

Transnational Media Events The Mohammed Cartoons and the Aftermath

**Revealing the Diversity of
Interpretations & Practices**

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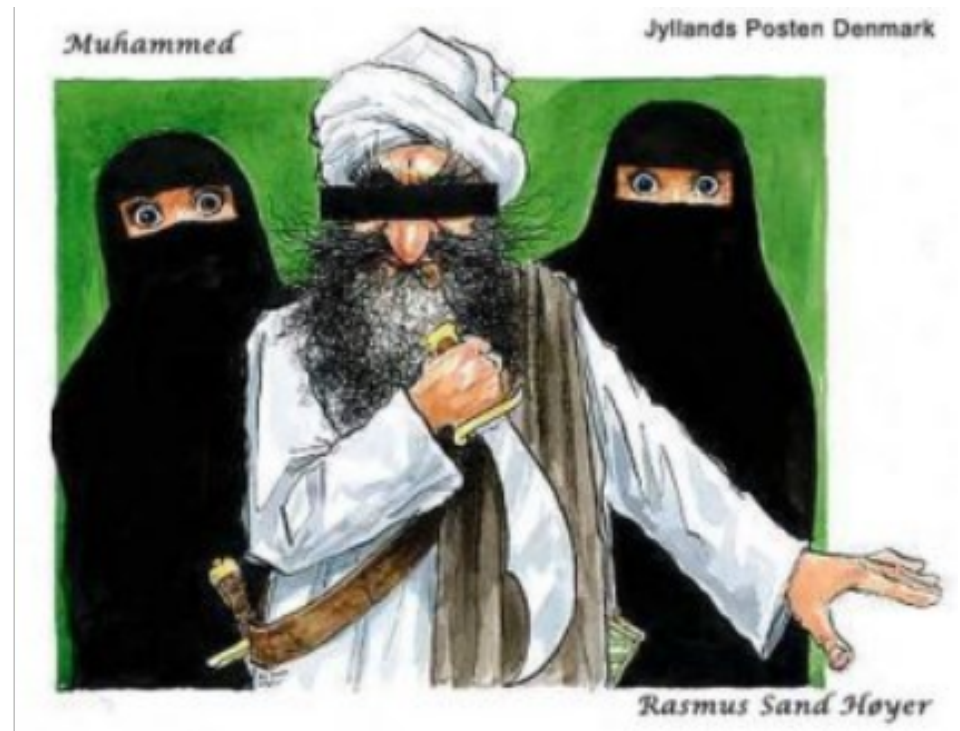
In this lecture

- The event and the project
- The 2006 controversy
- A later story; a blogger
- A clash of Laws?
The Geneva (Durban II) controversies
- Journalism research: challenges



I. A case: The Mohammed Caricatures

- Published in *Jyllandsposten* 30th of September 2005
- Some published in the Egyptian paper *Al Fagr* in October
- Initial reactions in Denmark
- Diplomatic initiative in Denmark rejected
- Travelling Imams – spreading the news
- Republished in a Norwegian weekly *Magazinet* 10.1.2006 and in a number of other European papers
- Harsh reactions in the



Context: A world with increasing transnational processes

- **Organizational/economical: remittances, migration, (non)regulation (WTO)**
- **Political-military: WoT, intelligence etc**
- **Cultural-ideological: Tele-evangelism (Ramonet: lady Di's death)**
- **Views and life worlds stretching in time and space**
- **Identity/identities: diasporic people and double belongings**
- **Representation: "transnational media events"**

Transnational Media Events

- Contests, Conquests and Coronations. TV events attracting wide attention (Dayan & Katz)
- 9-11: One major transnational (media) event in late modernity; contributing to the discursive situation in which the cartoons landed.
- The cartoon controversy (qualifying if a wider definition is applied) in its turn may have contributed to a discursive situation allowing for the recent suggestions of resolutions to the UN conference on Racism in Geneva to include contempt of religion.

A transnational media event

The Mohammed Caricatures themselves were transnational in style and content

- A cultural-ideological point of departure and mode of expression (but also political)
- Political interaction and exploitation (Danish politics; diplomacy, travelling Imams, state leaders in various countries, religious parties)
- Economic consequences (boicott, destructions)
- Human impact: lives lost in countries far from Denmark
- Also trans-historical (rhetoric with references to the 2nd World War, to the crusades etc.)

The Caricature Project I

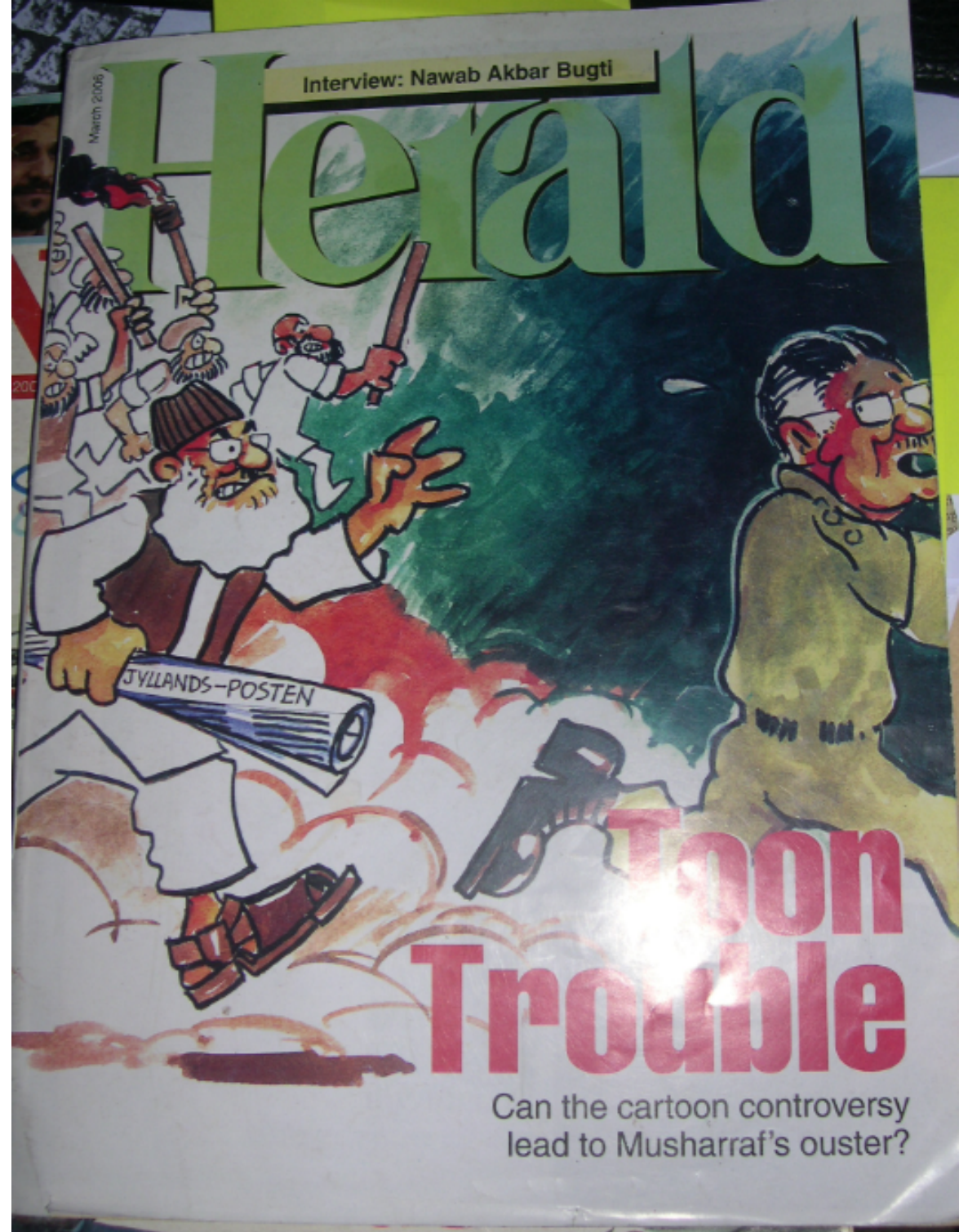
Title: Freedom of Speech as a News Item

An international analysis of the press discourses on the Mohammed caricatures.

Publications:

* Kunelius, Eide et.al. (eds.): *Reading the Mohammed Cartoons Controversy. An International Analysis of Press Discourses on Free Speech and Political Spin*. Projekt Verlag, April 2007 (country reports).

- Eide, Kunelius & Phillips (eds.): *Transnational Media Events: The Mohammed Cartoons and the Imagined Clash of Civilizations*. Nordicom, November 2008 (thematic-analytical).



The project II

- **Researchers and material from 16 countries (3 with Muslim majority).**
- **Mainly qualitative approach.**
- **Monitoring 5-6 publications in each country.**
- **Focus both on news coverage and opinionated articles**



National and local media

- Most media are still local or national. International news are mostly interpreted in national contexts: domestic filter (Nossek 2007)
- Challenges : globalization, the increasing existence of diaspora
- The "domestic filter": national vs. professional frame
- The press coverage of the cartoon controversy revealed different "communities of interpretation" (Said)



II. The 2006 Controversy: Context

- Past history present (colonialism)
- National political conflicts
- Global, post-colonial conflicts: Views on new 'Empires' and ongoing wars
- Diaspora: "The West is now everywhere, and so is the East" (Stuart Hall).



The World and a T-shirt with a message

- 11 people were killed in demonstrations against the Mohammad caricatures in Benghazi, Libya (February 2006), the day after the Italian minister Roberto Calderoli on TV displayed a T-shirt with one of the caricatures
- Benghazi is not too far away from El Ageila, where Italian militaries ran a concentration camp during the 1930s, in which more than 100 000 people were starved to death

Source: Jan Guillou 1989



Who printed? Country varieties

- Not (or almost not) printed: China, UK, US, Sweden, Israel, Russia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt
- Printed to an extent: Norway, Finland, Canada
- Printed more: Denmark, Germany, France



The cartoons



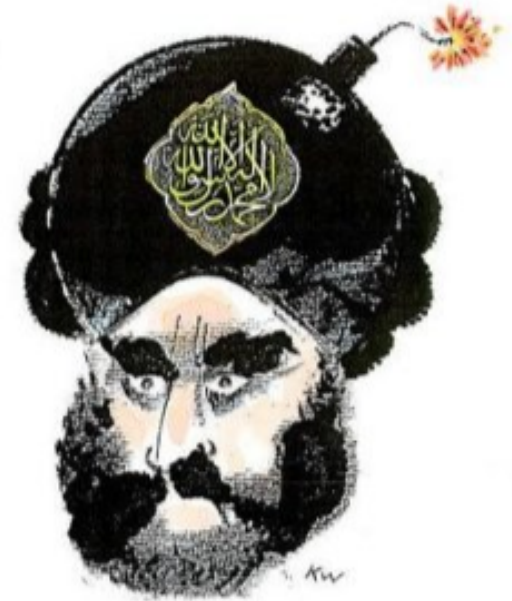




Peder Bundgaard



Text on the blackboard: The journalists in Jyllandsposten are a band of reactionary provocateurs



Jens Julius



Easy my friends, when it comes to the point it is only a drawing made by a non believing Dane...

Really a National Event?

- In spite of the intentions of addressing the Danish public sphere: References to the Netherlands and Europe. Danish-European event?
- Is *any* public sphere today to a degree porous (and thereby with transnational potential), given the existence of diaspora/migrants?



Transcontinental travels and initiatives

- **In Denmark: Diplomats approaching the prime minister**
- **Travelling caricatures: as manifest entities, and as oral and written stories, imaginations and phantasies**
- **Travelling Imams – to the Middle East**
- **Travelling actors in transnational, trans-religious dialogue (Norway – Middle East and Pakistan)**

The meta-perspectives:



One of the twelve:
On the blackboard it says in Persian
that "Jyllands-posten's journalists
are a bunch of reactionary provocateurs"



Various readings during the crisis as seen from our material

- **A Western Conspiracy to marginalize and provoke Muslims**
- **A Muslim conspiracy to create unrest in the Muslim world (the travelling Imams)**
- **Western inconsistency and double standards**
- **The harsh reactions in the Orient are a result of underdevelopment, despotism, lack of understanding of democratic freedoms**
- **Misgivings among Orientals ("Punish Blasphemy")**
- **Lack of sensitivity in the 'West' towards religious minorities**
- **Lack of adaptation to modernity in the 'East'**
- **"This is not about us" (U.S., Israel)**
- **This case might disturb our national harmony (China)**
- **Large national differences in practice between geographically close nations (Sweden – Denmark; UK – France)**

Images travel, but discourses and contexts do not...

A small London demonstration

In London: Arrests, hate speech accusations

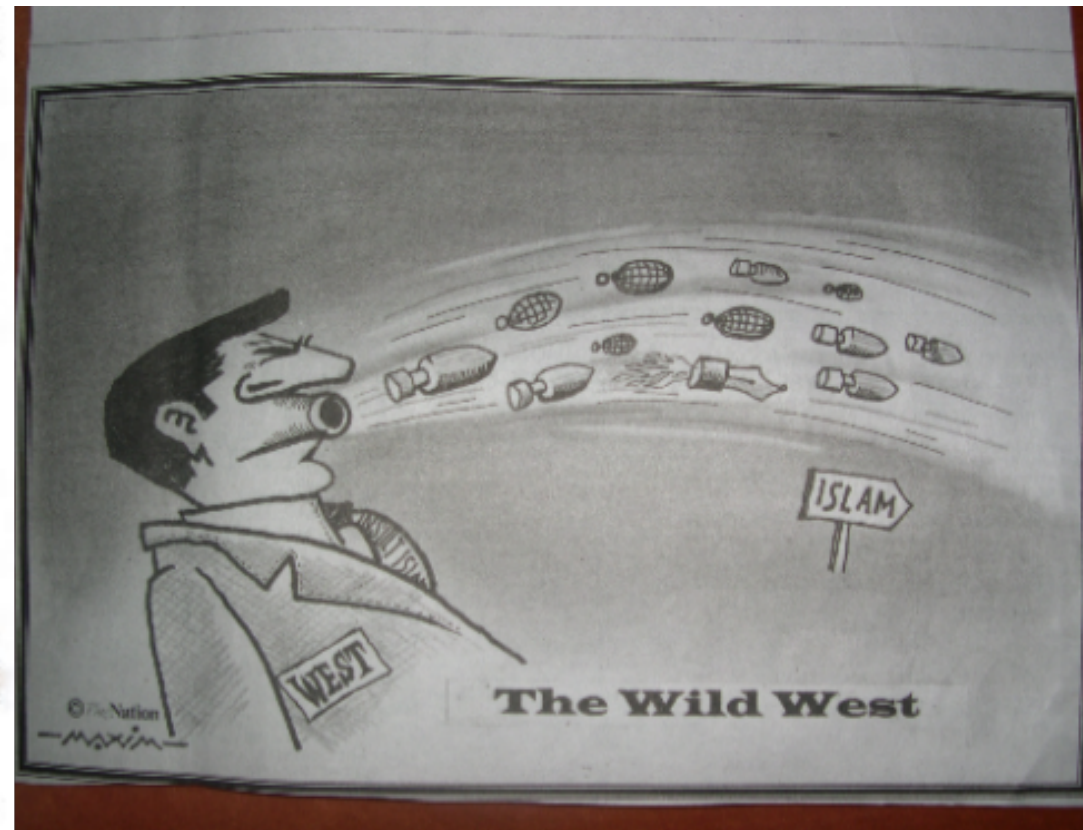
In Pakistan: Just another illustration

In both countries: Focus on extremes



**Dawn, Pakistan 4.02.2006,
front page.**

Theoretical perspectives important for understanding transnational representation:
Orientalism critique (Said), Critique of Occidentalism (Carrier, Chen, Buruma&Margalit)



**"Our" world seen from Pakistan
(The News, feb 06)**



Transnational *double standards* debate

Critique of or within the "West":

- **Irving's sentence in Austria**
- **Jesus vs Mohammed**
- **French prohibition of hijab**
- **Hollow democracy (FIS, Hamas)**
- **Human rights rhetoric vs Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib**
- **Defend f of ex, but not print = cowardice?**

Critique of or within the "East":

- **What about Arab caricatures of Jews?**
- **Tolerance of Holocaust denial**
- **What about minority religions and rights in the Muslim world?**
- **What about caricature protests to stop social uprising – or gain political power?**

Diasporic roles

- **The origin of the conflict and the diaspora in Denmark (and Europe)**
- **In countries of origin: "Europe's" lack of sensitivity. Critique of violence that could backfire on people elsewhere.**
- **Cross-continental comments**



The Discourse of Double Standards



Various views on Freedom of Expression:

Two trends of *communication* :

- Communication/dialogue and deliberations only within one culture OR across cultures and identities
- Freedom of expression as a universal value – or as a relativised cultural value

Four extremes in relation to *freedom of expression* :

- Absolute liberalism (no rules)
- Liberal pragmatism (self-imposed sensitivity)
- Religious and ethnic fundamentalism (strict rules)
- Dialogic multiculturalism (cultural relativism)

III. A more recent case

- **A reporter from TV2 and his blog**
- **Time: June 2008**
- **After a new cartoon of Mohammed in Norway was published**
- **Where: In NW Pakistan, and in Norway**





THE EVENT:

WHERE?

**1. Madrasa,
North
Waziristan,
and**

2. Peshawar

WHEN?

June 2008

A TV-reporter and his blogg:
”Do Norwegian editors try to have me killed?”
(Fredrik Græsvisk, TV2, Norway)



EMBEDDED WITH TALIBAN

“Yesterday they quarrelled over who would sleep next to the Norwegian reporter. This morning they quarrelled over who would get close enough to give me a solid beating. A little more than two years ago a Palestinian group at the Gaza strip tried to assassinate me due to the Mohammed caricatures printed by V.S in his Christian magazine. I had a narrow escape from that attempt. This time I escaped with some pushing, since I swore at them and since the Mullah after a while came to my rescue”.

(The reporter’s blogg 11.6.2008)



DID HE DESERVE A BEATING?

“Do YOU think the editors are cowards who put others’ lives in danger? Or do you think it is right to print cartoons to provoke – regardless of the costs? Please write a comment. (And – yes, I know that there are many among you who may think I had deserved a solid beating, that might be right, but you do not need to write this.)”

(Ibid. Punch line)



The blogg response

201 letters, from one-liners to one page

Appr. 2/3 critical of the reporter (more males)

DISCOURSES:

"F.G. betrays *our values* (i.e. F of Ex)"

"The self-centered reporter"

"The closet Muslim ('extremist' lover)"

Appr. 1/3 supportive of his perspective (more females):

DISCOURSES:

"global sensitivity"

"anti-provocation, dialogue"

A small minority: ambiguous responses (i.e. polarized debate)

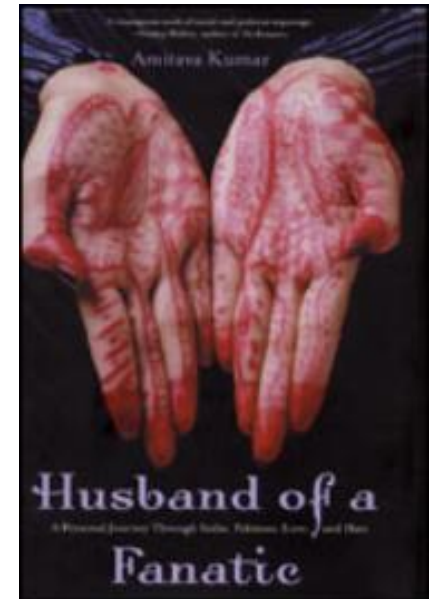
Possible MMS routes:

- Trondheim – North Waziristan
- Trondheim – Gujarat – N. Waziristan
- Trondheim – Oslo – N. Waziristan
- Trondheim – London – Gujarat – N. Waziristan ...
- Trondheim – Oslo – Dubai (Riyadh) – N. Waziristan (etc.etc.)

Oneself and the enemy

“The most challenging space of scrutiny that one can occupy is the place where one is both oneself and the enemy”

(Amitava Kumar 2004)



The reporter:

**In retrospect:
I should have
written this
differently, less
about myself.
I believe in
F of Ex**



III. A clash of Laws?

- Most constitutions refer (or have recently referred) to "contempt of religion" and morality in some way
- Many countries still have blasphemy laws (albeit dormant in most of the "West")
- These may be applied to curb opposition and religious minorities
- A transnational interpretation of laws may result in misunderstanding if disregarding the historical context

David Irving and European inconsistency

- Irving, a Holocaust denier sentenced to three years of prison in Austria late Feb 2006
- This would not happen in all of Europe
- The verdict harvested critique in Pakistani newspapers for inconsistency: Why were the cartoonists not brought to justice?



A case: Opinion Article by Shireen Mazari

Investigative journalism: studies of the constitutions in Denmark, Norway and France, plus the European Convention for the Protection of Human rights and Fundamental Freedoms

”Exposing Freedom Myths Legally”

So let us be clear about this so-called “freedom of expression” and the claimed legal helplessness of the European governments to take action against the papers printing the offensive cartoons. All this is absolute rubbish and this is where Muslims can take on the guilty in a non-violent and legal manner.

(The News; Pakistan 8.2.2006)

The Geneva controversy I

- **March 2008: UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution against "defamation of religion"**
- **Thereby changing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Racism to include defamation**
- **This became a central issue at the Durban (2001) Review Conference in Geneva in April 2009.**



The Geneva controversy II

Pakistan's suggestion on behalf of OIC:

Governments should “effectively combat defamation of all religions and incitement to religious hatred in general and against Islam and Muslims in particular.”

As examples of the problem, it [the draft text] cites attempts to associate Islam with “human rights violations and terrorism,” discrimination faced by Muslims since 9/11, including “in the context of the fight against terrorism,” as well as “deliberate stereotyping of religions, their adherents and sacred persons in the media.”

The Geneva controversy III

- Norway, Egypt, Belgium; compromise: Ban on defamation of religion – and of Islam is deleted
- Other states boycotted (Israel critique was also an issue):
Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, and the United States



From demonstrations during the Durban I conference 2001

The Outcome of Geneva (IV)

- A resolution with critique of many kinds of racism and discrimination
- No mention of religious defamation
- The results included passages on modern slavery, on the Holocaust to be remembered, on rights of minorities, including the Romany, not to be discriminated, etc. etc.



Great issues of our time, illustrated by Geneva

- Boycott or participation?
- Dialogue or confrontation?
- Principles of F of Ex vs "consideration" and "sensitivity".
- Sensitivity advocacy vs use of law. UN with transnational legitimating of oppressive national practices...?
- Does provocation work?

IV. Points for further (transnational) dialogue – and research

- **One world: The need to exchange views**
- **A deeper understanding of the role of the media in a globalized world**
- **Recognition of an increasingly diasporic world: The West is everywhere, and so is the East!**
- **Ethical challenge: Critique of double standards; consideration of "the Other"**
- **Explore different conspiracy theories**
- **Do away with blasphemy laws**
- **Tolerance for intolerance? What is intolerant?**
- **Oppose the a limitation in the mandate of a UN special rapporteur: Freedom of Expression – or curbs on critique of religion?**

Which challenges/options for journalism research?

- **A multiperspective approach: (Löffelholz 2008)**
- **Modernities (and media proficiency as criteria)?**
- **Exploring the transnational – MMS and areas considered remote (routes of travelling images)**
- **Blogg as a medium (the media not-theres are there): Gender, rhetorics, dialogue...**
- **The political economy of outsourcing (of blogg editorship)**
- **Contrapuntal reading (Said 1994)**
- **The transnational commons (Hannerz 1996)**
- **Transnational media researchers' co-operation**

The local, the global

When I refer to global journalism I do not mean to suggest that it has replaced the local and national. In a broad sense, no media practice has escaped the transformations of globalization. Even the smallest Third World news agency with access to the Internet has changed the way it works [...] **So we can see aspects of the global embedded in many settings, which makes theorizing more challenging.** (Reese 2008:241)

Transnational Literacy

- [...] the ability to read the world in its differences even when required categories such as 'literature' or 'decolonization' impose a uniformity [...] It allows us to sense that the other is not just a 'voice' but that others produce articulate texts, even as they, like us, are written in and by a text not of our own making. It is through transnational literacy that we can invent grounds for an interruptive praxis from within our disavowed hope in justice under capitalism (Spivak in Sanders 2006)

Transnational media literacy

- **Awareness: Local and national media events going global; a plurality of readings and interpretations.**
- **Ability to see the world with the eyes of (also) the distant other: an exchange of lenses:**
 - **across continents**
 - **between media researchers and practitioners**
 - **A recognition that transnational media literacy also operates and is required within a nation's borders**
 - **A shared in-depth research of the various media systems of this world and of how the struggles for media freedoms and human dignity take various shapes due to a variety of national and local circumstances**

Thank You!

