



# IRAN AND THE BOOMERANGING CARTOON WARS: CAN PUBLIC SPHERES AT RISK ALLY WITH PUBLIC SPHERES YET TO BE ACHIEVED?

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**ABSTRACT** Twelve cartoons, published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005, nine cartoons published in the Tehran newspaper *Iran* in May 2006, and 282 cartoons curated in Tehran in September 2006 provide a useful case study in the experimentation with new and old media in the transnational circuitry.

At stake are the agons, *polemos* (Greek terms of reference), or *luti-jahel-darvish*, "Karbala paradigm," and *jumhuri-ye moral struggles* (Persian terms of reference) in Iran and the West over creating and protecting robust public spheres and civil

societies. Four perspectives are probed: *cultural politics*; *cultural media histories*; the *emotional excess (jouissance, petit à)* of cultural politics; and the *deep play mode of aesthetic judgement* formed between the practical and ethical, between political economy and expressive art (including political drama), and between individual self-fashioning on the one hand, and on the other hand changing symbolic and social orders.

KEYWORDS: cartoons, transnational circuitry, public spheres, civil societies, media

**0.0. INTRODUCTION**

Europeans have used tolerance as an excuse for not confronting intolerance.

Bassam Tibi, January 10, 2007 *Boston Globe*, A5

a misled and foul group, which has misinterpreted and manipulated the values of the revered religion . . . has adopted a *takfiri* path, which allowed for . . . killing . . . This . . . provided a dangerous opening to opponents [of Islam] to spread their venom and revive their hatreds using new ways and methods . . . most recent was the desperate attempt of a Danish newspaper . . .

Ayatullah al-Seistani.<sup>1</sup>

[the matter of *Jyllands-Posten's* caricatures]’s potential as an easily accessible metaphor for the battle over values in the Middle East means that it, when the opportunity arises, will again be taken up by Middle Eastern Islamists. Like the Rushdie affair, it will likely never be subject to complete closure . . .

Lars Erslev Andersen, head of commission of scholars’ report to the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Twelve cartoons, published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005 and the violent responses across the Muslim world stirred up in the following months (peaking in February 2006) by an “action group” of militant Danish imams who claimed the cartoons defamed the Prophet Muhammad and made fun of Islam, provide a useful case study in the “frenzy of position taking” and experimentation with new and old media in the transnational circuitry.<sup>2</sup> Iran – by sponsoring a Holocaust cartoon contest in September 2006 in response to the Danish cartoons – moved from the periphery to the center of disputation, as it had in the earlier 1988–9 Salman Rushdie affair.<sup>3</sup> A third cartoon controversy, in May 2006, exploiting Tehran-centric

and Persian hegemony over Azeri Turkish Iranian citizens, also generated public demonstrations and provides a reality check on overly polarizing East versus West differences.

At stake are the agons, *polemos* (strife, struggle, war), or *lutijahel-darvish*, “Karbala paradigm,” and *jumhuri-ye* moral struggles (see below) in Iran and the West over creating and protecting robust public spheres and civil societies. I probe these questions and their complications from four perspectives: (i) viewing the *cultural politics* on all sides to highlight the struggles within Iran, Denmark, and elsewhere for the building of inclusive civil societies and for the “dialogue of civilizations” invoked by former President Muhammad Khatami against the “clash of civilizations” ambiguously prognosticated by political scientist Samuel Huntington and adopted with élan by President Mahmud Ahmadinejad; (ii) *cultural media histories* that remind us of many precedents for political cartooning and satire in Iran (and the Muslim world generally), and of the changes in the transnational circuitry which provides opportunistic resources for synergizing conflicts within different social niches and political arenas; (iii) the *emotional excess* (*jouissance*, *petit à*) of cultural politics; and (iv) the philosophical *deep play of the aesthetic* realm, where “aesthetic” is understood as not just beauty, but as an interactive space between the practical and ethical, between political economy and expressive art, and between individual self-fashioning on the one hand, and on the other hand changing symbolic and social orders.

In Iran, Mahmud Ahmadinejad took office as Iran’s sixth President in August 2005. He began to reverse previous President Muhammad Khatami’s calls for a more liberal civil society and a dialogue of civilizations with the West. In Europe, tensions over immigration and militant Islamic actions were on the rise in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 (“9/11”) attack on the World Trade Center in New York, the March 11, 2004 train bombings in Madrid (“3/11”), the July 7, 2005 transport system bombings in London, the November 2, 2004 murder on the streets of Amsterdam of filmmaker Theo van Gogh, the tightening of immigration laws in Scandinavia, and the effort in France to provide an elected Council for Muslim Congregations to mediate legitimate immigrant complaints (created in the aftermath of the 1994 hijacking of an Air France flight by Algerian militants).

### 0.1. Preliminary reminder on conflicts within cultural chronotopes

Times are often said to be “out of joint” with contesting ideologies invoking different historical horizons within the same societies. Ideals of one era are invoked alternatively as critique (a sense of difference) and as criticism (impatience) about another era bygone or to come. Religion, for instance, is outdated or is yet to be instituted; secular society obversely is the way of the future or is to be overcome.

*Luti* and *jahel* are two cognitive-moral frames, invoked here as a preliminary *deixis* or signal of a variety of such moral languages, like that of Ayatullah al-Seistani cited above, that are available to be mobilized from the internal culture wars of the Iranian and Muslim world. The transnational circuitry carries multiple cultural languages of political and moral philosophy, creating possibilities for misunderstanding cultural signals and cues, but also for enriching the possibilities of cross-cultural negotiation. Such possibilities are particularly rooted in the mutual indebtedness of Europe and the Islamic world to Greek terms of reference (Aristotle, Plato [Pers. Aflatun]), the idea of a philosopher-king, and genres of manuals for princes (Nizam ul-Mulk, Machiavelli). Just as Oedipus, Antigone, and Socrates became again key cultural stories used in post-1968 French debates about politics (Leonard 2005), so too popular film in Iran keeps the *luti-jahel-darvish* paradigm alive. Just as Sophoclean tragedy is less known in the Islamic world except through Western education, so too the *luti-jahel-darvish* series of moral types is less well recognized in the West except for fans of Iranian popular films of the 1950s and 1960s (Naficy forthcoming), and the exceptional focus on the sufi *darvish* by people seeking “the mystical wisdom of the East.”

The *jahel* is an unscrupulous tough guy; the *luti* has matured into the neighborhood protector and moral hero; the sufi dervish (Pers. *darvish*) withdraws from the public world of corruption in principled resistance to it (Bateson et al. 1977). In popular films, the *luti-jahel* competing pair is as familiar as the *eiron-alazon* (self-deprecating ironist and bragging poseur) pair in comedy (both Greek and Persian). Both *jahel* and *luti* exercise in the sacralized athletic pit (or *gowd*) of the traditional ritualized gymnasium, the *zurkhaneh* (literally house of strength; for a description, see Fischer 1973). The *zurkhaneh* is presided over on the one hand by the heroic figure of ‘Ali, (the first Shi’ite imam, fourth Sunni caliph), and on the other hand by Rostam and other *pahlavans* (champions in warfare and in physical strength) of Firdawsi’s national epic, the *Shahnameh*. In popular tough guy films of the 1960s and 1970s, the struggles between *luti* and *jahel* were eulogies for the passing era of *lutis* and their replacement by amoral modernity dominated by *jahels* in both neighborhood and national governance (Naficy forthcoming). The *luti* or *darvish* is the cultural ideal, the *jahel* the corrupt present reality. The *luti-jahel* pair are lower-class figures, and thus could be used safely as emotional allegories for the state and its leadership. In contemporary diasporic music videos both figures affectionately signify a slightly comic, moral nostalgia, playing upon a newer chronotope division between a transnational liberated sensibility and a domestic Iranian caughtness within domestic constraints and international sanctions. The external sanctions are US trade embargoes. The domestic constraints are a penal system that rules even behavioral and dress codes.

The *luti-jahel* pair, like the religious Karbala paradigm (of struggle for justice against overwhelming evil) of Shi'ite passion plays (Fischer 1980), or more quietist sufi resistance to the corruption of the world, continue to provide analogies for politics. More directly, and more emotionally, contested is the notion of a republic. Should the Islamic Republic be more republic (*jumhuri-ye*) or more Islamic? Can class-linked religiosities in this Islamic Republic be noncoercive? A parallel question exists in United States politics where religion-linked social conservatism has been revived as a voting bloc to coerce all to adhere to the social morality claimed by some to be demanded by fundamentalist (Protestant and Catholic) Christianity.

## 0.2. Cartoons in the Transnational Circuitry

The transnational circuitry evolves in punctuated phases often marked by dramatic incidents of *Kulturkampf* or culture wars from which later publicity- and advantage-seeking political actors learn. The Salman Rushdie affair is the most obvious immediate predecessor to the Danish cartoon affair. The stirring up of murderous rage against the author of the novel *Satanic Verses* was a major test bed of viral vectors traversing social membranes across the globe and acting parasitically within otherwise different social conflicts. The political arenas, social dramas, goals, and stakes were different in Bradford (England), Pakistan, India, and Iran. Iran was the last major player to get in on the act, and its parasitic contribution, in the form of Ayatullah Khomeini's fatwa, became the most potent transnationally and of least concern internally in Iran. The belatedness of Iran's entry is not so odd, given that Rushdie had won a national prize in Iran for his previous book, *Shame*, a searing satire on Pakistan, and that *Satanic Verses* made use of well-known Shi'ite hadith and stories in his comic portrait of the nightmares or derangements of migrants in England whose interior struggles braided together Bollywood film images with childhood religious indoctrination. Ayatullah Khomeini's fatwa – anathematizing Rushdie for a book few Muslims (whether in England, India, Iran, or Pakistan) had read, and most heard of only through bowdlerized excerpts read out by incendiary preachers or through word of mouth – proved infectious among Sunni and Shias around the world, cabdrivers and professors alike.

With the Danish cartoons, the anti-Azeri cartoons in a government-aligned Tehran newspaper, and the Holocaust cartoon contest, Iran continues to be a nodal site, not only in the play of cartooning rickshay, but also in experimentation with the media circuitry. The Holocaust cartoon contest was sponsored by the Tehran municipality and a government-aligned newspaper. These experiments with the media circuits received bully pulpit attention and support from President Mahmud Ahmadinejad and Ali Khamene'i, the *Rahbar* (Leader, Führer, or Duce, a title apparently increasingly used because of his contested status as the most qualified ayatullah or religious

expert of the time, which was the original qualification for being the constitutional *velayat-e faqih*).

While the Rushdie affair dramatized the transnational circuitry's power to transfer the frenzy of position taking from one political arena to another, the more recent cartoon affairs suggest a new phase in the turbulence of the transnational circuitry, focusing attention on how such circulating controversies help and hinder the construction of global, national, and local public spheres. The construction of civil society is still centrally on the agenda in Iran, reignited as a goal of the revolution since the calls of President Khatami for open civil society, respect for civil rights, and dialogue of civilizations, and continuing in student, worker, and women's protests against restrictions imposed under President Ahmadinejad. The construction of civil society is also on the agenda again in Europe in a way that has not been the case since perhaps the time of the French Revolution. The furor stirred up by the Danish imams transnationally crystallized the stakes for many Europeans.

I will try to probe these questions and their complications from a perspective that respects the struggles in Iran. These struggles include those within the clerical elite, those within the larger intelligentsia, and those within the society at large that has, with all its failings, numerous elections to its credit and a taste for participatory forms of governance that will not rest. It is notable in this context, as Danny Postel (2006) has recently argued, that unlike so-called progressives in the West, Iranian thinkers tend to be attracted more to liberal political theorists than to revolutionary ones in part because of the policing of opinion by revolutionary ideologies and movements. Civil society is on the agenda, under siege, restriction, and tutelage. The vital role of *dowrehs* (discussion circles), as well as public demonstrations, efforts by human rights lawyers, blogs, women's rights organizations, and film continues. Many of these are networked to the transnational circuitry. The *dowreh* chronicled in Azar Naficy's controversial *Reading Lolita in Tehran* was stimulated by Naficy's attendance, with Moroccan and other Middle Eastern activists and women's groups, at the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

With regard to the cartoon controversies, and the response in Iran by the holding of the Occupation and Holocaust cartoon contests, it seems necessary to go back over again, briefly, but with a more complicated eye, the Danish cartoon controversy itself. It has been argued, correctly I think, by Mark Peterson (2006), that we need to recognize the sophistication and irony of Iranian responses to the Danish affair (and more generally of its geopolitical theatrics). It is certainly true that the Danish imams and the Iranian cartoon competition organizers contribute to the global public sphere by pointing out blind spots in many Western secular positions. At the same time, two other features are equally critical. First, Ahmadinejad and Khamene'i used the cartoons in a bread and circus tactic of

domestic political distraction and consolidation, and to assert Iran's independence on the world stage. Second, the interventions of the Danish imams and the Iranian cartoon contest organizers do not themselves seem to pass the tests of Islamic ethics or democratic responsibility. Such cultural politics is, of course, also deeply emotional. In the current case, the emotions both got out of control, causing, some calculate, over 139 deaths. This should be a potent warning about demagogic politics. Theatrics may be required in politics, but not all theatrics need play with fire in contexts where the fire can get out of hand.

In a philosophical register, there is here a deep play of the aesthetic realm, where "aesthetic" is understood not as just beauty, but as an interactive space between the practical and the ethical, between political economics and art, and between self-fashioning individuals and always changing symbolic and social orders. The tools required are not just media circuit analysis, nor just symbolic and tactical political analysis, both of which are crucial, but also hermeneutic interpretation, which itself is always an interactive space of cultural and moral struggle, and a trial in both the procedural-justice sense and the religious-moral sense.

## I

### 1.0. THE *JYLLANDS-POSTEN* CARTOONS AND THE ACTIVATION OF TRANSNATIONAL CIRCUITRY

At first the argument that free speech also requires the exercise of prudent responsibility in politically charged settings garnered sympathy for the liberal political judgement that the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, and its cultural editor, Fleming Rose, had acted imprudently. Soliciting artists to draw something about the meaning of Islam to them in the alleged context of the fear of Danish artists to undertake the illustration of a children's book on the life of Muhammad was cited by the paper as a principled defense of free speech in a liberal democracy. Hervik (2006) has questioned the validity of this "context story" used by *Jyllands-Posten* to justify its solicitation of the cartoons, and has drawn attention to the explicit anti-Muslim provocateur stance of some of the cartoonists, the *Jyllands-Posten*'s prior anti-Muslim track record, and the antireligious stance of the Marxist Kåre Bluitgen, who is said to have made the claim that he could find no illustrators for his children's book on Islam.<sup>4</sup> But with the revelation of active incitement to characterize the cartoons as defamatory, including what appeared to be deliberate misrepresentation by the Danish imams, that position seemed undermined.

Indeed there even might be a case to be brought under Islamic law against the Danish imams for defamation of Islam and for the sin of spreading false gossip about one's neighbor. Ayatullah al-Seistani, for one, condemned the cartoons, but also condemned the militants

who discredit Islam by their acts, and whose un-Islamic acts justify attacks on Islam. And in Denmark, a Network of Democratic Muslims formed, at the initiative of Member of the Danish Parliament Naser Khader (Det Radikale Venstre Party or Liberal Party) to counter the fundamentalist fervor.

The imams, like everyone else, had an obligation to act responsibly and prudently in the public sphere.<sup>5</sup> Generalized threats were issued against those who dared mock Muhammad. These helped incite several (foiled) bombing and assassination efforts, including the arrest in Berlin of a Pakistani who later committed suicide in prison and whose funeral in Pakistan attracted fifty thousand people. Public boycotts were started against all Danish products in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and elsewhere. But the boycotts were condemned duplicitously on Danish television while at the same time promoted on Arabic Al Jazeera by one of the organizers of the campaign, Ahmed Abdel Rahman Abu Laban. In Damascus, the Danish and Norwegian embassies were set on fire; in Beirut, the Danish embassy was set on fire and one person died; in Benghazi, the Danish consulate was set on fire and ten died; in Tehran, the Danish and Austrian embassies were attacked; in Afghanistan, a Norwegian peacekeeper base was attacked. Some 139 or more people were killed in protests in Nigeria, Libya, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. In Iran, President Mahmud Ahmadinejad called for canceling all contracts with Denmark, recalled the Ambassador to Denmark, and prohibited Danish journalists from reporting inside Iran. The Leader (*Rahbar*) Ali Khamene'i claimed it was all a Zionist plot to deflect attention from, and stir up sentiment against, the Hamas election victory in Palestine. In India, an Uttar Pradesh state official, Haji Yaqoob Qureishi, offered a (US) \$10 million dollar reward for whoever beheaded Danish cartoonists caricaturing Muhammad. In Pakistan, a clerical fatwa was used by a goldsmiths' association (perhaps to solidify relations with a religious organization more than for any other purpose) to offer \$25,000 plus a new car to those who killed the Danish cartoonist.<sup>6</sup> This last provoked one Western cartoonist to draw an aide to one of these clerics taking a call and saying to the cleric, "it's the wife of one of the Danish cartoonists, she wants to know what kind of car?"

The debate over the cartoons did eventually flush out arguments, hurt feelings, and misrepresentations on all sides. The cultural editor of *Jyllands-Posten* has held meetings with Danish Muslims and has been well received. Danish Muslim groups dedicated to both free speech and respect for Islam have been formed. The leaders of the campaign apparently tried (unsuccessfully) after four months to call it off. While militants in the Middle East repeatedly rejected apologies and protestations of any intent to offend from *Jyllands-Posten*, Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono evenhandedly condemned the cartoons and advised religious Muslims to accept the apologies in the spirit of Islam. Although the Egyptian Ambassador to Denmark had been instrumental in providing

access for the Danish imams to the Middle Eastern leaders and the Arab League, Egypt eventually worked to defuse the tensions in the Middle East.

It is worth going back over three key issues: aniconism; the creation of public spheres in multicultural states as well as global arenas; and (as with Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*) what actually was, rather than what was alleged to be, the *Jyllands-Posten* offense, or rather whether *Jyllands-Posten* was merely a useful political tool for the Danish imams, and the actual cartoons only incidental. A case could be made, as with Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, that the social drama and media circuits providing global resources for local conflicts were far more important, and could have been triggered by other objects. The triggering object is, in a sense, an example of Lacan's notion of a *petit à*, a potent but elusive remainder of the real. The *petit à* is that which is most revealing of the play of passion and desire, of transgressive *jouissance* on all sides. This is not to say that the liberal democratic ideal of nonduplicious public free speech is not also in need of vigorous defense, as is vigilance that free speech not be perverted into hegemonic discourse that disallows minorities from expressing their points of view. On the contrary, as Slavoj Žižek might say, this is exactly what makes the *petit à* so politically explosive in these (scandalous) times.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.1. Aniconism in Islam

It is often wrongly asserted that Islam forbids images and especially portraying the face of the Prophet. Theologically, what is forbidden is the *worship* of images. Muslim fundamentalists who assert that Islam forbids images need to be held to account to their own traditions. As the Mohammed Image Archive, or any Islamic art encyclopedia, demonstrates, there is a long tradition of representing the image, including the face, of Muhammad. The Shi'ite tradition is most represented among such artists, but there are Sunni images as well. The theological objection is against the worship of anything other than God. Indeed efforts to institute blanket prohibitions against pictures, or against depicting Muhammad, itself has a taint of *shirk*, of the heresy of thinking that Muhammad is God, and not his messenger. Of course, one may argue, as Sufis often do (at risk of their lives among fundamentalists) that God is in all human beings and it is our task to find that divine trace within us ("*anal ul-haq*" as al-Hallaj famously and ecstatically declared, for which he was executed). As in Christianity there have been movements of aniconism, today most strong among Wahhabis and *salafis*, rightly feared by moderate Muslims as carriers of totalitarian, Taliban-like, puritan controls.

There is nothing wrong with taboos to instill a ritual sense of spirituality, but once they are turned into social controls they become something quite different. Indeed many ritual and spiritual traditions are highly self-conscious about the visceral as well as

cognitive-moral importance of purification and self-discipline through a system of voluntarily accepted taboos, dietary restrictions, dress, and behavioral constraints. The issue is voluntary self-discipline versus coercive imposition by a power elite (in this case expressing a lower-middle-class sensibility), and tutelage as in the education of a child versus tutelage as a means of political repression.

In Iran, recently there has been a flood of popular images of Muhammad looking (if you don't know the code) very much like a beautiful young girl or a young Christ-like figure, with bright eyes, long hair, glossed lips, smiling, lost in thought. One difference with the Danish cartoons is that this image is intended reverentially. That, of course, is crucial. But so is the long tradition of satire in Islam against repressive rules of piety, canonized in Iran in the poetry of Sa'edi among others.

## 1.2. Public Spheres

Bassam Tibi's comment, quoted in the epigram to this article, cuts both ways. It works as a critique of Europeans for not requiring new citizens, and immigrants even if temporary workers, to publicly swear loyalty to the duties and responsibilities of citizenship and legal protections of individual rights as a condition of the right of residency. It works also as an equally sharp critique of liberal democracy for all too often using legalities as a screen against structural inequalities and injustices. Muslim moderates need backing if they are to stand up publicly against intimidation by religious fundamentalists. Central to liberal democracy is the possibility for correction of structural injustice, and indeed the point of the withering critiques of triumphalist ideologies of liberal democracies in the last forty years was precisely to preserve the ability to institute change. The fight against the capture of the democratic state (by fundamentalists, or by capital) is perpetual. The price of freedom, as they say, is eternal vigilance, critique, and rebalancing. Demeaning the regulatory ideals of liberalism as if they depended upon unbridled individualism was a tactic of Carl Schmidt and Martin Heidegger in the Germany of the 1930s. It is a mischievous theme easily picked up by well-intentioned communitarians, including Islamicists who would ground their communitarianism in appeals to sacralized rather than disputatious traditions of Islamic knowledge and moral endeavor.

Communications across cultural habits, presuppositions of truth, behavioral signs of community, and generational change are particularly challenging when done through humor at a distance – through newspapers, through second- and thirdhand hearsay and rumor – where signals of affect, and immediate ability to correct or modify effects, that accompany all face-to-face communication are absent. Tolerance is not just a liberal creed. It is also a tactic of intergenerational and interfamilial conflict, accommodation, and change. It works for friends and family even at a distance, because one knows the affects and persons involved, their complicated

psychologies, and how they may react. The public sphere is not just a “regulatory ideal” space for rational argument and play of ideas; it is also a moral sphere in the Kantian sense of becoming the best we collectively can be (which in the international realm meant for Kant not to so defeat an enemy that all future reconciliation becomes impossible). Democracy is not just elections (as antidemocrats tend to use them), but institutionalized systems of checks and balances, transparency where possible, accountability, and public review of policy directions.

### 1.3. Emotions of cultural politics: *jouissance* and the *petit à*

The revolutionary period Iranian cartoons of Prime Minister Shapur Bakhtiar as king and former President Bani Sadr in a chador carry partisan sting, and provide a giddy or excessive enjoyment to their partisans, but they are also exaggerations of truths that the targets can ruefully understand. This excess is recognition of a gap created by a parallax view, a crossing of two monocular perspectives (as when you open only one eye, then only the other, observing a displacement of perspective). It is in this gap, or shift, that Slavoj Žižek locates the *jouissance* (excess of enjoyment, or intensity in Deleuze’s language) of the *petit à*. It is the bite of reality that cannot be held stable enough to be caught. It is the excessive passion that needs triangulation to be made available for rational discussion in the public sphere. And it is in the French pun a play of the senses and sensibility (*jeu-i-sense*).

The forty-three page pamphlet used by Ahmed Abdel Rahman Abu Laban and Sheikh Rais Huleihil in their campaign against the Danish cartoons (seeking out Amr Mousa, the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Sheikh Mohammad Sayyed Tantawi, the head of al-Azhar in Cairo, and Yusuf al Qaradawi, a prominent Islamic scholar), with visits to Lebanon and Egypt, includes most egregiously a newspaper photo of French comedian Jacques Barrot competing in a pig-squealing contest while wearing a rubber pig nose, a contest that has nothing to do with Muslims, Islam, or Muhammad, but which was characterized in the campaign as an example of defamatory portrayals of the Prophet with a pig face. Two other ribald cartoons, in the obscene tradition of cartooning, also appear in the pamphlet but are not among the twelve cartoons in *Jyllands-Posten*. Nor were some thirty other cartoons in the pamphlet.

In defense of the imams, the pamphlet wanted to describe a growing atmosphere in Denmark and Europe hostile to Islam, but many of the cartoons were from a set of satires about the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons. These are hard to see as anti-Islamic. Take for instance, the cartoon of the Mona Lisa which lampoons an alleged effort to see secret Muslim plots in the great paintings of Europe, and is part of a larger making fun of European fears that their identities can be undermined by new immigrants. The imams perhaps missed an

opportunity to make common cause with these cartoonists. Perhaps only by reacting as if they really did mean to undermine Danish civil society did the imams come to realize their mistake and the force of the fears of the other (projections on both sides, the truth of the *petit à*). In the heat of the controversy, many said yes, they wanted *shari'a* law to be in force in Europe. The calls for the death of the cartoonists did not help, even if they did not come from the Danish imams.<sup>8</sup> Nor did the calling of Christians in Denmark infidels, or the claim that Muslims were prevented from building mosques. On the other side, it was no help that the Danish Prime Minister first refused to meet with the Muslim Ambassadors, and then (December 18) received the controversial Dutch Member of Parliament, Mirsi Ali, who had just won a freedom prize from his Danish party, even if both were defended and justified on the grounds of free speech and objection to Islamic militant intimidation.

#### 1.4. The Danish cartoons themselves

The twelve *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons printed on September 30, 2005 – six reprinted without incident in the Egyptian newspaper *Al Fagr* on October 18, 2005 (it condemned them, and that was that) – are worth looking at. *Jyllands-Posten* claimed they were responses to a request to draw “what Islam means to you,” in the context of the inability to find an illustrator of a children’s book on the life of the Prophet Muhammad because of a chilling effect on free speech from Muslim intimidation with regard to anything having to do with their religion.

Free speech regarding religion is a major issue in the history of Europe and liberal democracy, but one wonders if the book publishers had gone, as they should have, and perhaps did, to a Muslim illustrator, if they would have had so much trouble. They might have if *salafi* or Wahhabi ideologues wanted to make an issue of even Muslim illustrators operating with other Muslim sensibilities. This makes the mixture of Muslim sensibilities in Europe an interesting crucible for Islam and democracy discussions.

In any case, the cartoons are at worst reinforcing of negative stereotypes, at best expressive of Danish fears. They are nothing compared to the sharpness of political cartoons generally in the West about the West’s own politics, including its religious figures or arguments. They are also nothing compared to the sharpness of political cartoons within the Muslim world, not to mention the frequent images, many deriving from the Nazi and pre-Nazi European traditions of anti-Semitism in cartoons about Jews and Israelis. This latter tradition indulged in by the subsequent Iranian-sponsored cartoon contest was supplemented by President Ahmadinejad’s theatrical suggestions that the Holocaust might not have happened, or that if it had happened it might not have been as extensive as claimed, that the plight of Palestinians was worse, and that the Zionist State (Israel) needed to be disappeared from time and

space. Many Iranian intellectuals protested these tactics of the Ahmadinejad leadership.

Four of the Danish cartoons centrally thematize the issue of speaking freely without the threat of violence. Two are about intimidation. The cartoon most frequently described as offensive, and the most often reproduced and described as a terrorist image of Muhammad with a bomb in, his turban, the fuse lighted, is by Kurt Westergaard. While clearly depicting someone from the Muslim world – and Westergaard acknowledges the terrorist reading – the image is actually quite hard to recognize as an image of Muhammad. The sideburn whiskers are more nineteenth century than anything remotely from the time of the Prophet, and the turban is decorated with an Ottoman-style calligraphic medallion (with the *shahadah*, “there is no God but God and Muhammad is his Prophet”). Seventy-one-year-old Westergaard is quite unrepentant about the cartoon, seeing the intemperate reaction to it as proof of its point.

Some have seen the image as derivative of the nineteenth-century image by Occultist Eliphas Levi of Baphomet, the goat idol of the Knights Templar. The Templars were accused by the Inquisition of harboring secret Muslims and heresy, so the parallel with European fears of Muslim immigrants threatening Christian identity fits, but the images are not really similar except that the torch between Baphomet’s horns might suggest the lighted fuse, though the torch was a symbol of intelligence, not a weapon.<sup>9</sup>

We can be sympathetic to, and acknowledge, the anger at the terrorist stereotype, while at the same time being intrigued by a tangled semiotic and imagistic history in which a Christian fear of Muslims within is older than we think: much of the description of the Templar figure comes from the Inquisition’s interrogations to root out crypto-Muslims.

As Ayatullah al-Seistani suggested, the explicit claims by Muslim militants that they want to impose *shari’a* rule in Europe does little to allay such fears. At the same time, with just a little interpretive attention, the image if associated with Baphomet contains a cultural history in which positive mystical meanings were attached, not just demonic ones, that is, in which the perennial tension between what Mawlana Rumi would call the kernel versus the shell of religion is at stake. Similarly the Ottoman imagery signals more politics than religion.

But most important here is the stirring up of violence by the interventions of the Danish imams, a playing with populist fire, that they attempted eventually and ineffectively to call off. They had first appealed to the Danish courts, which had they not understood beforehand (a failing of the immigration process) did not consider these quite mild cartoons any kind of hate speech, or anything not concerned with the appropriate exercise of free speech about the basic protections of the democratic public sphere, something of which the imams as leaders of their community should be defenders, as they claim in their forty-three-page dossier to be.<sup>10</sup>

A second cartoon, also mildly insulting perhaps, though it can be interpreted otherwise, is actually a mild commentary on old iconic traditions. Poul Erik Poulson drew a figure with golden horns which almost touch in a halo. One thinks of the long tradition in Europe of depicting Moses with horns, and of the Islamic epithets in the Qur'an and elsewhere of Alexander the Great as two-horned (*Dhul-Qarnayn*), meaning a militant but righteous king, one who traveled from West to East (the two horns of the world). *Dhul-Qarnayn* is a term of approbation, not of denigration. In the Poulson cartoon, after all, the horns are golden, and in their horizontal orientation clearly not bestial. The figure itself clad in simple tunic and *shalvar* is hardly threatening, in no way the image of a terrorist.

The most interesting cartoon in the context of the newspaper's original request is Arne Sorenson's of a cartoonist (himself), the shades drawn, sweating nervously, as he tries to create a drawing of an Arab man's head. This is the democratic concern that Muslim militants have used violence to back up a claim that their religiosity is different from anyone else's, and should be given special protection from discussion in the public sphere. This is the central concern that the *Jyllands-Posten* cultural editor used for soliciting the cartoons in the first place, and that the courts and Prime Minister of Denmark used to invoke the principle of free speech. The Prime Minister was wrong, as a simple matter of political prudence, to refuse to meet with the Ambassadors of a number of Muslim countries to discuss the matter, particularly since their request referred to a climate of Muslim-baiting and did not mention the cartoons specifically. The imams and leaders of the Muslim community were certainly within their democratic rights and obligations to publicly raise the issue of negative discourse against Muslims in Denmark, and when these initiatives were unsuccessful to "internationalize" and embarrass Denmark in the court of world opinion or through enrolling protest elsewhere in the world.

At the same time, *Jyllands-Posten* was equally within its democratic rights and obligations as part of the fourth estate to object to the chilling effect on free speech of Muslim violence in relation to speech. The case at hand, *Jyllands-Posten* said, was a children's book on the life of Muhammad which could not find artists willing to put themselves at risk by illustrating Muhammad's life. The book has since been published with illustrations by an artist who undertook them *only on condition of being anonymous*. There seems to be nothing objectionable or insulting or demeaning about these illustrations, other than perhaps in the mind of extreme *salafi* Muslims offended by the simple fact that Muhammad was portrayed. It does not help the imams' case, that in the dossier they referred to Christians in Europe as infidels (in the indirect rhetoric of saying that those who call the European Christians infidels would not be wrong, thereby preserving deniability).

A fourth cartoon emphasizes the censor's mark. Rasmus Sand Hoyer's cartoon of an iconographic Muslim figure with a black censorship bar across his eyes, holding a scimitar, standing in front of two veiled women (with Japanese-manga-style round eyes expressing wide-eyed curiosity, peering from their chadors) is both stereotype and valid protest by secularists (Muslim and non-Muslim) both about the struggle of women against their second-class citizenship justified by patriarchal Muslim leaders, and about the insistence that Muhammad's face not be portrayed. Were it penned by a Muslim woman, it would be unexceptionable as part of a feminist assertion of rights under Islam. The sword of course is drawn from Ottoman iconography (used in Turkish and other Eastern tourist industry iconography), so it would not be drawn in quite this way by, say, a twentieth-century Iranian, but the same point is made, for instance, in the graphic novels of Iranian cartoonist Marjane Satrapi (e.g. 2003). The feminist argument using Qur'anic and hadith sources against patriarchal interpretations and forceful insistence has been made by Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi (1991[1987]) among others. The feature of the cartoon, however, in the Danish public sphere context that must not be overlooked is the censor's mark. The challenge that Islam is not able to defend itself in open free speech is not something that many Muslim believers would want to allow to stand. Believers usually assert that in a free debate they can persuade. The central issue is that of free speech (for the women, for the cartoonist). The cartoonist apologizes only that the beard could have been a bit less scraggy.

Jens Julius's cartoon of a turbaned figure in heaven protesting as a line of suicide bomber "martyrs" try to enter, "we have run out of virgins," would not be out of place in Iranian and other Muslim world newspapers. Of course, it is often allowable in humor for insiders to say things that are not allowed to outsiders, but this doesn't really seem to rise to that level. Unfortunately the cartoon is labeled "Muhammad," an unnecessary specification, and the cartoon would be better without it. Merely by itself the mytheme of virgins in heaven for martyrs is a feature of popular Islamic culture, now politicized in an age when suicide bombing has been adopted by the Afghan-Pakistani Taliban and militant Palestinians, much to the distress of many Muslim parents who worry about the pressures on their teenaged sons (and some daughters). In Iran, it is a source of some bitterness by veterans of the Iran-Iraq War who feel abandoned and betrayed by a society that often does not pay attention to their injuries and sacrifices.

Five of the cartoons are actually sympathetic to the imams' complaint, and could be taken to show that *Jyllands-Posten* was not pursuing an anti-Muslim or anti-immigrant campaign. They are, if one likes, self-reflexive, metacommentaries about themselves.

Lars Refin has drawn a resolutely multilingual, multicultural cartoon. It shows an immigrant boy in jeans and trainers who has

written on a blackboard in Persian. In the caption, in English, he explains, “On the blackboard it says in Persian in Arabic letters that *Jyllands-Posten’s* journalists are a bunch of reactionary provocateurs.” The boy is labeled “Muhammad Valbyskolc,” and the FREM on his T-shirt identifies him as Mohammad, a fan of the Valby soccer team. Persian, English, Arabic, and Danish (the label on his shirt) compete for attention. In itself, the cartoon is open to either positive or negative interpretation: the Muslim is one of us, or look out for the Muslim within even our local leisure activities, but in any case is not an explicit attack on the Prophet. Rob Katznelson has drawn a Muslim man in purple knit shirt and turban holding a stick figure drawing of a man in a turban. A red tomato labeled “PR stunt” lands in the man’s turban from above, its line of flight indicated. “Orange in Turban” is a Danish idiom for “stroke of luck”: the reference is to Kåre Bluitgen lucky with his PR stunt.<sup>11</sup>

The third in this set, by Franz Fuchsel, is in period costume, a bit like putting President George Bush in the garb of King George, or in this case, a scene from an opera. Two janissaries, one with scimitar, the other with a bomb, rush on stage, but are dramatically stopped by an upheld hand of the sultan, who is looking at a piece of paper, and says (in both Danish and English): “Relax folks, it’s just a sketch made by a Dane from southwestern Denmark.”

The fourth in this set, by Annette Carlson, is a lineup of seven men in informal modern dress, except that all have turbans, one wears a peace sign. Danes would recognize that one of the men in the lineup is Marxist Kåre Bluitgen, and one is Pia Kjærsgaard, the radical right leader of the Danish People’s Party.<sup>12</sup> A middle-class Dane says, “Hmm, I don’t recognize him,” i.e. these are just ordinary guys – none of these Muslims looks dangerous; or, there is a difference between the Prophet and ordinary Muhammads; or, how can one pick out the Prophet from ordinary people since we don’t know what he looked like; or, Danes cannot tell a Danish provocateur from ordinary Danes because they are ethnocentrically blinkered. Claus Sidel just draws a shepherd or peasant in white T-shirt and *shalvar*, rust-orange turban (a Rajasthani?) with walking stick, leading a mule with vegetables, with hills and a red sun behind.

Then there is Peter Bundgaard’s composition, more logo than cartoon: a green crescent and star, in which a pleasant face, turbaned and bearded, is sketched with a few pen strokes. It could be a commercial logo for a Muslim bakery.

The twelfth image, by Erik Abild Sorenson, is childishy offensive: it is a simple line drawing repeated five times of a head in profile in which the eye is a six-pointed star, the mouth a crescent, and comes with the taunt “Prophet! daft and dumb, keeping woman under thumb.”<sup>13</sup>

No wonder the imams decided they needed to include other images to bolster their complaints. They had a valid cause, particularly when the political authorities refused to talk. But they toyed with fire, and it got out of hand. And that, as Ayatullah al-Seistani indicated, is

an issue of the construction of a public sphere, whether secular or Islamic.

## II

### 2.0. IRAN MOVES TO THE CENTER

Iran only enters the stage in early February 2006, recalling its Ambassador to Denmark, banning Danish journalists (on February 5), stopping all trade with Denmark, and announcing a counter cartoon contest about the Holocaust (on the 6th), the *Rahbar* charging the Western press with hypocrisy, but also using tear gas to disperse a demonstration in front of the Danish embassy (on the 7th). Iranians in Denmark responded by planning a protest against the attacks on European embassies in the Arab world; and moderate Danish Muslims begin to plan a pro-Denmark campaign for the Arab world.

There is of course the hypothesis floated by some at the time that the Iranian entry into the cartoon campaign had a deliberate timing. Denmark was to take a rotating position in the UN Security Council in 2006 and was scheduled to take the presidency of the Security Council in June. On the agenda was the censuring of Iran over its partially secret nuclear programs. On February 2, President Ahmadinejad called for cutting contracts with Denmark, on February 5 he recalled Iran's Ambassador, and, mocking the earlier US Congress resolution to rename French Fries "Freedom Fries," decided Danish pastries should henceforth be called "Muhammadan pastries." On February 6 the *Rahbar*, Khamene'i, called the cartoons a "Zionist conspiracy" to shift attention from Hamas's electoral victory; and there was a flag-burning demonstration at the Danish embassy in Tehran. The hypothesis is that Iran, supported by radical Islamicists elsewhere, was trying to capitalize on the cartoons to send a warning that it could create trouble inside Western countries and across the Muslim world. It was a threat should the Security Council impose sanctions on Iran for refusing to stop its secretive nuclear energy and possibly nuclear weapons program. It was not a serious physical threat like the Iranian funding and supply of surrogate allies in Iraq, Lebanon, or Palestine, only a cartoon threat. Still it had a serious cultural politics edge. It was part of a longer-term effort to carve out a voice and extend its cultural reach. Most interesting in this latter politics is the effort to enroll cartoonists around the world. At issue is as much the global as the domestic public sphere.

Iran moves then to the center of a network of opportunities, not as a prime mover, but as a skillful player using the opportunities presented, one, however, that is also contested internally in Iran.

#### 2.1. The Iranian Theater: Sponsoring Cartoons, Politics of Cultural Irony, Playing with the *petit à*

Really good political cartoons are more than single-eyed partisan attacks: they exploit the *petit à*, the parallax gap, the Gestalt switching of visual puns such as the famous rabbit-duck illusion. In so doing,

they also expose surplus enjoyment, the excess over rational prudence that both compels obsessive (often self-destructive) repetition, and is a surplus that can be manipulated, put to political use for good (analytic ends), and for ill (demagogic stirring up, or justifying, crowd behavior), often through repetition in slightly variant viral forms. Humor, as Freud pointed out, can have an aggressive structure whereby the teller of a joke enrolls a listener by assuming a commonality of presuppositions and creating an in-group that excludes the butt of the joke (Freud 1955[1905]; Flieger 1991). Such aggression can be undone when the presuppositions are exposed, are contested, or are turned against the speaker.

Although cartoons often trade on single-mindedness – Charlie Brown never learns that Lucy will snatch the ball away just before he kicks it even though she promises not to do it again, repeatedly; cartoon characters are often defined by single passions, playing out to exhaustion or self-destruction. The analytic work of cartoons places tensions or conflicts into visual formats, often using the techniques of dreamwork: condensation, displacement, puns, rebus, allegory. They can be diffractive, rather than merely stereotypic, diffracting reality (mirroring it but at an angle), revealing neuroses, obsessions, displacements, secondary rationalizations. Often, they can attract at least a wry smile of acknowledgement on the part of the target. They are in that sense binocular, juxtaposing opposing perspectives in ways that can be acknowledged by both. They can help to release anger rather than stoking it, reminding people of other perspectives, reminding them to lighten up, to take their obsessions with a grain of salt, to return to negotiation with others rather than turning ever more inward in solipsistic hurt. Such reflexive forms of intellectual work are accomplished with great sophistication within cultures, but become troubling across cultural misunderstandings.

It is precisely to such crossings of cultural boundaries that the cartoons boomeranging around the global circuitry speak. If they are deployed merely as a game of dozens – insult contests – they primarily build up in-group versus out-group walls. But if their satire is deployed more subtly they can perform upsets of relations of power, reframing an action in ways that embarrass and make an actor change, making what seems ordinary and natural no longer a matter of course, or at least making the more powerful for a moment reflect upon how those relations of power, injustice, and so on are felt or viewed by others, how they are not just rewards of playing the game well. Minorities and people living under repressive regimes often develop such humor in ways that position themselves as the butt of the joke, but subtly also try to address the holders of power to gain recognition. Naji al-Ali's widely disseminated little Hanzala is such a figure, a little boy seen from behind, almost always with hands clasped behind his back, in a pose of just watching, a figure of conscience. Hanzala means "bitterness" and Naji al-Ali, a Palestinian from Galilee who grew up in a refugee camp in Lebanon,

said the little boy was himself as a child expelled from Palestine, and that it functioned as his conscience, preventing his soul from making mistakes, and as a bold witness to history. It is all that, but as a figure it is mainly an icon of the self-reflective gaze, a figure of conscience. The gesture of the hands behind the back is universal, and hence provides a kind of uncanny doubleness of the uncomfortable gaze, of being watched, as actions of occupation, trauma, injustice, inequality unfold, eliciting the interrogatory, “Just what is going on here!” The same would be the case were the little figure deployed watching the cartoon contest. Although one never sees the face, it expresses what Levinas calls the demand of the other, the call of the face of the other, an ethical response, to which one may not be able to respond right now, but whose call will not go away (e.g. 1999[1995]; see also Llewelyn 1995, 2002; Donoghue 1996; Eaglestone 1997; Dudiak 2001).

## 2.2. The Azeri Cartoons

In May 2006, before the Danish cartoon controversy had spent itself, indeed midway toward the staging of the Holocaust cartoon contest, a cartoon sequence appeared in a leading Tehran newspaper igniting riots and police repression in Tabriz and other cities of Iranian Azerbaijan.

It is hard to understand what the cartoonist, Mana Neyestani, was thinking of when he drew a series of nine cartoons portraying Turkish speakers as cockroaches. One can only guess that, despite apparently being a Turk from Azerbaijan himself, he made a gross symbolic error<sup>14</sup> in trying to portray a government charge that the United States was stirring up ethnic conflict within Iran to destabilize the Iranian government. This would be the charge in *Rahbar* Ayatullah Khamene'i's public speech in the aftermath. The first panel, the only cartoon described in the international press and online reports, is of a girl saying “cockroach” in different ways in Persian to an uncomprehending cockroach, and the latter replies, “What?” in Turkish but written in English lettering, which makes it seem like a mindless ethnic joke.

The anthropologist Fereydoun Safizadeh (2006), who happened to be in the area at the time, provides a richer account both of the content of the drawings and accompanying text, and the dynamics of the riots. The title of the cartoon series is, “What should we do that the cockroaches don't turn us into cockroaches.” The text begins with a story about a new *version* (using the English word “version” transliterated into Persian script) of cockroach that has arrived in Iran (from the United States?), and that one should deal with it at first by dialogue, and only if that does not work due to the incomprehension across linguistic grammars (the coded language of propaganda, of American cultural warfare using slogans of fostering pro-democracy movements, as had been done in Eastern Europe, but in fact meaning destabilization by stirring ethnic unrest), only then with violence.

It is no surprise that the Turks from Azerbaijan found this insulting, targeted at them, overdetermining any effort to read it as about American foreign policy, because it trades upon a long history of ethnic jokes that Turks are slow, speak Persian with an accent, and upon the ever encroaching isogloss of Turkish speakers moving eastward and up the class hierarchy from the bazaar and servant classes of Tehran. But the cockroach theme is far more disturbing, for anyone familiar with Nazi and other racist imagery. And the cartoons give no relief from this darker set of meanings. Safizadeh notes that while the first cartoon shows the little girl talking to a cockroach seated at a miniature chair and desk, the following ones show cockroaches coming from toilets and eating human waste.

Recuperation by the state was slow but harsh. As described in greater detail by Safizadeh, students photocopied the images, and passed word around by text messaging and cell phone. Demands were made for an apology from the newspaper, *Iran*, an official organ of the government. When this demand was rejected, demonstrations moved out from the bazaar and university. The Governor-General refused to meet with the demonstrators, who proceeded to break shop windows and burn police vehicles and banks. In response, the government shut down cell phone service, and riot police and “brown shirt” paramilitary were flown in. In Urmieh, the television station was set on fire. Riots were suppressed in Urmieh, Miyandoab, Marand, Ahar, Ardabil, Miyaneh, and Zanjan. Officially only one person in Tabriz was wounded and fifty-four arrested, but the Military Governor for Azerbaijan, General Hasan Karami, reported four killed in the town of Naqaeh (150 km southeast of Tabriz), and Baku-based opposition groups claimed scores were wounded in many towns in Iranian Azerbaijan, and particularly in the town of Fasandeh. Safizadeh says eventually the head of the East Azerbaijan Judiciary, Hojjatollah Najaf Aghazadeh, announced that in East Azerbaijan alone, 330 persons had been arrested. There were claims that instigators included Baha’is, communists (Tudeh), and even two persons with ties to Israel.

In Tehran, the Prosecutor General, Saeed Mortazavi, had the cartoonist and the paper’s editor, Mehrdad Qassemfah, incarcerated in the notorious Evin Prison. More importantly, on May 25 President Ahmadinejad in a televised address charged that the unrest was part of a foreign plot to disrupt Tehran’s efforts to acquire peaceful nuclear technology. And on May 28 (Friday) the Leader (*Rahbar*) Ali Khamene’i, also an Azeri (although he grew up in Mashad), in an address to Parliament, suggested a connection to President George W. Bush’s government efforts get appropriations for \$75 million to promote democracy in Iran, and to rumors that US covert operations were attempting to stir unrest among ethnic minorities around the peripheries of Iran.<sup>15</sup> This was part of Tehran’s concerns about the independent state of Azerbaijan’s, to the north of Iranian Azerbaijan, tightening ties with the US and Israel, including the opening of an Israeli embassy in Baku, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, and

two US-funded radar stations in Azerbaijan with the capability of eavesdropping on fixed landline and mobile communications in Iran. News reporting of what had happened was blocked by shutting local newspapers and arresting journalists, and in the national news media there was a brief campaign of praise for Azerbaijani patriotism (a television address by Parliament Speaker Haddad-Adel from an Azerbaijani mosque in Tehran; also part of Khamene'i's speech on May 28).

### 2.3. Holocaust Cartoon Contest

If the Azeri cartoon and riot social drama was rapidly put to use by the national state narrative in its defensive-aggressive posture toward the United States and Western secularism, the Holocaust cartoon contest sponsored by *Hamshari* newspaper and the Iran Cartoon House was from the beginning an effort to speak globally across cultural frontiers. There were also domestic reverberations. The Exhibition of Holocaust Cartoons opened in September 2006, ostensibly on the theme of the limits of expression in the West. On September 13, 2006, the reformist newspaper *Sharh* was closed down by the Iranian government due to a cartoon of President Ahmadinejad as a donkey. The donkey is shown on an otherwise empty chessboard. The light around its head alludes to Ahmadinejad's comment that when he spoke to the UN he felt the divine light shining on him.<sup>16</sup> An open letter from the Jewish community protesting the cartoon contest and the suggestions by President Ahmadinejad that the Holocaust might not have happened or been as bad as claimed was responded to by the shutting of a Jewish community magazine and removal and replacement of its local leadership.

Both the rhetoric and the organization of the cartoon contest, partly ironic political gesture (we can play your game too), leveraged the networking of global cartoonists. The front page of the archive of the Iran Cartoon gallery of 282 cartoons contains a disclaimer by four of its foreign contributors, and this again is leveraged by the Iran Cartoon House curator, Massoud Shojai Tabatabai.<sup>17</sup> The disclaimer of Firuz Kutal (Norway), Ben Heine (Belgium), Marcin Bondarowicz (Poland), and David Baldinger (US) says, "We are not anti-Semitic and do not agree with the way this contest is being used and manipulated by the Iranian government as a revisionist action which purpose is to incite Israel and the U.S." They dissociate themselves from President Ahmadinejad's suggestions that the Holocaust did not happen or was not so extensive: "The Iranian government states 'the Holocaust on Jews never existed.' For us this is a historical fact and we want to make clear that we are against all kinds of revisionism, anti-Semitism, racism, or xenophobia. We do not at all deny that millions of Jews were horribly murdered by the Nazis." They assert that their contributions were for the original contest titled "What is the Limit of Western Freedom of Expression?", that they are antiwar proponents, and support the Palestinians and Lebanese "in the war

that Tsahal [the Hebrew acronym for the Israeli Defense Forces] wages on them.”

Yet Ben Heine contributed a cartoon of the gates of Auschwitz as a Hassidic Jew with side curls, one ending in a Star of David, the other in a swastika, and the infamous sign above now reading “Welcome Home.” Another of his cartoons, less anti-Semitic-baiting, is of eyes peering through a *kifayya* whose normal black cross hatchings are made up of tanks and their canon. If one tracks the home page of Heine (who turns out to be a prolific twenty-three year old), one gets a much wider range of images. This, of course, is true in general. The images selected for the Iran Cartoon House are not necessarily representative of the wider work of the cartoonists, although many are political activists taking the side of the Palestinians in their struggles with Israel. The prolific Brazilian cartoonist, Carlos Latuff, who is part of the network (each of these cartoonists provides links to others), and who provides some ten cartoons for the Iran Cartoon House site, has on his own website a large portfolio of some 240 cartoons about the Palestinian conflict alone protesting the heavy-handed tactics of the Israelis, and particularly devilish images of Ariel Sharon, yet also images of an Arab woman comforting a Jewish child, and other images protesting the killing of Jews, Israelis, Arabs, and Palestinians.

One gets, in other words, a much different impression of the engagement of cartoonists as political commentators and actors by exploring their work and networks than one does by visiting the Iran Cartoon website gallery, which is heavily repetitive of a few formulas and stereotypes.

Still, at least one foreign cartoonist, Jorgen Bitsc (Denmark), understood perfectly well the nature of the contest, unlike the disingenuous protests of the above four. It is to the Iran Cartoon House’s credit that it posted the cartoon, called “Where is the real holocaust?” in three panels, labeled yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Figures are provided: six million in the concentration camps yesterday, thirteen million children starving to death today mainly in Africa, and six million tomorrow from environmental pollution. The first panel shows a skeletal white figure with a Star of David and the taunting Auschwitz entry banner, *Arbeit Macht Frei*. The second panel is of an equally skeletal black child with an airplane in the background dropping bombs. The third is of environmental pollution causing death.

A few other cartoonists contributed generic cartoons which do not fit the agenda: Omar Turcios (Colombia) has a bird of peace shitting a skull into a nest of bombs, and two fat men with guns coming out of their eyes, ears, and mouth shaking hands. Similarly Oguz Gural (Turkey) contributes a cartoon of a fat man with a squashed head being interviewed or interrogated. The balloon above his head shows a vice squeezing a box. Alessandro Gatto (Italy) contributes a cartoon of a hand against a white sheet tacked to a black background, and below a lighted pack of explosives, plus two very mild protest cartoons

about Palestine. Jitet Koestana (Indonesia) draws a monument to the dove of peace whose base is being chipped away by a soldier (could be anywhere), and, only slightly less generic, a bedraggled dove of peace with an olive branch is ensnared in the tattered stripes of the American flag. Jihad Awrtani (Jordan) draws a man with a club marked liberty of hate and a shield marked liberty of expression (though in another cartoon he pictures the Palestinian crucified on a cross labeled Holocaust). Ikhsan Dwiono (Indonesia) draws a bent old figure with a cane who sticks his or her finger into a soldier's gun as four figures cower in a rundown corner by a turned over garbage can and a piece of wood nailed to the wall (could be East Timor, or Aceh before the tsunami, or anywhere else).

The leveraging by the Iran Cartoon House is inadvertently made clear by curator Massoud Shojai Tabatabai in his attempts to associate himself and Iran Cartoon House with the statement of the four cartoonists. Shojai Tabatabai underscores that “the bigger holocausts are happening in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan,” and the transitivity theme that Palestinians are suffering for what Europeans did in Europe (see below). The entanglements of the US, Britain, and Israel as military aggressors in Iraq and Palestine are a prominent theme in the cartoons on the site, but primarily via Israel, only a few via Iraq, and none via Afghanistan. These are braided together with the primary repetitive theme that there is a direct transitivity between what Nazis did to European Jews and what those same Jews are doing to Palestinians (as if Jews from Arab lands were not involved).

It is striking how repetitively Jews or Israelis are imaged as Hassids with side curls. Some of these images come directly from the Nazi image-repertoire. Among the most egregious perhaps is the American Forrid's “Origin of the Holocaust” which depicts a goat-devil holding a trident and Israeli flag standing on a prostrate Arab on a map of Palestine, and paying money to Uncle Sam, asking “How Low Cost?” All is framed through a north flying, old (Messerschmitt? F16?) fighter plane's three-part nose window, the left one marked with a W(est), and the right with an E/Arab flag. Equally derivative from the Nazi portfolio are Sadic Pala's (India) two cartoons of a blood-sucking, vampire-fanged Hassid with side curls drinking a bag of blood marked “Palestinian Blood ABrh+,” and of a Hassid-bat with a Star of David and vampire fangs hanging upside down over the Dome of the Rock. Hossein Taheri (Iran) shows a long-bearded Jew with side curls pouring beakers of Caustic and Hollow into a bubbling blood soup with skull and bones, labeled “Holocaust.” Amir Vahedi (Iran) pictures an evil Hassid pouring pails of Palestinian blood onto a fire of Stars of David lit by a swastika-emblazoned box of matches. Behnam Bahrami (Iran) pictures a devil Jew (with red eyes), a Star of David on his hat, blood dripping from fang-like teeth, and a long Pinocchio nose skewering a dove of peace while muttering “Holocaust.” Om Prakash Sharma (India) shows us a rabid dog head

with blue Star of David eye and blood-dripping mouth as hands of victims are raised between the teeth. Nedal Ali Deep (Syria) also uses a rabid dog with a Hassidic hat and Star of David on a leash held by Uncle Sam, having taken a bite out of a drumstick labeled “Palestine” held out to the dog by a world with its other hand over its eyes (see no evil). Djoko Susilo (Indonesia) generalizes: a Star of David slices into a crescent causing bleeding.

The identification of Israel and the Nazis is constant. Choukri Bellahadi (Algeria) simply peels an Israeli flag back to reveal a Nazi banner, and, in case you cannot read images, labels it “Identity.” Causality, identity, and illegitimate use of the Holocaust as justification for the misdeeds of Israel today are mixed together. Palestine as Auschwitz is a frequent theme, and one of its variants won the contest’s first prize: Abdellah Derkaoui (Morocco) shows concrete slabs of the separation wall being put in place, and on them a mural of Auschwitz. The causal transitivity theme is also constant. Shiva Sahamifard (Iran) draws a Nazi sword piercing a tall gaunt man, wearing a wide-brimmed hat, with beard and side curls as a Palestinian family cowers below. Yasin Al-Khalil (Syria) shows a Nazi bashing a Jew over the head with a missile and the Jew in turn bashing an Arab over the head with a missile. He also portrays a Hassidic Jew holding a large knife with a trail of skulls and bones behind him to a mosque, looking in the mirror and seeing a Nazi soldier. Sidnei Marques’s (Brazil) version is a Hitler figure shooting a Hassid through the head, his gun coming out the other side of the Hassid’s head to fire at a Palestinian in white turban and shirt holding his hands up. Galym Boranbayev (Kazakhstan) shows us a hanged Jew with two hanged Arabs in his side curls; they wear Arab *kifayyas*, but otherwise are dressed in Asian tunic and *pyjamas* or *shalwar*. Another of his cartoons shows a pile of bodies producing a flood of blood on which a Hassid floats away in a newspaper boat in the moonlight. Causal transitivity morphs into a related but different charge: lies and false justifications for Israeli misdeeds today because the Holocaust happened seventy years ago, or in visual language: using the Holocaust as a gun. Mohammad Hossein Niroumand (Iran) portrays Israel as a Pinocchio with a gun through his comic-strip body coming out as an elongated nose. More blackly, Naser Al-Jaferi (Jordan) gives three related images: a figure with an atomic scarf holding up a sign “Holocaust Victims” while standing on a swastika that crushes an Arab; a swastika-shaped hole in the ground covered by barbed-wire mesh, with a small figure holding a Palestinian flag; a swastika-handled knife along the blood-dripping cutting edge of which an Arab refugee leads a camel carrying a palm tree.

Even more problematic than simply equating Israeli actions with Nazi ones is the full assertion of equivalence between the Nazi’s systematic extermination policies and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (no mention, of course, of the many other genocides and

ethnic cleansings in the world). Ismail Effat (Egypt) pictures Hitler goose-stepping after a Star of David puffing “Holocaust, 2nd time.” Similarly Soheil Setayash (Iran) draws two identical volumes, one labeled “Holocaust Story I, writer Hitler,” the other “Holocaust Story II, writer Sharon.” And Sadic Pala turns the two volumes, Holocaust 1 and 2, sideways and has an Israeli stand on them so he can shoot over a wall at an Arab.

How exactly these images contribute to a discussion of the ostensible theme of the contest, “What is the Limit of Western Freedom of Expression?” – the theme according to the four protesting foreign cartoonists, whose own cartoons also do not seem much related to this theme – is perhaps explained by curator Massoud Shojai Tabatabai. He says his instructions for the contest included two further themes: first, the holocaust is past history and the “bigger holocaust” is happening now in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan; and second, the transitivity theme, “why suppressed and suffer[ing] people of Palestine living hundreds of kilometers away from Poland and Germany should pay the price for holocaust?” (He himself contributes a literal cartoon for this: in a top panel a man asks why should the Palestinians pay for the Holocaust story; the bottom panel has the man bound and gagged with a Star of David bandana.) On the question of sponsorship, Tabatabai insists that there is no connection to the government, but that “we are working for [the] municipality of Tehran,” and “the *Hamshari* newspaper is working for [the] municipality too.” Tabatabai’s own contributed cartoons include several of the Holocaust as gun or club: an Israeli tank commander having fired a machine gun says “Holocaust” (pow!), another has the tank commander saying “We are the Victims of the Holocaust,” a third has a gas-masked soldier holding a gun out of which comes a flag saying “Holocaust” (bang!), and another has a soldier holding a nightstick (club) marked “Holocaust.”

Shojai Tabatabai claims not to be anti-Semitic (he has two Iranian Jewish friends, he says). But despite the official Iranian position to distinguish between Jews and Zionists, another constant blurring is the identification of Jews, Israel, and Zionism. Like Shojai Tabatabai, the official position is to claim (correctly) the largest remaining Jewish community still living in the Middle East outside Israel. It is a community that proudly asserts its origins to precede the coming of Islam to Iran. The Iranian government persuaded some orthodox American Jews, who oppose the establishment and continuance of the state of Israel, to come to the Holocaust conference in Tehran.<sup>18</sup> In Alaa Rostam’s (Syria) cartoon of a man writing “No Holocaust” at his desk while a Jew with side curls and gun paints a blood-red bull’s-eye on his back illustrates well the slippages and ambiguities: Hassid or Israeli? Denial of past holocaust or protest against current ethnic cleansing (and why only this ethnic cleansing)? Jew objecting to denial of Holocaust or charge that the Jews are preparing a holocaust for others?

Of the very few cartoons that break out of the generic repetitions, one is by Neda Tanhai Moghadam (Iran), who draws in Sesame Street style six little girls wearing suicide belts, in front of two tents, expressing fear and horror as they look at toys (rejecting the toys? Suicide belts have become their toys?). (She also has a cartoon of a blindfolded figure in brown cassock [the Christian West?] carrying scales of justice but trailing behind are squashed Arabs on which he has stepped, handing a present to a white *jelabiyya*-garbed Israeli with a Star of David on his chest.) More targeted is the cartoon by Benji Naji (Morocco) showing an Arab driver of a cement mixer churning out people as poured cement for the separation wall. This is both literally and metaphorically disturbing: the Palestinians who are forced by economic need to do what is against their own interests, but maybe also metaphorically for the Arab governments who have helped keep the Palestinians in their purgatory. He also has a cartoon of the US in cowboy gear, getting its hooves (the devil?) reshod in a Western blacksmith's shop, and a cartoon of a US soldier in Iraq carrying scalps in his belt. Raed Khalil (Syria), given his other cartoons, probably does not mean this cartoon so ambiguously, but he has two hands held up in supplication handcuffed in the Os of Holocaust with the UN insignia behind. No doubt he means to say that the Holocaust is doing the handcuffing, but just as easily one could read the image as UNWRA doing the handcuffing, given all the restrictions they placed on refugee camps to try to prevent them from turning into the urban permanent neighborhoods they have become. And there is a cartoon of the roads for Israelis only in the West Bank in the shape of a Star of David.

At issue in these fine points of general blurring, and clarification when challenged (of independence from government propaganda, of Jew and Zionist), is precisely the play of *jouissance*, that excess of often transgressive pleasure, a play with fire, a *fort-da* mechanism of control over anxiety, a deep play with anger that oscillates between justified anger and excessive rage, controlled and out-of-control.

#### 2.4 *Jouissance*, Jew-i-essence in Tehran

If Parisian intellectuals are amused by the French pun of *jouissance* and *jeu-i-sense*, the (excessive, surplus) play with sense, in transnational and transreligious circuits one might consider (*à la* Joyce's Jew-Greek) a cross-linguistic pun involved in the rhetoric of contemporary political Islam, the Jewish essence within Islam and Christianity, their Jewyness or Jewiessence. Fear of Judaicizing tendencies within Christianity, of course, was the greatest fear of the Inquisition, and it has some parallels in neurotic Muslim obsessions, beginning with the claims that the Jewish Bible has been altered by the Jews, and that Jewish hermeneutics is too clever by half, liable to undermine faith and belief. A cartoon by Majid Salehi shows the world sitting on a stool bewildered by the cat's cradle in its hands that has turned into a Star of David, as a Jew with long

side curls and a devil's tail, holding an eight-canded menorah, runs off celebrating.

This charge against Jewish hermeneutics is identical to the defensiveness against Islamic *tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur'an). Hence in the *howzeh*, or *madrassah* system (training jurists and preachers), *tafsir* is not a formal course, since it always plays with the possible hubris and heresy of claiming to know what God wants or intends. Sufism or gnosticism (*'irfan*), at best, as with Ayatullah Khomeini, is practiced only by the elite who know enough to protect themselves from going astray. There is an old tradition of concern about the *Isra'iliyyat* in the Qur'an and the *hadith*, as not merely the traditions, learning, and wisdom brought by the earliest Jewish converts to Islam, but the insinuation of Judaicizing. (For a positive account of the seamless intertwining of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic lore and interpretation about the mount of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, see Kenan Makia's *The Rock*, 2001)

In the Holocaust cartoon contest, and the Holocaust conference that followed, given high-profile media status in the transnational circuitry by President Ahmadinejad, the intention was both serious and cartoonish. The serious side was to make visible to Westerners the limits of their self-proclaimed defense of freedom of speech. (At issue is not that Iran does or does not have freedom of speech, but the charge that the West's claims are hypocritical and untrue.) The cartoonish side was to mimic and mock Western behavior: if Danish cartoonists can play freely, so can we. If President Bush wants to disrupt internal affairs in Iran, we can do so in the West too. Few Iranians went to the Holocaust cartoon contest display. There was deafening silence in the West to the cartoon contest and the conference. The primary effect was hardening of negative opinions about Ahmadinejad both within and outside Iran. The political theatrics of the Ahmadinejad leadership were viewed in both settings as primarily providing fodder for daily speculation about the factional struggles within the Iranian government.

### III

#### 3.0. CONCLUSIONS: READING HANNAH ARENDT IN TEHRAN

Six months after the furor of February 2006, the burning of embassies, the boycotts of Danish dairy and other products, and, according to Lars Andersen, the greatest foreign policy crisis in Denmark's history since the Second World War, things returned more or less to normal in the state of Denmark. There was wide parliamentary support for the continuation of the Arab Initiative that had seemed threatened. The Danish–Egyptian Dialogue Institute was still active. A cultural festival, Images of the Middle East, had been a great success. Arla products (the major Danish dairy producer) were back on the shelves in supermarkets in the Gulf and elsewhere (Andersen 2007: 21).

Still, as Andersen warns,

Like the Rushdie affair, [the cartoon affair] will likely never be subject to complete closure, although it will be overshadowed by other discourses, only to reappear suddenly in the headlines . . . This is something Danes will just have to live with. As such, the image of Denmark in the Middle East has forever been altered by the Muhammad cartoon controversy. (ibid.: 21)

This alteration is not all bad: awareness has been increased among Danes “that Danish Muslims constitute a much more heterogeneous group than, and are in no way identical with, a small group of imams who . . . almost managed to achieve a monopoly on representing Danish Muslim immigrants” (ibid.).

Not quite so quick in Iran or the Middle East. In Tehran at Noruz (March 21) 2007, amidst the New Years banners, one could still see billboards around town with the caption, “Year of Muhammad,” referring to the cartoon wars. Iranian Jews, for instance, remained a pawn in a game that they had no active relation to. Almost two years earlier, in June 2005, at the Yusefabad Synagogue in Tehran, a student from the School of International Relations of Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, part of an official educational visit, took out his *tasbeih* (worry beads) as the ordinary afternoon religious services began. He anxiously began to recite the name of Allah over and over, as if imitating a sixteenth-century Christian holding his cross in front of him as protection against the heathens. In February 2007, in response to an open letter to President Ahmadinejad published in the *New York Times* and on the web, written by members of the Jewish Central Council of Tehran, protesting the President’s suggestions about the Holocaust, the leadership of the Council was reprimanded, dismissed, and replaced with more compliant people. Shortly thereafter, to counter the damage from the cartoon wars, an official visit was arranged to Jewish sites for the foreign diplomatic corps including meetings with the new Council members. The old Council members were advised to stay at home. Ambassadors were supposed to gain an appreciative view of the largest remaining Jewish community tolerated in the Muslim world, filled with individuals who refuse to abandon their homeland of attachment back to pre-Islamic times. Some weeks later, the former President of the Council gave a talk to the community on Hannah Arendt, his favorite philosopher. It was a thorough and well-informed account of her life and her philosophy. Only in the question and answer period was the lesson drawn from her: that when one is maligned, one must speak back, not just keep one’s head down and allow the slurs and injustices to go unchallenged. Arendt is a philosopher of the “human condition in its plurality” (Arendt 1958). It is the plurality that is at issue again today in Iran, in the Islamic world generally, but also in Europe and the US, and in the transnational public sphere.

Would that all wars were cartoon wars. Would that sensitivities could be easily relieved with humor, but humor too is infected by the relations of trust, understanding, and protection of relatively safe spaces for the humor to work.

I hope to have shown, or at least provided some access to, the layered cultural politics that respects the struggles in Iran as well as Denmark, as well as in nonunitary global public spheres. While diplomatic and political signals, as well as increasingly signals within local cultural arenas, are responded to transnationally, they often respond to multiple games simultaneously. Players may therefore modulate responses asymmetrically using moves in one game as tokens in another. Iran had little to do with the original Danish cartoon controversy, and was not even on the itinerary of the Danish imams in November and December 2005 to rouse international support in the Middle East. Iran only joined the controversy in February 2006, over four months after the controversy began.

Once President Ahmadinejad had entered the fray, however, Iran took on a central role thanks to its other high-profile international conflicts. Governments in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt fighting their own struggles against religious fundamentalism opportunistically aligned themselves with the fundamentalist complaints about the cartoons to relieve pressure on themselves. Syria even allowed the Danish embassy to be burned in sharp contrast to Iran, which allowed demonstrations and flag burning but dispersed demonstrators with tear gas before they could get out of hand. Meanwhile although the United States and United Kingdom were centers of attention in three primary conflicts in the Middle East (Iraq, Afghanistan, and with Iran over its nuclear programs), they carefully stayed out of the cartoon controversy. While major European papers republished the Danish cartoons in defense of the freedom of speech principle (for which a number of editors were censured), US and UK papers, although fully reporting the cartoon wars, refused to republish the cartoons themselves in prudent defense of the civility of the public sphere and not stirring further troubled waters. Lars Andersen notes (2007) that al-Qaida, like Iran, was slow to support the cartoon wars on the grounds that the focus of Islamicist militancy should be Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Chechnya, and the Sudan, not a lack of Western respect for the Prophet. Andersen sees the cartoon controversy as a less risky proxy battle on the grounds of small or peripheral countries.

Second, I have tried to provide access to parts of the cultural media histories of cartooning in Iran and the Middle East as well as Europe. The cartooning (and satirical) traditions in all these places are venerable, and on and off have played powerful political roles (see Fischer and Abedi 1990). The Tehran newspaper cartoon series that provoked demonstrations in Iranian Azerbaijan, and the Tehran municipal and Iranian state promotion of the Holocaust cartoon contest provide two examples of political cartoons and their roles

and effects. In both these government-aligned cases, the trouble stirred up subsequently had to be managed with damage control measures. In the Azerbaijan example the symbolism of the cartoon target (the US) misfired because of local overdetermination of the symbolic vehicles (a history of slurs against Turkish speakers). In the Holocaust example Iran found its intelligentsia under pressure from negative world opinion, and a number of them signed petitions dissociating themselves and criticizing the President.

The expanding role of the internet provided access to interested parties, even when direct access was limited, creating a backstage and front stage differentiated public sphere. Americans who could not find the allegedly offensive images in their newspapers (US newspapers chose not to print the cartoons, only to report the controversy) could find them, if they wished, on the web. Similarly the web provides access to vet the claims of participants in the Holocaust cartoon contest by looking up their other portfolios and exploring their citations, copying of visual formulas, and networks. Cartoonists who did not join the Iranian regime's propaganda exercise produced a series of cartoon criticisms (Mosher 2006).<sup>19</sup>

Cultural media histories must include not only the transitivity of opportunistic use of symbolic resources in circuits connecting quite different local conflicts (as in the Rushdie affair), but also the gradual maturing of social technologies of democratization that modulate and rechannel destructive protest. Of particular interest is the formation of moderate Muslim networks in Denmark, not simply to defend the liberal state, but to assert the plurality of opinion among Muslims, parallel to the satire about the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons in Danish opposition papers, such as the *Weekend Avisen*. Ayatullah al-Seistani's intervention is another such example. Although deliberately ambiguous, it too highlighted principled differences among Muslims, in a way that is not merely sectarian, and that provided resources for Muslims to curtail self-defeating tactics.

Finally, I have tried to draw attention to the dynamics of emotional excess (*jouissance, petit à*) of cultural politics, and to the connected philosophical deep play of the aesthetic realm, where "aesthetic is understood as not just beauty, but as an interactive space between the practical and ethical, between the political economic and expressive art, and between individual self-fashioning on the one hand, and changing symbolic and social orders on the other.

## NOTES

1. *Takfiri* is the term used for extremist Wahhabis and *salafis*. The comments attributed to al-Seistani were widely reported as condemning both the Danish cartoons and the *takfiri* militants whose un-Islamic acts are used to justify attacks on Islam. A search for al-Seistani's actual words yields mainly a document, unsigned and without his seal, on a website in Qum (not Najaf). (Fatwas are usually handwritten, signed, and sealed). This is a

common and old tactic by politically savvy Ayatullahs to take public positions that are deniable should they not find support or require later modification. Mirza Shirazi's famous fatwa in 1891 that blocked the tobacco concession the shah was giving to a British company is an exemplar: it has never been determined if he actually issued it or it was issued in his name by associates. In Shirazi's case, the ambiguity was aided by being a telegraph (no handwritten signature or seal). In principle Shirazi could wait to see if the call was taken up in which case he could claim credit; if the call had fallen flat, he could have denied it was actually his. In the current al-Seistani case, the text although somewhat convoluted and equivocal strongly condemns both the Danish imams and the Danish newspaper. It is crafted so it can be read in many ways.

A fuller translation of the relevant Arabic text is as follows. Persian, English, and French versions are also posted on al-Seistani's website, and each language and presumed audience has different omissions and stress from the Arabic text.

However, a misled and foul group, which has misinterpreted and manipulated the values of the revered religion and its blessed contents, has altered [Islam's] principles . . . (and spread) corruption and injustice over this earth. (This group) has adopted a *takfiri* path, which allowed for the killing of the respected soul, which God has forbidden to murder, unless justly. This has reflected a dark image of the religion of justice, love, and brotherhood. The opponents (of Islam) used this dangerous opening to spread their venom and revive their hatreds using new ways and methods. And the most recent was the desperate attempt of a Danish newspaper and was repeated by a Norwegian one, which attempted to defame the reputation of the Prophet and his refined divine status. However, it is with no doubt, an unsuccessful attempt, a failed discourse, and a superficial reading, which will, God willing, not find attentive ears. As we denounce and condemn this terrible attempt, we call upon the free people of this world and the Islamic ummah, with its scientists, thinkers, and intellectuals, to stand in the face of these nonwholesome practices, which undermine the truthful values and high principles. Dated 1 Moharram 1427.

(Thanks to Omar Al-Dewachi, Orkideh Behrouzan, and Mehdi Abedi for help with the translation.) Available at <http://www.sistani.org/local.php?modules=extra&eid=2&sid=63> (accessed 08/20/2008).

2. I take the phrase "frenzy of position taking" from the work on religion and telemedia by Jacques Derrida (2001).

3. On the Salman Rushdie affair, which provides a parallel analysis for an earlier media environment, see Fischer (1990, reprinted in Fischer and Abedi 1990).
4. Hervik says that Bluitgen's claim was apparently made at a private dinner, and was used by a journalist present only some weeks later, and in turn was used by the *Jyllands-Posten*, and was picked up by papers around the world without verifying if the claim was true. In fact Bluitgen did find an illustrator, and even a second after the first withdrew over Bluitgen's wanting a more detailed face. For a chronicle of events see Hervik (2006), Lars Andersen (2007), Wikipedia, under "*Jyllands Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy" and the companion file "The Wikipedia Muhammad Cartoons Debate: A War of Ideas" (ed. John Simmons).
5. While Peter Hervik has done an important contextualization of the Danish artists, the three major frames for spinning the story, and the competing positions of the three major Danish newspapers, clear accounts of the Danish imams, and of the countermobilizations within the Danish Muslim community have not yet been done. See also note 8.
6. On the goldsmiths' detail, Zenia Shaukat via Mark Peterson (personal communication).
7. Žižek, like Sloterdijk before him, has explored the dynamics of cynical reason, of doing things despite knowing their negativities, and of using the tools of the public media circuits in perverse ways. The notion of scandalous times refers to this last recursive and iterative, but nondirect, way of using and responding to the media flows, a theme he has been working. On a more ethnographically concrete case example, that of organ transplantation in India, see Lawrence Cohen's wonderfully articulated article (1999).
8. *Ad hominem*s are out of place here in arguments about the construction of the public sphere, but for any political analysis one must eventually also take under consideration the specific political interests that members of a public sphere bring along, their alliances and support structures, short-term tactics versus long-term agendas (which of course can change). Abu Laban, the Palestinian born Danish imam, for instance, in the mid-1990s is said to have been a translator and assistant to Talaal Fouad Qassimy, one of the leaders of one of Egypt's militant *Gamiyya Islamiyya* groups. Ahmad Abu Laban died of lung cancer, age sixty at Hvidovre Hospital, Copenhagen, Thursday 1, February 2007.
9. The Bahomet image is a winged goat with female breasts and a torch between the goat horns. In a positive gnostic interpretation, the composite body symbolized the burden of matter from which arose the repentance from sin. The Templar name is an acronym for "*Templi omnium hominum pacis abbas*" (universal peace among men). The Inquisition seems to be the source of some of the descriptions of the Templar figure, and charges of heresy were brought against the Templars for members being secret

Muslims. Hence perhaps the deformation of the name Bahomet from Mahomet. Negatively seen as an image of Satan or devil worship, in the nineteenth century the gnostic meanings were thought to derive from Egyptian wisdom traditions. A German Order of the Templars of the East (O.T.O.) was established and installed Aleister Crowley as head of its English branch, who took Baphomet as his magical name, A.G.H.

10. On October 27, 2005, complaints were filed under Danish criminal code sections 140 and 266b, and the police began an inquiry. The public prosecutor said no grounds for prosecution could be found and closed the investigation on January 6, 2006. The Danish Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, on similar grounds already on October 21, 2005, had rejected a request by eleven Ambassadors of Islamic countries for a meeting about the cartoons, and in his New Years address called both for not demonizing the Muslim community of Denmark and for defending free speech. Andersen and his commission colleagues judged the refusal to meet with the Ambassadors a serious diplomatic misstep, but rejected this judgement as one causing the crisis, as some apparently tried to interpret it (Anderson 2007).
11. Thanks to Mark Peterson for this identification (personal communication).
12. Thanks to Peter Hervik and Mark Peterson for this identification (personal communication).
13. Sorenson has since died at age eighty-nine.
14. Of the sort, perhaps, that Lloyd Warner (1949–51) analyzes in the Tercentennial Parade in Yankee City, when the Jewish community was assigned sponsorship of a float intended to recognize them as Americans from early days. The float, however, was of Benedict Arnold and instead of resonating with his hero status in colonial America, his turncoat status in the Revolution resonated more strongly with a deeply rooted Judas allegation that Christians have made against Jews.
15. “This tumult – these ethnic and religious instigations – are the last arrow left in the quiver of the enemies of the People’s Islamic Republic of Iran,” he said. “They are wrong when they plan to spend money with a view to stirring ethnic groups, social classes, and the youth. As a rule their plans are based on a wrong assessment of the situation. And now they’ve decided to turn to Azerbaijan.”
16. This was a period of heightened use by Ahmadinejad of rhetoric about the imminence of the return of the messiah (Twelfth Imam) that was being promoted by fundamentalist cleric Ayatullah Mesba-Yazdi. It was used as part of a phase of cultural repression against secularists and moderates.
17. A list of cartoonists in the competition, along with the disingenuous disclaimers cited below by the four cartoonists and the curator are found at <http://www.irancartoon.com/110/>

index3.htm (accessed 08/25/08). Cartoons awarded prizes are at [www.irancartoon.com/120/holocaust/](http://www.irancartoon.com/120/holocaust/); and 227 of the cartoons are up at <http://www.irancartoon.ir/gallery/album48> (both accessed 08/25/08).

18. The group of anti-Zionist Hassidim, led by Rabbi Yisroel Dovid Weiss, was from the Neturei Karta congregation in Monsey, New York. "Neturei Karta" ("guardians of the city" in Aramaic, founded in the 1930s) argue that formation of a Jewish state is forbidden until the Messiah comes (*New York Times*, April 3, 2007: A19).
19. Mosher in a speech defending the tradition of cartoonists using humor about religion presents the following (had he looked a bit further he could have found many Iranian and other Muslim world cartoonists as well). Bruce MacKinnon in the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* draws Salman Rushdie greeting a forlorn cartoonist who shows up at his campfire in a tunnel hideout, "What took you so long?" MacKinnon, at the time of the Khomeini fatwa against Rushdie, had drawn an aide to Khomeini taking a phone call and turning to Khomeini says, "Allah, He wants you to lighten up." Brian Gable in the *Globe and Mail* draws the four horsemen of the apocalypse (war, death, famine, disease) led by a fifth horseman, a jester on a horse with drawing pad and pencil. Serge Chapleau in *La Presse* draws himself wearing a suicide belt of pencils. Michael DeAdder of *Halifax Daily News* draws a circle of bomb defusers, police with helmets and shields, press and onlookers around a paper with a smiley cartoon. It is the same image that Jbosco from Brazil uses in the cartoon contest except Jbosco's is a circle of tanks marked with five-pointed (US) stars aiming their canons at a bird of peace with four skulls on the ground, and it is called "Avian Flu in Baghdad." Two of the cartoons Mosher uses illustrate humor about Christians: the Last Supper with a balloon in which Jesus or someone calls out (in Hebraicized English lettering) "separate checks please!" (by George Feyer in *McLean's Magazine*), and the *New Yorker* cartoon by Tom Cheney of a genially smiling dog on a porch holding up a sign "Jesus Loves You," while on the grass below a sign says "Beware of Dog."

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