

Freedom to Express or Repress?

What motives behind the publication of the Mohammed drawings?

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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As the furore around the publication of the drawings of the Prophet Mohammed continue, so does the danger that people become more galvanised around their given ideals. The central argument on the Western side of the debate rests on its notion of 'freedom of _expression'. The Western media, so it is claimed, has the freedom to express whatever it likes, free from religious or political interference. But as I have argued in a previous article, the media in the West is anything but free.¹ Whilst the highly charged demonstrations against the publication of the Mohammed drawings have provided the Western media with an ideal opportunity to cast Muslims as violent extremists and themselves as innocent victims and/or the bold defenders of freedom. Curiously, the various media outlets have chosen in their 'freedom' almost uniformly to highlight the more violent moments of the demonstrations, and to turn the debate away from the original publication of the Mohammed drawings and towards a debate about the incompatibility of Islam with the West.

It could easily be argued that the powers in the West along with its media have been pushing for this for a long time. Since the events of September 2001 in particular, the Muslim community has had to suffer a barrage of abuse, criticism and victimisation. The publication of these drawings is just the latest and most devious of these attacks. The media is belittling this event now by calling the drawings cartoons, to try and emphasise the fun and jokey nature of them. But it is not so the much words or actions that people become upset or angered by, it is the motives and intentions behind them. The reprinting of these drawings around Europe has only added fire to an already hot situation, for the only conceivable motive behind doing this is to antagonise Muslims even further.

Couple this with the discovery that Jyllands-Posten, the Danish newspaper who originally published these drawings, had previously rejected some satirical drawings of Jesus.² The artist, Christoffer Zieler, who submitted the drawings to the newspaper, received an email from their Sunday editor, Jens Kaiser, who replied:

"I don't think Jyllands-Posten's readers will enjoy the drawings. As a matter of fact, I think that they will provoke an outcry. Therefore, I will not use them."

When questioned about this, Jens Kaiser claimed that he did not think the drawings were funny, and that they would offend some people, though 'not much'. This 'not much' however was enough for them not to publish the drawings. This discovery rather destroys the portrayal of the Danish media as an innocent and open medium, who inadvertently offended some Muslims whilst exercising their cherished freedom. The Danish mainstream media, like the bulk of all Western mainstream media, is ideologically charged and espouses the

Western agenda. What were the motives and intentions behind the publication of the Mohammed drawings, when the newspaper knew perfectly well the offence that it would cause? That is not to say, of course, that nobody should publish anything that causes offence. But when publishing something that is obviously hugely offensive, then there must be some positive merit in doing so. The only attempt at justifying the publication of these drawings has been to state that the newspaper was 'testing the boundaries' of _expression about Islam.³ But do you really test boundaries by insulting people? Would you be justified at hurling abuse at somebody in the street, on the grounds that you wanted to see how insulting you had to be before they became angry? Surely nobody would accept this defence, and nobody should accept that defence for Jyllands-Posten and the other European newspapers that have published these drawings. So the defence always swings around to a gratuitous special plea – that the ideal of the freedom of _expression must be upheld, and this, conveniently, pretty much justifies anything they happen to express, regardless of the hidden motives behind it.

But we must remember that freedom of expression is an ideal and as such it remains an abstract concept in which to guide action. It is not contained in our actions – there is no freedom of expression in all actuality. Can we say the same things to our mothers as we do to our lovers? Or to strangers as we do to our friends? Or to children as we do to adults? No, because in each situation we assume different roles and different ethical responsibilities. If these responsibilities are transgressed in any way then our cry of 'freedom of _expression' holds little water. The responsibilities of a national newspaper differ again, and they are not 'free' to print whatever they like, despite their desperate claims. For too long now the Western media has used the ideal of freedom to promote a Western agenda and to attack everyone else. The vast majority of Western media output is owned by large corporations and is funded by corporate advertising and sponsorship.⁴ From the very beginning it is not free, but it can use and promote long established ideals for its own ends. Witness the Bush and Blair administrations and their use of ideals such as democracy and freedom. Ideals can all too easily be used as masks to hide deadly agendas. As Nietzsche, someone who knew all too well about the dangers of Western Idealism wrote:

One is deceived every time one expects "progress" from an ideal; every time so far the victory of the ideal has meant a retrograde movement.⁵

We must ensure that we do not get caught up in seductive media noise and be misled into divisive polarization, and instead look behind their masks and expose their real motives and agenda.

Notes

1

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=PET20060202&articleId=1870>

2 <http://media.guardian.co.uk/site/story/0,,1703500,00.html>

3 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4656664.stm>

4 See www.mediachannel.org

5 Nietzsche, F. (1968) *Will to Power* #80, Random House

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