



Tourism worldmaking and market post-truth: *Borat's* new spirit of capitalism

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Abstract

The article develops a theoretical framework for the critical examination of cinematic tourist design. Considering ‘film-induced tourism’ as part of a bigger system involving the design of mobilities, it interrogates the connection between the aesthetic and ethical principles that end up informing the engineering of national hospitality in media platforms. The design, which is managed by a ‘worldmaking authority’ or network encompassing the host nation state and international tourist and media markets, conforms to the rationalised rules of what Boltanski and Chiapello termed the ‘new spirit of capitalism’, which mobilises romantic ideals of individual freedom to sell landscapes and exotic cultural characters. The phased development of such mobilities conforms to contingency and is indifferent to the welfare of particular social groups. The model is exemplified through the phased design of mobilities out of two films with virulent sexist and antisemitic content centred on the journeys of the fictional Kazakh journalist Borat to the United States.

Keywords

biopolitics, capitalism, cinematic tourism, ethnicity, gender, memory, mobilities design, modernity, stereotyping, symbolic capital

Film tourism, art, and the new spirit of capitalism

Over the last two decades, film tourism or film-induced tourism has developed into a subject area, in which a variety of issues are explored, including fandom and pilgrimage (Geraghty, 2019: 208–211; Reijnders, 2011: 113–114), destination management planning (Lindström, 2019), labour conflict (Tzanelli, 2013: 53–62) and strategic destination development (Wray and Croy, 2015). The question of sustainability seems to cut across all these themes, as there have been scholarly voices questioning the longevity of interest in such niche tourism (Beeton, 2016; Kim et al., 2017; Macionis, 2004), but also the

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factors determining this (Thelen et al., 2020). Contrariwise, there has been less interest in the *sociocultural modus vivendi* rather than economic consequences and impacts of such development for the filmed destinations that have to host diverse tourism mobilities (Buda, 2015; Tzanelli, 2018). The scarcity of rigorous research into such issues seems to reflect the disciplinary orientation of film-with-tourism analysis, which prioritises the development of business – regardless of whether this focuses on community growth or fandom – over social-scientific critical analysis, which may even question the promotion of such tourism mobilities per se. A limited number of scholars with significant contributions in the field talk about the need for ‘social exchange theory’ (Thelen et al., 2020: 292) – a term, which can involve disparate and potentially conflicting sociological and anthropological methods and perspectives, all of which were never used in relevant studies. Whereas such research is not uncritical or lacking in analytical depth, it deploys critique as a means to a particular end: to develop a sustainable business agenda and a limited number of epistemological and methodological tools.

The present article returns to the classical sociological traditions of ‘critique’ to do social analysis, rather than social policy. This pertains to the machinations of the suprasystem under which creative industries converge in the production of tourism: the *capitalist*, rather than the tourist or cinematic system. To explore how the machinations of capitalism affect lifeworlds, I look at the representational consequences of the notorious *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2006, director Larry Charles, henceforth *Borat 1*) and its recently released sequel, *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm: Delivery of Prodigious Bribe to American Regime for Make Benefit Once Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2020, director Jason Woliner, henceforth *Borat 2*). I examine the ways the ‘Borat tourism effect’ side-lined the widely renounced narrative core of the film, which involved representing human characters as landscape specimen or objects available for light consumption. On this particular point, my differentiation between ‘film-induced tourism’ and ‘cinematic tourism’ is pivotal and not properly explored in tourism analysis as yet: the first concept adheres to a tourism management perspective, which is based on psychology, to explore individualistic motivations in filmed visitations. When it is used in explorations of more than that (e.g. community development or film fan community-making), its etymological and associative connections in tourism management do not favour theoretical precision, rather, they recycle the focus on doing sound business without considering whether the business itself is the problem.

Contrariwise, ‘cinematic tourism’ is etymologically and ideologically loaded with variations of artistic and political movement: on the one hand, the word *kinēma* as cinema commonly refers to a technological and fan complex orchestrating sound, image-based and imaginative movement; on the other, it metaphorically refers to ecologically delineated *social movements*, which may support or oppose tourism mobilities. This definition focused in other studies on film auteurs’ and actors’ pilgrimages-as-political-movements in filmed locations (Tzanelli, 2013: 3–6; Tzanelli, 2018: 52), but here I dig deeper into the cultural politics of movement in global spheres of capitalist exchange by key drivers in tourism development. ‘Cinematic tourism’ is a process of inscription of movement on a surface or ideational body (*kinēmatographos*: the inscription of movement – Tzanelli, 2013, 2018). Indeed, my focus is the ways a movie ended up being

inscribed onto the Kazakh body politic, and subsequently used to inscribe the nation onto global political and cultural fields with the help of further alignments with other global markets. I will return to this point below when I discuss the function of Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) as the maiden of capitalism.

Unfortunately, in this process, the 'humorous activism' of Jewish British actor Sacha Baron Cohen, was misplaced and inappropriate, ultimately endorsing an array of structures of inequality. I will briefly discuss the value of 'camp' and 'kitsch' in the production of 'Borat humour' but say little about the ways 'in-group affinity' ensures that jokes do not offend people, because in such successful films as *Borat 1* and *2*, we deal with their global dissemination. Cosmopolitan irony of this type has its limitations. Parenthetically, I also find the suggestion that media messages are adopted and acted upon uncritically problematic. However, the argument that it is fine for creative industries and their distinguished labour to endorse hate speech or denigrate difference, just because the 'message' can be interpreted in different ways by different audiences is equally disturbing.

Epistemological framework

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2018) suggest that in the mid-1970s Western capitalism replaced the hierarchical Fordist structure of work with a new network-based form of organisation founded on employee initiative and autonomy in the workplace. The new organisational style used the emergent libertarian and romantic currents of the period (its revolutionary 'spirit') to ensure that innovation would be placed at the top of the desired employee skills. Not only did this generate a new and more pernicious form of exploitation but amplified the creative labour's material and psychological insecurity. Art became subjected to the idea of originality in contexts of extreme competition, which was elevated to a value. I import this argument into the field of cinematically-induced tourism, to interrogate what such creative-industrial connections between freedom in initiative and profit-driven capitalist control over the employers' creative work actually do, as well as some unpalatable unintended in *Borat's* case consequences. My exploration of this 'doing' focuses on the pragmatic basis on which solidarities are forged or modified in host contexts in tourism markets (see Tzanelli, 2018, 2020 on all phases of such design). How do host communities end up functioning and behaving in such competitive environments, in other words?

The place of such representations in global interpretive fields is fluid, but when it comes to uses of vulnerable social categories a can of worms opens for creative industries and host communities. The tourism industries' strategic repression of the stereotypical repertoires that *Borat 1* and *2* employed exemplifies the new spirit of capitalism, whereby the tourism sector refuses to address the normalisation of sexism and racism. Both *Borat* films are humorous in ambivalent terms: you cannot always tell when their extreme cheap humour ('kitsch') consciously crosses the line to communicate the irony of a learned cosmopolitan subject ('camp'). The outrage that used to surround 'kitsch' and 'camp' has subsided in most Western societies, but the recognition of 'camp' as a middle-class pursuit persists (Holliday and Potts, 2012). However, the implication of both in the pragmatics of image management and 'public decency' continues to matter, because it intertwines the politics of race, gender, class and mobility even in the Western world (Cresswell, 2006).

To consolidate this theoretical import in tourism analysis, I translate Hollinshead's (2009) and Hollinshead and Suleman (2018) thesis on 'worldmaking' as a bundle of representational productions of place into *capitalist worldmaking* that remoulds them through the adjustment of 'reality glances' or perspectives on culture (Lynch et al., 2011: 14). This translation comes as a response to an open invitation dating back to a *Tourism Geographies* special issue on 'worldmaking' to consider the concept's future implications and implementations (Ateljevic et al., 2009). Concurrently, I return to conceptions of the 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 2002; Urry and Larsen, 2011) and 'tourism mobilities' (Sheller and Urry, 2004) to elucidate the interplays between visual fixity and tourist/tourism interpretations of place and culture in the capitalist exploitation of native resources. On the one hand, Sheller and Urry's (2004) ground-breaking edited volume on tourism mobilities provides some essential links between systemic tourist production/exploitation of place and culture and their impact on conceptions of identity. On the other, the recent suggestion that in postcolonial contexts tourism development can generate possibilities of becoming, retains an ambivalence that does not address the workings of capitalism – lest we conflate this with the postcolonial condition, which Hollinshead and Vellah (2020) do not (see also Tzanelli, 2020 on problematic links between capitalism, travel, tourism and postcolonial becoming).

I prioritise an analysis of how things are designed in film tourism and what is designed, as well as what and who moves/is moved within these systems (i.e. humans, products and ideas – Cresswell, 2010) and with what effects. Hence, the article does not discuss what film tourists do, but *how* creative industries produce *what* to entice them to visit filmed locations. The 'how' highlights also the movement of symbolic capital accrued by lead artists across a global cultural field, modulated by and shared between nation states and markets. More conventionally, the 'what' highlights what (ideas) and who (human categories) is objectified in this enterprise. Part of the problem is detected in the ways the system of 'art' in the form of film currently operates, another part being the ethics of tourism mobilities and how the two feed into each other to repeat the same mistakes (Büscher and Fletcher, 2017). However, both are overlaid by the denial of existence of multiple modernities and the flattening of local/ethnic experiences in contexts of rapid globalisation (Habermas, 1989; Tuan, 2001). On this, it is worth noting that even the 'transmodern' manifesto of critical tourism studies takes for granted the reality of tourism as a system, within which justice is supposed to be delivered (e.g. Ateljevic, 2008). Diversity often requires considering developmental formulas beyond tourism, to see how some populations are affected by the mandate of tourism business, which has to follow the pragmatics of Western mobility.

Methodological considerations

Boltanski and Chiapello (2018: chapter 1) prioritise the ways this new network-based form of organisation founded on employee initiative and autonomy in the workplace enhanced ontological insecurity. Instead, I consider how its post-Fordist Romantic ethic is embedded in the ways tourism design is done *in phases* informed by contingency and opportunism. Specifically, I explore how it actually affects the cinematic tourist host's attitude towards themselves and the world while deliberately or unwittingly reproducing

damaging social stereotyping. My use of the term ‘design’ highlights a problematic merging between the practice of designing mobilities that borrow unreflectively from artistic registers (see Jensen’s (2020) focus on the ethics of accessible design) and the policy of designing (what Fuller (2011, 2012) has seen in the birth of an abstracted and rationalised ‘Humanity 2.0’ in policy regimes, which serves biomedical, cybernetic and ecological interests). My contribution to this blend pertains to the ways artistic registers of what it means to be human seem to have entered this complex network of interests to inform the content of a multi-industry of leisurely mobilities. This ‘sign industry’ (Tzanelli, 2011, 2013), which manipulates stereotyping, is the maiden of a particular type of capitalism, borrowing from inscriptions of heritage into popular culture. Its Romantic ethos (as per Boltanski and Chiapello’s (2018) discussion of putative labour freedom and Urry’s (2002) discussion of the disciplinary nature of the romantic tourist gaze) consolidates capitalist interests as a *biopolitical* mode of pleasure. Based on a fictional blueprint of what makes us the right type of human, such ‘biopolitics’ classify us into consumers that enjoy symbolic forms of death and consumed, who are gazed upon as disposable things (see Korstanje (2017) on ‘thana-capitalism’; Tzanelli and Korstanje, 2019 on dark tourism, terrorism and racism).

Rigorous up-to-date critiques of late capitalism feature in tourism analysis in critical tourism studies, especially in the new mobilities turn (Bianchi, 2009; Diekmann and Hannam, 2012; Mostafanezhad and Promburom, 2018) and the academy of hope paradigm (Ateljevic et al., 2013). Neither of these schools has mobilised Boltanski and Chiapello’s (2018) influential thesis on the new spirit of capitalism or Steve Fuller’s (2011) work on the ‘design of Humanity 2.0’. Whilst there have been many excellent explorations of the ethics of tourism mobilities, there is less clarity concerning the connection between the components of this system of mobilities: design/designer – product/producer – audience/tourist – industry/tourism/film (but see also Lash and Urry (1994) for an earlier attempt to forge some of these connections at a semiotic level). Establishing links cross them can better elucidate how creative industries such as tourism operate under Western modern rules, which are dominated by excessive rationalisation. Such interlinking can develop into a methodological enterprise across three different paradigms in critical tourism analysis (tourism imaginaries, tourism mobilities and the academy of hope), which seem to converge on the analytics of the just, the possible and the hopeful. I propose that the actual analytics must use a strong paradigm based on selective fusions of Marxism, Foucaultianism and merology. I modify Goodman’s (1978) original ‘worldmaking’ account of coexisting world (or reality) versions from which merology emerged so that I do not fall into the trap of market pluralism: I will be exploring the unfolding (phased) of tourism design and considering some evidence on the ways such marketing actions have on people’s lives, which cannot be easily disputed as untrue and unreal, and thus subject to multiple interpretations, when they are subjected to tests (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006). My reading of the *Borat* case focuses on how the cinematic inscription of stereotyping endorsed *biopolitical* experimentation in tourism mobilities that became enhanced by its global *cybernetic* distribution as an anodyne form of digitised landscape for tourism consumption. I use ‘landscape’ as an *ecological* plane subjected to the politics of nationalist valorisation.

This epistemological scaffolding informs my data collection, which are digital as all press releases, the digital advertising of Kazakhstan and the three films I use are forms and products of our digital age. Designing mobilities, argues Jensen (2014), involves a great deal of montage and perspectivism. His thesis encompasses ideas of ‘staging’ subject and cause-directed movement, which cut across architecture and filmmaking, with particular emphasis on movement through built urban environments, ‘and the vistas and sights . . . that emerge as one, for example, turns a corner to find new sights and impressions’ (p. 32). Jensen’s analysis, which borrows from European filmmaking techniques and is akin to Goodman’s merology, discusses perspectives but not phases in design. I stress that the ‘phasing’ (from *fāskō*: to agree) of movement and its corresponding mobilities of ideas, objects, technologies and humans, have a strong phenomenological character (*fāskō* from *phainomai*: to appear, become apparent), which stems from discourse, hence is associated with the ways knowledge is wedded to authorial scripts (power) (Foucault, 1980). The architect’s or the filmmaker’s camera will never simply present reality, they will direct attention through technology, thus *re-presenting* it, or rather versions of it in agreement (*fāskō*) with pre-set intentions. The design of *Borat 1 & 2* tourism mobilities produced not a static, but evolving reality about the fictional character’s alleged homeland, Kazakhstan. However, the evolution (or ‘phasing’) conformed to the contingent calls of the new spirit of capitalism, fostering a problematic ‘post-truth’. This changing truth embraced innovation *in flux*, to address contemporaneous economic needs and statist political ambitions. I look into the ethics and aesthetics of this phasing and staging, which are conditioned by convergences and divergences between the cinematic and tourist re-presentations of Kazakhstan.

The following section explains how *Borat 1* and *2* managed to shift attention from controversial discourses on other-hate to the design of cinematic and tourism mobilities. I examine how Kazakhstan’s tourism industry repressed the stereotypical repertoires both films employed as an example of the new spirit of capitalism, which refuses to address the normalisation of sexism and racism. I follow the development of the design of Kazakh tourism policy and advertising between 2006, the year *Borat 1* was released, and late October 2020, when *Borat 2* hit the TV screens amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. I conclude with observations on the ways the new spirit of capitalism contributes to the standardisation and serialisation of what it means to be the perfect and imperfect human in contemporary image-based markets, with a particular emphasis on tourism.

The *Borat* effect on tourism design: Phasing the new spirit of capitalism

Sacha Baron Cohen starred in *Borat 1* as the fictitious Kazakh journalist Borat Sandiyev. Borat is asked by the Kazakh Ministry of Information to visit the ‘US and A’, the ‘Greatest Country in the World’, to produce a documentary on its culture and society. Standing between a mockumentary and a travelogue, the film features real-life interactions with Americans, some of which led to lawsuits after the release of the movie. The film produced several controversies, not least because among its participants, who were unaware that they participated in a satire, there were gay pride groups, African American youth

and politicians. The fictional journalist's speech is characterised by excessively strong antisemitism, sexism and antiziganism. In Israel, a proposed poster featuring Borat in a sling bikini was rejected in favour of one in which the anti-hero was fully suited (Anderman and Haaretz Staff, 2006). The film was banned in almost the whole of the Arab world, whereas the government of Kazakhstan denounced it. The Foreign Ministry threatened to sue Baron Cohen and the film's Kazakh-based website www.borat.kz was taken down (Wolf, 2007). In the last three instances, accusations of racism were used to modulate perceptions of decency in public in the form of a discourse on shame/shaming. Widely circulating in the Eastern world but also in traditional enclaves of the Mediterranean societies, 'shaming' is the responsibility of women, in opposition to 'honour', which is the quality of hegemonic masculinity (Herzfeld, 2006).

Repressing a shameful representation of Kazakhstan in film made sense in these terms in 2006. If anything, the state's advertising via a 'Heart of Eurasia' campaign privileged a masculinised merger of the tourist and the national gaze to endorse heritage/nature tourism (Pritchard and Morgan, 2000). However, about a decade after the film's release and several mostly failed lawsuits on the production company and *Borat 1's* protagonist, the film was recognised by Kazakh Public Relations guru Yerlan Askarbekov as the product of a misread genius. According to Askarbekov, the film was designed 'to get an outsider's view of the US and reveal the prejudices of the Americans who Borat interacts with', making it him '21st century Alexis de Tocqueville' (Askarbekov, 2016). Askarbekov also suggested that those who felt the most unease about the film were Kazakh students studying abroad, because 'their fellow students were sure that the movie showed the real Kazakhstan' (Askarbekov, 2016). Again, behind such comments one may discern the fear of resurgence in racist stereotyping, rather than the conventional Public Relations offense, but such concerns were dismissed. Some Kazakh press, especially tabloids, had even applauded the film for being 'cruelly anti-American', funny but also 'sad at the same time' (Guardian Film News, 2006).

The celebration of *Borat 1's* anti-Americanism was also endorsed by the BBC, a channel notorious for its sexist treatment of female professionals, whom it underpays vis-à-vis its male presenters. This makes the jubilant tone of the comments twice as problematic. Such uncritical acceptance of the genre discarded how Baron Cohen's public appearances on shows connected to the public defamation of several female professionals: WAPT news producer Dharma Arthur resigned after Baron Cohen, whom she booked for an interview, caused havoc during the show in which he was invited. After the episode, her boss reportedly 'lost his confidence in her abilities' and started 'second-guessing everything she did thereafter', an attitude that led to her depression and worse (Friedman, 2006). The fact that Borat's unruly behaviour exposed the sexist prejudices of Arthur's boss did little to improve his ex-employee's wellbeing and ended her career, leaving her in debt. Pamela Anderson, who starred in *Borat 1*, also filed a divorce from her husband Kid Rock, who called her a 'whore' and a 'slut' for her involvement in the film (Bonawitz, 2006). This time, tabloid gossip finished the job of the pseudo-Kazakh clown, by preying on the actress' personal life. Many celebrated the fictional character's on-stage 'camp' performance, which yielded millions, while indirectly affecting female professionals, who ended up becoming the target of negative public judgement.

However, the aim of this article is to analyse how an aesthetic overlaying of the ethics of representation with cultures of mirth enables the design of tourism mobilities. In this case, 'poking fun' is authorised for male agents, such as Baron Cohen, whose performances can inspire other mobilities, such as tourism, in which what is moved is decent heritage only, rather than the original script of ethnic ridicule. An obvious focus becomes how *Borat 1* valorised the Kazakh nation-state's tourist brand, prompting its policymakers to manipulate the 'Borat effect' to its economic and political benefit. In fact, the film's success triggered a proliferation of stakeholders in the global and local cultural fields (Heitmann, 2010), including media conglomerates, the Kazakh tourism organisation, independent tourist business and localities filmed as 'colourful landscapes'. As we will see below, the state's official tourism handle and independent tourism designers from Kazakhstan and the US would eventually form a DMO group based on constellations of signs to promote key Kazakh biomedical and international cybernetic interests. The filmed places' ecological integrity and their communities' wellbeing were simply subjected to these interests (in contradistinction see Japan, where even rural communities are actively involved in tourism development of this kind – Thelen et al., 2020: 294–295). This takes us back to the new spirit of global markets. Here, the poetics of phased design meet the politics of mobility: award-winning *Joker* (2019) director Todd Phillips, who had made a career on successful comedies, resigned from his post as *Borat* director in early 2005, citing 'creative differences'. Contemporaneous events suggest that his withdrawal had more to do with a filmed Virginia rodeo event, in which Baron Cohen jokingly told spectators in his *Borat* alter-ego that 'US President George W. Bush should drink the blood of Iraqi civilians he kills' (World Entertainment News Network, 2005).

Such comments would not appeal to American markets so close to the 9/11 tragedy, and the antisemitism and sexism of both films certainly had an active role to play in thinning *Borat* tourism traffic (Thelen et al., 2020: 300). It would also be logical to assume that in Kazakhstan the film made Baron Cohen a moving target, because re-building the country's image would urge investment in a new tourism campaign that steered international visitors' interest away from the film's unpalatable aspects. Adopting a comparative cross-cultural (Kazakh and American) perspective, I argue that the poetics of cinematic-come-tourist design merged with the politics of national (im)mobility: intimate glances into ethnic culture, involving antisemitism and sexism, as well as terrorism and unbearable multiculturalism, were silenced. It helps bearing in mind that in most international relations contexts the politics of nationalism are based on a representational script, which is constantly repeated. The script endorses the policing of the domestic hearth, which is feminised (Cresswell, 2015: 40), and casts women as carers or whores and men as warriors and leaders of the nation (Walby, 2006). This authorial script also informs cultures of hospitality, which are heavily feminised in most international labour contexts (Paolucci, 1998).

However, we must examine the ways a putative network of mobilities was organised so as to ensure not just 'recovery' from the ridicule, but complete alignment with the rules of hospitality in cinematic tourism. The filmic component would not survive the design of tourism mobilities, which were progressively more aligned with standard notions of tradition, landscape heritage and history. The 'tourist state' (e.g. Hollinshead,

2009) had to work hard to harmonise ('author', in Hollinshead's (2009) terms) the flow of production within and across individual market chains: from design/designer to product/producer, audience/tourist and of course, industry/tourism/film. To do so, one does not exclude such a 'black sheep' or 'intruder' as Baron Cohen, a British-born Jew who topographically and ethnically had little to do with Kazakh identity, they use their skills and assets in productive ways, often at the expense of those who are not deemed to be as immediately 'useful'. Let us now unfold the phases in which this strategy developed.

Phase 1: Borat 1

The first phase of the rebound did not focus on Baron Cohen's performative antics at all. It was organised around a multi-million dollar 'Heart of Eurasia' campaign, involving the production of feature films on the country's mythic past, to counter the *Borat 1* effect. Heritage, not insulting popular culture, had to win the day and the tourist markets. The turn to memory repositories that produce a coherent public image focused on landscapes reflecting Kazakh ethnic essence: land (Urry, 2004). The gaze was 'darkened' to suggest seriousness – a strategy of normalisation that bestows upon the nation the honour it deserves. However, Baron Cohen became even more provocative. After the Kazakh *Borat 1* website was removed, he denounced the Kazakh campaign at an in-character press conference in front of the White House (President Bush refused to accept him) as the propaganda of the 'evil nitwits of Uzbekistan'. 'I would like to make a comment on the recent advertisements on television and in media about my nation of Kazakhstan saying that women are treated equally and that all religions are tolerated. These are disgusting fabrications', he added (Inskeep, 2006). We should not ignore the core of Baron Cohen's counter-attack, which used the denigration of women to discredit the Kazakh campaign: his satirical obstruction of tourism mobilities was built on stereotypical female immobilities, but his comments angered this time Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan for their insolence, making him a target. Unravelling the Kazakh government's design was based on a disruption in the chain of production between the meanings of the film, the performances of its key actor/character and the touristic representations these yielded.

Satire has been the weapon of the weak since time immemorial. However, we must be able to tell when profit displaces the content of the message to such an extent, that violence is not inflicted upon the sources of power (the nation-state), but specific categories of citizenry. Baron Cohen himself is a highly mobile subject of the global now artistic elite. Such elites are certainly faced with obstacles in their personal developmental projects (Favell et al., 2007), but their privileged positionality in global cosmopolitan hierarchies is indisputable. There is an obvious clash between universalist principles and access to resources or implementing democratic justice in context, which guide liberal pretensions to equality (Cresswell, 2006: 14; Cresswell, 2010: 21; Seiler cited in Adey, 2017: 107–108; Sayer, 2013: 252; Tzanelli, 2013: chapter 1). Though not exactly part of the 'kinetic elite' when the film was released, Baron Cohen would soon become both affluent and highly mobile in media networks. The Kazakh government also realised that the *Borat 1* effect could be beneficial for the country. Especially young audiences became excited about the prospect of visiting the country – so much so, that the UK Kazakh Embassy recorded a rise in visa applications for British tourists. It is unsurprising that by

2012, the country's Foreign Ministry had associated this change in tourism influx with the film.

Visit Kazakhstan's established non-*Borat 1* branding was based more on nature-based activities associated with its mountains, such as trekking and winter sports, visits to lakes, water sports or health resorts. In fact, even independent tours that bothered to juxtapose this branding to *Borat 1*-based perceptions of the country, seemed to favour the cultural, recreational/sport and eco-friendly end of activities. These would include visits to cosmopolitan city centres, such as Almaty, tours to ancient sites, engagement with local people and activities, food tourism, such as tasting local produce, as well as shopping flâneries in traditional bazaars, craft workshops and fashion boutiques (Pratt, 2015: 282). Pratt (ibid.: 185–286) suggests that we need to take a closer look at the real factors contributing to this tourist influx after 2005–2006, which may not always have to do with *Borat 1*, as the Kazakh Government's commercial campaigns never really focused on the film (Macionis, 2004). More importantly, the overall increase of tourism over the 6-year period between the release of the film and the London Olympics seemed to have an adverse impact on other public sectors, such as that of welfare provision: drawing resources from other areas to support tourism led to a neglect of other priorities. A 6.4% increase in tourist expenditure because of the film, in which we can include the 'Heart of Eurasia' campaign, decreased the GDP by US\$2.78 million, producing a net loss of US\$1.43 million over the same period (Pratt, 2015: 290).

Lack of detailed data may never help us to determine the true impact the film had on Kazakh tourism. However, we can still interrogate the core narratives informing the design of Kazakh tourism. As explained in the introduction, phased design participates in the production of an image of the tourist destination, which projects place authenticity as an unequivocal reality or 'truth' (Hollinshead, 1999). It is apposite to talk about regimes of truth at this stage to ascertain not the accuracy, but processual production of reality in markets that rely on representation (Hollinshead, 1998; Hollinshead and Vellah, 2020; Tzanelli, 2011). Truth regimes are pliable to contingency and the design of tourism can work wonders on the ways the content of a message is manipulated. By 2012, *Borat 1*'s toxic content had been normalised, to potentially allow Kazakhstan to reap the benefits of the tourism it induced. Regardless of the actual results, we need to examine something that received little, if any, attention in scholarship: Kazakhstan never featured in *Borat 1*, which was filmed in the Romanian village of Glod. Situated 85 miles from the Romanian capital, Bucharest, Glod was at the time of filming a place of 1400 inhabitants, mostly Roma and definitely poor. The release of the film enraged village inhabitants, many of whom had featured in it as paid extras for what even external observers found a demeaning depiction of a community living in an arid, forgotten area without much welfare support (Hasan, 2008). The lawsuit mentioned the lack of linguistic communication with the English-made film crews, something that clearly posits questions of exploitation.

Croy et al. (2019: 399–400) sharply critique the marginalisation or erasure of certain stakeholders from DMO strategies, pointing a finger to film industries' indifference in the effects of their presence in localities. In the first *Borat* development phase, an 'image dissonance' (p. 398) or representational conflict emerges between cinematic industrial and community interests: note that neither Bucharest, nor Glod, nor the Romanian nation-state tried to reap any benefits from associations with the film. Kazakhstan's

tourism campaigns erased this 'backward' rural element from their script too, which mostly conformed to imaginaries of hospitality inextricably connected to slow tourism (Germann Molz, 2006; Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014). Poignantly, the village featured only 3 years later in *Carmen Meets Borat* (2009), a film directed by Dutch Mercedes Stalenhoef. Far from being a travelogue of any sorts, the film documented local life before and after the *Borat 1* crew visited Glod, with particular emphasis on the impact this had on its small society. The film/documentary narrates through the eyes of a 17-year-old woman trying to escape this life how after *Borat 1*'s release, lawyers seeking to capitalise on its controversies, incited anger among locals and promised huge compensations to them if they sued 20th Century Fox. The actual lawsuit (filed for US\$38 million in damages on account of the thin reimbursements of locals for participating in scenes, as well as libellous depictions of local life as incestuous and ignorant), was dismissed by US District Judge Paska in early December 2006. Its result was the production of local jealousy, anger and further global humiliation (Cecchine, 2009). Refiling the complaint was also dismissed on account of insufficient evidence (Cecchine 2009) – something provoking further questions regarding the prevalence of racist prejudice in international justice.

Here it helps to compare representational notes: Baron Cohen's camp depiction of Borat as the comic figure of the yokel, whose predictable humour is based on backwardness, was perceived by most as a reflexive performance of racist Nazi propaganda that could highlight, equally reflexively, the 'foreignness' of multiculturalism and cosmopolitan irony (Bornstein, 2008). The reactions of the Roma of Glod were never regarded on a par with this: after being positioned as illiterate kitsch objects within the film's narrative, their angry reactions confirmed their cosmopolitical immobility, discrediting their legal claims to compensation. The rules of belonging to an aesthetic cosmopolitan elite fed back into the biopolitical interests of Humanity 2.0 via cinematic art. However, all this translated into tourism mobilities: although national(ist) valorisation trumped the film's sexist and racist subtext, elsewhere in the world, the content of human rights objections to *Borat 1*'s sexist and antisemitic representations did not change. I therefore re-iterate that the 'truthfulness' of what *Borat 1* is and does was verified contingently, in particular (national and international) contexts by particular institutions, which either safeguard specific political interests (e.g. Kazakhstan's reputation in the world) or global economic mobilities (film and tourism markets).

Phase 2: Borat 2

If the first phase of Kazakh tourism image-building involved the complete suppression of 'everything Borat' in the country's international advertising, the second phase engineered a volte-face conforming to the new spirit of capitalism. Let me commence the analysis by browsing through some hard data on international tourism mobilities in Kazakhstan between 2008 and 2018: taking on board the 2008 global recession, which slowed down tourism in the region, the numbers of visitors to Kazakhstan between 2008 and 2011, were mostly not from the two international target Borat audience pools, the US and Europe, especially the UK, but regional, from other Asian countries (World Data Info, 2018). In 2018, the country recorded a total of 9 million tourists, ranking 45th in the

world in absolute terms and first in Central Asia. Notably, World Bank data on inbound tourists projecting tourism mobilities up to 2021 without the coronavirus pandemic in the horizon referred to the number of arrivals, not to the number of people traveling, which means that anyone entering the same country more than once is counted each time as a new arrival (Trading Economics, 2021). When in 2017 the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan approved the concept and official design of 'Tourism Industry Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2023' (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2017) and 'Film and Literary Tourism: Analysis and Strategy' (Tourism in Kazakhstan, 2017) was published, *Borat 1* featured nowhere in the statement. The rise in tourism mobilities after 2012 prompts us to reconsider the production of post-truths and how these fit into the current *Borat 2* landscape, *which is used by the Kazakh tourism discourse*.

We deal with two separate controversies in phase 2: the first connects to *Borat 2* and the fact that it displays a clear political orientation its 'prequel' lacked. Again, the fictional journalist depicts his homeland as misogynistic, homophobic and anti-Semitic, but the narrative arc 'turns the horns' on the US political establishment. The appearance of personal attorney to Donald Trump and former mayor of New York city Rudy Giuliani in the film, who is putting his hands in his trousers while reclining on a bed in the presence of Maria Bakalova (the actor playing *Borat's* daughter and posing as a TV journalist) is a direct attack on the Trump administration (Shoard, 2020). This is conventional political satire, and it is unsurprising that Mike Pence and Rudy Giuliani complained that they appeared in the film without their consent. In an out-of-character interview in *Good Morning America* Baron Cohen renewed his joking about Giuliani by using Trump's catchphrase 'It is what it is. He did what he did' (Blackwelder, 2020) – something that infuriated the then campaigning American President and led to further satirical exchanges (Associated Press, 2020).

More important here is how *Borat 2* incorporated an invisible movement-travel to a non-existing homeland. The heirs of late Holocaust survivor Judith Dim, who appears in the film, sued *Borat 2* creators alleging that she did not consent to commercial uses of her likeness (Ghermezian, 2020). However, Baron Cohen dedicated *Borat 2* to Dim's memory and claimed that he even broke character to reveal to her that its script was designed to dispel her concerns that the antisemitic jokes were real (Fleming, 2020). All the same, the film's misogynistic and antisemitic content provoked reactions once more, this time from the Kazakh American Association, in which even *Borat 2* distributor Amazon Prime was dragged (Welk, 2020). The disorganised nature of new capitalism prompts us to treat actions independently, conceding that in this instance the one who 'worldmakes' is Baron Cohen, not the markets. The ambiguity of his actions is dispelled only if we accept that he engages in self-subversion, by adopting an ironic stance towards his own heritage (Turner, 2002). It is not injudicious to argue that, although Kazakhstan features as the putative 'destination' of the cinematic tourist gaze, *Borat 2's* performative design refracts transformations of an imaginary homeland (Israel) into essentialised spirituality. Joking about the Holocaust produces a memory-souvenir, which is controversially deconstructed through Baron Cohen's antisemitic performance (Powers, 2017: 143; Ricoeur, 2004: 24; Tzanelli, 2011: 95). For tourism studies scholars, *Borat 2* can be a shock reading of spiritual travel, intentionally defiling both the activity through its sexist

joking, and the destination of this putative pilgrimage through Borat's satirical Holocaust denial.

What did such cinematic authorship yield for Kazakhstan's tourism authority? The current phase of touristic image-building in Kazakhstan is instructive of the ways the new spirit of capitalism colonises the moral sphere, endorsing complete destabilisation of meaning, so as to adjust political narratives to the circumstances (I call them 'biopolitical interests' that sanction the politics of mobility). In an unprecedented convergence of international cybernetic and national interests, *Borat 2's* rather unflattering depiction of Kazakh culture was not erased (as was the case with the response to *Borat 1*), but airbrushed: cosmetically modified (Nederveen Pieterse, 2006). The modification was based on a selective discursive montage of 'Boratisms' that fit established touristic imaginaries of the country in advertising. The national facelift focused on things *nice*: aesthetically pleasing, if morally wanting. Kairat Sadvakassov, the Deputy Chairman of Kazakh Tourism, said in a statement to the *Huffington Post* that adopting Borat's catchphrase 'very nice' offers 'The perfect description of Kazakhstan's vast tourism potential in a short, memorable way' (Sullivan, 2020). This strategic alignment featured in a promotional video, depicting tourists who hike the mounts of Kazakhstan with a selfie stick, exclaiming 'Very nice!'; drink fermented horse milk after Kazakh tradition saying 'Mm, that's actually very nice!'; marvel at Kazakh architecture ('Wow, very nice!') and pose for a photograph with Kazakhs in their traditional costumes ('That's very nice!') (Kazakhstan Travel, 2020). 'Very nice' is a phrase that belongs to some of Borat's most indecorous cinematic moments that I will not mention here.

Significantly, this time the campaign was designed by Stanford-educated American Dennis Keen, who had first travelled to the country on a high school exchange. Keen now lives in Almaty, where he gives walking tours to visitors, so he is part of the hospitality industry without the nationalist investment of a native Kazakh. His collaborator in the design of the campaign, Kazakh Yermek Utemissov, is not concerned about adverse reactions to the film, stressing that younger generations 'get it': 'They've got Twitter, they've got Instagram, they've got Reddit, they know English, they know memes. . . . They're inside the media world. We're looking at the same comedians, the same Kimmel show. Kazakhstan is globalized' (Stein, 2020). On the one hand, this highlights that cosmopolitan irony and the capacity to 'worldmake' from below has a strong generational element, with younger citizens keener to explore alternative worldviews through self-subversive forms of identification or engagement (Germann Molz, 2006; Salazar, 2017; Swain, 2009). However, it is fair to stress that as designers, Utemissov and Keen belong to the highly mobile middle classes and it is very likely that most of the young Kazakh audiences with access to technology are of the same class profile (Nederveen Pieterse, 2019). Hence, on the other hand, the campaign's airbrushing brings to the fore the role of media systems in marketable manipulations of memory (Tzanelli, 2007: 255). Of course, it is one thing that it took an outsider to enable this airbrushing, another to consider how his design was embraced by the Kazakh Tourism Board. In the latest phase of the design of Kazakh tourism, the Borat image was turned into a discursive tabula rasa, a sign ready to be re-encoded in cosmetically plausible ways. This time, the new spirit of capitalism embraced the innovative take of an outsider to the Kazakh nation, for his ability to remove unpleasant gendered and racialised scripts from *Borat 2's* superscript (Huysen, 2000).

At this stage, Baron Cohen was reduced to a marketable catchphrase for the tourist state of Kazakhstan. Practically, neither he nor Keen were promoted to Kazakhstan's distinguished kinetic labour, but their symbolic presence in tourism marketing campaigns is at least tolerated. Kazakhstan's Tourism Board Deputy Chairman, Kairat Sadvakassov revealed that the decision to let the *Borat 2* controversy 'die its natural death and not respond' was planned (Stein, 2020). The discourse of honour gave way to the acknowledgment that cosmopolitan irony controls late modernity's most powerful steering medium, money (Habermas, 1989: 118–119). The model of Humanity 2.0 promoted in the Kazakh tourist imaginary conformed this time to an even more advanced conflation of ecology, biology and cybernetics (Fuller, 2011: 130), which enmeshed elements of Borat's ignominious craft into noble Kazakh heritage.

In both phases of tourism development, we deal with a strategy of biopolitical 'sorting', whereby tourism design draws on ideas of the national body as a text, coded in genomic keys, which may be violated and destroyed by the outside, if the nation's 'immune system' is not careful. Successful immunisation borrows from haphazard strategies of exposure to 'a bit' of the other (Esposito, 2011: 148–150), who in our case can only be the cosmopolitan ironist, the tourist designer or anyone from the global kinetic or distinguished creative labour classes. Granting access to such cosmopolitan subjects, who can enhance the nation's immune apparatus (e.g. valorise national image despite their strangerhood and all the tensions it introduces), contrasts to the rejection of anything that is not strong enough to support its flourishing. Despite their differential status, both professional women and the ethnic poor do not fit into this agenda. As a result, their fortunes were simply silenced in the design of tourism mobilities – a new unethical habit that also endorses conflations of different sociocultural categories with its complete (ironically equitable) disregard for their wellbeing.

Post-truth and the new spirit of capitalism

In this article, I amend the implicit in film-tourism studies suggestion that, when films generate tourism, scholars can deal in research with a self-contained form of economic development. Borrowing and further adjusting arguments from mobilities design and critical tourism analysis, I shed light on the discursive potential of phased design when a film is connected to tourism. Specifically, I highlight the traps of such discursive evolution in a world dominated by the capitalist organisation of lifeworlds, from localities all the way to the nation and its official handle, the nation state. In analytical terms, I explained that in film tourism the authorial powers of development are free-flowing in global realms but socially distributed in contingent ways across the nation state and global markets. As a result, what develops as a tourist destination (or bundle of destinations) out of popular cinematic texts can endorse mobilities of ethnic, racial and gendered character in both beneficial and highly problematic ways. What in the case of Borat tourism is problematic, may be beneficial in a different context. All the same, luck and contingent interests seem to inform such 'good luck', positing questions concerning the moral coding guiding market mobilities.

My example of film tourism development, *Borat 1 & 2*, errs on the latter case due to the films' virulent sexist and antisemitic focus, which caused social harm, regardless of

their satirical pretensions. The harm was amplified due to the indifference harboured by tourism authorities, the markets and the Kazakh nation state, in an attempt to maximise profit. I examined how indifference was crafted across different phases of tourism design. The first phase of designing tourism associated with *Borat 1* redirected attention away from the ignominious fictional character of the film to the noble romantic features of Kazakh landscape and modern culture. It replaced the admittedly contentious popular cultural element of the film with the folk, techno-cultural or natural elements of Kazakh identity. The second phase completed this process, by accepting the racist and sexist elements of *Borat 2*, while appropriating two outsiders' creative labour (Baron Cohen and Keen) to cosmopolitanise Kazakh identity in the tourist trade.

We should not lose sight of the fact that tourism design communicated with the projection of a particular version of 'human': technologically advanced, masculine and ruthless. To return to Fuller's (2011) apt analysis of 'Humanity 2.0', the Kazakh design of tourism conformed national identity to a blueprint of what it means to be modern, progressive and civilised. Ticking the cybernetic (technology, architecture), biomedical (a nation facelifted as a valorised/manly specimen) and ecological boxes (beautiful landscapes to visit), produced an 'acceptable', 'decent' brand. To achieve this, the brand appealed to a purified version of art/heritage, which is not polluted by vulgar 'pop' elements. Kazakhstan's tourist branding consolidated the nation's cybernetic, biomedical and ecological interests via processes of artistic axiology that we associate with successful/aesthetically pleasing design. From now on, what would 'move around' the world would be a noble version of host identity, compliant with a model of modern Western development.

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