

BORAT'S RACISM: PERFORMANCE OF ANTI-SEMITISM AS JEWISH ACTIVIST ART

Marc Tasman

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Journalist Borat Sagdiyev, was the sixth most famous man in Kazakhstan before he came to America to make a documentary, with only his clothes and a “jar of gypsy tears to protect [him] from AIDS.” He sometimes utters that his sister was “number four prostitute in all of Kazakhstan,” his unwashed grey suit is too small and “foreign smelling,”¹ he often greets men by kissing both cheeks then attempts the traditional greeting in his country, grabbing the other man’s *Khram*, or genitals. He is a racist, misogynistic, homophobic, anti-Semite.

Sacha Baron Cohen, the creator of Borat, in one of his rare interviews not in character, revealed that placing a fictional character in real situations is a new form of comedy. Borat’s use of inappropriate language and imagery would seem to appeal to the lowest common denominator, encouraging the worst kind of behavior from that element of society. But this Cambridge educated British Jew, who did graduate research on Black and Jewish relations during the civil rights movement in the U.S. claims that his intent of his offensive speech is not to encourage, but to expose racism.²

He Can’t be an Anti-Semite, He’s Jewish

These recorded interactions of Borat with real people he says, are a “dramatic demonstration of how racism feeds on dumb conformity, as much as rabid bigotry.”³ But even when one learns that Baron Cohen is Jewish, and his performance is ironic, an uneasy feeling still lingers. There are many aspects of the work that are simultaneously hilarious and distasteful. It is not clear whether Baron Cohen’s creation passes the somewhat aphoristic litmus test of being “good for the Jews.” Nor is it clear in what cultural context these scenes of abominable bigotry and humiliation could be construed as comedy. It’s not clear whether Borat is good for anything but making money.

“Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan” debuted at No. 1 in box offices in November of 2006 with \$26.4 million in just 837 locations, breaking Fahrenheit 9/11’s record for the highest gross for a movie opening in under 1,000 theaters (the Michael Moore documentary made \$23.9 mil in 868 locations in 2004).⁴

However, one way in which we might contextualize Borat’s anti-Semitic performances are to see Baron Cohen as part of a Jewish activist artist lineage. Baron Cohen, citing his professor, Ian Kershaw, who said, “The path to Auschwitz was paved with indifference,” became intrigued by the idea that “not everyone in Germany had to be a raving anti-Semite. They just had to be apathetic.”¹

By looking at the work of Jewish artists from the era of the Nazi regime, the supposed predecessors of Sacha Baron Cohen, we can see a few artists, such as visual artists Ben Shahn and Arthur Szyk, who were expressing their outrage with the intent

of awakening the world and inspiring action to stop Nazi atrocities; and satirist Karl Kraus who was both a critic of Jews and the rising tide of fascism, alike.

The life and work of Ben Shahn reveals a profound concern for social justice,⁵ seen in his 1927 mural based on an unjust trial and execution of Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti; in his 1931 print series based on Dreyfus Affair, late 19th century anti-Semitic scandal involving French officer; and most prominently in his 1942 print for the U.S. Office of War Information. In “This is Nazi Brutality,” the image of a handcuffed and masked (Abu Ghraib style) prisoner is captioned by the following telegram text:⁶

RADIO BERLIN.—IT IS OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED:—
ALL MEN OF LIDICE - CZECHOSLOVAKIA - HAVE BEEN SHOT:
THE WOMEN DEPROTECTED TO A CONCENTRATION CAMP:
THE CHILDREN SENT TO APPROPRIATE CENTERS—THE
NAME OF THE VILLAGE WAS IMMEDIATELY ABOLISHED.
6/11/42/115P

Arthur Szyk, a Polish émigré to the U.S. was prolific in railing against the murderous Nazi regime. A 1943 pen and ink illustration entitled, *We're Running Short of Jews*, reflected the “calculated and ongoing nature” of the Nazi atrocities as well as an awareness by U.S. officials. A caricature of Hitler points to a note on his desk reporting the killing of two million Jews, a figure publicized in November 1942 and confirmed by the U.S. State Department.⁷

Perhaps the most complex comparison is made by Dan Williams, a Jerusalem correspondent for Reuters, by suggesting that Baron Cohen’s Borat is the heir apparent to Austrian-Jewish satirist, performer, and lecturer, Karl Kraus (1874–1936).⁸ Kraus was famous for his aphorisms, many with an anti-Semitic tone, such as “The Jews control the press, they control the stock market and now they control the unconscious,” and “One knows that my hatred of the Jewish press is exceeded only by my hatred of the anti-Semitic press, while my hatred of the anti-Semitic press is exceeded only by my hatred of the Jewish press.”⁹ Kraus’s devotion to Jews as his people is ambivalent at best, as he became a Catholic¹⁰ from 1911–1923, so it would seem that his intent was different from that of Baron Cohen.

Baron Cohen’s Codes

However, we know from Baron Cohen that he is a proud, Israel loving Jew.¹¹ He is the grandson of Holocaust Survivors. His Grandmother lives in Haifa, Israel.¹² He attended *Habonim*, a labor Zionist camp in Israel¹³. One of Borat’s catch phrase exclamations, “Wawaweewah,” is an appropriation from Israeli television and popular culture¹⁴. His Jewish identity in his private life seems well intact. In the film, when he is not speaking English, or the few utterances of Polish and Russian, he is speaking Hebrew. And not just any Hebrew, as my wife points out, Israeli Hebrew, street Hebrew. In “The Running of the Jew 2004” scene, you can hear this linguistically coded wink at the Jews in the announcing of this (fictional) yearly sporting event in his home village in Kazakhstan, in Hebrew. In this scene, grotesque paper mache heads of a huge Jew and Jewess, complete with hooked noses, horns and fangs for teeth, in carnival-like display, terrorize the villagers who taunt the monstrous Jews by waving paper money in their faces. As the Jewess lays her egg in the street, the children are urged to hurry and smash the egg before it hatches.

Running of the Jew 2004

Here comes the Jew.
It's a big one this year.
Whoaaa...
He nearly got the money there.
Wait, here comes Mrs. Jew.
She's stopped.
Is she? Is she?
Here it comes.
She's laid a Jew egg.
Go kids! Crush that
Jew chick before he hatches!

Jews with Horns

Anyone who is familiar with the annual Spanish phenomenon would recognize this as a play on The Running of the Bulls in Pamplona, but in the Borat film, Baron Cohen has replaced one horned creature with another. Amid the enduring anti-Semitic images and myths of the Wandering Jew, and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion is the notion that the Jews' planning, scheming, suffering and torment comes from a special relationship with the Devil. The Jews are cursed to wander bringing trouble wherever they go. They are engaged in enacting a plan for World Wide Jewish Domination (WWJD). But it is the Devil who facilitates the Jews' mobility. This relationship between the Jews and the Devil is illustrated neatly in a children's Nazi propaganda book, *Trust No Fox on his Green Heath And No Jew on his Oath* by Elwira Bauer, published in 1936 (courtesy Randall Bytwerk).¹⁵ The first chapter, "The Father of the Jews is the Devil," concludes,

By the banks of Pharaoh's Nile
Pharaoh saw this folk, and said:
"I'll torment the lazy blighters,
These people shall make bricks for me."
The Jew did this all wailing and whining,
Never was there such cursing and swearing,
With bent backs and over-big slippers.
Even today we see them shambling
With lip hanging down and great red noses
And looking daggers, flashing hate.
They owe Pharaoh thanks,
Who trounced them soundly for their pranks.
The Jews soon had enough of that!
The Devil brought them [the Jews] to our midst,
Like thieves they stole into our land
Hoping to get the upper hand.

Just as Baron Cohen did not invent the Jewish caricatures and stereotypes he depicts, neither can Elwira Bauer take credit for authoring the Jewish Devil partnership conspiracy. Four hundred years before, Martin Luther wrote in "The Jews and Their Lies," that, "you [Jews] are of your father, the devil. It was intolerable to them [the Jews] to hear that they were not Abraham's but the devil's children, nor can they bear to hear this today."

Luther continues in this 1543 publication, "My essay, I hope, will furnish a Christian with enough material not only to defend himself against the blind, venomous Jews, but also to become the foe of the Jews' malice, lying, and cursing, and to

understand not only that their belief is false but that they are surely possessed by all devils.”

In addition to the inferences that the Jews are allied with, akin to, and possessed by the Devil, he recommends curatively, forced labor and the burning down or razing of synagogues, Jewish homes and schools. Furthermore, Luther advises that a devotee of the Lord should “bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them.”¹⁶

The trail from Luther to the Nazis portrays not only a shocking vision of things to come, but a notable shift from anti-Semitism based on religious convictions to a *Wagnerian, Dryfusian* or *Krausian* style in the mid and late 19th century which marked another kind anti-Semitism. This modern incarnation, organized in the academy and in political parties was based on economic and “scientific theories of race” rather than religious reasons first put into words by the German Martin Luther four centuries before.¹⁷

A Renaissance of Conspiracies

A simple retelling of the past, or decrying “look what they did to us,” does not qualify anyone as an activist. If we are to assign Baron Cohen the label of Jewish activist artist, there must be a cause for alarm or a call for action embedded in his performative codes. But in the film, when Borat says that his colleague “insists we not fly in case the Jews repeat their attack of 9/11,” he is using a contemporary conspiratorial anti-Semitic slur.

What we may be experiencing now is a renaissance of anti-Semitism, based again on a classic principle that dehumanizes Jews by a literal demonizing (which justifies their killing). But the post-modern, post-Intifada II, or post 9/11 anti-Semitism is coupled with a political denial of the State of Israel’s right to exist, plus a religious dispensation for cleansing the land of infidels. Ironically, (or logically) part of this requires the disassembling of the truth claims (as Luther and the Nazis did with previous persecutions) regarding the systematic murder of six million Jews in Europe.

Regarding the Jews’ contract with the devil and conspiratorial pacts for world domination, Egyptian pop singer Shabaan Abdel Rahim, (who became a sensation for his 2001 hit single, “I Hate Israel,”) makes some interesting observations in his early 2003 “Hey Arab Leaders” music video. Rational thinking, consistent logic and reason fail him at points, however, in this cartoon video where Israeli Prime minister Ariel Sharon presses a red button that sends a jet plane to crash into the Twin Towers, before Sharon himself grows a devilish set of horns and pointed tail.

“Two faces of the same coin, America and Israel.
They made the world a jungle and ignited the fuse.
America spread its wings, doesn't care at all.
No one can stop her, no one can catch her.
Soon he [Bush] will say Iran, then he will say Syria,
but he is silent about Korea.
About the Towers, Oh, people, definitely:
His [Sharon's] friends were the ones who brought it down.
What terrorism!
How many years are left for America and Israel

to act as bullies?"¹⁸

Political leaders ought to be fair game here, but in realizing how other libels have fueled violence against Jews, the September Eleventh conspiracy resembles incitement in a proper context. A television show depicting Jews slitting a Christian boy's throat to make matzah might be laughable if it were in a satirical or comedic context—rather, Blood Libels from medieval to modern times in Europe often led to rioting and lynching or *pogroms* on Jews. What is disturbing in this particular context is that all of the anti-Semitic libels in "Al Shatat," a Syrian produced series of which first aired during Ramadan in November 2003, then on Iranian TV in 2004, are presented as fact. See the following screenplay and dialogue below.¹⁹

"The Jews preparing Passover Matzah by using the blood of a Christian boy"

Scene I: Two men talking.

Rabbi (speaking to a young man seated next to him): We have a task from the leadership. We need the blood of a Christian child before Passover for matzah.

Scene II: Dimly lit hallway. Rabbi with young man behind him. A third man enters dragging a child.

Christian child: Nathan save me!

Nathan: Don't be afraid.

Rabbi nods to the young man who nods to Nathan. Nathan forces the child down onto the floor and cuts his throat. Someone catches the blood in a bowl.

Scene III: Rabbi and young man standing eating matzo. While chewing they nod to one another.

Baron Cohen's performance as Borat is powerful and has a feel of authenticity. As a reference to "Al Shatat," or the pop singer Shabaan Abdel Rahim, Borat seems to be a quite well researched parody of contemporary uses of anti-Semitic media. But the victims, or dupes caught on film of Baron Cohen's "experiment in comedy" are not exposed to the Arab mass media that airs this latter day brand of anti-Semitism. Borat goes to the United States of America and in doing so he exposes the prejudices that Americans hold, bridging a contextual and cultural gap in the understanding and confrontation of bigotry.

In My Country There is a Problem

As part of Baron Cohen's HBO series Da Ali G show, first airing in August of 2004, Borat offered a reasonable (ironic) solution to problems in his country, in song at a Country Western bar in Tucson, Arizona. The song begins innocently enough, certainly with a catchy tune, venting about Kazakhstan's problems with transportation.

Verse

In my country there is problem,
And that problem is transport.
It take very, very long,
Because Kazakhstan is big.

Chorus 1

Throw transport down the well (*repeat line*)
So my country can be free (*repeat line*)
We must make travel easy (*repeat line*)
Then we'll have a big party (*repeat line*)

Verse 2

In my country there is problem
And that problem is the Jew
They take everybody money
And they never give it back

At this point we are all holding our collective breath to see what happens. How will people in the bar react? Some are reluctant to sing along at first, but there is enough enthusiasm for the song expressed by a few. By the end of the song we see that those reluctant at first now are chanting the horrific lyrics loudly and proudly.

Chorus 2

Throw the Jew down the well (*repeat line*)
So my country can be free (*repeat line*)
You must grab him by his horns (*repeat line*)
Then we have a big party (*repeat line*)

Verse 3

If you see the Jew coming
You must be careful of his teeth
You must grab him by his money
And I tell you what to do
(Repeat Chorus 2 twice)²⁰

Critiques of Borat in America (by a wide spectrum of the Jewish Media?)

After receiving hundreds of complaints in response to this segment, the Anti Defamation League on August 9, 2004 released an open letter to Sacha Baron Cohen. Part of the letter follows:

“While we understand this scene was an attempt to show how easily a group of ordinary people can be encouraged to join in an anti-Semitic chorus, we are concerned that the irony may have been lost on some of your audience – or worse, that some of your viewers may have simply accepted Borat's statements about Jews at face value.”²¹

Flash forward two years, where cultural critics begin to react to the release of the film, and to the ubiquity of promotional media for and by Borat. Mark LeVine, a Middle East and Islam scholar and regular contributor to The Huffington Post, in his November 4, 2006 article, “The Trouble with Borat,” worries that most viewers will assume that Borat, “with his dark hair, bushy moustache, and faux-Kazakhstani identity and accent” is Muslim. (Kazakhstan’s population is about half Muslim, half Christian). And that “Baron Cohen's depiction of Kazakhstan as a backwards, deeply misogynistic and anti-Semitic country” will add “grist to the mill to America's ignorance of and prejudice towards Islam.”²²

David Brooks in his November 16, 2006 New York Times Op-Ed piece on says Baron Cohen capitalizes on and reinforces a kind of American classist snobbery based on mass condescension, “an explosively funny rube-baiting session orchestrated by a hilarious bully.” He criticizes Baron Cohen for rigging an unfair fight. “The more tolerant the simpletons try to be toward Borat, the more he drags them into the realm of anti-Semitism and vileness. The more hospitable they try to be, the dumber they appear for not understanding the situation.”²³

Charles Krauthammer Op-Ed columnist for the Washington Post on November 24, 2006 says that the real danger of Borat is not that his biting satire could be missed, nor that Americans may think less of Muslims, nor that the bourgeoisies is laughing at the working class, but to believe that the residents of America’s heartland are the world’s most dangerous anti-Semites is to be dangerously confused. Rather, he

concludes, it is “a sign of the disorientation of a distressed and confused [Jewish] people that we should find it so difficult to distinguish our friends [the Americans] from our enemies [radical Islam and terrorist states].”²⁴

Reactions Outside of America

Of course, this criticism looks past the façade of the derogatory representation of and defamation of the nation of Kazakhstan. Previous to the release of the Borat film, in November 2005, but following Borat's crass performance as host of the MTV Europe Music Awards in Lisbon, spokesman for Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry, Yerzhan Ashykbayev told a news conference: “We view Mr. Baron Cohen's behaviour...as utterly unacceptable, being a concoction of bad taste and ill manners which is completely incompatible with the ethics and civilised behaviour of Kazakhstan's people...We do not rule out that Mr. Baron Cohen is serving someone's political order designed to present Kazakhstan and its people in a derogatory way,” and concluding that, “we reserve the right to any legal action to prevent new pranks of the kind.”²⁵ The tone was ominous and appropriately suggestive of a conspiracy that involved the shadowy Elders of Zion flexing their influence over Sacha Baron Cohen.

Baron Cohen, rather, Borat responded, as the man rarely spoke out of character during these episodes, by posting a video to his MySpace.com site on the Internet:

“In response to Mr. Ashykbayev's comments, I'd like to state I have no connection with Mr. Baron Cohen and fully support my government's decision to sue this Jew. Since the 2003 Tuleyakiv reforms, Kazakhstan is as civilized as any other country in the world. Women can now travel on inside of bus, homosexuals no longer have to wear blue hats, and age of consent has been raised to eight years old. Please, captain of industry; I invite you to come to Kazakhstan where we have incredible natural resources, hardworking labour, and some of the cleanest prostitutes in whole of Central Asia. Goodbye! Dzienkuje!”²⁶

This response seemed not only to add insult to Kazakhstan, but proved the resolve and genius of Sacha Baron Cohen's performance. For a country to sue a comedian is to encourage transgressive art and heap more attention on the project.

Sean R. Roberts, the Central Asian Affairs Fellow at Georgetown speculates that Borat especially frustrates Kazakhstan as well as Russia because he reminds the world of an awkward time in the history of the countries. “Borat is a satire of the former Soviet Union of the early 1990s, Kazakhstan included. In the early 1990s, Kazakhstan did not enjoy the respect of the international community. Instead, it was seen as a backwater and under-developed country that happened to be rich in resources.”²⁷

And yet, Baron Cohen's performance is constructed in such a way that there is scarcely room to criticize the actual author and performer of Borat. Assailing a fictional character is to play in to the comedy act, while anyone who scrutinizes Baron Cohen's motivation as a Jew, conjures anti-Semitic stereotypes and will be exposed in the spotlight of bigotry. However, Baron Cohen's (Jewish) performance is precisely the anti-Semitic stereotype espoused by Borat: a treacherous, conniving, trickster, whom you must grab by his money (by suing him).

Stojniev O'Donnell's following editorial written for the Russian sensationalist newspaper, Pravda Online says more about the rich tradition of anti-Semitism and irrationality of hatred than the indignation felt by him or his fellow White Supremacists:

"While there's not much stable in human history, one of the few things we can always count on is the Jews' conviction of their own moral and cultural superiority. Despite the subterfuge of the film's mythical Kazakhstan, Borat is really a story for and about Jews. Anyone who knows the Jews' traditional stereotypes recognizes the moral here: whether we talk about Kazakhs or goyish hillybilly [sic] Americans, they're all really the same dirty, depraved bunch. The world knows one decent, sober, righteous, "chosen" minority, and what's left over is the irrational, immoral, hardly human remainder."²⁸

Despite the despicable and generalized accusations that Stojniev O'Donnell makes against Sacha Baron Cohen and his people, his point should be taken: Racists will latch on to Borat and/or his creator as proof and reinforcement of their bigoted beliefs, strengthening and making more powerful their positions.

Hugo Chavez, like Borat and O'Donnell, says he also has a problem in his country, and that problem is the Jews. Speaking on December 24, 2005, the controversial left-wing president of Venezuela said "the descendants of those who crucified Christ... have taken ownership of the riches of the world, a minority has taken ownership of the gold of the world, the silver, the minerals, water, the good lands, petrol, well, the riches, and they have concentrated the riches in a small number of hands."²⁹

The Anti Defamation League called this Venezuelan anti-Semitism a spillover effect from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's anti-Semitic (anti-Zionist) rhetoric.³⁰ After the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published the now famous Mohammed Cartoons, riots broke out in the Muslim world. Leaders in these rioting countries were anxious to point out the hypocrisies of the West's ideas about "Free Speech." Emerging as a result of this was the Iranian Holocaust Cartoon Contest, in which the free speech/hate speech dialectic was examined, in some cases by denying or questioning the accounting of murdered Jews in Europe.³¹

President Ahmadinejad used these Holocaust denials, rejecting the Holocaust as justification for the creation of a Jewish state (Israel), first proclaiming at the "The World without Zionism Conference" in Tehran on October 26, 2005, "Israel must be wiped off the map."³² The parodic comparisons between Borat and Ahmadinejad have been noted at the right winged satirical blog, The People'sCube.com. Here, analogous to Borat's spoof by Sacha Baron Cohen, Ahmadinejad is characterized as a caricature performed by another Jewish performance artist, Misha Braslavsky: "Son of Jewish parents who immigrated to Brooklyn from Ukraine in 1988, Misha found inspiration in the work of his friend and colleague Sacha Baron Cohen, modeling his "Iranian President's" character after Borat's quirky looks and pronouncements."³³ Imaginative satirists find either that Borat's earnestness is so convincing, that Ahmadinejad's pronouncements are entirely ludicrous, or that the juxtaposition of these two characters delegitimizes the real while authenticating the fake.

Hunting the Jew

In most cases, scenarios that are suggested by the Iranian president are horrific and unimaginable. However, finishing them (the six million living Jews in Israel) "off in a place the size of Greater Indianapolis, with a bomb or two,"³⁴ would be something akin to shooting fish in a barrel compared to the kind of ardors involved in the roundings-up, executions, and attempted genocide in the perpetrative style of the Nazi regime. Reminiscent of the Einsatzgruppen death squads, Borat has another proposal for dealing with the Jewish problem, in perhaps his most disturbing piece of encouraged anti-Semitism.

In this unaired scene from the HBO series, *Da Ali G show*, Borat visits the Serengeti Ranch in Texas, a place where one can hunt exotic and endangered animals. He elicits the following dialogue from the ranch's owner, Gene Gordon:

Gordon : "You don't have any Jews up in your country do ya?"
Borat: "Jews, we have a lot of Jews... the one that like the money?"
Gordon: "It's one of their traits alright."
Borat: "In our country the big nose people make a lot of trouble. They make trouble here in America too?"
Gordon: "Everywhere they are!"
Borat: "Yes."
Gordon: "They were so bad in Germany and controlled the economy and all of the money and stuff. That's why when the Nazis got in power, they said 'We're going to have a final solution to this Jewish...'"
Borat: "Hunt the Jew?"
Gordon: "Kill 'em all!"
Borat: "It is a shame you cannot have in one of this..." (Borat indicates to the ranch) "Deer and then a Jew. Then you can hunt the Jew."
Gordon: (laughs) "You can't be this way in this country!"
Borat: "But why not?"
Gordon: "It's OK with me. But it's not with other people."³⁵

YouTube Comments

Baron Cohen already catalyzed a contextual shift by immersing a fictional character inside real situations, but when new media forms, such as YouTube.com, allow users to break apart the original frame, this context is fragmented even further. Here users post short videos of Borat, and responses to these clips, making for some uneasy exchanges and frightening expressions of virulent anti-Semitism.

By analyzing the comments posted with the Borat videos, one can see that many are word for word recitations of Borat. These comments are *Borat memes*, (a meme in this case being "an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture," as defined by Merriam Webster). The comments and the individuals who make them parallel Borat's performance, that is, they have the same effect as the actual (fictional character) Borat in real situations. These memes carry out Baron Cohen's intent of exposing bigotry.

Audiences are shocked by Borat's ignorance but horrified when they hear support or sympathy by real people for his bigotry. Likewise, online, when a user mistakes (ironic) comments for a Jew-Haters' support group, and offers an anti-Semitic comment that crosses a (sometimes subtle) line they are triggering an alarm. The sincere anti-Semite's display of disturbingly brutal imbecility is a wake up call for all those who were not aware or previously indifferent to this kind of bigotry and incitement.

In the commentary following the “Hunting the Jew” video on YouTube,³⁶ note the exemplary *Sincere Racist*, Amar90, and the defender or *Justifier*, breakdance74. This *Justifier’s* final comment in response to Amar90 is most poignant for his tenacity in trying to convince the *Sincere Racist* to be aware, be informed, and that context and agency are at play.

Amar90: Jews hunting should be allowed!! i went jew hunting once it was awesome i still have their heads mounted on the wall.
jews are hated by everyone!!!!1

breakdance74: u stupid fuck

Amar90: jews are hated by everyone!!!!
they are evil ppl with huge noses that hate everything but money :)

breakdance74: You are so stupid, I bet you've never even SEEN a jew, they have small noses and in most cases they are quite poor

Amar90: jews are the worst assholes in the world
everyone hate them because they kill inocent ppl in the world

caimhghain: I hope you're being sarcastic!
caimhghain: my comment is directed at breakdance74.

breakdance74: dude borat IS a jew... if u watch the movie when he speaks to azamat he is speaking hebrew! Even borats real name is sacha baron => COHEN<= which is a jewish name!

caimhghain: i was referring to your comment about jews small noses and being poor. maybe in austrailia, but not here in L.A. man...

Amar90: no i'm not
jews are hated by all the world
they r all rejects

alexeddygordo: I hope the IAF busts your ass...

This stream of commentary begs the question, in what context is Amar90 actually operating? That is, who is he? Is he living in the U.S. or Kazakhstan? What media, culture and politic is he under? By looking at his YouTube profile, we can read who Amar90 is in his own words:

Amar90

Joined: August 10 2006

Videos Watched: 3,415

my name is amar and i love watching others feeling pain but don't get me wrong i'm not evil (cough)

Name: amar

Age: 21

City: mexico city

Hometown: mexico

Country: Mexico

Occupation: servant

Interests and Hobbies: wrestling and wrestling

Movies and Shows: wwe

Music: any thing that sounds good

Books: non³⁷

I presume that Amar90 is also a part of the spill over effect from Ahmadinjad,

Chavez, and the Latin American Press,³⁸ and that the subtleties of (the English) language are lost on him. Like the pop singer Shaaaban Abdel Rahem, Amar90 boasts of his illiteracy and status as everyman.³⁹ But, purposefully or inadvertently, he reinforces the stereotype of a person who is ripe for *Boratian* ridicule. The actual danger of the words, however, is that they have power beyond fixed contexts. The new media has the ability to preserve feelings and attitudes that might otherwise be fleeting or forgivable hotheaded expressions.

Baron Cohen's *Kavanah* or Intention: Words have power

Baron Cohen's words are saturated with codes and comedy. Farce and parody are lost on a vocal minority, however our discomfort may come from the bitter feeling that there is truth in jest. The caricature of Borat is based on a reflection of our mediated reality, and while the twelve million living Jews in the world may or may not fit into a neat stereotype, contemporary Jewish identity still does carry the feeling of being a survivor, in a minority, with a dutiful call to defend. But just because we are paranoid doesn't mean they are not out to get us.

Dr. Ahmad Abu-Halabia, a member of the "Fatwa Council" appointed by the Palestinian Authority and the former acting Rector of the Islamic University in Gaza, delivered the following in a sermon in the Zayd bin Sultan Nahyan mosque in Gaza and carried live on Palestinian television on October 13, 2000,⁴⁰ one day after a "Palestinian mob [in Ramallah] stabbed and stomped to death two Israeli reserve soldiers and then paraded a mutilated body through town."⁴¹

"The Jews are Jews, whether Labour or Likud, the Jews are Jews. They do not have any moderates or any advocates of peace. They are all liars. They are the ones who must be butchered and killed... Have no mercy on the Jews, no matter where they are, in any country. Fight them, wherever you are. Whenever you meet them, kill them. Wherever you are, kill those Jews and those Americans ..."⁴²

Daniel Pearl

"My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, and I am Jewish," were journalist Daniel Pearl's last words before his throat was slashed.⁴³ At least one of his captors admitted that the kidnappers were specifically looking for a Jewish victim. On March 10, 2007, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, reported to be third in command under Osama Bin Laden, claimed responsibility for the murder of Daniel Pearl. In a confession read during his Combatant Status Review Tribunal hearing Mohammed is on record repeating:

"I decapitated with my blessed right hand the head of the American Jew Daniel Pearl, in the City of Karachi, Pakistan."⁴⁴

On April 16, 2007, Pearl was added to the Holocaust Memorial on Miami Beach as the first non-Holocaust victim. His father, Judea Pearl, gave his reasoning for the induction by saying, "the forces of barbarity and evil are still active in our world. The Holocaust didn't finish in 1945".⁴⁵

This extensive line drawn between historical anti-Semitism and the murder of a Jewish journalist can be imagined as slicing through turbulent episodes in civilizations,

ensnaring artists and activists who demand, plea, and hope for a higher ethos from humanity. Sacha Baron Cohen may be remembered as one such artist, but a clear answer to the question about the effects of his works matching his intention is seemingly evasive. A simple measurement can be performed on the hundreds of YouTube comments by counting the number of racist comments versus the number of comments that defend or justify Baron Cohen's agency as a comedian or Jew. This group known as the *Justifiers* produces far more comments and has many more members than any other racist or indifferent group. This means that many more cooler, more rational heads populate the comment fields of this particular "Hunting the Jew" video on YouTube. In short, Borat encourages thoughtful discussion and critical debate about the problem of bigotry, racism and hatred in society.

The implication of this work may not only be about whether his comedy falls in or out of bounds of offensive, subversive, or dangerous speech, but also in the ways that he has brought our attention to that line. As we are learning, the issue of free speech in the new media is one that must be debated if we are to continue to enjoy and exercise our democratic rights and obligations.

Notes

¹Strauss, Neil. "The Man Behind the Moustache." Rolling Stone Magazine 14 Nov. 2006. <http://www.rollingstone.com/news/coverstory/sacha_baron_cohen_the_real_borat_finally_speaks>

²Ibid.

⁴Rich, Joshua. "Borat Shocks Hollywood." EW.com 5 Nov. 2006. <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,1555093,00.html>>

⁵Ben Shahn: Passion for Justice. Retrieved 16 April 2007. <<http://www.njn.net/artsculture/shahn/timeline.html>>

⁶Ibid.

⁷"The Art and Politics of Arthur Szyk." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. <<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/szyk/action/94612.htm#art1>>

⁸ Williams, Dan. "Could Borat's Anti-Semitism be Good for the Jews?" Ezilon Infobase 6 Nov 2006. <http://www.ezilon.com/information/article_17186.shtml>

⁹ Reitter, Paul. "Karl Kraus and the Jewish Self-Hatred Question." Jewish Social Studies vol 10 (2003): 78-116. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jewish_social_studies/v010/10.1reitter.html>

¹⁰ Steiner, George. "The Life of the Apocalyptic Satirist." Times Online. Retrieved 15 Feb. 2007. <<http://tls.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,25336-1914702,00.html>>

¹¹ Heller, Aron. "Israelis get the inside jokes in 'Borat'." Record online.com 14 Dec 2006. <<http://www.recordonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061214/ENTERTAIN/61214012>>

¹²Strauss, Neil. "The Man Behind the Moustache." Rolling Stone Magazine 14 Nov. 2006.

<http://www.rollingstone.com/news/coverstory/sacha_baron_Baron_Cohen_the_real_borat_finally_speaks>

¹³ Tugend, Tom, "Borat' Laughs Across the U S and A - in Hebrew." The Arts 10 Nov 2006. <http://www.jewishjournal.com/home/preview.php?id=16760>>

¹⁴ Urban Dictionary definition of "wa-wa-wee-wa," Retrieved 30 October 2007. <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=wa-wa-wee-wa>>

¹⁵ Bauer, Elwira. Trust No Fox on His Green Heath and No Jew on His Oath. Nuremburg, 1936. Retrieved 8 Apr 2007. <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/fuchs.htm>>

¹⁶ Luther, Martin. "The Jews and Their Lies (1543)." Translated by Martin H. Bertram. Retrieved 16 April 2007. <http://www.humanitas-international.org/showcase/chronography/documents/luther-jews.htm>>

¹⁷ "Anti-Semitic Political Parties." Simon Wiesenthal Center Multimedia Learning Center. Retrieved 16 April 2007. <http://motlc.learningcenter.wiesenthal.org/pages/t001/t00196.html>>

¹⁸ Palestinian Media Watch, "Hey Arab Leaders" music video, performed by Shabaan Abdel Rahim. Retrieved 8 April 2007. <http://www.pmw.org.il/tv%20part12.html>>

¹⁹ Palestinian Media Watch, "The Diaspora, Al-Shatat," The series was produced in Syria and first broadcast on Hezbollah's Lebanese Al-Manar satellite channel in October–November 2003. Retrieved 16 April 2007. <http://www.pmw.org.il/tv%20Al-Shatat.html#Maza>>

²⁰ The Unofficial Borat Homepage, "Borat's Guide to the USA II, Episode Three: Country Music," Retrieved 19 Jan. 2007. http://www.webgeordie.co.uk/borat/usa_country.htm>

²¹ "ADL letter to Sacha Baron Cohen." ADL.com. 9 Aug 2004. http://www.adl.org/media_watch/tv/20040809-hbo.htm>

²² Levine, Mark. "The Trouble with Borat." The Huffington Post. 4 Nov 2006. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-levine/the-trouble-with-borat_b_33256.html>

²³ Brooks, David. "The Heyday of Snobbery." Blogspot.com. 16 Nov 2006. <http://freedemocracy.blogspot.com/2006/11/david-brooks-heyday-of-snobbery.html>>

²⁴ Krauthammer, Charles. "Just an Anti-Semitic Laugh? Hardly." The Washington Post. 24 Nov 2006. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/11/23/AR2006112300966.html>>

²⁵ Crowley, Michael. "In America, Woman *Can* Vote, but Horse *Cannot*!" The Plank.com 14 Nov 2005. <http://www.tnr.com/blog/theplank?week=2005-11-08>>

²⁶ Broat's MySpace profile, <http://www.myspace.com/borat>>, "Borat response" to Kazakhstan threatening legal action on YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFVN59sR4IY>>

²⁷ Roberts, Sean R. "Borat and Kazakhstan: The Political Psychology of the Relationship." Blogspot.com. 22 Oct 2006. <http://roberts-report.blogspot.com/2006/10/borat-and-kazakhstan-political.html>>

-
- ²⁸ O'Donnell, Stojniev. "Borat: Hollywood's nasty Talmud fable." Pravda.ru 7 Dec 2006. <<http://english.pravda.ru/opinion/feedback/85824-1/>>
- ²⁹ Gross, Tom. "Venezuelan President Chavez: 'The descendants of the Christ-killers' control the world." Mideast Dispatch Archive, 2 Jan. 2006. <<http://www.tomgrossmedia.com/mideastdispatches/archives/000625.html>>
- ³⁰ "Report: Anti-Semitism on Rise in Venezuela; Chavez Government "Fosters Hate" Toward Jews and Israel." ADL.org 6 Nov 2006. <http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ASInt_13/4925_13.htm>
- ³¹ Morley, Jefferson. "That Holocaust Cartoon Contest." Washington Post.com 24 Feb. 2006. <http://blog.washingtonpost.com/worldopinionroundup/2006/02/that_holocaust_cartoon_contest.html>
- ³² "Ahmadinejad: Wipe Israel off map." Al Jazeera.com 28 Oct 2005 <<http://english.aljazeera.net/English/archive/archive?ArchiveId=15816>>
- ³³ Square, Red. "Borat And Iranian President A TV Spoof?" The Peoples Cube.com 26 Jan. 2006. Retrieved 8 Dec. 2006. <<http://thepeoplescube.com/red/viewtopic.php?t=492>>
- ³⁴ Kitaj, R.B. First Diasporist Manifesto. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989.
- ³⁵ "Borat-Hunting the Jew," on YouTube, Retrieved 8 Apr 2007. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCrMyl6ngLg>>
- ³⁶ All Comments on "Borat-Hunting the Jew," on YouTube, Retrieved 8 Apr 2007. <http://www.youtube.com/comment_servlet?all_comments&v=MCrMyl6ngLg>
- ³⁷ User Profile of Amar90 on YouTube, Retrieved 8 Apr 2007. <<http://www.youtube.com/user/Amar90>>
- ³⁸ "Report: Anti-Semitism on Rise in Venezuela; Chavez Government "Fosters Hate" Toward Jews and Israel." ADL.org 6 Nov 2006. <http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ASInt_13/4925_13.htm>
- ³⁹ Lake, Eli J. "Egypt's New Pop Sensation." Sheik Yo Booty." The New Republic 2 May 2006. Retrieved 8 Apr. 2006. <<http://www.tnr.com/doc.mhtml?i=20060508&s=lake050806>>
- ⁴⁰ "Special Dispatch Series - No. 138: PA TV Broadcasts call for Killing Jews and Americans." Memri.org 13 Oct. 2000. <<http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Area=sd&ID=SP13800>>
- ⁴¹ Sontag, Deborah. "2 Israeli Soldiers Slain by a Mob; Helicopters Hit Back." NYTimes.com 13 Oct. 2000. Retrieved 31 Oct. 2007. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9903E0D7153FF930A25753C1A9669C8B63>>
- ⁴² "Special Dispatch Series - No. 138: PA TV Broadcasts call for Killing Jews and Americans." Memri.org 13 Oct. 2000. <<http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Area=sd&ID=SP13800>>
- ⁴³ Verbatim Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing for ISN 10024 (ie. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed). US Department of Defense 10 Mar. 2007. <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/transcript_ISN10024.pdf>

⁴⁴ Kamber, Michael. "The Chosen One: Journalist Daniel Pearl Was Killed for Being a Jew." The Village Voice 25 Feb. 2002. <<http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0209,kamber,32627,1.html>>

⁴⁵ "Slain Journalist Daniel Pearl Honored With Holocaust Victims." Editor and Publisher 16 Apr. 2007. <http://www.mediainfo.com/eandp/departments/newsroom/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003572119>