

vastness turns it into a bland, “veritable McEmbassy,” Campbell says. Chinese guards patrol the gates of the construction site, and virtually every worker and contractor has come from outside the United States. The Chinese explain the secrecy and security monitoring by saying that when they received an airplane built for senior leaders by Boeing some years ago, they found many “unexpected surprises” in the form of listening devices. “In today’s environment of barely disguised strategic competition,” both sides appear to

EXCERPT

Verses Versus Marriage

It may be too sweeping to say that modern poetry is unhappy poetry, but it is certainly true that modern poems about marriage are almost always about unhappy marriages. . . . Such unanimous poetic testimony against the possibility of happy marriage . . . is more than a sign that poets are unusually difficult to be married to. It is a statement of the modern artist’s belief that truthfulness to experience, especially the worst phases of experience, is more important than the promise of pleasure; that it is better to be authentic than to be happy.

—ADAM KIRSCH, poet and critic,
in *The New Criterion* (April 2008)

be constantly probing for inside information on what the other is up to, according to Campbell.

America’s biggest embassy is not its mission in Beijing but the one under construction in Baghdad. When the new Chinese embassy opens, it will be a reminder that while the 20th century belonged to America, China intends to seize the 21st. Its “McEmbassy” is a piece of a larger public-relations strategy, Campbell concludes. Its message is that while the Americans were away “fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, China arrived.”

OTHER NATIONS

Spain’s Memory Wars

THE SOURCE: “Pinochet’s Revenge: Spain Revisits Its Civil War” by Omar G. Encarnación, in *World Policy Journal*, Winter 2007–08, and “The Politics of History and Memory in Democratic Spain” by Carolyn P. Boyd, in *The Annals*, May 2008.

CALL IT PINOCHET’S REVENGE. When Spain asked Scotland Yard to go to a private London hospital in 1998 and arrest Chile’s former dictator, General Augusto Pinochet, on charges of murdering Spanish émigrés, the shock waves hit Spain even harder than his home country. Spain seemed morally hypocritical for attempting to prosecute a foreign

autocrat while adopting a policy of “collective amnesia” toward its own bloody civil war and nearly 40-year aftermath. When Spain went after Pinochet, who later died of natural causes at age 91 without ever standing trial, it could no longer ignore its own dictator, Generalissimo Francisco Franco, writes Omar G. Encarnación, a political scientist at Bard College. The worldwide reaction to the Pinochet arrest destroyed Spain’s unwritten “Pact of Forgetting” that had made the politically connected deaths of 580,000 Spaniards during Franco’s reign (1936–75)

almost unmentionable.

Other countries, including Germany and Argentina, conducted trials to punish crimes of former despots and their henchmen. But in 1977, Spain legislated amnesty. Within a decade of Pinochet’s arrest, however, a dramatic shift in public attitudes led to the 2007 passage of a “Law of Historical Memory” to commemorate the vanquished and rebuke the myth that the victors—Franco’s fascist forces—were right.

International human rights organizations argue that the 2007 law continues to let the guilty off the hook. It metes out no punishment even for wholesale murder and torture. But the measure’s supporters in Spain note that it is the first declaration that the Franco regime was “illegitimate” and requires visible sym-

bolic change—getting rid of ubiquitous Francoist monuments and renaming streets called “Avenida del Generalissimo,” which can be found in nearly every city.

Although there is consensus among Spaniards that the record needs to be corrected and history recovered, there is less agreement on what should be remembered, according to Encarnación.

By 2000, nearly half of the Spanish population was too young to recall either the civil war or the dictatorship, writes Carolyn P. Boyd, a historian at the University of California, Irvine. And though more than 15,000 books have been written about the period, there is still no agreement on the causes of the war and who was at fault. The Right continues to think Franco saved the country by eliminating Marxist atheists, and the Left believes itself victimized in the “Spanish Holocaust.” Boyd notes that most history textbooks simply describe the civil war as a “fratricidal tragedy.”

OTHER NATIONS

Cultural Learnings of Kazakhstan

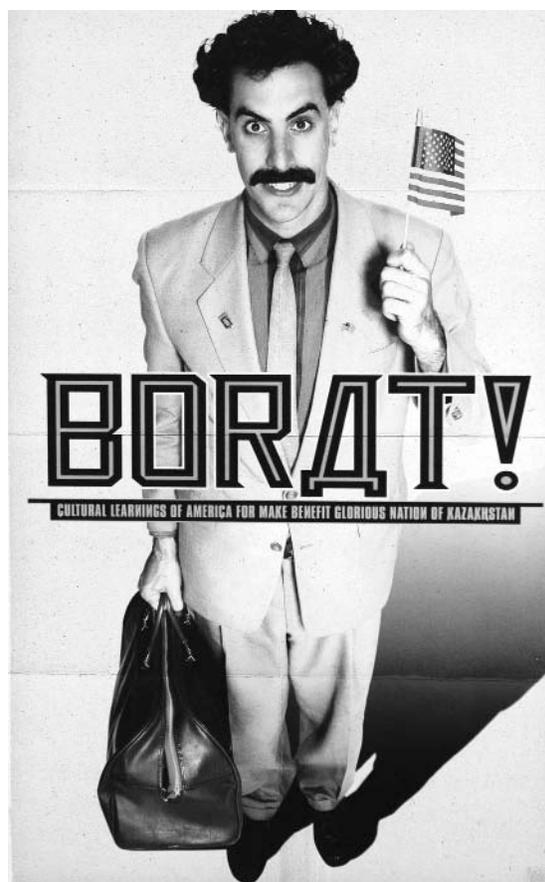
THE SOURCE: “Buying into Brand Borat: Kazakhstan’s Cautious Embrace of Its Unwanted ‘Son’” by Robert A. Saunders, in *Slavic Review*, Spring 2008.

IMAGINE THAT YOURS IS A newly independent nation the size of Western Europe. Your country straddles the world’s sixth-largest oilfield. It befriends the United States. It lays out millions to brand itself as one of the most stable, diverse, and rapidly

modernizing states on the planet.

Then enters a fictitious reporter, star of the \$250 million-grossing film *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*. Suddenly, your unknown country is famous. But it’s been rendered as a medieval backwater populated by rapists and anti-Semites. It’s become notorious for an imaginary festival called “The Running of the Jew.” It’s portrayed as a world center of wife beating. It’s depicted as hiring one-eyed drunkards to pilot the planes of its national airline.

And how has the actual nation of Kazakhstan handled this all-too-extensive exposure? It has vacillated, writes Robert A. Saunders, a historian at the State University of New York at Farmingdale. In responding to Sacha Baron Cohen, a Cambridge University-educated comedian who has promoted Borat into a lucrative specialty, Kazakhstan has tried being tough, branding Cohen’s humor as racism. It’s issued threats and demanded that the character be banned. It’s been nonchalant, saying it can take a



The fictitious movie journalist Borat put oil-rich Kazakhstan on the map—as uncouth and anti-Semitic. Tourism has blossomed.

joke. And it’s been cynical, touting Kazakhstan as the “perfect home for this autumn’s hottest comedian—Borat.”

The more Kazakhstan fussed, the more people wanted to see the film. And the more people who flocked to the film, the more tourists wanted to go to Kazakhstan. Visa applications in Cohen’s native Britain spiked as Borat became better known.

So in the end, Kazakhstan adopted the attitude of P. T. Barnum—any publicity is good publicity—and proved that not only circuses but even sovereign nations with oil wealth can make money off slander.