Summary and Outlook

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In the following, we provide a summary of the most important similarities and differences to be observed when comparing the case studies in this volume. Many of these observations call for verification, further discussion, and refinement in future transculturally comparative research. As such, they shall serve as a starting point for our future work, which we will elaborate on below.

Summary

The case studies have shown that, in general, producers of visual satire used different forms of existing media such as journals and postcards, but also published texts such as diaries or travel accounts, to place their caricatures in order to reach a certain audience. Caricatures were used by different participating parties in political, societal, and cultural debates, and in these contexts served either as communication tools engaged in controversies or as media of self-assertion and negotiation. Regarding these aspects, the situation in our case studies does not differ from the nature and functions of visual culture in our own times.

We can observe the entanglement of different lines of discourse and different group conceptions in the contexts in which caricatures are produced: such subjects of caricature as women's emancipation can serve as examples of complex and often surprising societal divisions. For instance, caricature artists from different ethnic communities in Tbilisi supported the emancipation movement, while others across the different groups preferred to adhere to traditional gender roles. In the same way and during the same period, the women's emancipation movement in Istanbul was backed by women and men from different social and ethnic backgrounds but also had its opponents across society.

It is striking that caricatures are often used in the context of identity building, such as in the context of nation-building in Egypt when the country was in the process of emancipating itself from British influence. As caricatures offer the possibility of transmitting their producer's intentions

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implicitly, they open spaces of almost "coded" communication.[1] Especially from today's perspective, it is often impossible to grasp the full scope of a caricature's layered meaning and communication intentions when examining it in isolation. As caricatures did not exist in a vacuum, but always formed part of discursive threads, they always need to be read in connection with their context. Arguing on the basis of the Grand Duchy of Finland's democratisation and modernisation process, Juho Korhonen is able to show that these challenges posed by caricatures as source material offer the opportunity to reassess and question historical narratives. Juxtaposed against a rather linear representation of history, caricatures, with their inscribed ambiguity, make it possible to uncover the interdependence and polyphony of developments and to unveil alternative histories.

Although hard censorship, a priori 'guidelines' or the proverbial scissors inside the heads of caricaturists or editors have the power to prevent the production of caricatures or to determine their content and form, as discussed in Mariia Guleva's contribution, our case studies show producers developing different techniques and new ways of expression to circumvent such restrictions or work within them. This leads to the astonishing observation that censorship, for instance, may be seen not only as a hindering factor, but at times even as an influence that triggers development in the visual satire of a certain region.

Strikingly, caricatures as a communication tool blossomed similarly in different regions, although the audiences show distinct variations in the cities that emerged as centres for caricature culture. For example, comparing Berlin to Cairo and Istanbul, the much more limited literacy rates in the latter did not hinder the caricature boom of the 1920s. Rather, what we may accurately state is that we have more evidence of the working class in Berlin consuming satirical journals at the beginning of the 20th century. The reading and production of caricatures in Cairo and Istanbul in the same period seemed to be rooted in the (upper) middle class. However, certain modes of reception typical for illiterate people there, such as consuming satirical journals communally in a coffee house, are practically impossible to substantiate with evidence.

The contributions in this volume show that caricatures were used to criticise as well as to lend support to dominating ideas, ideologies, and discourses. They could also serve to disseminate new forms of self-perception and educate future generations accordingly, as shown by the case of Cairo's first children's journal. On the other hand, one of the most important

1 Stuart Hall, Encoding / Decoding, in: Stuart Hall / Dorothy Hobson (eds.), Culture, Media, Language, London 1981, 128–138.

functions of caricatures seemed to be their use as propaganda tools both on the part of the prevailing political power and by contesting groups, parties, or ideologists. Caricatures have the power to either motivate or demoralise the audience. They can be used in opposing periodicals at the same place or across national or regional boundaries. The power of the visual can be used to variously support or enhance editorial policy in contesting rival journals, in propagating a certain political agenda—certain journals or caricaturists would align with a certain party or ideology—or in contesting depictions of one's own country in international (satirical) discourses of the time.

In all these different situations or applications, caricatures work either by condensing and simplifying information or by revealing complex entanglements or connections behind simplified representations, such as in deconstructing political propaganda. A reduction of information complexity on the one hand heightens their potential in terms of immediate 'at-a-glance' communication and at the same time opens an opportunity for multiple interpretations. The ambiguity in caricatures also emerges from a twofold handling of stereotypes: on the one hand, stereotypes emerge as identity-building devices in caricatures, helping one to define oneself in contrast to the other. But conversely, caricatures can also serve to deconstruct stereotypes that are prevalent in societies and people's imagination. From our present-day perspective, caricatures can therefore also serve as sources for an alternative reading of past events. Different representations of points of view in caricatures and reflection on potential alternative readings can offer a new perspective and reflect the ambivalence and multilayered discourses of the time.

The analysis of caricatures in this volume has shown that similar or even identical symbols were used across regions, nations, and times and can have a global dimension. Many of them, such as national stereotypes like John Bull or Mrs Egypt, are even well-established components of the global inventory of today's visual satire. However, global interconnections and exchange, including urban centres in countries under colonial influence or in regions often regarded as remote from a Western perspective, were in existence even in the second half of the 19th century. This universality of symbols demonstrates the interconnectedness and interplay of caricatures and producers. It shows the existence of a common visual language that bridges linguistic and cultural borders. Nevertheless, every regional producing culture also includes its own stylistic devices that developed out of that region's larger visual archives and have been adopted and adapted for incorporation into their caricatures.

Outlook on Future Research

We are mainly interested in exploring the commonalities and interrelations that link our different research sources, times, and spaces. To analyse and understand these links, we will deepen our focus on aspects such as visual language, context, and style. In doing so, it will be of utmost importance to include the interplay or interrelation of caricatures and texts. On the micro-level of the caricatures themselves, this means studying the relation between image and caption. On the macro-level, this includes the texts surrounding the caricatures in the periodical they are printed in, or even in the larger media discourse.

To achieve these goals, two prerequisites must be met first. Regarding the methodological approach, it will be significant to further our development of a common research language and a toolbox of common research tools to enhance comparability between our case studies. On the practical side, we will therefore establish a visual archive of caricature culture. The archive will build on collections already present in Heidelberg and Bonn, and we will aim to add material from the research projects of our working group consecutively. Using (and building) a controlled vocabulary to tag the caricatures regarding their content, context, and style, the database will serve as a resource for transdisciplinary and transcultural comparison. After the initial phase, the database will be available with open access on the Heidelberg heidIcon platform and be amenable to continuous enlargement and development by including more non-Western examples over time.

On the thematic side, the question of the agency of caricatures has already emerged as a core interest of the group. Scholarship on visual satire ranges between two polar positions in terms of agency. While the first denies the notion that caricatures have any agency at all, the second acknowledges some kind of agency.[2] From the discussions in our group, we tend toward the latter position, but still need further discussion and research to understand the relation of agency of involved persons versus the agency of the caricatures themselves.

Finally, we would like to foster collaborations with partners in three respects: First, regarding research, we will collaborate with projects both

2 As discussed by Gustav Rossler, Do Pictures Have Agency? Reflections on the Agency of Things in the Light of Works of Art and Image Acts, Berlin 2023; Horst Bredekamp, Image Acts. A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency, transl. Elizabeth Clegg, Berlin / Boston 2021; Ernst H. Gombrich, The Cartoonist's Armoury, in: Gombrich, Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art, 3rd ed. London 1978, 127–142.

regarding non-Western and Western caricature cultures. As a first step, a collaboration with the ChinaComX project on Chinese *manhua* has been established.[3] Second, building on our research on Middle Eastern and Chinese caricatures as well as caricatures from Eastern and Southern Europe, we aim to build a bridge to the study of visual satire from the perspective of immigrant cultures, such as Lebanese or Chinese immigrants to the United States. Regarding partners outside academia, we have already initiated collaboration with caricaturists, a move that is already proving to be very fruitful in terms of understanding working processes and the relation between artistic creation and political or societal contexts. We aim at deepening this kind of work, including in connection with the collaboration with partners from the cultural or educational sector. The exposition "Laugh first, think later"[4] that opened in Heidelberg in 2025 and the development of teaching material[5] were first steps in this direction.

The present volume is just one of many steps on what will hopefully be a long and fruitful journey. We have already tackled many interesting questions and topics that have paved the path for many more. Also in the future, interdisciplinary and transcultural collaboration will be key to this field of research, because the questions that have risen from this summary alone can only be answered by joining forces.

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3 See https://chinacomx.github.io/.

4 „Erst lachen, dann denken!" Karikaturen aus dem Nahen Osten, 1850–1940, in: Anna Kollatz / Veruschka Wagner (eds.), Erst lachen, dann denken!/Laugh first, think later! Karikaturen aus dem Nahen Osten, 1850–1940 / Caricatures from the Near East, 1850–1940 (Universitätsmuseum Heidelberg: Kataloge 18), Heidelberg 2025, 4–5. https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.1608.c23191.

5 Forthcoming teaching material on Ottoman caricatures will be published at www.zwischentoene.info.

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