

only about gender practices and alcohol in that town and in Russia but linked issues of hospitality and friendship, ethnic assimilation into the larger society, health and marital patterns. Metzko blends the personal with a much larger scale without losing track of either. She deftly shows what larger lessons can be learned, but it is the narrative of the individual that enables Metzko to delve beneath the surface.

Less dramatic, but still fascinating, Melissa L. Caldwell (“Tempest in a Coffeepot”) shows that sharing a coffee provides insights into changing and apparently contradictory social patterns in Russia. Caldwell writes, “Above all, Russian consumers have expressed strong sensitivity to issues relating to the moral inflections of consumption in the new Russia” (103). Indeed, as Barthes might have expected, this is a theme running through the chapters and each of the countries studied. As Caldwell portrays the quest for the right place to drink coffee together, it becomes clear that images of self and other are also being negotiated and explored. Being seen and possibly overheard in particular public spaces is not necessarily good and potentially hazardous. In another era this may have been a political issue, but today the issue appears more to involve a careful navigation of appropriateness or morality. New public eating spaces continue to be created, from newcomers like McDonald’s to the renovation of old Soviet-era canteens. These are welcomed by some as shared public space while others regard them suspiciously as neither public nor private and prefer home or the anonymity of a park bench. Caldwell’s chapter echoes many others as individuals rethink and engage with the rapidly changing social landscapes.

As Marion Nestle observes in the foreword, food is more than a symbol and through it and associated practices, abstractions become real and issues “accessible, vivid and tangible” (xi). The personal is political and the political personal, as illustrated in these chapters. In the introduction, Caldwell, the editor, notes the diversity of the postsocialist present, due in part to their separate waves of entry into state socialism, varied pasts, ethnic makeup, and other links with the world beyond. She writes that while food studies may be relatively new in some parts of the world, the importance of food as a symbol in the centralizing plans of the socialist states meant that many researchers chose to focus on aspects of food production and consumption, thus laying the groundwork for the numerous studies that have followed. Elizabeth Cullen Dunn returns to this theme in her concluding afterword, writing that the essays demonstrate the myriad ways in which these countries create their own paths to modernity, making “use of their own histories and cultural schemas as well as imported ones” (220). Many of the arguments present in these chapters are being discussed in countries outside eastern Europe, including the concerns of a single high-speed highway to one modernity and the various ways in which food producers and consumers react to, work around, play with, and submit to forces larger than their individual or local selves. The chapters provide material from the seams of society where the micro and macro levels are woven together, demonstrating what Nestle and Barthes both point to as the hallmarks of successful writing about food. *Food and Everyday Life in the Post-Socialist World* is an important contribution and should be of great interest to policymakers and regulatory bodies, as well as students and researchers.

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The Many Faces of Sacha Baron Cohen: Politics, Parody, and the Battle over Borat. By Robert A. Saunders. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2008. xii, 185 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. \$26.95, paper.

In March 2007 *GQ* ranked Sacha Baron Cohen as the nineteenth most powerful man in Britain. Robert A. Saunders’s book sets out to explain and assess the comedian’s career and the place of Baron Cohen’s satire in domestic and international politics and culture. Saunders argues that Baron Cohen’s humor operates in the context of “deterritorialized, denationalized, decentralized media products” (6). The first part is dedicated to exposing how Baron Cohen’s “true talent proved to be his ability to expose the stultifying ignorance

of the political elite vis-à-vis the masses they purportedly served" (2). The second looks specifically at one of his characters, Borat, and the domestic and international dimensions of his portrayal of Borat's "fictional" home country, Kazakhstan.

As someone who followed the reaction to Borat in Central Asia, my initial curiosity about this book lay naturally in the second half. I did, however, read with interest the first section's biography of Baron Cohen, particularly Saunders's analysis of the place of satire in postmodern society and his portrait of Baron Cohen as a vaudevillian. He emphasizes Baron Cohen's Jewish identity, and he also shows how his identity is founded on shared traits of other marginalized peoples such as blacks and Hispanics. Saunders argues that the comedian's success lay in his ability to encourage people to unpack their social stereotypes and inhibitions.

Baron Cohen came gradually to acquire his own television program, and this success mirrored the media world's increased emphasis on "soft news" (59). Arguing that Baron Cohen "is the prodigal son of the country's cultural studies movement" (62–63), Saunders explains how each of the comedian's three characters—Ali G, Borat, and Bruno—represents a critique of identity politics in the postmodern west. The character Ali G embodies for Saunders the contemporary British debate about the nature of Britishness and minority identities in Britain, while Borat serves to stereotype a former Soviet identity, embodying tropes developed in the Cold War period.

Borat and the repercussions of the Hollywood film, *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2006), is the subject of section 2. Chapter 4 sets out to dispel the myths about Kazakhstan generated by Borat, and it offers an account of who the Kazakh people are, where they originated, and what their place is in the contemporary state system. These originally nomadic people were forced to become sedentary and their economy was industrialized under Soviet rule, so the modern Kazakh state is a powerful amalgam of tradition and modernity. Indeed, Central Asia remains poorly understood by outsiders, and this lack of understanding, coupled with the relative unimportance of Central Asian states in the international system and its security, offered Baron Cohen a tempting provenance for his character. Saunders shows how surprising, even depressing, the media world's reaction to this character was, often reinforcing rather than dispelling Soviet-era-inspired myths.

While many failed to take Borat seriously, or were able to decouple the "real" from the fictional country, the Kazakhstani government at the outset was not able to react so sanguinely. The remainder of chapter 4 introduces Saunders's view on why Kazakhstan's initial response was vitriolic: "1) the fragile state of Kazakhstani national identity; and 2) the importance of marketing the country's global brand in the postmodern political system" (98). After Borat's MTV appearance, foreign ministry spokesperson Yerzhan Ashykbayev threatened the comedian with legal action. This contrasted, however, with Roman Vassilenko, the press attaché for Kazakhstan's embassy to the United States and Canada, who instead "emerged as Borat's alter ego, deftly bobbing and parrying in response to Borat's barbs" (101). In both cases, the Kazakhs were taking Borat seriously.

Chapters 5 and 6 look in greater detail at Borat's repercussions in Kazakhstan and the United States. Academic discussions about Borat have rightly centered around the concepts of framing and national branding, and here Saunders's account is no exception. Kazakhstan's substantial oil and mineral deposits had ensured the country was already well known among investors and policymakers, but it had yet to figure in the popular imagination. The film *Borat* changed that, and as a result Kazakhstan's subsequent public relations were in good part reactive, quickly attempting to reassert control over its own image making. Over time, the Kazakhstani elite became persuaded that their country's accidental branding might carry advantages, not least an increase in tourism and an aggressive marketing of the country that emphasized its credentials as one of the success stories of the post-Soviet political and economic reform program. In short, the book is interesting both as an introduction to Baron Cohen's humor and as a case study in how a new state in the international system grapples with an externally imposed identity.

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