CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

DISSONANCE: Cartooning in Iran, Humor, and the Study of Things That Don't Match

MIRCO GÖPFERT
Goethe University Frankfurt
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0170-5742

I was taking a walk with Nasrin Varesi, an art teacher and cartoonist, in the beautiful Hasht Behesht Park in central Isfahan. It sported plenty of verdant lawns, flowerbeds, and fountains on a calm island in the middle of busy traffic. After going to an underground public toilet, Varesi told me that she had seen a tiny, beautiful flower on the floor, probably made of the kind of fabric like often attached to children's hair pins, with glitter on one of its petals. It was lying there, right beside a "shithole" in the ground, from which emerged a penetrating stench. Ever since she began drawing cartoons, she said, she had not been able to pass such a display without picturing a punch line. I could see that a flower from a children's hair pin and a toilet are somewhat incompatible, "incongruous" perhaps, but I could not see the cartoon, I told her. Varesi stopped and looked at me. "It is not about seeing the flower *and* the shithole," she said. "It is about seeing the one *with* the other. The cartoon is not a beautiful flower next to a shithole, but a flower growing out and in spite of it." She paused to check whether I understood and then added: "It's like the Supreme Leader tweeting about the evil of Twitter!"[1]

This essay delves into Varesi's insight, unraveling the cartoonist's ability to perceive, compose, and amplify dissonance through humor. While many theories of humor orbit the notion of *incongruity* (Morreall 2009, 9), Varesi's perspective

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, Vol. 39, Issue 4, pp. 645–666, ISSN 0886-7356, online ISSN 1548-1360. Cultural Anthropology *is the journal of the Society of Cultural Anthropology, a section of the American Anthropological Association.* Cultural Anthropology *journal content published since 2014 is freely available to download, save, reproduce, and transmit for noncommercial, scholarly, and educational purposes under the Creative Commons BY-NC 4.0 license. Reproduction and transmission of journal content for the above purposes should credit the author and original source. DOI: 10.14506/ca39.4.07*

hints at a more experiential term: *dissonance*. Beyond cognitive dissonance or acoustic discord,[2] this dissonance parallels the uncomfortable tension found in music, where tones clash, challenging norms and demanding resolution without delivering, keeping us on our toes, rejecting our belief in the illusion of harmony (Adorno 1973, 18–19; 2003, 52). Thinking with dissonances and humor thus holds an uncomfortable potential both as a way of knowing and as a practice of critique.

Cartooning and other humorous practices have often been studied as a means of popular and artistic resistance (Damir-Geilsdorf and Milich 2020; Göpfert 2020a), activism (Haugerud 2013; Sørensen 2016) or propaganda (Bihl 2015), and rightly so, because studying them yields important insights into particular fields of social, economic, and cultural contestation (see Kuipers 2011). At the same time, there is far more to humor than politics; Bronislaw Malinowski ([1937] 2015) even saw it as a starting point for a theory of culture. Humor and laughter serve as windows into the nuanced ways in which people experience their lives and navigate moral subjectivities, even amid contexts marked by suffering and violence (see Goldstein 2003).

In delving into humorous practices such as cartooning, we encounter not only a rich tapestry of social and political commentary but also a distinctive set of skills. These skills provide a unique approach to studying, interpreting, and engaging with the complexities of the world—a peculiar way of knowing. When Varesi juxtaposes the flower and the toilet by picturing, for instance, a delicate, daisy-like figure relaxing in a nauseating "shithole"-Jacuzzi, she not only evokes powerful forms of resonance in the form of laughter, irritation, or even disgust. She also ventures down a path of engagement with a world that seems full of things that repel, negate, or appear incongruous with each other, not just for cartoonists in Iran, and invites us to explore our uncomfortable knowledge of them.

This essay explores humor, particularly in cartooning, as a unique mode of engaged knowing. The exploration unfolds in three parts: an overview of the Iranian cartooning scene and my research since 2015; an examination of the dissonant image (or mirage) that emerged during the research, one reflecting sharp opposites and contradictions in Iranian society; and an investigation of cartooning skills in perception, composition, and amplification that combine the aesthetics and ethics of dissonance. The essay concludes with an invitation to think more about the possibilities (and limits, as the case may be) of how anthropologists can embrace dissonances with humor, humility, and critique.

EXPLORING CARTOONING IN IRAN

I first came across cartoons by Iranian artists during my Persian language classes in Mashhad in 2015. I was immediately struck by the surreal darkness that many cartoons conveyed: visual echoes of Sadegh Hedayat's writings. I had just read *The Blind Owl*, Hedayat's masterpiece, riddled with the narrator's nightmares and feverish thoughts of suicide, when I came across Javad Alizadeh's black-and-white picture of Hedayat wearing a hat shaped like an owl from a children's book. Then his picture of a fountain pen penetrating the hand holding it. Next I discovered the works of Ardeshir Mohasses, perhaps Iran's most famous cartoonist, who had fled the country under the shah in the 1970s after criticizing the dictatorship and was unable to return after the revolution of 1978/79 that installed the Islamic Republic. This discovery was followed by the depressing works of Davoud Shahidi, an early companion of Mohasses, the work of Touka and Mana Neyestani, political cartoonists in exile, and many more. These cartoons hardly gave me anything to laugh about, except for a desperate laughter sometimes in response to the painful truth they so ruthlessly portrayed. I learned of the existence of cartoon houses (*khāne-ye karicatūr*), cartoon associations, and cartoon museums in all major cities, accompanied by a continuous stream of national and international competitions, festivals and exhibitions, cartoons in every major newspaper and even a variety of satirical magazines on the newsstands. Suddenly Iran appeared like a country bristling with cartoonists.

At the same time and still in 2015, I read and was deeply worried about the imprisonment of the cartoonists Hadi Heidari and Atena Farghadani. They were neither the first nor the last cartoonists to face imprisonment in Iran. Although there had been periods of relative freedom of expression both under the shah and after the revolution, the suppression of satirical expression has entrenched itself as a recurrent feature of the Iranian sociopolitical landscape (see Farjami 2017, 78). Most of the cartoonists I met were born during the Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988 or shortly before, a decade in the grip of war with little room for satire and humor. In the 1990s, the political atmosphere in Iran eased gradually, allowing satirical publications to spring up. Among them was a magazine called *Gol Agha*, a trailblazer of satire in postrevolutionary Iran, even though it was rather toothless and under the close watch of the regime (Föllmer 2008, 32–33). President Muhammad Khatami's victory and his reform movement in 1997 meant an opening of the public sphere and the emergence of journalistic activism, bringing political satire and caricature into full bloom in Iran. At this time, the cartoonists I would later meet were in their late teens and twenties. That period also saw the

proliferation of a reformist press (and later social media), which became central to the emergence and wide circulation of cartoons in Iran. Yet when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power in 2005, the atmosphere changed radically. His eight-year presidency saw uncompromising restrictions imposed on these newly won liberties, leading to the emigration and exile of many cartoonists, including Touka and Mana Neyestani.

Many cartoonists associated with the reformist press shifted their primary field of activity to social media. At the same time, an anti-reformist cartoon scene with both financial and institutional support has gained more and more power and international visibility. It materialized, paradigmatically, in so-called Holocaust cartoon competitions and similar events organized under the aegis of the "resistance art" or *honar moghāvemat* association (see Göpfert 2020a). This movement and events organized by it form a political project initiated by Ahmadinejad and in response to a problematic depiction of Islam and Muslims, the Islamic Republic, and to the exceptionality of Jewish victimhood in and for the West.[3] Its protagonists are particularly influential due to the sheer financial and institutional force of their network. Yet beyond Iran, for instance, when consulting the highly frequented English-language website irancartoon.com, it has not always been easy to see how close they are to the regime. Emerging cartoonists depend on their goodwill, for example, when they want to tap into this network's resources or use their connections to hold their first individual exhibitions in Iran, or when they need support letters to travel abroad. At the same time, more and more cartoonists have fled or emigrated to evade restrictions or imprisonment, particularly under Ahmadinejad and in the wake of the Green Movement, a mass protest against Ahmadinejad's contested re-election in 2009. Some of Iran's most famous cartoonists left the country at that time. The election of the more moderate President Hassan Rouhani in 2013 left many hopeful, even optimistic. But their optimism faded quickly in the face of the imprisonment of Hadi Heidari and Atena Farghadani. That optimism has not been rekindled.

My fieldwork in this context has been patchy. In 2015, I enjoyed the privilege of spending a few months in Iran for language training. I also slowly began mapping out the scene of Iranian cartoonists, both in Iran and abroad. In preparation for a longer stretch of fieldwork the following year, I contacted a professor of anthropology at a university in Tehran. He proved immensely helpful as my host when I taught as a guest lecturer in his department in 2016; and he also put me in touch with Masoud Shojaei Tabatabaei, the head of the Iranian House of Cartoon, where I would have loved to become an intern, participate in drawing classes, help

maintain the website, and organize events and exhibitions. Shojaei was the first Iranian cartoonist I met in person. During our first meeting, facilitated by a phone call from my academic host, Shojaei appeared kind and welcoming—but a second meeting never happened. He would not answer my calls or messages or see me in his office. Only then did I understand that he was an influential art manager close to the regime, a key figure in the "resistance art" association and an organizer of the Holocaust cartoon competitions—and thus particularly unpopular among most of the cartoonists I met later. (It gives testimony to my blatant naïveté as a European anthropologist that I only then realized that my academic host, too, formed part of an influential political network, one that would disagree, to put it mildly, with the positions held by most of my interlocutors.)

Since 2015, I have spent longer and shorter periods of fieldwork (between three weeks and six months) in Iran during which I conducted interviews, but mostly had long and recurring conversations with roughly fifty cartoonists. I also spent a few months following the activities of a cartoon association outside of Tehran that had about fifty members (two-thirds of them women), fifteen of them regulars in its weekly activities. The most common activities were workshops during which the artists discussed and sketched initial ideas for cartoons. I also started drawing cartoons myself, under the guidance of a cartoonist. Once a week for several hours, we would meet and she would give me exercises to complete, go through the sketches that I brought along, criticize my drawing technique, and help me improve my skills or come up with ideas. The cartoons I produced would, in turn, become the subject of my conversations with other cartoonists. Thus my former focus as a rather passive observer of (political) cartooning and satire in contemporary Iran gave way to an engaged exploration of the epistemic potential of humor in drawing.

EXPLORING AMBIGUITIES IN IRAN

Many of the studies I had read before my first trip to Iran rang uncomfortably true when Varesi spoke about the tension between the flower and the toilet, the ban on Twitter and the Supreme Leader's tweets, and about the far broader tensions she noticed in Iran. The studies I had consulted depicted Iran as a country and society full of sharp contrasts, binary oppositions, contradictions, and paradoxical relations. The overall image seemed like a simplified and somewhat exaggerated version of Iran: a depiction I thought had to be unrealistic because it resonated so well with my own internalized orientalist and racist preconceptions—which I knew were false and wanted to reject.

To begin with, Tehran appeared grotesquely bipolar in many accounts. Ramita Navai (2014), for instance, in the prologue to her acclaimed book on the capital, the *City of Lies*, follows the course of Vali Asr Street, which runs from north to south:

> The deep gutters known as *joobs* carry icy water that gushes out of the mountains in the north. The farther south the water flows [alongside the street], the murkier and darker it becomes. . . . Farther south, the buildings become smaller and more decrepit: houses of raw cement and crumbling brick with broken windows and corrugated iron shacks set up on rooftops. Rusting gas flues and air conditioning units hang from walls, like metal guts pushed outside. Here the colour is sucked from the streets, into the shadows of conservatism and poverty. . . . Just over eleven miles from top to bottom, it [Vali Asr Street] connects the rich and the poor, the religious and the secular, tradition and modernity. Yet the lives of the people at either end seem centuries apart. (Navai 2014, Prologue, n.p.)

This geographical split between the north and the south, Shahram Khosravi (2008, 60) maintains, supposedly stands for a much more profound cultural and moral dichotomy. Ultimately, it echoes what the Iranian cultural theorist Daryush Shayegan (1997) problematically termed "cultural schizophrenia." This "cultural schizophrenia," Shayegan (1997, vii) maintains, characterizes those societies that are "trapped in a fault-line between incompatible worlds, worlds that mutually repel and deform one another," worlds in which people experience a "contradictory double fascination" with both tradition and modernity, caught between an "enchanted vision of a world still infused with the aura of collective memory, and the equally compelling allure of the new and unknown" (Shayegan 1997, 5). The perceived "delay" between these two worlds, he continues, is "not just a chronological dislocation, but an ontological divide" (Shayegan 1997, 6).

Then I noticed an omnipresent description of the supposedly radical divide between inner and outer spaces, between the private and the public, between the *biruni* and the *andaruni* (Vahdat 2017, 83). According to Khosravi (2008, 123), the "cultural duality between life in private and in public" is still the "most conspicuous aspect of social life in post-revolutionary Iran." The "unveiled" public, Khosravi says, is a hegemonic space in the Islamic social order; the "veiled" and private, in contrast, offers room for illicit lifestyles in a pre-revolutionary atmosphere.[4] This duality of lifestyles has drastic consequences for the people practicing

them, Khosravi maintains; the way selves are presented depends fundamentally on whether they are being presented outdoors or indoors. Most Iranians have lived "double lives" since the revolution, Khosravi concludes (2008, 123), between two different, largely opposed norms and cultures. Roxanne Varzi (2006) calls this a "schizophrenic existence," one caught between modes of self-construction, on the one hand, with a sharp rise in meditation classes and self-help books, and self-annihilation, on the other, with an equally steep increase in drug addiction and suicide, particularly among youths in the mountains north of Tehran (Varzi 2006, 10–11; see also Shirazi et al. 2012 and Hassanian-Moghaddam and Zamani 2017).

All these accounts depict simplified versions of complex realities while exaggerating select elements, ignoring many others and carrying implicit normative biases. Navai's account of Tehran remains painfully partial and full of clichés. Yet she depicts, within a single frame, as it were, many Iranians' agonizing experience of harsh contrasts between economic, social, and environmental privileges and handicaps. Shayegan's notion of "cultural schizophrenia" deserves to be emphatically contested for its psycho-pathologizing reification of orientalist motives (see also Khosravi 2008, 21), for oversimplifying the intricacies of life in Iran (Adelkhah 1999, 3; Hashemi 2020), for subscribing to a radically modernist and thus normative conception of the world built on the conceptual split between tradition and modernity (Akman 1998; Khiabany 2010). Yet it corresponds with the images many other Iranians (and certainly most cartoonists) I spoke to draw of their lives. Khosravi and Varzi focus on upper-class Tehrani youth at a specific historical moment, while generalizing perhaps too quickly the actions of Tehran's young elite (see Hashemi 2015, 281n13), which points to a common bias for ethnographies of Iran in the early 2000s (Olszewska 2013). However, many of the cartoonists I met shared this bias. Most of them were middle- and upper-class urbanites who had picked up drawing when Khosravi and Varzi did their fieldwork in the late 1990s and the early 2000s during Khatami's reform-oriented (yet ineffective) presidency (Khosravi 2008, 16), which included the experience of deep frustration when Ahmadinejad became president in 2005.[5]

All these accounts (or my shorthand representation of them) appear problematic or even false because, again, they depict simplified and distorted versions of complex realities while perpetuating implicit normative biases. Yet as accounts that echo the experience of ambiguities and things that don't match for a particular group of people, they are very much true. They align to a surprising degree with the images many of the cartoonists I met would draw of their lives and experiences in contemporary Iran, combining falsehood and truth in unsettling ways.

PERCEPTION AND DISSONANCE

When Varesi spoke about her inability to walk past a beautiful flower in a public toilet without picturing a cartoon, she described a particular kind of perceptive sensitivity that, according to her, was cultivated through the artistic practice of cartooning. Many anthropologists have, in the past decade, underlined the epistemic potential of artistic practices. Drawing inspiration from Tim Ingold's (2014, 2016) notion of *enskillment*, Cassis Kilian (2021), for instance, focuses on the performing arts, Arnd Schneider (2017) and Christopher Wright (with Schneider 2010, 2013) on the visual arts, and Andrew Causey (2017) on drawing. Drawing means, Causey reminds us, learning to see. The movements of the eye, literally following and moving along the perceived lines, merge with the movements of the hand to draw lines on paper. Drawing thus helps us see lines, edges, movement, and the absent by fusing visual perception with engagement, attention with embodied response (see also Ingold 2016, 17). Rather than a mere means of representation, drawing should be understood as an epistemic practice in its own right, as Lochlann Jain (2022) beautifully shows.

Drawing cartoons taps into the epistemic potential of both drawing and humor, which makes for a peculiar way of engaging with the world, perhaps even a particular mode of cognition (Hsu 2016). As many approaches inspired by phenomenology have shown, humor enables us to perceive, communicate, and ultimately make sense of the dissonances—the absurdities—of social life (Mulkay 1988) and the political present (Boyer 2013; Göpfert 2022; Petrović 2018), perhaps even of the human condition (Berger [1997] 2014; see Kuipers 2008, 376–378). According to Peter L. Berger, humor holds great epistemic potential when considering the profoundly dissonant human experience of the world, its uncertainties, the contradictory, ambivalent, fleeting, and fragile elements that constitute it. Humor, he says, leads above all to the perception of incongruity (Berger [1997] 2014, 193).

The "incongruity theory of humor" was also what Varesi was referring to when she explained how she saw the flower and the toilet. According to this theory, advocated by Immanuel Kant ([1790] 1983), Arthur Schopenhauer ([1819] 1986), and Søren Kierkegaard ([1846] 1989), humor violates patterns and expectations, exciting laughter. In that sense, humor concerns the perception of incongruous elements—seeing two otherwise incompatible elements as related. Yet when thinking about cartooning, Varesi slightly shifts the accent of the argument from the perception of things that don't match toward the experience of discomfort that goes with it. What matters to her is dissonance, rather than incongruity: seeing not the flower *and* the shithole, but the one *with* the other.

Children's flowers in public toilets are not the only manifestation of "incongruous" elements in contemporary Iran. Think of the contradictions built into the Islamic Republic, with the impossibilities of the conflation of religious and political belonging, as described by Wael Hallaq (2013). Think of all the tensions described by Navai, Shayegan, Khosravi, and Varzi; the proliferation of meditation classes and the growing number of suicides among youth—for Varesi, the list proved endless, experiences of ambiguity and dissonance sprawling.[6] Not without cynicism she asserted that drawing cartoons becomes easier when so much incongruity is already built into the world in front of you.

Then there was the official political discourse of the Islamic Republic, one riddled with binary oppositions that all boil down to the neat distinction between friends and enemies of the revolution. As Narges Bajoghli (2019) has impressively shown in her ethnography of regime media producers in Iran, keeping the revolution alive means maintaining clear, live binaries between insiders and outsiders, between *khodi* and *gheyr-e khodi*, otherwise the revolutionary imagery and the revolutionary collective itself would dissolve (Bajoghli 2019, 76).[7] Ali Mirsepassi (2011) sees a similar tendency at play in contemporary intellectual debate in Iran. Influential thinkers, Mirsepassi (2011, 67) says, stick with and reproduce such simple binary notions as modern/traditional, inside/outside, and universal/local, which are of little help in understanding extant social, cultural, and political conditions. This tendency is, although at times in reverse, also visible in some of the accounts presented in the previous section. Do they all, in one way or another, subscribe to a similar motif? The reproduction of profound binary opposites feeds into what the cartoonist Hamed Rezaei described in conversation as "keeping the machine of absolutes running," avoiding nuance and ambiguous in-betweens. This, he said, means keeping the revolution alive. Cartoonists, however, develop a sensitivity for seeing and unmasking such "machines of absolutes" by forcing the disparate elements into a single frame, focusing on and exploring the connection between them, embracing ambiguity, perceiving not a picture of two incongruous bits but one of a dissonant whole.[8]

COMPOSITION AND NUANCE, CERTAINTY AND DOUBT

As Varesi explained, composing a cartoon often means forcing two incongruous elements into a relationship with each other: good and evil, night and day, rich and poor, north and south, meditation and suicide, the ban on Twitter and the Supreme Leader tweeting. In a follow-up interview on that issue, the cartoonist took out pen and paper to give me an even simpler example, probably the most

stereotypical pair of opposing elements: a dove and prison bars. She drew a white dove, a symbol of freedom, and next to it iron bars to symbolize imprisonment. Looking at them next to each other, they appear incongruent and somewhat incompatible, but not much more. Then she turned the page and skilfully drew not simply a melancholic dove behind prison bars but a dove playing the bars like the strings of a harp.[9] This, she told me while pointing to the picture, was what cartooning on the basis of incompatible elements should be about: after perceiving the tension between the two, provoke a reaction between them. This occurs by placing them in a single frame and letting their two separate worlds collide and unfold on each other, dissolving the supposed absoluteness—literally, the disconnectedness—of both. Not a beautiful flower next to a shithole, but a flower growing out of and despite it; not a ban on Twitter and the Supreme Leader tweeting, but the Supreme Leader tweeting about the evil of Twitter; not self-help books and meditation classes in one part of town and famous suicide spots in another, but a bus ride from yoga to overdose, or a self-help book about "how to kill yourself *en balance*." The perception of dissonance makes a cartoon possible; the composition makes the cartoon.

Exercises in cartoon composition took place collaboratively during the weekly workshops of a cartoon association whose activities I was following. At the beginning of each session, the cartoonists would choose a topic for the day, for example, the car manufacturer Saipa's announcement of a new model. People jokingly called Saipa cars "death traps," as the faulty vehicles cause many accidents. The cartoonists would then begin their individual studies, or *études*, look over each other's shoulder, laugh, and talk about their diverse ideas. As a result of the many cartoon studies on a single topic, the different elements that people chose and combined and their angles of them, as well as the cartoonists' conversations about these studies—what worked well and what did not, what was funny and what was not, what felt right and what felt wrong, what could and could not be drawn—the issue at hand appeared more nuanced than initially assumed, clearly visible in the final outcomes.

One of the cartoons I set out to draw during one of my stays in Iran concerned the main organizer of the Holocaust cartoon competition, Shojaei. Like most of my interlocutors, I found this competition revolting on many levels and I came to see its organizer as an opportunistic valet to hard-liners of the Iranian regime. The 2016 competition, which was announced through a poster showing a swastika-shaped prison with a Palestinian kite flying above it, caused massive outrage and media coverage in the North Atlantic. Press conferences in Tehran were

packed with international journalists, with Shojaei enjoying the spotlight, making him even more powerful in the Iranian cartooning scene. I wanted to draw him bathing in the blazing light of a giant, swastika-shaped theater lamp. But in what posture should I draw him? Should he wear sunglasses? Should he frown or laugh, appear angry or relaxed? Should he point his finger in a gesture of paternalistic warning? Should there be others behind him, peeking into the light? And would it be funny? I drew dozens of versions. None was funny, none felt right, but I learned a lot. The necessity of reduction and condensation forced me to analytically dissect the phenomenon at hand and look at it from different perspectives—in direct and barely controllable complicity with the lines unfolding on the paper. In addition, showing my cartoon studies to other cartoonists triggered some of the most intimate and insightful conversations I have ever had during fieldwork. These conversations provided insight because they revealed much about how other cartoonists perceived the phenomenon that I wanted to depict; but they also provided insight because they revealed the certainties and doubts people had about what could and could not be shown in Iran and what felt aesthetically and ethically right or wrong.

This also means that the reaction caused by the composition of a cartoon, often between two opposing elements, should not be misunderstood as a form of naive dialectics. In a dialectical process, two opposing elements come together, react with each other, and form a synthesis, which represents a form of temporary closure, the provisional resolution of dissonance, if you like. Cartoons, in their funny or confusing appearance, however, represent openings. If anything, they proffer temporary stabilizations of unfinished studyings. A cartoon as an object may appear fixed; cartooning as a practice is quite the opposite. In other words, an art form geared toward condensation and simplification (see Morris 1993; Greenberg 2002, 187) comes to life as a practice of analysis that reveals complexity and nuance.

Unlike cartoons, comics have been very much appreciated for their openness. In their structural hybridit—bringing together, without synthesizing, narratives of word and image (Chute 2008, 459; 2006, 201; Theodossopoulos 2022)—they allow for nonlinear and multilinear modes of representation and reflection, as Nick Sousanis (2015) so impressively shows in his graphic philosophical book *Unflattening*. By their very form, comics resist closure. Yet so do cartoons. Comics as sequential narratives allow for much more complex lines and intersections of temporality and narrative, rhythm and orientation (Hamdy and Coleman 2022, 1). Yet even a single-frame cartoon may bring together text and image in ambiguous ways, thereby resisting synthesis. The caption might say "Festival of Free Speech,"

but the picture shows a graveyard. In addition, the metaphorical and often surreal quality of cartoons, and even more so the irony and satire of humorous drawings, leaves ample room for nonlinear and ambiguous forms of representation. Cartoons, in their harsh reduction to a single frame, can prove confusing and even blatantly nonsensical—even to the person drawing them! Yet many cartoonists told me that these pictures, even while painfully eluding rationalization, can feel unmistakably "right" (or "wrong," for that matter). In an uncomfortable way, they combine absolute certainty with profound doubt, embracing both audacity and humility (Zarifian 2022, 67) to reveal much more than what they hide.

While the final composition should be simple, the process of composing certainly is not. Drawing a simple black-and-white cartoon includes playing with simple black-and-white categories, thereby highlighting the complex and often paradoxical relation between them. Composing cartoons invites complication and ambiguity instead of absolutes, eventually revealing nuance through black and white.

AMPLIFICATION AND CRITIQUE

Cartoonists exaggerate. They do not depict naturalist facts. An orchid that looks like a half-starved heroin addict vomiting on the floor in a nauseating public restroom does not really exist. A politician does not really play chess with a man held at gunpoint. Or, as in Ardeshir Mohassess's masterful pre-revolutionary cartoon, the monarch does not really use the gallows and a hanged corpse as decoration at his birthday party. Dissonances get amplified, blown out of proportion and turn into something false yet uncomfortably true.

Telling the truth and telling it loudly served as the cartoonist Rezai's motivation, he stressed during one of our conversations. Rezaei lived in Tehran and earned a living as an engineer, and he is also a prominent cartoonist in Iran. Many of the younger cartoonists I spoke to hailed him as *Ostād*, or "Master." The two of us were sitting in a café overlooking a busy street in northern Tehran when he remarked:

> Look down at the street with all the cars and people out there. They are walking in the street and taking the metro. They have friends and they are drinking their coffee and they are drinking their whiskey and they are eating well and everything is running very smoothly. But you know that it is not.

A passing bus blew its horn after nearly hitting a young woman.

> Oh no, things are not running smoothly. Humans are being humiliated. Animals are running our lives.

He took a sip of his iced coffee.

> For example, I have a cartoon showing a politician.[10] He is sitting at a table with many fine glasses, wine bottles, nice plates, and napkins, and everything is neat, clean, and elegant. But the politician's head looks like that of a vicious dog drooling over pieces of a dead corpse.

Another sip of coffee.

> We can do better than that. But of course, I don't have the solution. I am paradoxical, too! Look at me, I always say I'm a socialist—but I am so bourgeois!

We both laughed loudly.

> I don't have the solution. But I have a responsibility. I am a messenger. I have to critique. I have to give consciousness to people, make them aware of what is going on. Analyze the situation and then express it with art.

I said this reminded me of Ardeshir Mohassess and his motto, "I am only a reporter" (qtd. in Neshat and Nodjoumi 2008, 37).[11] "That is right," Rezaei said, "cartoonists are only reporters—but with a little extra: My pictures should give you a shock, like a needle that goes through the layers of fat and then it touches your nerves." He told me that cartooning should not be about presenting the audience with a solution to the dissonances on display. It should force you into a relationship with them, provoke resonance, an immediate affective reaction, much like the needle penetrating layers of fat, even against our will.

But how? The anthropologist and humor scholar Elliot Oring has coined the notion of *appropriate incongruity* in relation to comical things. According to Oring (2016, x), we perceive humor when incongruous words, practices, images, or ideas seem—in a joke or a cartoon—appropriately related. Yet what many cartoonists wanted to convey was, on a different level, the inappropriateness of the relationship on display; the experience of dissonance, rather than the mere perception of incongruity. Rezaei perhaps brought together incongruous bits in a formally appropriate

way, but he wanted to shine a harsh light on precisely the ethical inappropriateness of the relationship depicted. "No, everything is not running smoothly!"

Cartooning as Rezaei describes it constitutes a deeply critical enterprise. For him, it means revealing the evil at play in what seems to be good. If Theodor W. Adorno had been a cartoonist, he would perhaps have said something similar. He was not a cartoonist, of course, perhaps not even particularly humorous,[12] but he did explore the notion of dissonance in ways that resonate deeply with Rezaei's words. For Adorno (1973, 18), dissonance is an aesthetic expression of suffering; it opposes complacency and rejects our belief in the illusion of existing harmony. Consequently, it holds profoundly liberating potential. According to Asaf Angermann (2015, 271), the notion of dissonance should even be thought of as a key element of Adorno's never explicit and thus painfully elusive moral foundation of critical theory. Yet unlike other forms of critique, cartoons and humor can provoke—literally—painfully intense reactions, bodily convulsions.

But, again, how? Commenting on satire, Simon Critchley (2002, 36) said: "To have an effect, the warning signals have to be deafening." Dissonance, particularly in its amplified form, resonates or gets under our skin when it taps into and explicates what Steve Rayner (2012) calls "uncomfortable knowledge." According to Rayner, uncomfortable knowledge is what we know but exclude from the simplified, self-consistent versions of the world that we develop to make sense of the world's complexity so as to act in it, because it is in tense relationship or in outright contradiction with these versions. In other words, it is that which we know but don't want to know; the connections we know exist but do not explore. In Iran, for instance, the uncomfortable knowledge revealed through cartoons may add nuance within the simplified versions of reality propagated by the revolutionary regime of the Islamic Republic, or it may raise concerns that should not be raised. Cartoonists can get arrested, magazines closed for that kind of impact.

The force (and the threat for the regime) of cartoons lies perhaps in their potential to reveal what should remain hidden, but this force expands through cartoons' capacity to show just how uncomfortable the knowledge they reveal is. In other words, through an affective engagement with things that don't match or things we shouldn't know, cartoons show us that what sometimes presents itself as a matter of fact is instead really a matter of concern (see Latour 2004). My interlocutors in Iran hardly took anything they saw as a matter of fact; they perceived it as a fictive production of a highly contentious and contradictory sociopolitical context. And still, seeing these dissonances amplified and humorously blown out of proportion, being drawn into an affective engagement with them, had powerful

effects. Perhaps like irony in politics (see Samanani et al. 2023, 191), humor can generate surpluses and intensities that go beyond mere understanding, "cultivating embodied tensions that can become animating forces." Cartooning thus combines an aesthetics *and* an ethics of dissonance, so that even the most surreal images can take on an uncanny appearance of unmistakable truth, substantiated by powerful affects and bodily convulsions from laughter to disgust.

ANTHROPOLOGY, HUMOR, AND HUMILITY

In this essay, I have tried to reveal cartooning as a form of engaged knowing, intertwining drawing and humor. The practice of cartooning, with its blend of perceptive sensitivity, analytical skills, and moral commitment based on careful engagement with dissonances, presents an intriguing lens for comprehending the political present in Iran and beyond. But can this creative practice be of use to anthropology?

Anthropology, while seldom engaging with humor,[13] has considerable experience embracing dissonance, even if it is not aware of doing so. Remember, as a worn example, E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1976) encountering witchcraft among the Azande. "Witches, as the Azande conceive them, clearly cannot exist," he writes (Evans-Pritchard 1976, 18); "witchcraft has no real existence" (Evans-Pritchard 1976, 43). And yet he notes, "I have only once seen witchcraft on its path" (Evans-Pritchard 1976, 11)—Evans-Pritchard experienced something that definitely *was* witchcraft: a bright light passing through the night and toward the homestead of a man who died a few hours later.

Doesn't the tension between rational explanation and embodied experience, the logical incoherence, mirror a certain humility in acknowledging the unknowable? Evans-Pritchard's matter-of-fact description of the event opens up a sense of unsettling possibility, David Graeber (2015, 36) suggests, and prompts us to wonder: "Who knows, maybe there actually is something going on here that we just don't know about?" This refusal of synthesis, this open-ended exploration of the dissonant, can become as audacious as it can be an invitation to humility.

Witches cannot exist.
Witchcraft is not real.
I have only seen it once.
(Said the stone to the anthropologist.)

And isn't it also a bit funny? A cartoonish amplification of dissonance that combines the premise of rationality with the intimacy of experience and, rather than seeking resolution, invites us into an affective relationship with the ambiguity. Punch lines, like those in cartoons, do not resolve tensions; they allow dissonance to unfold, fostering inconclusiveness, holistic modes of cognition (Rossing 2016, 13), critical engagement, and affective connection. Thus ways of knowing through humor can open up new zones of engagement between anthropology and the world(s) it encounters and in which it dwells.[14]

Consider the prospect of sketching cartoons or crafting stand-up bits in the midst of our fieldwork (or while engaging with the literature). What if we then shared these creations with our research partners and colleagues? This practical and affective engagement could open up a new way of collaboratively processing knowledge. By venturing into the realm of discomfort and delving into matters of concern from a place that is as audacious as it is modest, we would, in essence, be exposing ourselves to humility rather than ridicule. In other words, exploring the potential (and limitations) of such an aesthetic and ethical practice of dissonance through humor offers peculiar pathways for collaboration and commitment. That way, perhaps humor can equip us not only with the means but also embolden us with the audacity needed to grapple with the unknowable—all with a spirit of humility and critique.

ABSTRACT

This essay, drawing on research with cartoonists in Iran, explores cartooning as a distinctive mode of engaged knowing through drawing and humor. By unraveling the cartoonists' capacity to perceive, compose, and amplify dissonance, the study reveals a practice that intertwines perceptive sensitivity, analytical skill, and moral commitment. Embracing dissonance through cartooning and humor not only provides new perspectives on the political present in Iran and beyond but also offers a peculiar mode of knowing the uncomfortable—studying things that don't match. Unlike cartooning, anthropology seldom embraces humor, yet both share a capacity for navigating dissonance. Humor as an aesthetic and ethical practice can open unconventional paths for research and commitment, providing a means and audacity to understand the unknowable—all with a spirit of humility and critique. [dissonance; humor; knowledge; cartooning; incongruity; humility; Iran]

چکیده

این مقاله با تکیه بر پژوهش با کاریکاتوریست‌های ایران، کاریکاتور را به‌عنوان شیوه‌ای متمایز از دانستن درگیرانه از طریق طراحی و طنز بررسی می‌کند. این مطالعه با آشکار کردن ظرفیت کاریکاتوریست‌ها برای درک، نوشتن و تقویت ناهماهنگی، عملکردی را نشان

می‌دهد که حساسیت ادراکی، مهارت تحلیلی و تعهد اخلاقی را در هم می‌آمیزد. پذیرش ناهماهنگی از طریق کاریکاتور و طنز، نه تنها دیدگاه‌های جدیدی را در مورد وضعیت کنونی سیاسی در ایران و فراتر از آن ارائه می‌کند، بلکه شیوه‌ای عجیب از دانستن چیزهای ناراحت‌کننده-مطالعه چیزهایی که مطابقت ندارند- را نیز ارائه می‌دهد. بر خلاف کاریکاتور، انسان شناسی به ندرت از طنز استقبال می کند، با این حال هر دو ظرفیتی برای هدایت ناهماهنگی دارند. شوخ طبعی به عنوان یک عمل زیبایی شناختی و اخلاقی می تواند راه های غیر متعارفی را برای تحقیق و تعهد بگشاید و ابزار و جسارتی برای درک ناشناخته ها فراهم کند - همه با روحیه فروتنی و نقد. [ناهماهنگی - طنز - دانش - کاریکاتور - ناهماهنگی - فروتنی - ایران]

NOTES

Acknowledgements I have presented early drafts of this essay at the University of Konstanz, the University of Hamburg, and the University of Cologne. I am particularly grateful to Thomas G. Kirsch, Julia Pauli, and Katajun Amirpur for these opportunities, and I thank the participants of these seminars for their critical comments. The conversations at GU Frankfurt with friends and colleagues during our *Ethnographische Runde* and in the NoJoke project proved key in bringing this essay to life. Thank you! Also, I want to thank the anonymous reviewers and the editorial collective for helpful criticism and encouragement, as well as Lukas Armbrust, Sepide Ghorbani, and Pauline Bugler for their assistance in preparing the manuscript. Part of the fieldwork that led to this essay was financed by the Center of Excellence "Cultural Foundations of Social Integration" at the University of Konstanz. Beyond that, this research is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, mine only, and they do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. This work is supported by ERC grant 101040059 (NoJoke).

1. All the names used in this article are pseudonyms. Places have been changed to keep my interlocutors anonymous.
2. *Cognitive dissonance* as a concept was introduced by the social psychologist Leon Festinger ([1957] 1962). Festinger's notion refers to a supposed state of mental discomfort in which a person holds two conflicting ideas or desires and then tries to lessen the discomfort. According to the anthropologist Richard Jenkins (2013, 57), an outspoken critic of Festinger's thesis, "there is nothing that counts as evidence for the mental reality of dissonance, of discomfort, and of the impulse to remove or diminish that discomfort." In acoustics, dissonance describes the (objectively detectable) conflicting overlap of mathematically incompatible wavelengths (Baron 2008, 7–8).
3. First held in 2006, the "Holocaust cartoon competition" was presented as a direct response to the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands posten*. Ten years later, in 2016, the second Holocaust cartoon competition was held; the preparations for it began shortly after the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* published more caricatures of the Prophet in the wake of the terror attack on its offices in Paris. The combined prize money amounted to $50,000 USD and was more than twice as high as the awards presented by the internationally renowned Aydın Doğan International Cartoon Competition in Turkey, which many of my Iranian interlocutors called the "cartoon Oscars." For a background analysis, see the white paper by Majid Mohammadi (2016).
4. However, this trope of a strict moral distinction between public and private spaces is not a result of the Islamic Revolution, but merely an inversion. As a popular saying goes, before the revolution, people danced in the streets and prayed at home; today they pray in public and dance in private.

5. Manata Hashemi (2015; 2020), for instance, describes in great nuance lower-class youths' multifaceted attempts to "save face," that is, to preserve their dignity while doing labor viewed by their broader society as inherently undignified. This, however, would not be a tension—between undignified labor and the yearning for dignity—that cartoonists experience or could relate to, given their middle- and upper-class backgrounds; it also lies beyond Khosravi and Varzi's focus.
6. Perhaps it is thus not surprising that dressing contradictions, as Hamid Keshmirshekan (2013) shows, has constituted a key concern for contemporary Iranian art more broadly.
7. All of this feeds into an increasingly polarized political discourse with increasing tension between "liberals" and "reformists," on the one hand and "conservatives" and "hardliners," on the other, with hardly any room between (Föllmer 2008, 37).
8. A similar sensitivity has been cultivated in contemporary Iranian art more broadly. Pamela Karimi (2022) impressively describes the intricate and complex, dialectical relationship between Iranian art and its sociopolitical context (see also Lotfalian 2022).
9. For stunning variations on this simple theme, see the cartoon collection *The Prisoner of Cell No. 8*, which Hadi Heidari (2017) published after being incarcerated in Tehran's infamous Evin prison.
10. I have changed the cartoon to protect Rezaei's anonymity.
11. In authoritarian contexts, of course, "mere reporting" is in itself almost synonymous with journalistic activism, itself a reflection of a political context with deeply restricted party politics.
12. Adorno's reputation is not that of a funny guy, but he certainly was interested in humor. He even taught a whole seminar on humor and laughter.
13. Of course, there are Malinowski's ([1937] 2015) famous saying that "anthropology is the science of the sense of humour" and contributions like those of Horace Miner (1956), but by and large anthropology has proved pretty serious business, just like most academic endeavors.
14. Such an approach would also allow us to humorously engage with and thus move past the more conventional epistemophilic obsessions we cultivate (Göpfert 2020b).

REFERENCES

Adelkhah, Fariba
1999 *Being Modern in Iran*. London: Hurst.

Adorno, Theodor W.
1973 *Ästhetische Theorie* [Aesthetic theory]. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
2003 *Dissonanzen: Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie* [Dissonances: Introduction to the sociology of music]. Vol. 14 of *Gesammelte Schriften: Theodor W. Adorno* [Collected works of Theodor W. Adorno], edited by Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Akman, Ayhan
1998 "From Cultural Schizophrenia to Modernist Binarism: Cartoons and Identities in Turkey (1930–1975)." In *Political Cartoons in the Middle East*, edited by Fatma M. Göçek, 83–131. Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers.

Angermann, Asaf
2015 "The Ghosts of Normativity: Temporality and Recurrence in Adorno's Ethics of Dissonance." *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 90, no. 4: 260–72. https://doi.org/10.1080/00168890.2015.1096165

Bajoghli, Narges
2019 *Iran Reframed: Anxieties of Power in the Islamic Republic*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Baron, Oliver
2008 *Dissonanz als ästhetische Kategorie* [Dissoance as aesthetic category]. München, Paderborn: Fink.

Berger, Peter L.
[1997] 2014 *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
Bihl, Laurent
2015 "Le dessin de presse comme outil de propagande." [Editorial cartoons as propaganda tools] In *La caricature… et si c'était sérieux ? Décryptage de la violence satirique* [Cartoons… and if they were serious? Decyphering satirical violence], edited by Marie-Mélodie Delgado, 41–46. Paris: Nouveau monde.
Boyer, Dominic
2013 "Simply the Best: Parody and Political Sincerity in Iceland." *American Ethnologist* 40, no. 2: 276–87. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12020
Causey, Andrew
2017 *Drawn to See: Drawing as an Ethnographic Method*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Chute, Hillary
2006 "'The Shadow of a Past Time': History and Graphic Representation in 'Maus.'" *Twentieth Century Literature* 52, no. 2: 199–230. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20479765
2008 "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative." *PMLA* 123, no. 2: 452–65. https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2008.123.2.452
Critchley, Simon
2002 *On Humour*. London: Routledge.
Damir-Geilsdorf, Sabine, and Stephan Milich, eds.
2020 *Creative Resistance: Political Humor in the Arab Uprisings*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839440698
Evans-Pritchard, E. E.
1976 *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Farjami, Mahmud, ed.
2017 *Iranian Political Satirists: Experience and Motivation in the Contemporary Era*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
Festinger, Leon
[1957] 1962 *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
Föllmer, Katja
2008 *Satire in Iran von 1990 bis 2000: Eine Analyse Exemplarischer Texte* [Satire in Iran from 1990 to 2000: An analysis of exemplary texts]. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.
Göpfert, Mirco
2020a "An Artistic Reaction to Perceived Injustice: Cartooning, Resistance, and the Textures of the Political in Iran." *Anthropological Notebooks* 26, no. 1: 147–66. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4317442
2020b "Epistemophilic Obsessions: Espionage, Secrets, and the Ethnographer's Will to Know." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 10, no. 2: 487–498. https://doi.org/10.1086/709483
2022 "On Dictators and Clowns." *Anthropology Today* 38, no. 3: 22–24. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12729
Goldstein, Donna M.
2003 *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Graeber, David
2015 "Radical Alterity Is Just Another Way of Saying 'Reality.'" *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5, no 2: 1–41. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau5.2.003
Greenberg, Josh
2002 "Framing and Temporality in Political Cartoons: A Critical Analysis of Visual News Discourse." *Canadian Review of Sociology* 39, no. 2: 181–98. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1755-618X.2002.tb00616.x

Hallaq, Wael B.
2013 *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Hamdy, Sherine, and Coleman Nye
2022 "Comics and Revolution as Global Public Health Intervention: The Case of *Lissa*." *Global Public Health* 17, no. 12: 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2019.1682632
Hashemi, Manata
2015 "Waithood and Face: Morality and Mobility among Lower-Class Youth in Iran." *Qualitative Sociology* 38: 261–83. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-015-9306-3
2020 *Coming of Age in Iran: Poverty and the Struggle for Dignity*. New York: New York University Press.
Hassanian-Moghaddam, Hossein, and Nasim Zamani
2017 "Suicide in Iran: The Facts and the Figures from Nationwide Reports." *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry* 12, no. 1: 73–77. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/pmc5425355/
Haugerud, Angelique
2013 *No Billionaire Left Behind: Satirical Activism in America*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
Heidari, Hadi
2017 *Zindānī-i band-i hasht / The Prisoner of Cell No. 8*. Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Farhangī Pizhūhishī-i Chāp va Nashr-i Naẓar.
Hsu, Elisabeth
2016 "Humour as a Mode of Cognition." In *Humour, Comedy, and Laughter: Obscenities, Paradoxes, Insights, and the Renewal of Life*, edited by Lidia Dina Sciama, 58–75. Oxford: Berghahn.
Ingold, Tim
2014 "That's Enough about Ethnography!" *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4, no. 1: 383–95. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau4.1.021
2016 "From Science to Art and Back Again: The Pendulum of an Anthropologist." *Anuac* 5, no. 1: 5–23. https://doi.org/10.7340/anuac2239-625X-2237
Jain, Lochlann
2022 "Companion Images." Society for Cultural Anthropology, Theorizing the Contemporary, *Fieldsights*, July 28. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/companion-images
Jenkins, Richard
2013 "Tales of the Unexpected: Doing Everyday Life, Doing Fieldwork, Doing Anthropology and Sociology." *Anthropologica* 55, no. 1: 5–16. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24467369
Kant, Immanuel
[1790] 1983 Vol. 5 of *Werke in 10 Bänden* [Works in ten volumes]. Edited by Wilhelm Weischedel. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
Karimi, Pamela
2022 *Alternative Iran: Contemporary Art and Critical Spatial Practice*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
Keshmirshekan, Hamid
2013 *Contemporary Iranian Art: New Perspectives*. London: Saqi.
Khiabany, Gholam
2010 *Iranian Media: The Paradox of Modernity*. New York: Routledge.
Khosravi, Shahram
2008 *Young and Defiant in Tehran*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Kierkegaard, Søren
[1846] 1989 *Abschließende unwissenschaftliche Nachschrift zu den Philosophischen Brocken* [Final, unscientific postscript to the philosophical fragments]. Edited by Emanuel Hirsch. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn.

Kilian, Cassis
2021 *Attention in Performance: Acting Lessons in Sensory Anthropology*. New York: Routledge.
Kuipers, Giselinde
2008 "The Sociology of Humor." In *The Primer of Humor Research*, edited by Victor Raskin, 361–98. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
2011 "The Politics of Humour in the Public Sphere: Cartoons, Power, and Modernity in the First Transnational Humour Scandal." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1: 63–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549410370072
Latour, Bruno
2004 "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30: 225–248. https://doi.org/10.1086/421123
Lotfalian, Mazyar
2022 *What People Do With Images: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Production of Iranian Visual Culture in Transnational Circuits*. Canon Pyon, UK: Sean Kingston Publishing.
Malinowski, Bronislaw
[1937] 2015 "Anthropology Is the Science of the Sense of Humour: An Introduction to Julius Lips' *The Savage Hits Back; or, The White Man through Native Eyes*." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5, no. 3: 301–3. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau5.3.020
Miner, Horace
1956 "Body Ritual among the Nacirema." *American Anthropologist* 58, no. 3: 503–7. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1956.58.3.02a00080
Mirsepassi, Ali
2011 *Political Islam, Iran, and the Enlightenment: Philosophies of Hope and Despair*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Mohammadi, Majid
2016 "Iranian Holocaust Cartoon Competitions and Exhibitions: Goals, Sponsors, and Themes." White paper commissioned by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, May 11.
Morreall, John
2009 *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
Morris, Ray
1993 "Visual Rhetoric in Political Cartoons: A Structuralist Approach." *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 8, no. 3: 195–210. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327868ms0803_5
Mulkay, Michael J.
1988 *On Humour: Its Nature and Its Place in Modern Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Navai, Ramita
2014 *City of Lies: Love, Sex, Death, and the Search for Truth in Tehran*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
Neshat, Shirin, and Nicky Nodjoumi, eds.
2008 *Ardeshir Mohassess: Art and Satire in Iran*. New York: Asia Society.
Olszewska, Zuzanna
2013 "Classy Kids and Down-at-Heel Intellectuals: Status Aspiration and Blind Spots in the Contemporary Ethnography of Iran." *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 6: 841–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2013.810078
Oring, Elliott
2016 *Joking Asides: The Theory, Analysis, and Aesthetics of Humor*. Logan: Utah State University Press.
Petrović, Tanja
2018 "Political Parody and the Politics of Ambivalence." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 47: 201–16. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102215-100148
Rayner, Steve
2012 "Uncomfortable Knowledge: The Social Construction of Ignorance in Science and Environmental Policy Discourses." *Economy and Society* 41, no. 1: 107–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2011.637335

Rossing, Jonathan P.
2016 "A Sense of Humor for Civic Life: Toward a Strong Defense of Humor." *Studies in American Humor* 2, no. 1: 1–21. https://doi.org/10.5325/studamerhumor.2.1.0001
Samanani, Farhan, Susannah Crockford, Daniel M. Knight, Craig Stensrud, Girish Daswani, Marc Tuters, and Io Chaviara
2023 "Animating Irony: The Force of Irony in Online and Offline Political Movements." *Public Culture* 35, no. 2: 191–206. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-10575859
Schneider, Arnd, ed.
2017 *Alternative Art and Anthropology: Global Encounters*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
Schneider, Arnd, and Christopher Wright, eds.
2010 *Between Art and Anthropology. Contemporary Ethnographic Practice*. London: Routledge.
2013 *Anthropology and Art Practice*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
Schopenhauer, Arthur
[1819] 1986 *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung I* [The world as will and representation]. Edited by Wolfgang von Löhneysen. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
Shayegan, Daryush
1997 *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press.
Shirazi, H. G., M. Hosseini, M. Zoladl, M. Malekzadeh, M. Momeninejad, K. Noorian, and M. A. Mansorian
2012 "Suicide in the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Integrated Analysis from 1981 to 2007." *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal* 18, no. 6: 607–13. https://doi.org/10.26719/2012.18.6.607
Sørensen, Majken Jul
2016 *Humour in Political Activism: Creative Nonviolent Resistance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Sousanis, Nick
2015 *Unflattening*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
Theodossopoulos, Dimitrios
2022 "Introduction: Graphic Ethnography on the Rise." Society for Cultural Anthropology, Theorizing the Contemporary, *Fieldsights*, July 28. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/introduction-graphic-ethnography-on-the-rise
Vahdat, Vahid
2017 *Occidentalist Perceptions of European Architecture in Nineteenth-Century Persian Travel Diaries: Travels in Farangi Space*. London: Routledge.
Varzi, Roxanne
2006 *Warring Souls: Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
Zarifian, Mohsen
2022 "Understanding the World by Means of Cartoons in Modern Media Space." *ОРГАНИЗАЦИОННАЯ ПСИХОЛИНГВИСТИКА* [Organisational Psycholinguistics] 17, no. 1: 60–80.