

Our Borats, Our Selves: Yokels and Cosmopolitans on the Global Stage

ELIOT BORENSTEIN

The comic figure of the yokel has undergone a resurgence in the past decade, culminating in Sacha Baron-Cohen's *Borat*. The yokel, whose predictable humor is based on his aggressive backwardness and persistent malapropisms, draws attention to the "foreignness" with which multiculturalism is uncomfortable, while also highlighting the economic and cultural dislocation of globalization. Cohen builds on the longstanding stereotypes about Jews and Gypsies (Roma), creating a persona who resembles the "vermin" of Nazi propaganda and manages to elicit racist responses from his unwitting audience. *Borat* functions within a fictional framework of racism and ethnic hostility, bringing to light barely concealed discomforts about border-crossings, cosmopolitanism, and global cultures.

Borat the Trickster: Folklore and the Media, Folklore in the Media

NATALIE KONONENKO and SVITLANA KUKHARENKO

Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan (2006) elicits extreme and contradictory audience responses. Some filmgoers find it amusing and clever, while others consider it repulsive, even obscene. Analyzing the film's hero as a traditional and archetypal trickster figure, a master of contradictions, a violator of boundaries, can help explain audience reaction. But while traditional folklore tricksters act in a fantasy world, Sacha Baron Cohen entered the lives of real people in trickster (dis)guise. For theater audiences removed from the interactions that created *Borat*, this film might serve the function of traditional trickster narratives, even as those appearing in the film feel exploited. By using real people and real situations, Baron Cohen has also precluded a follow-up or sequel: folkloric tricksters adapt with time, but a person immediately recognizable as a Hollywood figure cannot reassume trickster (dis)guise.

Borat, Multiculturalism, Mnogonatsional'nost'

STEVEN S. LEE

In this article, Sacha Baron Cohen's *Borat* appears as just the latest in a decades-long exchange between American and Soviet models of minority uplift: on the one side, civil rights and multiculturalism; on the other, *druzhiba narodov* (the friendship of peoples) and *mnogonatsional'nost'* (multi-national-ness). Steven S. Lee argues that, with *Borat*, multiculturalism seems to have emerged as the victor in this exchange, but that the film also harkens to a not-too-distant Soviet alternative. Part 1 shows how *Borat* gels with recent leftist critiques of multiculturalism, spearheaded by Slovenian

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philosopher Slavoj Žižek. Part 2 relates Borat to a largely submerged history of American minorities drawing hope from mnogonatsional'nost', as celebrated in Grigorii Aleksandrov's 1936 film *Circus*. The final part presents Borat as choosing neither multiculturalism nor mnogonatsional'nost', but rather the continued opposition of the two, if not a "third way." For a glimpse of what this might look like, the paper concludes with a discussion of *Absurdistan* (2006) by Soviet Jewish American novelist Gary Shteyngart.

Hyperrealizing "Borat" with the Map of the European "Other"

DICKIE WALLACE

Sacha Baron Cohen maps a cultural background for his "Borat" character by creating a hyperreal Kazakhstan that is based, nonetheless, on gradations of a "real," yet Orientalized, eastern Europe and Balkan region. Having no cultural connections to its actual Central Asian namesake, "Borat's Kazakhstan" is a Baudrillardian simulacrum because, for a western filmgoer, it essentially replaces the original. Scratching beneath the surface, however, we see that Baron Cohen composes his clown-journalist using exotic, yet familiar, "realities" from the "Other" in Europe's backyard. Using Edward Said's *Orientalism* (along with Milica Bakić-Hayden's and Maria Todorova's modifications of the idea), Dickie Wallace describes how this discursive bricolage of eastern European and Balkan music, language, folkloristic rituals, and archetypes, as well as continual tabu violations and commonsensical acceptance of violence, gives the character the sharp parodic elements that have had western audiences laughing even while wincing as they recognize themselves in this "Other."

Transnational Image Making and Soft Authoritarian Kazakhstan

EDWARD SCHATZ

A primary mechanism of rule in soft authoritarian post-Soviet Kazakhstan was the regime's ability to monopolize the instruments of persuasion. By carefully crafting and propagating images of state and society, constructing political dramas, and developing plausible public narratives about the provision of public goods, Nursultan Nazarbaev continually outflanked his political opponents. And then came *Borat*, the Hollywood comedy that presented Kazakhstan as a racist, homophobic, misogynistic, economic, and political backwater. Not only were the images of this "Kazakhstan" out of the regime's control, but the film's creator, Sacha Baron Cohen, went on the image-making offensive by conducting a variety of public dramas that further eroded the regime's image-making monopoly. This essay explores how the transnationalization of image-making creates new challenges for regimes intent on remaining soft authoritarian.

Buying into Brand Borat: Kazakhstan's Cautious Embrace of Its Unwanted "Son"

ROBERT A. SAUNDERS

Since 1991, the Eurasian republic of Kazakhstan has endeavored to build a recognizable and credible national brand as a resource-rich, multicultural, and stable outpost in an otherwise troubled region of the globe. It is therefore not surprising that Sacha Baron Cohen, the creator of the fictitious Kazakhstani reporter "Borat Sagdiyev," touched a raw nerve with his parody of the country and its people as bigoted and backward. While the Borat satire is both grotesque and spurious, the success of the motion picture *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* has provided Kazakhstan with a precipitous increase in its global profile. Using the analytical tool of "nation branding," Robert A. Saunders discusses the challenges and opportunities the Borat film presented to the government of Kazakhstan. After some false starts, Kazakhstan has entered into a querulous but symbiotic relationship with Borat's creator to promote its own efforts to build a brand state and hone its national image in the west.

East and West Kiss: Gender, Orientalism, and Balkanism in Muslim-Majority Bosnia-Herzegovina

ELISSA HELMS

Through an ethnographic analysis of public and "everyday" discourses in the Muslim-majority area of Bosnia-Herzegovina, this article shows how gender is frequently constitutive of orientalist and balkanist representations. Both orientalism and balkanism have recently undergone a shift, precisely in the ways in which they are gendered. Women have become more visible symbols of Balkan backwardness while orientalist depictions have moved from emphasizing erotic sexuality to a focus on heavily veiled and controlled women, symbolizing the political threat of the east/Islam. In examining the everyday workings of such discourses in a community straddling the imagined boundaries of east and west, Elissa Helms shows a range of competing (re)configurations of east/west and related dichotomies, which are reconfigured precisely through notions of gender. While some of these (re)articulations seem to challenge dominant orientalist and balkanist frameworks, Helms argues that they ultimately reproduce (gendered) notions of opposing east and west civilizations.

Demonizing Judaism in the Soviet Union during the 1920s

ROBERT WEINBERG

In this article, Robert Weinberg explores the visual representation of Judaism and observant Jews in the Soviet journal *Bezbozhnik u stanka* (The atheist at the workbench), which appeared in the 1920s. In their efforts to promote atheism and undermine organized religion, the artists responsible for the images in this journal singled out the Jewish god to be depicted

with inhuman, bestial, and bizarre features such as a single eye and a nose made out of a fist. This portrayal of Judaism and religious Jews drew upon the pervasive antisemitic tropes and motifs in Russian culture and society and served to demonize Judaism and its adherents.

Speaking National: Nationalizing the Greeks of Bulgaria, 1900–1939

THEODORA DRAGOSTINOVA

In this article Theodora Dragostinova examines the interplay between official policies and popular demands in the nationalization of the Greek minority in Bulgaria. She explores why national activists and ordinary people chose to “speak national” in the context of the conflicting national interests and territorial aspirations of Bulgaria and Greece. At the official level, the national discourse and practice showed the co-existence of essentialist and constructionist understandings of nationhood; while the rhetoric of the primordial nation was ubiquitous, politicians realized that certain policies could “improve” the national body. At the popular level, the profuse use of national rhetoric functioned as an “emergency identity,” or a discursive strategy that allowed individuals to claim social legitimacy in emergency situations. Thus, despite the fact that people were forced to adopt clear-cut national allegiances, national side-switching remained a frequent phenomenon.