

Borat as Tragicomedy of Anti US-Americanism

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Alexei Lalo, "Borat as Tragicomedy of Anti US-Americanism"
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Abstract: Alexei Lalo discusses in his article "*Borat* as Tragicomedy of Anti US-Americanism" the 2006 mockumentary in the context of stereotypes and clichés that exist about the United States and elsewhere, particularly in Europe. Anti US-Americanism is arguably at the core of this project, but *Borat's* creators seem to mock not only US-Americans, but also those who invent and practice clichés about the U.S. Lalo draws parallels between Sacha Baron Cohen's work and the legacies of Lenny Bruce and Charlie Chaplin (most notably his late film *A King in New York*). Of the numerous socio-cultural problems of the United States *Borat* explores, special attention is paid to the film's take on the relationships between the races and also to the ideology of "political correctness," as it is explicitly and implicitly attacked in the film. Differences between the creators of *Borat's* approach to comedy and more mainstream conception of comedy in the U.S. are also explored in the article. Lalo suggests that films like *Borat* are far from being just eccentric comedies or thoughtless entertainment; in fact, they succeed in helping their audiences think about their own culture self-critically and self-ironically.

Alexei LALO

Borat as Tragicomedy of Anti US-Americanism

Lenny Bruce, a pent-up U.S. comic of the 1950s and 1960s, once noted that "The only honest art form is laughter, comedy. You can't fake it ... try to fake three laughs in an hour -- ha ha ha ha ha -- they'll take you away, man. You can't" (Bruce <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/l/lenny_bruce.html>).

Sacha Baron Cohen is certainly a talented comedian whose work echoes both outrageously hilarious Jewish humor originating from such hubs of global Jewish culture as Odessa, Ukraine, or New York and, strangely enough, such lost or thoroughly forgotten traditions as that of the bold "pent-up comics" of the 1950s to the early 1960s in the U.S. For example, Bruce with his poignant satire of U.S. society comes to mind instantly as a possible important progenitor: Borat's rodeo performance on the Iraq War strikes me as vintage Lenny. And yet this feature film leaves one with an eerie feeling of sadness and melancholia. Were he still alive, the sick comic Bruce would most certainly approve of *Borat*. After all, maybe Socrates was right when at the end of the huge drinking party in the *Symposium* he explained to his cronies that an author of good comedy is somehow simultaneously a tragedian and vice versa. Certain episodes of *Borat* may signal the advent of a new, post-Cold War epoch of infallible black humor, the black humor of the unipolar, U.S.-run world, the humor that causes a bitter smile, some sort of laughter through tears: for now I will only give an example of the touching scene in the car after Borat and the Black sex worker Luenell are thrown out of a Southern white home (the white U.S. South's idea of etiquette of good manners is thus brilliantly mocked). In what is arguably the most piquantly uneasy episode of the whole film, a visibly embarrassed Borat tells the woman he is sorry -- and thus the irony: presumably, it takes a British comedian to apologize to her on the behalf of the whole white population of the U.S. South!

It is also quite plausible that *Borat* has another crucial predecessor in satirizing the culture and society of the United States. Charlie Chaplin's *A King in New York* (1957) bears a number of resemblances to the mockumentary. It is also possible that Cohen echoes intentionally or alludes to his great compatriot in several ways throughout the film. I limit myself to mentioning a few of these hypothetical parallels. *Borat*'s "producer" Azamat Bagatov is dressed like Chaplin's tramp when Borat finally finds him in Los Angeles and the latter refers to the former as "Hitler": Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* is one of his best-known satires. The rodeo performance may be compared with King Shahdov's famous scene in the trial room. Amid general satirizing, both films seem to have a streak of almost sentimental sympathy to the U.S. in them; in *Borat* this is achieved through the introduction of Luenell, the sex worker; in *A King in New York* -- via the boy Rupert character played by Chaplin's eleven-year-old son who is suspicious of all authority and government in the world. It can be understood not as a playfully Marxist or communist argument but as a declaration of US-Americanness: historically and "mythologically" there is no legitimate authority in the U.S., and many US-Americans tend to distrust the state or any other external authority (such as a patronizing opinion of an "expert" or "specialist").

A King in New York was created as Chaplin's response to having been denied entry to the U.S. by immigration authorities as he had become one of the targets of the McCarthyist anti-communist witch-hunt. The film had been banned in the U.S. until 1973 and usually was considered (especially by U.S. reviewers) as an artistic failure, something made by a man embittered by the U.S. and bearing a grudge against it. However, even some of the Chaplin movie's denouncers agree on its historic importance: it serves as a significant document shedding light upon the conflict between a creative individual and the repressive McCarthyist ideological state apparatus. Commenting on his film, Chaplin once said, "I love America even now ... I made the film for laughter" (Chaplin qtd. in "The Unfunny Comic" <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,893725,00.html>>). Satire has become a standard genre in US-American film making and films such as Lars von Trier's *Dogville* or *Borat* are created and/or promoted by major Hollywood studios and star successful male and women actors. And yet, the satire of Bruce and Chaplin is still alive and kicking and I postulated that Cohen's project may be considered within this tradition of bitter, at times "black," "dirty," or "sick" comical exposure of US-

American mental attitudes and cultural habits. In other words, what used to be largely a creative individual's grudge against McCarthyism has metamorphosed into almost the entire world's resistance to the hegemony of the U.S.

It is ironic that in its annual *2006 Report on Human Rights* the U.S. State Department accuses the Kazakh government of deeming Sacha's website "as offensive": "Independent web media reported that the government monitored e-mail and Internet activity, blocked or slowed access to opposition Web sites and materials critical of Nazarbayev or members of his family ... In December 2005 the government deemed as offensive the content of a satirical web site controlled by British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen and revoked the .kz domain" (*Country Reports* <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78820.htm>>). On the one hand, Nazarbayev's Kazakhstan is certainly a non-liberal "compromised" democracy, a mildly totalitarian post-Soviet country that merits these criticisms as do Belarus, Uzbekistan, or Russia, for example. On the other hand, it is rather odd that Kazakhstan is charged with trying to fight something that is really much more offensive to the United States itself. The language chosen by the State Department is downright ludicrous: the "satirical website" is "controlled" by the British comedian! A reader of the *Report* may get the impression that the movie *Borat* is a social satire of Kazakhstan. The vigilant fighters for human rights from Washington, D.C. would be disappointed to learn that *Borat* (with its "Kazakh" episodes filmed in a Romanian village who sued the production company for misuse), its website and the pop-cultural excitement has really little to nothing to do with satirizing this Central Asian country (according to one of the most odious adages of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Central Asia is the "underbelly of Russia" <<http://www.solgenizin.net.ru/razdel-sb-elbook-605-pgs/3/>>). In fact, and as I attempt to demonstrate, its satirical jabs are more than anything directed at the U.S.: *Borat* might be considered as a benchmark achievement in countering the cultural hegemony of the U.S., that is, cultural imperialism.

Borat was conceived along the lines of some of the most persistent clichés of European anti US-Americanism. These clichés sometimes are not untrue: for instance, some right of center Europeans assume that the U.S. is a pro-Israel state "run by the Jews": the strong lobby for Israel in Washington may be one reason for unsubstantiated proposition. Or, the U.S. is an ideological hell ruled by an explosive combination of its puritanical heritage and the adherence to "political correctness": one is unable to discuss matters of gender or race without offending either the conservative right or the liberal left -- or, paradoxically, both at the same time. Then, of course, there are the issues of capital punishment, genetically modified food, gay marriage, etc. I must point out that I am not trying to downplay either direct or indirect links *Borat* may have with Kazakhstan and other Eurasian countries mentioned in the film (Russia, Uzbekistan, etc.). First and foremost, it is certainly built around the correctly presumed ignorance of many US-Americans about such overseas cultures as the Kazakh one. In addition, *Borat* can be seen as a satirical comment on the civilizational prejudices many Westerners have about non-Western cultures. Last but not least, the very choice of Kazakhstan by Cohen and his team was undoubtedly a thoroughly calculated, rational decision: for instance, the country is located in the same region with Afghanistan, one of the battlefields of the global "War of Terror" (since *Borat*'s memorable rodeo performance, the use of a preposition in the phrase is no longer straightforward). The feature was supposed to be filmed as a huge hoax, as an intricately planned and finely executed practical joke with some elements of a confidence game: for example, the Alabama-based etiquette company featured in the film is reported to have sued the filmmakers for assuring them that they represented the State Television of the Republic of Belarus and were making an official documentary film about the U.S. South's culture ("Belorussiyu vtyanuli" <<http://lenta.ru/news/2006/11/17/belarus/>>.)

The notorious fraternity boys ("a group of young scholars also traveling around the country" as *Borat*, the narrator, describes them in the film), in turn tried to complain that Cohen and his team got them drunk and then tricked them into making angry misogynistic and racist pronouncements. To this end, Russians have a wonderful proverb: "Whatever you keep to yourself when sober you blab out when you are drunk." The proverb calls Plato's *Laws* to mind where he talks about the almost socially therapeutic effects of drinking and even hints at the social necessity of getting citizens drunk and watching their behavior as their tongues loosen up a little bit: "When a man drinks wine he begins to be better pleased with himself, and the more he drinks the more he is filled full of brave hopes, and conceit of his power, and at last the string of his tongue is loosened, and fancying himself wise, he is brimming over with lawlessness, and has no more fear or respect, and is ready to do or say anything.

... What is better adapted than the festive use of wine, in the first place to test, and in the second place to train the character of a man, if care be taken in the use of it?" (*Laws* <<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/laws.1.i.html>>). In this jocular context, Borat appears to be a true follower of Plato who is set to test the Roman motto *in vino veritas* using young US-Americans as guinea pigs. One can only hope that his intentions are as benevolent as those of his ancient "mentor," i.e., aimed at ameliorating the social conditions in the global hegemon's own household. In sum, the region of the ex-USSR's new independent states is in a variety of ways relevant to *Borat* as a creative project and, by now, a pop-cultural phenomenon. It has been rumored that Cohen had met a presumably Jewish-Russian man from Odessa, Ukraine, on a train several years before, and this extremely funny fellow traveler had suggested that he try to use the fictitious Kazakh reporter Borat Sagdiyev alias and image. Be that as it may, I postulate that *Borat* can be understood as a statement of European distrust, envy, suspicion, and fear of the United States and thus an expression of anti US-Americanism. At the same time, the film is also an intra-Western affair (a Jewish-British comedian exposing US-American cultural values and mental habits) in which the non-Western world plays the role of static background that -- as oftentimes happens to be the case in intra-Western conversations -- is denied a voice of its own and here perhaps the perspective of the West's use of the East for denigration may be a valid point (on this, see, e.g., Deltcheva <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol11/iss2/4/>>).

The very fact that the *Borat* "characters" can actually get away with obscenities, misogyny, racism, and expressions of xenophobia in the "politically correct" United States strikes me an interesting and curious event and I can explain it only with Roumiana Deltcheva's description of the "scapegoat"-ing of the East. It was also baffling to see that many U.S. moviegoers missed the thrust of this film: just as they were cracking up at Borat's mishaps, were they really aware that in this confidence game it is largely US-American civilization that is the true object of the joke and thus the joke is on themselves? It would be interesting to conduct a sociological study of the U.S. audience as to why and who found the film funny. At the same time perhaps the US-Americanized world will not be as dystopian as the numerous places in the U.S. Borat Sagdiyev has visited. It would be depressing to think of the United States -- a leading postindustrial nation, the global militaristic, economic and technological hegemon of today -- as a society, in which one has to be a Pamela Anderson to "dig the joke" and try to play along with Borat (even if only because she had met Cohen long before and/or might have been warned of the hoax). Most scenes of the movie do not appear to be staged or rehearsed: for instance, the New York feminist's sexophobic sarcasm about Borat actually going to look Pamela up in California sounds believable to me. However, certain questions remain: why was the movie as shown in U.S. theaters so short (84 minutes) when the length of actual footage was much longer? It well may be because 84 minutes is an average length of a US movie, but a large number of scenes that one can find on youtube, for example, are not available even among the deleted scenes on the DVD (although some may have been borrowed from the HBO's *Ali G Show*, another project of Cohen and his team). In a truly liberal society, would this kind of satirical takes even be recommended to high school or college students and then discussed in class? In any event, what would the U.S. State Department say about (self)censoring *Borat* in the United States, endless problems with human rights in Kazakhstan notwithstanding?

Of numerous socio-cultural problems of the United States that Borat plays with, I take perhaps the most conspicuous one: his take on the relationships between races. Needless to say, the issue of ever-growing tension and lack of meaningful cultural dialogue between Whites and Blacks in the U.S. is unfortunately not just an internal cultural predicament: it has significant ramifications of the planetary scale. James Baldwin, a US-American writer of the twentieth century, was among those who realized this more than fifty years ago. In his essay "Stranger in the Village" he dwells on the perceptions of the US-American Negro in Europe and moves on to the ongoing "interracial drama" in the U.S.:

Yet, if the American Negro has arrived at his identity by virtue of the absoluteness of his estrangement from his past, American white men still nourish the illusion that there is some means of recovering the European innocence, of returning to a state in which black men do not exist. This is one of the greatest errors Americans can make. The identity they fought so hard to protect has, by virtue of that battle, undergone a change: Americans are as unlike any other white people in the world as it is possible to be. I do not think, for example, that it is too much to suggest that the American vision of the world -- which allows so little reality, generally speaking, for any of the darker

forces in human life, which tends until today to paint moral issues in glaring black and white -- owes a great deal to the battle waged by Americans to maintain between themselves and black men a human separation which could not be bridged. It is only now beginning to be borne in on us ... that this vision of the world is dangerously inaccurate, and perfectly useless. For it protects our moral high-mindedness at the terrible expense of weakening our grasp of reality. People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster. (Baldwin 128-29)

One of the mistakes White US-Americans have committed is thinking of their frontier experience and of their WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) heritage as the only true canon and measure of "Americanness." This canon certainly excludes (or, at best, marginalizes) the US-American Black experience as an indispensable part of US-American civilization, one that has undeniably exerted formative influence upon it. More than that, this view derives from a flimsy idea that the U.S. is merely an extension of Britain and Western Europe at large, culturally, historically, and socio-politically. In other words, it is blind to the fact that something distinctly non-European (in a sense, genuinely post-colonial) has been going on in this country all along. Writing in 1949, Baldwin points prophetically to the crucial relation between white US-America's failure to resolve the interracial conflict in any sensible way and the then emergent hegemonic role of the United States in the world. Today we "reap the fruits" of what Baldwin managed to observe in the embryonic stage. George W. Bush's "innocent" US-America has turned itself into the "monster" Baldwin was warning his contemporaries about -- and carnivalesque, eccentric, scabrous, sick humor appears to be one of the few available strategic approaches to dealing with this monster in the (inter)cultural terrain. *Borat* is one of the few thoughtfully orchestrated attempts to tackle the monster with this weapon of the last resort: laughter in a comedy of errors and inconveniences.

The intoxicated "young American scholars" in the frat boys episode (think of the problem of binge drinking on U.S. university campuses!) of the movie agree with Borat -- the provocateur -- that the U.S. would be better off if slavery returned (they probably mean the "downgrading" of minorities including gays, Blacks, Jews, Chinese, Indians ([India], and women who are allegedly and unduly more powerful than the "mainstream" of Whites). Whatever these boys have to say sounds too idiotic but once one starts thinking about it, things cease to be that straightforward. It is not an accident that the "young scholars" are likened to Borat himself by the narrator: they are also "on the road" looking for something that is called "America" (no parallel with Jack Kerouac's characters is intended here as this author would be very upset to see today's "avatars" of his classic characters). Their xenophobic, misogynistic slant has to do not just with their tardy and nervous adolescent sexuality but also with their mental confusion, their failure to come to terms with the "black and white" vision of their culture imposed on them through mass media, the education system, family, and other institutions of training good U.S. citizens. In what they are trying to share with Borat one can in fact discern certain traces of elemental resistance to these institutions. Indeed, it is hardly the case that these boys would so sincerely believe in the advantages of slavery or in the omnipotence of minorities in the U.S. Rather, they have just met a foreigner and want to impress him by means of trying to sound hip and cool, i.e., via defying the stifling rules of political correctness. After all, this kind of authority-defiant behavior is common for many young people worldwide. If viewed in this light, it seems odd that the frat boys would subsequently decide to sue Borat instead of sending him a thank-you note. The latter decision would appear so much more logical: after all, the "young scholars" -- and along with them a considerable amount of other U.S. youngsters who may have seen Borat's adventures in the theaters, youtube or on DVD -- must have broadened their horizons and reached a better understanding of their own culture and society.

One striking difference between Borat and his U.S. "victims" is that the latter almost never laugh, be it the morose New York feminists, Alabaman etiquette society members, or the driving instructor. These characters have lost their ability to laugh; they may still be able to joke or even occasionally teach others how to joke correctly (just as the "Humor Coach" does for a living) but laughter is no longer accessible to them. In this sense, Cohen can be understood as a fighter with the *agelasts*, i.e., pedantic individuals incapable of laughter, mirthless persons (Rabelais in Bakhtin). Indeed, humor has become thoroughly controlled by the ever-alert ideologues of political correctness. Very much like tel-

levision humor shows in the Soviet Union, U.S. stand-up comics never seem to be interested in satirically attacking the most painful issues confronted by this society, opting instead for vulgar and/or shallow jokes that are no longer funny simply because they are predictable and invariably politically correct. It is all right to joke about your mother-in-law but it is not funny if you have had sex with her, the Humor Coach explains to Borat.

One of the reasons of the film's success in the U.S. might have had to do with the fact that the population is hungry for a much more liberated and, surprisingly, more meaningful humor than the dull product offered by television networks (and the humor coaches, for that matter: acquiring a sense of humor seems to be akin to building up muscles in a gym). In other words, the *agelasts* under attack by Borat include the U.S. standup comedians and other entertainers who have turned themselves into "humor fitness coaches" of the increasingly "agelastic" public -- easy prey for the likes of Cohen. It is equally important that *Borat* has managed to expose post-September 11 White US-America's fear and suspiciousness of Muslims and Arabs. The most obvious example is the elderly rodeo manager who tips Borat that he shave off his Arab-looking moustache but it seems to me that it was Cohen's conscious choice that his boisterous anti-Semitism had to be supported by his Middle Eastern looks. Bearing in mind that many US-Americans do not know where exactly Kazakhstan would be and what its chief denominations would be (as Borat explains at one point, the Kazakhs "follow the hawk" -- and his interlocutors readily buy that!), I would not be surprised if some future studies will show that many of those who saw the film thought that Borat was indeed a Middle Eastern Muslim, your ultimate Israel-hater. My Jewish-Russian childhood friends taught me years ago that the best way to expose an anti-Semite is to make an anti-Jewish joke in front of him and watch his reaction. Sacha is definitely very good at employing this strategy in the most efficient way.

Following the above issues raised, one particular question remains unaddressed: what makes *Borat* funny, if at all, and to whom does it seem funny? To start with, it seems to me that the comedy's reception in the United States differs from the way it is viewed in Europe, or Russia, or, indeed, in the rest of the world. In the U.S. *Borat* makes most people laugh primarily because they are ailing from the "agelastic" culture of the entertainment industry and are desperate to be able to experience a comedy that is a boundary tester, a challenge to such dominant ideologies as political correctness. Some others (including, hopefully, well-educated elites) find it worthy of a laugh or at least a condescendingly wry smile owing to the fact that they realize the satire is aimed at themselves, that it will ultimately have a therapeutic, healing effect on their society and culture. In the rest of the world, on the contrary, people seem to talk about *Borat* because it raises one of the most important issues of nowadays: "what will we all be like if the project of US-Americanization of the planet succeeds?" We get to see some glimpses of this world in the closing scenes of the movie when Borat's neighbor has been able to afford a new iPod, albeit a mini ("everyone knows it is for girls," Borat explains), and thus withstand a competition in the US-Americanized, consumerist "Kazakhstan," now less "cruel" but more materialistic. As the narrator tells us, life in the village has indeed improved thanks to Borat's quest of the U.S. "for make benefit his glorious nation," but is he not being sarcastic just a little bit? Are some of the lessons one can learn from the United States beneficial or detrimental to the rest of the world?

While I have no readymade answers to these rhetorical questions, to me it is sad that this kind of film seems so hilarious on both sides of the Atlantic, albeit for different reasons. Cohen is perhaps a very good comic but does his humor really reach out for the spiritual or intellectual depth of a Charlie Chaplin or a Lenny Bruce? The answer must be negative; a feminist would perhaps say that he just exploits successfully the "pornographic imagination" of some US-American males who flock to the theaters to crack up at Borat describing what "doggy style," a "BJ," or a "funny retardation" would all be about. And yet, despite all these legitimate criticisms, one should give the British comedian and his team credit for studying the peculiarities of this "pornographic imagination" so well. One undeniable matter that strikes me about this successful comedy is that it is built on its authors' thorough, almost anthropological, research into the values and mental habits of their US-American "native informants." It goes without saying that the success of *Borat* has much to do with them having been able to locate the most vulnerable aspects of U.S. culture and thus be on target most of the time.

I must emphasize that I disagree with much of current European anti US-Americanism (although there is a promise of a change with Barack Obama's presidency). The fact that I often quote approv-

ingly, here and elsewhere is this: Lars von Trier's films or Umberto Eco's somewhat apocalyptic visions of humanity's US-Americanized future (e.g., Eco 14-20) does not imply that I share the views of this or that European artist or intellectual. Many hasty and stupid things are said in Europe (also in Russia or Kazakhstan, for that matter) about the U.S. While it is commonplace to point out the average US-American's ignorance of geography, history, and cultures of the rest of the world, it is somehow seldom noticed that very few European intellectuals seem to have a working command of U.S. history or passable knowledge of its literature and culture or the in fact non-homogenous nature of the U.S.. Some Europeans are often envious of US-Americans for various reasons and have thus developed a thinly veiled cultural -- or civilizational? -- inferiority complex.

It is not my intent to write a panegyric of the film; nor am I preoccupied with the peculiarities of its reception and commercial success. However, as a cultural critic, I attempt to use *Borat* as a pretext to discuss the crucial socio-cultural issues it raises. Unfortunately, humor and satire in US-American culture appear to have lost their legitimate ability "to bite," that is, to be incisive to its object, to sink their teeth into the very flesh of hypocrites and bigots at both the "conservative right" and "progressive Left" who have appropriated the ideology of political correctness for their ends. The reigning status of humor as something meaninglessly funny, totally impotent of highlighting the social and cultural sores in the U.S. has contributed immensely to the success of *Borat*. The public is downright thirsty for more socially and culturally articulate comedy. Many people appear to be sick and tired of the inanity of the entertainment industry's idea of what constitutes the funny and the humorous: just as Borat tells Martha Stewart who tried to teach him how to make some fancy bed on the NBC Jay Leno show, "This is boring, Martha; let's have some fun!" In any event, the film has presented us with a rare opportunity to discuss uncomfortable matters usually either silenced or restricted to drunken exchanges between otherwise more "responsible" citizens. Ultimately, as Emerson would argue in "Self-Reliance," U.S. culture is supposed be dynamic, ever in transition, in flux; with the individual taking full responsibility for his/her actions, while a voluntary association of such individuals should be able to initiate social and cultural changes (unlike, say, in Russia where popular wisdom suggests that things should go their own "natural way," with the individual unable to change the course of events), it takes a project as inspired as the *Borat* film to hit this ever-mobile target with its satirical arrows. The good news is that these discussions may in the long run contribute to the would-be re-emergence of an anti-mainstream, anti-consumerist counterculture in the U.S. capable of producing its own Borats, Chaplins, new Bruces and their likes -- in other words, the counterculture of irrepressible self-irony and omnipotent laughter.

I conclude with Borat the narrator summing up the results of his trip to the U.S. after the unsuccessful attempt to wed Pam Anderson: "I was humiliated. It was time for me to... fly back home. When I sat on the bus, I thought about my journey over the past three weeks, the great times, the good times, and the shit times [a fragment of the meeting with the "young scholars" appears on screen] ... I had come to America to learn lessons for Kazakhstan but what did I learn? Suddenly I realized: I had learned that if you chase a dream, especially one with plastic chests, you can miss the real beauty in front of your eyes [at this point, Borat knocks at Luenell the Alabaman sex worker's door]." For a "Black humorist" that is set to mock US-America, this is arguably a humane thing to say. It is also a very apt comment -- intended or not -- on the way the United States' culture is sometimes received in Europe and elsewhere: the "real beauty" is missed, while the one "with plastic breasts" and plastic surgery is taken to be the Grail one is longing to possess. It also somehow implicates the fact that one's "Quest of America" is largely a very personal, intimate journey into the depths of one's own soul, the "America of the Soul," as Thomas Pynchon writes in his novel *Mason & Dixon* (511). One could think about embarking on this journey with John Locke's famous line in mind where Locke talks about the invention of money to replace barter in commodity exchanges: "In the beginning all the world was America" (<<http://libertyonline.hypermall.com/Locke/second/second-5.html>>).

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