, the programme starts: "*Nous sommes en 2007 et vous regardez trop la télévision, bonsoir.*" (We're in 2007 and you watch too much television. Goodnight.)

## Poland

*Polskie zoo*

<[http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polskie\\_Zoo](http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polskie_Zoo)>

*Polskie zoo* was the satirical programme on Polish television (*Telewizja Polska*) broadcast every Saturday at 8pm from 1991 to 1993. The unofficial story is that the prime minister of the time, Waldemara Pawlaka, forced its cancellation when the show characterised him as an ox (symbol of Poland's Agrarian Party) in an indolent attitude.

## Hungary

*Uborka*

<<http://www.mtvzrt.hu/?lang=en>>

*Uborka* (“cucumber” and “stupid remark” in Hungarian) is a programme on MTV 1, the first channel for Magyar public television.

## Israel

*Chartzufim*

<<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0320847/>>

*Chartzufim* (or *HaChartzufim*) was the satirical programme from 1996 to 2000 on Channel 2, Israel's main private channel. The name comes from the Hebrew *Parzufim*, “faces”, and *Chara*, “shit”).

## Ireland

*Bull Island*

<[http://www.rte.ie/laweb/ll/ll\\_stills\\_b.html](http://www.rte.ie/laweb/ll/ll_stills_b.html)>

*Bull Island* was the Irish parody on RTÉ 1 from 1999 to 2001, made by a team of just seven scriptwriters. The programme was cancelled in 2001, just before the general elections of 2002. Although the political powers that be were accused of applying pressure to remove *Bull Island* from the programming, it is true that its ratings had fallen quite a lot up to that point.

## India

*Double Take*

<<http://www.ndtv.com/tv/programme.asp?progno=201>>

*Double Take* is the puppet satire broadcast by the Hindi channel NDTV on Mondays and Fridays at 23:30.

## Iran

*13 Dead End St.*

<<http://www.memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&P1=1325>>

*13 Dead End St.* is Iran's satirical programme, basically aimed at criticising Western politicians.

## Mexico

*Hechos de peluche*

<<http://www.tvazteca.com/corporativo/cultura/peluches.shtml>>

*Hechos de peluche* is the Mexican caricature that started in 1996 on TV Azteca. However, it has received some criticism for not touching certain themes or issues in the country's social and political life.

## Portugal

*Contra*

<<http://www.rtp.pt/wportal/sites/tv/contra/index.shtm>>

*Contra* is a daily puppet programme lasting four minutes, broadcast by RTP. At the beginning it was broadcast by SIC under the name of *Cara Chapada*, the leading private channel in the country, but it was not very successful and, in 1996, went on to public television. At that time it was called *Contra Informação*.

One of the characteristics of this programme is that it is broadcast at different times of the evening, at half-time in a football match or during the intervals of special galas.

## Czech Republic

*Gumáci*

<<http://www.nova.cz/>>

*Gumáci* is the Czech version of the satire made with latex puppets, broadcast by TV Nova, the main private channel in the country.

## Serbia

*Nikad Izvini*

<<http://www.nikadizvini.com/root.php>>

*Nikad Izvini* is the expressionist-looking puppet on the RTV Pink channel since 2004.

## Sweden

*Riksorganet*

<[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgUvb\\_QhXJg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgUvb_QhXJg)>

*Riksorganet* was a Swedish latex puppet programme on the public channel SVT until the end of the nineties.

## Rumania

*Animat Planet*

<[http://www.antena1.ro/s/content/emisiuni/animat\\_planet.htm](http://www.antena1.ro/s/content/emisiuni/animat_planet.htm)>

*Animat Planet* the programme broadcast by Antena 1 on Mondays at 8.30pm and repeated on Sundays at 10.30pm.

## Russia

*Kookli*

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/97456.stm>>

*Kookli* was a weekly puppet show till the end of the nineties. The term *kookli* is a transcription of the Cyrillic for the word for *puppet*.

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