

German speaking only

How do cartoons deal with taboo topics?

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When treating taboo topics, minorities or the sensitive issue of religion, German cartoonists are so cautious and politically correct that it borders on tiresome.

Religion in images

In the case of the Danish Mohammed cartoons, one was wondering what the agitation was all about. In any event, the Islamic world only got mobilized after a delay of several months. The cartoon depicting Mohammed's head as a bomb is the most notorious. Another shows the prophet denying burnt suicide bombers entry to paradise, saying that the supply of virgins was unfortunately exhausted. The first therefore caricatures the Western image of Islam as a militant ideology (this cliché has been successfully confirmed by the cartoon controversy). Even the virgin cartoon hardly ridicules the prophet or the majority of his worshippers, but rather the naïve conception that fanatical Islamicists have of him.

German cartoonists draw a similarly harmless image of their own religion. Religious topics make up a share of less than one percent of all cartoons. The most prominent target was the new pope. The **Welt** laments empty churches, while youthful and enthusiastic pilgrims are returning from the pope's election in Rome (18.4.2005). At the occasion of the World Youth Day, the **Welt** confronts an infantilized parent generation with the spiritual needs of the youth: Instead of going to the Love Parade, the offspring wants to see the pope (12.8.2005).

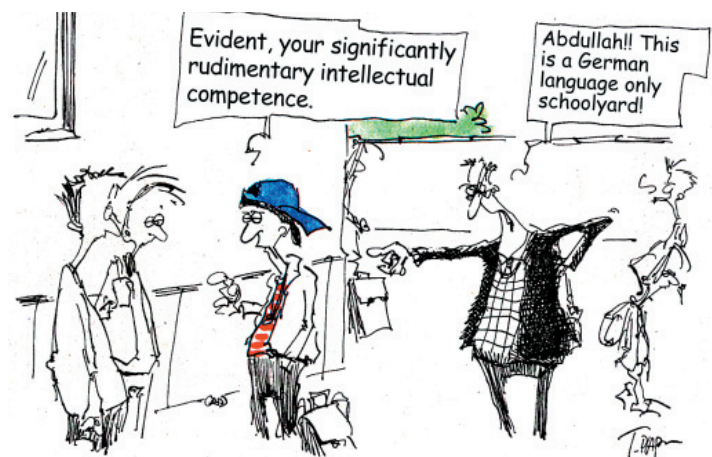
The **Frankfurter Rundschau** (**FR**) pokes fun at the German people's indifference towards traditions: Christmas is reduced to a time, when "such a red type fell from the sky" (24.12.2005). The **Süddeutsche Zeitung** (**SZ**) looks ironically at the Bavarians' local patriotism regarding "their" pope, or stages him as a kind of pop star in the midst of speaker towers (18.8.2005).

Coming to terms with the past

The Iranian President has mocked the West by asserting that the lauded press freedom reached its limits at the taboo topic Holocaust. As far as denying the Holocaust or deriding its victims are concerned, this

is true indeed – and for good reasons. Still, the **SZ** calls for more clear-headedness when dealing with the past: It satirizes the "platitudes" that the "school principal" and German President Horst Köhler had proclaimed in the Knesset in February 2005. The cartoon shows him at the teacher's desk, weighed down by a giant backpack full of "German history" (3.2.2005). On the 60th anniversary of the end of the war, the cartoonists looked at different ways of coming to terms with history: Chancellor Schröder bows down humbly to Putin, thinking of Hitler on a mountain of skulls, while Putin is thinking of a good-humored looking Stalin, who is surrounded by Soviet stars (**SZ**, 9.2.2005). German flags were not burnt in front of the Lenin Mausoleum after that one.

As to the treatment of Muslim citizens, it is the German side that is taunted. A cartoon in the **Welt** compares the "Muslim test", which the state government of Baden-Württemberg wants to make obligatory, with a driving school that introduces naturalized citizens into a world full of homosexuals and couples of mixed denominations (31.1.2006). The **FR** makes fun of the forced pledge of allegiance by depicting the aliens' registration office as it makes



Schoolyard-rules in discussion

Karikatur entnommen der Frankfurter Rundschau vom 28.1.2006

Abdullah Öztürk's tolerance towards homosexuals public (21.1.2006). Abdullah is also the student of "immigration background", who, on a schoolyard with German as obligatory language, uses too sophisticated a language and is scolded by the recess guard for this.

Conclusion: At best, German cartoonists take taboo topics as an occasion to poke fun at German culture. If it is a sign of cultural vitality to ridicule or even scorn foreign cultures, then the Islamic world with its "taboo-free" anti-Semitic agitation would be superior to ours.

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Religions in comparison

How the cartoon controversy played out in the media

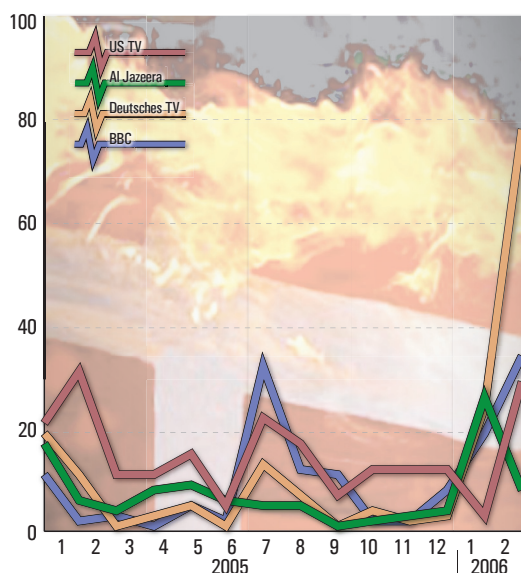
The cartoon controversy has had a negative effect on the image of Muslims. This is true both for German and US television news, and for Al Jazeera, the Qatar-based Arabic television station.

comes in third with 4.3%. Al Jazeera also focuses on Iraqi Muslims with 22.4% of coverage. Due to coverage on Mecca, where a stampede killed nearly 350 pilgrims in January, Saudi Arabia comes in first with 37.4%.

Muslim media image

Over time, the assessment of Muslim protagonists in US and German television media shows a co-

1 The cartoon controversy draws focus onto Muslims



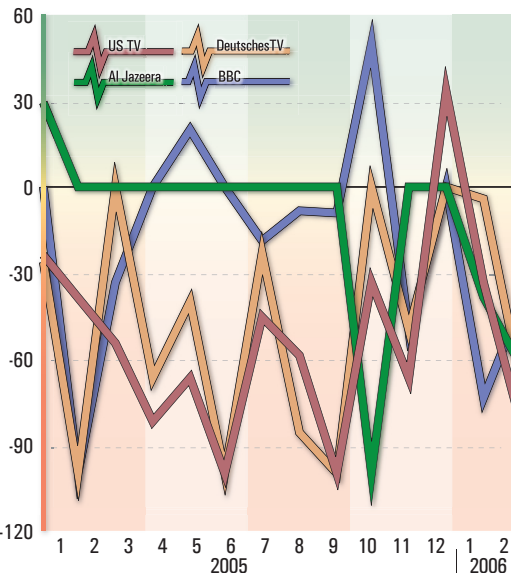
Number of news stories on Muslim protagonists
Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2005 – 02/20/2006
Basis: 622 stories in 7 German and 6 international TV news

Coverage on Denmark and the cartoon controversy started with 3 news stories on January 29th in the Arab TV news station Al Jazeera and peaked on February 3rd with 8 news stories. Muslims started to vent their anger with attacks on Danish embassies in several countries. The station covered religiously motivated violence on February 3rd (3 news stories), 5th (2) and 9th (1). It reported on disturbances in Lebanon (3), Syria (2) and Pakistan (1).

Fuel for an explosion

Looking at the coverage on Muslims in different countries over time, the explosive nature of the cartoon controversy in Germany becomes visible (graph 1). In the US news, 63.5% of all coverage on Muslims is on Iraq. Great Britain comes in second with 6.7%. Because of the riots in French suburbs, primarily involving disaffected immigrant youth from North and West Africa, France

2 The cartoon controversy taints the media image of Muslims



Balance of shares pos. and neg. ratings of Muslim protagonists
Source: Media Tenor
01/01/2005 – 02/20/2006
Basis: 622 stories in 7 German and 6 international TV news

variance (graph 2). On average, the image is negative, while the portrayal of Muslims by Al Jazeera is rather neutral. Since both Sunnis and Shiites took part in the developing political culture in Iraq and supported the Iraqi parliamentary elections, both groups scored in the US media. The stampede in Mecca caused negative assessments by Al Jazeera in mid-January. But especially the cartoon controversy at the end of January has tainted the image of Muslims both in Al Jazeera and German as well as US news. chal

Basis:

Media: Tagesschau, Tagesthemen, Heute, Heute Journal, RTL aktuell, SAT.1 News, ProSieben Newstime, NBC Nightly News, ABC World News Tonight, CBS Evening News, FOX Special Report, Al Jazeera, BBC

Time: 01/01/2005 – 02/20/2006

Analysis: 622 stories in 7 German and 6 international TV news broadcasts