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**BETWEEN BORAT AND EXPO-2017. NATIONAL IDENTITY IN
KAZAKHSTAN'S NATION BRANDING NARRATIVES**

MA Thesis in Sociology and Social Anthropology

Central European University

Budapest

June 2017

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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

Chair, Examination Committee

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I, the undersigned, **Zhanerke Shakhina**, candidate for the MA degree in Sociology and Social Anthropology, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 14 June 2017

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Abstract

As a relatively new field, nation branding has attracted attention of scholars from different spheres. Most of the research has been done in the fields of marketing, branding, social policy and political studies that employed perspectives to advance the subject and come up with new improved strategies. However, Kaneva (2011) found that there is a need to take critical approach to nation branding, which I have done in this research. I explored nation branding looking at the case of Kazakhstan that is completing a decade of emerging as a brand between Borat and Astana EXPO-2017 that is happening in the country. Building my thesis on Benedict Anderson's conceptualization of 'nation' as an 'imagined community' and employing theories about modernization and development I argue that nation branding limits the imagination of nation in other terms than economic. This discursive origin of nation branding may have further implications in producing inequality between global actors and facilitating the rise of imperialism and neo-colonialism that is suggested for further research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Alexandra Kowalski, for providing me with ideas to start and make this project possible. Additionally, I want to thank Professor Dan Rabinowitz for his invaluable feedback reading through several drafts and keeping me on track through the whole thesis writing period. Furthermore, this thesis would not be possible without constant support of my friends and groupmates Namwar Yusuf Rahman and Shreya Ramnath, who helped me a lot during the writing process sharing the advices on how to formulate my research question and proceed writing.

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Introduction

When efforts that are made to promote the nation are not sufficient, any external factors depicting a nation may ruin its image and reputation. This happened to Kazakhstan when British comedian Sasha Baron Cohen's mockumentary *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* was released ten years ago. It is about a Kazakhstani journalist, Borat, who travels to the United States to shoot a documentary about Western culture and society, and at the same time to introduce his country to them. Kazakhstan and people living there were shown as backward, racist, and sexist in the movie and though it was satirical comedy, people have differently interpreted it and some believed in the 'Kazakhstan' shown in the movie (Saunders, 2008). Thus, it has created a lot of debates on how it is going to affect the reputation of Kazakhstan in international arena. Though many agreed that it 'put Kazakhstan on the map' (Erlan Idrissov, then Kazakhstan's Ambassador in the United Kingdom¹) and made people around the globe aware of existence of such country it was not the best way to introduce the country to the world.

Putting this situation in Goffmann's (1963) words, the country or the nation of Kazakhstan was stigmatized, as the character of Borat possessed the features that are considered to be undesirable and shameful for normal society. The sociologist argues that it is outsiders who stigmatize, or in other words label, people as having bad reputation. However, those who are labeled do not necessarily have to live up to that stigma, or reflect it. Whereas most of the Kazakhstani population and some activists found it offensive and completely inappropriate (Beachain, 2011), others saw the opportunity for advertising and stated that Borat raised the

¹ Quoted in Saunders (2008)

recognition of the country among foreigners (Saunders, 2008), and thus was a good opportunity for further country promotion which the state has taken up.

Referring to Goffman's findings and claims Rivera (2008) suggests theoretical framework of how stigmatized countries can manage their 'bad' reputation. The author claims that there are three ways to overcome 'spoiled' identity for the states which are isolating itself from the rest of the world (e.g. North Korea), accepting stigma and apologizing, and 'strategic self-presentation' (Rivera, 2008). In order to forget Borat phenomena Kazakhstani state chose to cover the stigma and gradually become unstigmatized and strategically present itself through re-branding and re-creating the image of the nation. There was high need in nation branding of Kazakhstan to overcome bad consequences of the movie depiction. Though the movie challenged the image of Kazakhstan for some time, nation branding campaigns were likely to recreate national identity. Therefore, it is essential for newly emerging countries such as Kazakhstan to brand itself, which has been intensively done by Kazakhstani government for the last decade.

Passing a whole decade of promotional struggle Kazakhstan is hosting international mega event – International Exposition Astana EXPO-2017 – that will present Kazakhstan in a completely new light. In the year of 2012 Astana was elected by member states of Bureau International des Expositions as the host city of EXPO-2017. The country was a candidate for hosting the exhibition along with Belgium's Liege. However, Kazakhstan won in this competition thanks to the proposed theme of 'Future energy' which seems to be very important in contemporary world. Though the topic is going to raise the question of energy and 'green' technology, this exhibition is of high importance to Kazakhstan, as it is believed it will position the country in the global economic arena. World exhibitions are suggested to be the places where a nation can showcase its achievements, cultural features, and innovativeness (Masalimova, Omirbekova,

Alikbayeva, 2014). For young country as Kazakhstan with 25 years of independence and somehow damaged identity, those are very central advantages of EXPO. The fact of Kazakhstan's victory in a bet itself and attracting international actors to the World Expo shows probable success in a decade branding of the nation, and it is being demonstrated through the World Fair.

The expansion of information sharing and globalization has created a need in managing national reputation of countries in order to secure their position and competitive advantage in international marketplace (Kaneva, 2011). Simon Anholt (2008) who was credited to be the first to coin the term identified six basic categories that should be considered for successful nation branding which are tourism, export brands, foreign and domestic policy, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people. Despite globalization and global market where nation is being branded, national identity is usually involved in the process and should be taken into account. Thus, the uniqueness of the nation in global stage should be emphasized to develop an interest for potential investors (Porter, 1990). Anholt (2008) claims that nations that brand themselves only in economic terms may fail in long term. Therefore, it is important to promote culture, heritage, and historical identity as they may develop international trust in the country being branded. Simon Anholt claims that things associated with a country as well as people representing the nation being branded constitute the essence of the brand and keep it alive (Clifton, Simmons, and Ahmad, 2004). These categories are somewhat reflected in Aronczyk's proposed model of nation branding. Aronczyk (2008) identified four steps in creating a nation brand: evaluating the current image that is held by insiders and outsiders, training nation branding participants on which features of the nation to choose for creating a positive image, creating brand strategy or 'core idea' about the nation, and 'living the brand' or communicating new brand identity to the population (Aronczyk, 2008).

Though there is one concept for nation branding, strategies, intentions, and conditions for it tend to vary in different countries because of the internal features of particular state. Nevertheless, as the states engage in nation branding campaigns they want to present the nation in globally accepted favorable way. Estonia identified its brand essence to be ‘positive transformation’ after doing six months’ research evaluating the market it is going to be branded in (Jordan, 2011). So, it detached itself from Soviet past presenting the country as completely changed, positively transforming and ‘fresh’ country. In the same way, Croatia has distanced itself from former Yugoslavic countries covering its difficult historical past, and positioning the country as European country with similarities to Italy (Rivera, 2008). Furthermore, it was found that South Korea has been doing well in balancing different categories of nation branding including modern culture of the country. Lee (2011) analyzed the brand value of Korea, and found that though the state has a high rank in economy and science and technology, its identity image rank has been improving due to the tourism development, celebrity recognition, and traditional culture promotion.

Despite the increasing scholarly interest in the subject of nation branding, most of the research has been done in fields of marketing, public relations, and international policy. Nation branding was extensively studied in marketing field. Most of the studies were written by nation branding practitioners and used functionalist approach presenting nation branding as a tool for getting competitive advantage in global marketplace (Olins, 2002; Anholt, 2007). The most common argument was the similarity of nations to corporate brands and products. Despite the complexity of nations, they can be manipulated and changed using the same techniques to brand products (Anholt, 2007). Such approach allows performativity and ruling elites and those in upper hierarchies of social structures to manipulate national identities. There is absence of power relations and ignorance of implications on democracy and its values.

Political field studies focus on nation branding as a ‘soft power’ and emphasize the importance of nation’s image in influence on international arena and status. Ham (2001) sees nation branding as a shifting paradigm in post-modern world. Thus, if in modern world it was geopolitics that defined the status and power of states, in post-modern world it is images and reputation that position states in international hierarchy. Moreover, he also states that nation branding can form collective identity that is less dangerous than nationalism, which is questionable in the light of ethnic conflicts happening in the world. Anholt (2008) expands this idea by stating that market-based view on nation branding is peaceful and encourages healthy competition and ‘power of the individual’.

Kaneva (2011) found that despite the novelty of the subject, there are many studies done on nation branding applying technical-economic and political approaches² that were discussed earlier. However, there is a striking absence of research conducted in critical studies, such as the field of culture and communication, or sociology and anthropology. This research contributes to empirical knowledge in critique of nation branding concept. Existing research in these fields concern more with extending critique on nation branding discourse, rather than advancing and developing the theory on it (Kaneva, 2011). They focus on studying the implication of nation branding on national identities. For example, while Aronczyk (2008) discusses nation branding discourse referring to theories about nationhood and claims that nation branding is just an extension of how national identities were communicated, Widler (2007) builds further critique using theories of Foucault to show how nation branding ignores the principles of inclusiveness and participation as it does not give opportunity for citizens to participate in the discourse. Similarly, Kaneva (2007) argues that in post-communist states

² Bell (1976) states that there are three structures that govern capitalist social order, and contradictions can be found if analyze three of them together, First, technical-economic field is concerned with profit maximization through efficiency, hierarchy, and specialization. The political realms are based on principles of equality that is concerned with equal access, inclusiveness, and participation. The cultural realm is based on freedom of self-expression.

nation branding allows political elites to spread their ideology through new form of propaganda. Moreover, nation branding ‘enhances and reproduces stereotypes’ (Kaneva, 2007). Thus, critical view on nation branding shows the dimensions of history, economic power, politics, and ideology in nation branding discourse.

Most of the previous studies analyze nation branding as a discourse, however, there are few of them looking at constituents of the notion that are important for formulating the discourse. Dzenovska (2005) takes an anthropological approach to analyze narratives of public and private sector representatives that contributed to nation brand of Latvia. Kaneva (2007) contrasts discourses of international and domestic stakeholders and draws on Bourdieu’s field theory to analyze their relationship. Iordanova (2007) conducts a research of Dracula Theme Park which is important for Romania’s nation brand, and discusses the reasons of involvement of different parties claiming about their interested actions. My research fills in this gap by looking at the case of Kazakhstan where there is actually no specified nation branding strategy. I focused my study on Astana EXPO-2017 that is being hosted in the country and I adopted critical interpretative approach to analyze actions and narratives of different actors involved in Kazakhstan’s nation brand communication and preparation for Astana EXPO-2017. Nation branding is a recent phenomenon in Kazakhstan and has been institutionally taken up only in the last two years. Astana EXPO-2017 has been one of the catalysts that turned the attention of the state to institutionalize and take up nation branding.

In the modern world, the advocates of nation branding discourse (Simon Anholt, Wally Olins, Peter van Ham) claim that for the competitive advantage in global marketplace nations have to do nothing but brand themselves. However, the lack of other choices is not necessarily true; this implies that Kazakhstan does not have to brand its nation in order to successfully compete in the global arena.

My aim in writing this thesis was to sociologically analyze the field that is usually captured in frames of marketing research and strategy development, and in political disciplines. I analyze the branding technique of Kazakhstan and evaluate the degree of state emphasis of existing and newly emerged local aspects. Nowadays, we can find that national identity and its components are helping the countries to perform on global arena, and constitute their image. In order to achieve a better position in global hierarchy states use natural means and create new strategies to build their positive images. On the other hand, globalization of information exchange is likely to facilitate the loss of identities as individuals.

Therefore, the questions rise: what are the aspects of Kazakhstani nation that make it a good brand? How come that the practice of nation branding does not allow certain national identities in the discourse? Does Kazakhstan illustrate general, global dynamics and values or does it have to craft its own in order to address the imagery challenges it faces? How nation brands have been constructed as necessary and normal? How does the nation branding limits the imagination of the nation? How does nation branding facilitate imperialism in the global age?

I will attempt to answer those questions discussing nation branding through theories of nationalism and national identity. I argue that national identity is commercialized and undermined in nation branding process. According to Gudjonsson (2005) nation branding does not promote or brand particular nation, however, nation branding uses different tools to alter or even completely change the identity, behaviors, and attitudes of a nation to make it appear in positive light. Arguably, I will suggest that promoting nations as commercial brands makes it difficult to imagine nations in different terms other than economic.

This thesis is composed of three chapters to analyze and critique the notion of nation branding. Chapter One provides an overview of analytical and theoretical framework that inform my research. I refer to constructivist theories about nationhood and explore how the nation has

been imagined since modern times. I start the discussion with the analysis of theories about World Fairs because my research is concentrated around the World Exposition being hosted by Kazakhstan. I explore the way they influenced contemporary social structure of the world, hence, providing background for nation branding discourse in our times. Furthermore, the subject of nation branding as a construct of national identity is examined in this chapter mainly referring to conceptualization of nation by Benedict Anderson.

Chapter Two gives a detailed description of empirical findings within the case. Analyzing constituents of nation branding categorized by Simon Anholt that were mentioned earlier, I identify main themes that appear in branded identity of Kazakhstan. I look at the actors involved in constructing Kazakhstan's nation brand, the image they try to create and national identity they want to sell for public consumption. Consequently, I demonstrate how the nation branding tools of West are being applied to describe economic prosperity of newly emerged independent states such as Kazakhstan. Analyzing the issue further I show that nation branding was first developed in Western part of the world and that model is being suggested for application in newly emerged developing countries to position themselves in global marketplace. I present and explain my argument that the commercialization of the nation as brand, confines the nation in the frames of capitalist market, and alters national imagination to make it fit in global marketplace.

Methods

My methods concentrated around Astana EXPO-2017, the event that is of high importance for branding Kazakhstan, and its constituents. To explore how the country is being branded through international exposition, I adopted multimethod approach combining textual analysis of internet content with in-depth interviews.

My content analysis is based on textual and non-textual data sources on Brand Kazakhstan that are available online. Those are official websites, 50 short YouTube videos and series of press materials mostly found on the official websites of government organizations. I analyzed the data across the sources as they communicate almost the same messages about the Brand Kazakhstan. The narratives and visual representations collectively work to reconstruct Kazakhstan and its nation as a brand.

I extensively draw from official website of EXPO-2017 (www.expo2017astana.com) that contains information on Kazakhstan and the event to explore how the country presents and positions itself through the event. This website was created and is maintained by the “Astana EXPO-2017”, a national joint stock company that was established by the government for organizing and conducting international exposition. I selected it because it is the main platform for communicating messages of the event to targeted internal and external audiences. The website provides details about the country and displays “Kazakhstan’s global competitiveness” through images, videos, brochures, and the website itself. Furthermore, I analyzed the 6 web-pages of governmental agencies and 7 touristic companies³ that are related to the international

³ <http://baitereksayahat.kz/component/content/frontpage.html>, <http://kompastour.kz/>; <http://sayat-travel.kz/en/expo2017>; <https://www.skyway.kz/en/country/kazakhstan/>; <https://www.bestar.kz/>; <http://firmatourist.kz/>; <http://www.otrar.kz/>. The links found on official website of Astana EXPO-2017.

event ⁴and provide extensive information on nation branding components such as policy, investment, and tourism.

Alongside the websites, I conducted the analysis of promotional videos and press materials associated with EXPO-2017. The in-depth examination of language and the discourse in those sources, and interpretation of their meanings helped me to understand the communication of themes in nation branding of Kazakhstan. I coded descriptions of Kazakhstan's mission, culture, geography, and people for what they presented as constituents of the positive image of Kazakhstan, and from that induced categories refining them with data analysis.

With the purpose to critically evaluate textual materials and get insights on the events that have shaped the nation branding strategy of Kazakhstan, I decided to conduct in-depth interviews with individuals involved in executing brand related policies. I conducted the interview with the Vice-Chair Chamber of International Commerce which is a subsidiary of National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan, Nuraly Bukeikhanov, who became my key informant. The National Chamber of Entrepreneurs and its subsidiaries represent some dimensions of Nation Branding Hexagon and, hence, plays an important role in branding the country as its mission and responsibility is to improve business and investment climate in the country which seems to be one of the key components of nation branding strategy in Kazakhstan. The institution is one of the key partners of Astana EXPO-2017 and manages different fields such as tourism, exports and imports, industrial development, and social sector. These and other areas are important for communicating the brand and interviewee being a representative of the Chamber gave me extensive information on those issues. Moreover, the interviewee is a professional in Marketing field, which made it possible to get an expert opinion on brand management and nation branding. During the interview, he discussed the actions taken by the government to

⁴ The links were found on the official website of Astana EXPO-2017, and referred to them as partners of the event.

promote positive socio-economic image of Kazakhstan and branding policies that he thinks need to be implemented.

Chapter 1 – Theoretical and analytical framework

World Fairs, or International Exposition as they are called these days, has been one of the mega events that carried political, economic, and cultural importance since mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It's been almost two centuries since international expositions influenced modern history and were 'rhetoric displays of modernity' (Dibley, 1997) from their beginning in 1851. Thus, it is not surprising that the first EXPO was held by England as back then it was the most industrialized country in the world (Bolin, 2014). Since then world fairs have had the idea of innovation and progress at its core and they were the "the sites of the pilgrimage to the commodity fetish" (Walter Benjamin, cited in official website of Bureau International des Expositions, 2017). Even in 2017, Kazakhstan is hosting World Expo in the capital city of Astana with the purpose to discuss issues of nowadays concern and find solutions for them, hence, bringing new innovations to life.

There are different international actors engaged in the exhibitions representing their countries and nations, and each contributes to the issue being discussed. However, despite the contribution of all participant nations, according to Mitchell (1988), historically, these events displayed and staged achievements of colonial states to their colonies in science, industry development, and in the field of art. He states that the scale and scope of world fairs increased with the expansion of imperialism in Europe. As the Europe was the first part of the world where industrialization and capitalism was rapidly developing, he discusses how World Fairs exhibited 'the conversion of the world to modern capitalist production and exchange' (Mitchell, 1988:16). Mitchell (1988) argues that the constituents of that transition in forms of new communication systems that capitalism is thought to be built on were displayed. Likewise, researching American expositions, Rydell (1987) asserts that they allowed the United states to manage and exert power over the world according to its imperial views. World Fairs became

the places where imperial states were able to organize people and produce knowledge for facilitating imperial project. Mitchell (1988) adds to this by saying that there was some sort of expectation from visitor nations to see guidelines or instructions about how to keep developing in the right path. Thus, promotion of exposition organizer's views and values, that were imperial states, was likely to be the purpose of world fairs. The fact that most of the representations found in world fairs echo the desires of imperial states make international exposition an ideal case to study to answer my research questions.

The beginning of world fairs coincides with the rise of nation-states and national identities. Billig (1995) stated that there was a need for inventing nations to regulate economic growth during the growth of capitalist economy. Thus, the constructions of national identities were distinguished aspects of international expositions in late nineteenth century, as different minority cultures and national identities, such as Swedish Sami, Javanese indigenous dancers, and American Indians were exhibited (Ekstrom, 1994, cited in Bolin, 2006). Such nationalist values were important in world fairs to distinguish nations and prove their progress in technological development, modern architecture and art, and entertainment. According to Rydell (1987) world fairs were organized in the way to promote imperial states' visions about the world and correspondingly shape the visions of others. Therefore, the failure to showcase the ability to be equal to advanced nations might have led to the sense of unworthiness and inferiority to advanced countries in this respect. In this respect, demonstrating modern architecture and innovative ideas on Astana EXPO-2017, Kazakhstani community seems to be eager to juxtapose and align its national identity with all the things World Fairs have been associated with such as modernity, innovation, progress and development, and success. However, the question rises what national identity is in this sense and how the concept helps to define the country it is associated with.

National identity⁵ is one of the dimensions that has been used in different narratives including nation branding discourse, but, at the same time it is the one that is difficult to define due to its complexity.

“National identity is fundamentally multi-dimensional; it can never be reduced to a single element, even by particular factions of nationalists, nor can it be easily or swiftly induced in a population by artificial means” (Smith, 1991).

The term national identity has been used since modern times when the concept of nation came into being in 18th and 19th centuries. Thus, its definition is inseparable from the definition of nation.

Nation might be one of the powerful at the same time complex ideas of our times. However, despite the long existence of the notion, debates in sociology about its definition still prevail. There is no one agreed conceptualization of ‘nation’. My thesis is informed by Benedict Anderson’s definition and conceptualization of nation, which states that a nation is “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 2006:6). Thus, I draw my argument in this thesis on the role of ‘imagining the nation’.

According to Anderson (2006), the nation is *imagined* because members of a particular nation, despite its big or small number, will never know or meet each other. Nevertheless, they will all have particular images in their minds of what communion they belong to. Similarly, Gellner (1964) claims that nationalism does not awaken people and make them self-conscious of their origin, but ‘it invents nations where they do not exist’ (Gellner, 1964:169). However, Gellner’s formulation is somewhat reductionist as its meaning does not imply ‘imagination’, rather it compares ‘invention’ to ‘fabrication’. Thus, he assumes that there are ‘true’ communities that are falsely contrasted to nation. Anderson (2006) argues that even small communities are possibly

⁵ within this research I consider national identity as socially constructed phenomenon

imagined, and it is their style of their imagination that differentiates them from other communities, thus showing the creative power of ‘imagination’.

Furthermore, the nation is ‘imagined’ as limited and sovereign because as Anderson (2006) claims there are other nations beyond the boundaries and limits of one. It is not possible that any nation would dream of the whole mankind joining its race due to the differences that exist, the same as there is no nation that would join other nation sacrificing its freedom and sovereign state.

Benedict Anderson talks about nation as an ‘imagined community’ for the members of such community are bounded and naturally united by ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ (Anderson, 2006:7). They share common interests, and despite inequalities within a community it was historically demonstrated and proven that fellow-members are even willing to die for this imagination. Anderson’s analysis of imagined has been criticized for ignoring power relations and socio-political organization of the state (Stratton and Ang, 1994). However, the emergence of nations is deeply rooted within social and cultural contexts which are understood through imagination. Thus, it is likely that international expositions have been taking part in creating what Benedict Anderson calls ‘imagined communities’, when advanced nations wanted to impose their views on emerging ones. And when the latter picked up some of the identities that the former had to offer, also formulated the ‘imagination’ and reconstruction of national identities in certain direction.

From this discussion, it can be derived that national identity is the force that binds people together in a community, and gives them the feeling of being a member of a bigger entity. Despite vague similarities between members, national identity indicates that they share common features and aspects of their lives. Thus, imagination is one of the important abilities

to construct national identity. This ability allows people to categorize themselves and create a sense of belonging.

However, it is not always a case when members of a community have the same national identities and imagine exact the same things. Connor (1994) argues that national identity is not about observed characteristics that unite people, but it is about the way nations imagine and perceive themselves. Therefore, there is possibility of alternative national identities within one nation that have different perspectives on shared history and culture. This implies heterogeneity of a nation.

Nation is experienced and imagined through daily routines, rather than in more complex representations such as classification of race and culture, or performing traditions (Anderson, 2006). Anderson explains his argument by providing an example of the invention of printing press which provides an understanding of the idea of a nation. He discusses how the regular reading of daily or weekly newspapers where they are addressed as co-nationals demonstrated their common set of ideas (Anderson, 2006). Similarly, Michael Billig argues that political discourses and cultural products use national identity as a continual background for it is embedded or 'flagged' in everyday life and rationalization (Billig, 1995). Thus, identity may be expressed in forms of institutions, traditions and rituals, artistic and cultural products, and in other terms. It can be demonstrated through "national recreations, the countryside, popular heroes and heroines, forms of etiquette, styles of architecture, arts and crafts, modes of town planning, legal procedures" (Smith, 1991:77).

Changes in culture and in understanding the world facilitated the possibility to 'think' and imagine the nation. Anderson (2006) juxtaposes a nation to sociological organism that homogeneously moves down or up the history in empty time and space. As it was previously mentioned, people will never know or even meet each other, however, they will be sure that

they have similar interests, and steady activities. The possibility to 'think' the nation arose when three cultural conceptions became illogical for mankind. First is the inseparability of script language from ontological truth. As the usage of Latin language decreased it has caused pluralization and territorializing of communities that were bound by common old script language. The diversity of language has shown that it is impossible to unite mankind on language basis. Nevertheless, it was just a start. Second is the organization of societies around centralized power who were driven by cosmological divine, and third is the absence of difference between cosmological and historical development of humans. Therefore, capitalism, the system of production, and mass reading facilitated the imagining the nation even further.

Post-modernist theorists have an explanation for the quest of people for different identities, from national to global. According to Firat and Dholakia (2004), the chaotically fragmented lives people live leads to a desire for both meaning and substance. They write that consumers transform from people who belong to a certain culture or a society or from a given lifestyle, to people who negotiate with one or multiple communities, becoming cultural constructors (Firat and Dholakia, 2004). This view suggests that national identity is not a static phenomenon, but dynamic in nature where individuals, rather than solely relying on tradition, rely heavily on the imagined present. Since people simultaneously have multiple identities and use them whenever needed, the overlap between nationalities, ethnicities and races is not compromised. There is no obligation for these members to hold on to a certain way of existence; they take different identities at different junctions.

There might be different processes and resources available for reproducing and reconstructing national identity in different times and eras. Some of them have already been mentioned above including World Fairs, and as will be discussed further in this thesis, nation brand

communication also pervasively contributes to narratives and imagery to embody and claim particular national identity in globalized world.

It seems that world fairs have been developing a blueprint for globalizing world and giving a meaning to its rise in contemporary world since era of modernity. As it was previously mentioned national identity is tightly connected to nation-state that belongs to the age of modernity which is transiently disappearing. One of the consequences of transition from one era to another is the getting over boundaries and territories where national identity and consciousness is to be forgotten. In discussion of this perspective I look at the influence of the new era developments on various aspects of national identity. In the new world, national identity is challenged by ideas of globalization, economic power relations, and cultural trends. Therefore, the changes in national identity according to new era will be seen after I explore and demonstrate important positions of globalization.

Most of the postcolonial theorists claimed modernity to be a Western discourse and property. Edward Said depicted the era as being disseminated and divided as Oriental and Occidental, where the former has negative meaning as being 'the bad other' (Said, 1993). The reason of the Other being different has been a tool for judging the Other as uncivilized, barbarous, and cruel, hence, encouraging colonization process often through violence. Instead of sustaining local histories and cultures, Western discourse enforced their Occidental one over the world. Miyoshi and Harootunian (1993) claim that the notion of 'modern' defines the features of Western civilization, and thus it should be re-conceptualized accordingly.

The forming principle of modernity should be changed to 'globality', as suggested by Martin Albrow, which is fundamental change of social structure and action. Nation-states are challenged by new weaponry, globalized communication, and movements supported internationally, hence he states that globalism generally values human rights, sustainability,

and feminist movements. Thus, the slogans of these global entities emphasize global problems that can be solved locally. Alain Touraine seconds Albrow's argument about global movements stating that in contemporary society those should be axials of analysis. If before globalization nation-states had control over their people, progress, and environmental issues, new era undermines the ideologies of Enlightenment and principles of modernization (Albrow, 1996). The advocate of globalization Appadurai (1996) claims that global trends and commodities influence the cultural features of a nation, thus, giving it more power on international arena. Despite the appearance of homogenizing tools such as fashion styles, military weaponry, methods of advertising, and 'language hegemonies' in globalization narratives, he argues that homogenization and globalization of culture are two different things. Appadurai (1996) states that cultural and political economies of the nation just use them to present them back as heterogeneous narratives about traditionalism, sovereignty, and nation's independence.

Nevertheless, homogenizing forces of globalization, such as consumption and communication, tend to facilitate inequality. Cultural meanings are produced by ones and consumed by others, hence, making the latter inferior due to the lack of consistent knowledge. and performance. As the world has been structured from modernization times and divided to developed and developing countries, the desirable cultural meanings are constructed by developed nations. Those nations are mostly legacies of modernization period and they often represent Western identity as the one to be sought.

This was not only the paradox found in world of academia, such geopolitical order has also been criticized by the economist who won the Noble Prize, Joseph Stiglitz. In his article for the Global Policy Forum, Stiglitz (2002) praises globalization for developing and sharing knowledge that benefited global health and environment, however, he points to the colonial nature of globalized politics and economics. He quotes IMF in his own words, saying "We in

the establishment, we in the North who run our capital markets, know best. Do what we tell you to do, and you will prosper”, thus criticizing those world organizations such as IMF and the World Bank that allow Western superpowers to exercise power and promote their identity through new civilizing missions (Stiglitz, 2002).

Then, if the World Fairs were tools for constructing and imagining the nations to some extent in modern times, similarly, nation branding is a recent practice emerged in the age of neoliberalism. Nation branding has been embraced by the states with established capitalist economies and market economies. It is interesting that as well as the first World Fair in 1851 was held in London, nation branding was first developed by British experts. Simon Anholt – British brand consultant – considers himself as the ‘founding father’ first to come up with nation branding term. He extensively worked on institutionalizing it as an academic field of study along with Wally Olins – another brand consultant from the United Kingdom – who has been engaged in consulting governments and publish studies on nation branding.

In the globalized world, it is important to build a different brand from others to gain positive reputation that would facilitate local loyalty, legitimize a state in international arena, and earn the country economic benefits. Combining branding techniques with representations of national identity nation branding is another tool for reproduction of national identity in contemporary world.

One cannot explicitly discuss nation branding without defining what a nation brand is. Just as the brands of products, nations tend to have particular reputation and images linked to them. Nation brand is an image of one country in minds of public, be it symbols, signs, or associations. For example, when we think about Germany we think of German quality and engineering products, Italy brings to mind fashion world, and Syria evokes images of terrorism and war. According to Ying Fan (2010), nation as a brand always exists no matter if the image

is positive or negative. Therefore, when we talk about Borat as constructing Kazakhstan's brand, we talk about what image and perceptions about the country Borat creates in people's minds.

Hence, nation branding is creating an image or nation identity in others' views to maintain competitiveness and good reputation in international arena (Fauve, 2015). Generally, nation branding is done with intentions to get political, economic, and social benefits such as attracting investments to state, enhance nation building, and improve the image in transnational realm. Several countries had been engaged in using marketing and branding techniques to present particular images of their national identities. Nation branding allows the governments to control and manage the images of their state to attract targeted investors, tourists, talents, and obtain competitive advantage in global marketplace. Thus, nation-states strategically manage their brands emphasizing features that are favorable in international community and dismissing other aspects of national identity.

Giving values to specific aspects that are considered to be desirable on global stage, nation branding is a practice that reconstructs and reproduces national identity for global and domestic marketplaces. Therefore, on the one hand, nation branding is aimed at increasing economic benefits and economic development of the nation by attracting targeted international consumers of the brand, and investors. Moreover, the strategy boosts the reputation of the nation thus allowing it to get recognized in multilateral establishments such as NATO, the United Nations, or European Union. On the other hand, nation branding is used by governments to legitimize their economic policies and political actions, by invoking members of the nation to 'live' the brand (Aronczyk, 2008). In this sense, nation brand is perceived as a 'public good', which falls under principles of democracy, showing how interests of population and the government coincide.

The promotion of public and involving private interests in staging a nation has been practiced for a long time as it was discussed earlier in this chapter, nation branding has significant distinction from these processes. It can be seen that nation branding normalizes structuring national policies – no matter they are social or economic, public or private, local or global – according to the logic of market. In this perspective, only language of market dictates how to imagine a nation. Nation branding consultants claim that the nation branding is not only about communicating the brand, but also it is about involving national activities in state policy-making (Anholt, 2007). In this respect, Kaneva (2011) argues that such attempts to reconstruct national identity and seize imagination of nation blocks out political governance of the nation and dismisses the complex construction of national identity with the purpose to fit the nation in global marketplace.

Rendering the nation to principles of branding, nation branding gives value to neoliberal structure of the world for universally exercising power. As the claim by Anholt (2007) that ‘the world is one market place’ is naturalized, nation branding discourse further naturalizes the hierarchical division between powerful nation brands of West and developing, newly emerging nations of East. Hence, it implies that national wellbeing solely depends on economic development and position in global market, and its definition can be understood through the language of market.

Having discussed analytical and theoretical framework that inform my thesis, in the following chapter I present empirical data I have gathered during my research, and analyze them referring to arguments developed above.

Chapter 2 – Findings and discussion

In this chapter I analyze how Kazakhstani state brands the country and how it presents its image through different channels of nation branding communication. Kazakhstan does not have specific nation branding strategy, and the institutionalization of nation branding in the state has not helped to develop particular strategy. However, the government is constructing the image of the nation in the areas of policy, investments, brands, people, culture and tourism, which together build the hexagon of nation branding developed by Simon Anholt. Through my analysis, I try to seek answer for the questions: How the nation-branded image of Kazakhstan lets us imagine the nation? What does the image of the country tells us about Kazakhstani nation? Is it a real reproduction of Kazakhstani national identity?

I will start the discussion of Kazakhstan's national image from agents that construct this image, and then talk about what Kazakhstan's nation brand and national identity is according to imaginations of those actors.

2.1. Astana EXPO-2017 and Nation Branding Actors

Despite the national company 'Astana EXPO-2017' that manages all the images and processes associated with the event, there are different state actors that construct the image of Kazakhstan on the international exhibition. The main body that manages the policy dimension is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan. According to Simon Anholt, most of the time the Ministiries of Foreign Affairs take up the responsibility to manage the national reputation (Anholt, 2007). Actually, the offer to institutionalize nation branding in Kazakhstan came from the current Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Roman Vassilenko. At the time when controversial movie Borat that also damaged image of Kazakhstan to some extent came

out, he was the one who saw the opportunity for promoting the country and start nation branding campaign (Saunders, 2008).

Furthermore, the Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs placed the governmentality of the country as the first constituent that branded Kazakhstan and made it known. By governmentality he meant “the Head of the State – First President of Independent Kazakhstan, formation of governmental institutions, recognition of sovereignty of the country by international community, national symbols, [national currency] tenge, legal registration of state borders, and so on” (tengrinews.kz). Thus, the activities and behavior of the government and President of the country have an influence on image of the nation. Nursultan Nazarbayev’s position seems to be strong both internally and externally. Despite his portrayal as an authoritarian dictator, his leadership was proven again in early presidential elections in 2015 where he gained 97.7% of the votes. Moreover, in 2016 there were early Parliamentary elections where the party ‘NurOtan’ that is lead by the President won with 82.15% of votes. These early elections have been justified by the need of strengthening the economy during the crisis and facilitating further development of the country. Such political decisions became prominent recently and one of them is a new reform for passing some of the responsibilities of the President to the Parliament.

“Even today we have to think about how to react to global and regional challenges that the future history will make to us. The essence of the proposed reform is a serious redistribution of authority, democratization of political system in general” – President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, January 25, 2017.

These political activities seem to be important for demonstrating democratic values of the state, which can also be seen in above quote. The word ‘democratization’ has an important role here as the state wants to show its policies as being modern and democratic, favorable for outside world, and comply with predominantly Western values.

However, interestingly, in the campaign of EXPO-2017 none of the promotional materials discuss Kazakhstan's political structure and government, despite couple of general mentions on the website. Most of them focus on the policies in the frames of the theme of the event, thus, covering unfavorable image of authoritarianism, directing attention to other things that are attractive to foreign audiences. Such technique has been developed by Rivera (2008) where she discusses Croatian state's management of 'reputation-damaging element' which is Yugoslav War. She found that in Croatian case the history was covered and culturally reframed to build a positive image of the country. Knowing the internationally recognized unfavorable political structure of the country, Astana EXPO-2017 is using the similar strategy.

Further, the position of reliability and high quality has been supported through the exporting products of the country. Lately in order to brand the image of the country Kazakhstani government have been involved in the promotion of its products and services abroad through export brands. The country of origin effect can have a strong impact on the perception and image of country as prominent touristic campaigns (Anholt, 2007). Thus, it is important for the government to promote Kazakhstani products and services abroad to obtain a positive association with the country of origin in the long-run period.

"No one knows about Kazakhstan. For example, everyone knows that if we talk about coffee, it is Arabica, Africa, or Latin America. If it is beef, somehow, first, we think about the USA or Canada. If we think about mutton, we think of Australia." - Vice Chair Chamber of International Commerce, personal communication, Astana, April 14, 2017.

In this dimension, the National Chamber of Commerce, representative of which is my key informant, plays a significant role representing interests of Kazakhstani industries and commerce in host countries. Currently, they are working on developing brands of products they think should show essence and spirit of Brand Kazakhstan. Local and foreign agencies were hired for developing several brands for Kazakhstani products to make them appear attractive

in international market. The three brands that are being developed are QazaqMeat, Halal, and Organic, which are to show high quality of the products and also comply with international requirements.

“The new brand Halal, is being developed according to the requirements imposed by Arab countries and Iran, in order to enter the markets of those countries... alongside organization’s own brand, this brand implies particular certificate of quality that will be associated with the country (Kazakhstan).” - Vice Chair Chamber of International Commerce, personal communication, Astana, April 14, 2017.

Thus, the government seems to seek creation of positive reputation and image of “made in Kazakhstan” through the quality of good it is exporting. Such strategy has been used in countries such as Germany (Felkernova, 2014). The country of origin effect is very explicit in German products promoted abroad, as the long-term quality has helped to build trust in “made in Germany” label.

Kazakhstani representatives exploit both classical and modern methods for promotion of the country policies. Classical tools of public diplomacy refer to communicating policies through engaging domestic audiences in foreign policy and explaining the goals and objectives to foreign audiences, whereas current instruments are closely connected not to targeted audiences but more to ‘receptive environments’ that would influence public opinion (Szondi, 2008). Thus, Kazakhstani representatives constantly maintain their websites, communicate with local and foreign media, publish magazines, guidebooks, and publicly available materials, actively communicate on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, and organize and host different events, and one of them is Astana EXPO-2017.

2.2. Astana EXPO-2017 and national identity

I identified major themes in my analysis that construct the image of Kazakhstan that the state actors are trying to promote and sell for global consumption. Those are the global and local policies, investment and growth opportunities, and geographic location of the country that facilitate the positive image of the nation. Below I discuss every category in detail and show what image and identity they promote.

First, the actors that construct Kazakhstan's nation brand want to present an image of peaceful, tolerant, and sustainably developing nation that were discussed as values of globalization in previous chapter. The main topic of EXPO-2017 which is Future Energy shows the willingness of Kazakhstan to contribute to sustainable development of the world and "reflects the priorities of European Union's internal and external policies" (*EXPO-2017 Astana* promotional video). One of the events that will contribute to the debates about sustainable energy is the Forum where projects on the topics of the exposition will be presented. Moreover, international actors such as governments, scholars, research institutions and organizations will participate in conferences and discussions that will raise the issue of sustainability (Astana EXPO-2017 official website, 2017). Therefore, through EXPO-2017 Kazakhstan wants to show its contribution to globally important issue and the country's focus on "'green' development path" that is also valued by other states. Branding the country as 'a green nation' as Denmark government does can have positive outcomes such as attraction of professionals and researches, knowledge exchange, more investment to this field, and increase of tourists concerned about sustainability of the destination (Burchea and Foster, 2011).

The Kazakhstani government has been showing concern about globally important issues in policies and actively demonstrating them in practice. The issues that the state has been addressing deal with peace and global security, tolerance, and sustainable development. The events that has been organized in Astana show the eagerness of the state to tackle those issue

and make a contribution. The most prominent ones are Syria talks that has been organized in 2017 to discuss the paths to end the war in Syria, yearly Astana Economic Forum where anti-crisis strategies have been discussed, Kazakhstan's OSCE Chairmanship in 2010, and IV Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in 2012. Moreover, the country's 'global antinuclear movement' has been emphasized on official websites of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Astana EXPO-2017. This creates a positive image of the country that takes part in wellbeing of the globe.

“We are the first country in history that closed nuclear polygon and abandoned the 4th largest nuclear arsenal, and also that created non-nuclear zone in Central Asia” – President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in his speech on 70th session of General Assembly of United Nations, September 28, 2015

According to the Good Country Index created by Simon Anholt who coined the term of nation brand, Kazakhstan takes the 26th place among 163 of those that are taking actions in combatting nuclear weapons, and 40th in general contribution to the wellbeing and health of the world (The Good Country Index, 2016).

Furthermore, the state accentuates diversity to show the peacefulness, harmony, and how the country is safe place to live. Diversity is one of the aspects of nation branding that takes shape in all forms of defining the country. 'Diversified economy', 'diverse architecture', 'diverse in its landscape as it is in its people' are all the statements that appear in description of the country in most of the examined websites (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Astana EXPO-2017, tourist websites) and promotional videos (*Kazakhstan Spirit of the Steppe*). The main connotation that the world diversity holds is associated with people of Kazakhstan, referring to their ethnic and religious background. The videos 'Kazakhstan Spirit of the Steppe', 'Welcome to Kazakhstan', EXPO-2017 official website, and every tourist web platform I have examined mention multinational feature of the country, and peaceful and harmonious life of more than 130 ethnic groups. Moreover, Assembly of People of Kazakhstan is one of the main partners of Astana

EXPO-2017, despite the irrelevance of scientific topic to the activities of the establishment. The Assembly includes about 300 representatives of different ethnic groups that reside in the country. It was suggested and put into action by the President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who is also a Chairman of the Assembly and nominates the members of the Assembly such as artists, writers, and poets of different cultures (www.assembly.kz).

In this case, the state perceives and defines ethnicity from essentialist perspective which claims that ethnicity is something that is ontological fact, and characteristic of an individual that can also be seen from his physical appearance. Additionally, in this view ethnicity can be seen from individuals' possession and practice of symbolic tools of particular ethnicity such as traditions and culture, or language (Sylvian, 2014). Most of the videos and websites where ethnic diversity is emphasized portray representatives of different ethnic groups wearing their national clothes or performing their cultural traditions (*Kazakhstan Spirit of the Steppe*). Similar to the essentialist representation of ethnicity, religion is demonstrated through symbolic attributes in many promotional videos (*Kazakhstan Spirit of the Steppe*, *Kazakhstan – Heart of Eurasia*). Those include the images of different places of worship such as mosques, churches, and synagogues, and ancient mausoleum and sacred places. Religious diversity is another diversity that is being demonstrated in nation branding communication tools, and being emphasized as a feature contributing to peaceful coexistence of different people.

Also, significant meaning is given to the 'yurt' which is considered to be traditional Kazakh house, and 'dastarhan' which is a tablecloth that is laid when guests are invited. Its meaning conveys that Kazakhstan is a country and nation that unified many ethnic groups. This was also emphasized in Astana EXPO-2017 official web platform.

“Today different representatives living in Kazakhstan are gathered around dastarhan: Russians, Tatars, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Uygurs, Dungans, Germans

and Koreans. These nations have lived in peace on this land for a long time” –
Astana EXPO-2017 official website

By showcasing ethnic and religious harmony in nation branding artefacts Kazakhstan also attempts to market the image of generous, hospitable, and tolerant nation.

Second, the image of Kazakhstan as “a country of extraordinary opportunities and discoveries” has been promoted by state actors to give the meaning of innovation and progress to the image of the nation. That can be explored in promotional materials that position Kazakhstan as an attractive country for investments and economic opportunities. Such messages were communicated in most of the informational materials of “Astana EXPO-2017” company and advertising videos. Promotional videos created by other companies (Ministry of Tourism and Sport of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) usually mention the opportunities of economic purpose as part of general information of touristic advertisement, while the materials of international exposition campaign mainly focus on economic potential of Kazakhstan as a key branding image.

The focus of ‘investment and immigration’ dimension of nation branding hexagon is primarily made on attraction of foreign businesses, investments, and best talents to Kazakhstan. Although EXPO is an international exposition that is held for discussing and globally promoting sustainability and development issues, Kazakhstan sees it more as an opportunity for public diplomacy and business promotion.

“Many countries position EXPO as an exhibition of scientific achievements, but Kazakhstan, understanding that the theme is Future Energy, generally focuses to hold the exhibition as a large-scale business event, where the most innovative technological organizations will come and it will be elegant to invite them and tell that Kazakhstan is an open country with attractive investment climate.” –
Vice Chair Chamber of International Commerce, personal communication,
Astana, April 14, 2017.

The official website of Astana EXPO-2017 gives a lot of information about partnership and investment opportunities pointing to the advantages of investing and entering the market of

Kazakhstan. Also, the ease of customs regulations and diversity of fields play a great role in positioning the country as an open and ideal site for investment. The government has passed several amendments to regulations of customs which eases the procedure of passing Customs Union for foreign companies participating in EXPO-2017. They claim that international exhibition happening in the country is a ‘powerful marketing platform’ where businesses can promote themselves.

“All these foreign organizations will be able to open business in Kazakhstan, and taking into account the fact that we are the market of Eurasian Customs Union, they will be able to enter the markets of other member-states freely with lower taxes and less number of documents.” – Vice Chair Chamber of International Commerce, personal communication, Astana, April 14, 2017.

The attraction of investment has been one of the main goals of Kazakhstani government long before EXPO-2017 launch. The predecessor of investment dimension and still important partner of Astana EXPO-2017 has been KazNexInvest, which was divided into two separate organizations KazakhInvest and KazakhExport. KazakhInvest is a government institution that supports investment projects and develops reforms in cooperation with other government agencies to create favorable investment climate in the country. The organization positions Kazakhstan as a favorable investment site because of the investors taxation policies, big market which includes other Eurasian Customs Union member countries and Central Asia, and “best labor market” being 20th in the world according to 2016-2017 Global Competitiveness Report (KazakhInvest official Website, 2017). Alongside the statistics, the institution uses visual materials to support their arguments about attractive business environment, demonstrating modern machinery and factories, sustainable energy sites, big constructions and developed cities, and infrastructure (*Invest in Kazakhstan 2014* video). Such visuals signify the general image of development and modernization that the government wants to show as nation’s image and brand.

Another part of this dimension is attraction of best talents, which are professionals and students, to the country. It is mostly visible in the promotional video of Astana EXPO-2017 “*Welcome to Kazakhstan. Welcome to EXPO-2017*”. The video reveals the narratives of professionals from different areas working and doing business in Kazakhstan, portraying the development of different fields, ‘modernity of the country’, and the perfectionism of Kazakh people. “The quality and the stand-up of this Opera House are outstanding...It feels great to work here in Astana” narrates the opera singer, Galina Cheplakova, while local businesswoman points to efficiency of people of Kazakhstan saying “We think big. We think international. We think forward”. Such narratives demonstrate the characteristics of the environment in the country that considered to be healthy and attractive for working and doing business there.

Furthermore, most of the promotional videos include Nazarbayev University that is defined as a national project that would innovate and reform educational system in Kazakhstan, and interestingly the site of EXPO-2017 is built right opposite to the institution. The university defines itself as a competitive international academic institution that values academic freedom and autonomy. Such appealing position is likely to attract talented students from all over the world. “Our young people strive to prepare for careers in a modern society. Their ambitious research project, and new way of thinking often aren’t challenge for the university. We want to see them to go out to the new world and shape the future” says the Professor at Nazarbayev University about the students there in aforementioned video.

Additionally, to this vision of educating new generation of leaders and professionals Nazarbayev University can be seen serving to the state as an image of Kazakhstan. It might be just a coincidence, but the project of new university in Kazakhstan that would be innovative and preparing new generation of leaders was suggested by Nazarbayev in his annual address to people of the country in 2006, the same year when controversial movie Borat was released.

The President of the state, Nursultan Nazarbayev, clearly stated that the new university “should be created as a national brand” (Nazarbayev University Strategy 2013-2016, 2013).

All these facts discussed above in this section contributes to the modern, technologically advanced, and innovative image of Kazakhstan.

Finally, the state actors put an emphasis on the geographical imagination of the country defining Kazakhstan as the place where “East meets West in the Heart of Eurasia”. Kazakhstan is located in the center of Eurasian continent, which makes it useful to promote a country as connecting ancient civilizations and lying in the midway of most of the major trade routes such as Silk Way. The slogan “Kazakhstan Heart of Eurasia” has been the one of the very first advertisements that was created by the government for improving public diplomacy (Saunders, 2008) surprisingly after acquiring negative image from Borat. Nevertheless, it is still prominent in descriptions of Kazakhstan on tourist websites and some of the promotional videos of EXPO-2017. This campaign has been developed as an educational advertisement for Western audience to learn about the country. It delivered several messages to the United States audience which were the country’s policies of tolerance, production of energy, hence, economic stability, potential partner for the United States in ‘war on terror’, and modernity (Saunders, 2008). Roman Vassilenko (as cited in Saunders, 2008) stated that those messages are not political in nature, but they target ordinary population of the United States to show culture of Kazakhstan.

Apart from being located in the Heart of Eurasia, the country is also portrayed as place where economic and social exchanges between civilization of Eurasian continent happened. According to the EXPO-2017 official website, Kazakhstan being the ‘heart of Eurasia’, ‘place where East meets West’, and ‘New Silk Way’ demonstrates harmonious coexistence of civilizations that divided the world as East and West, or North and South.

“It was once said that ‘West is the West, the East is the East and they will never be together’. In Kazakhstan there is a city [Astana] which disproves this saying that seemed irrefutable” – Astana EXPO-2017 official website.

Going back to Said’s (1993) discussion of *Orientalism* it can be agreed that descriptions of Orient and Occident in his work somehow was embraced by Kazakhstan. There the author shows that East, Orient, or the Other is seen as living backward, idle, and slow-paced lifestyle, whereas West, or Occident is rapidly developing modernized part of the world. In this case, the East-ness of Kazakhstan is mostly shown in representations of culture and nature in promotional videos of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and EXPO-2017. For example, ‘Kazakhstan – Heart of Eurasia’ video shows people in traditional Kazakh clothes living traditional lifestyle in the mountains in yurts, far from the things associated with modernity. However, it also contrasts this idle life to modern one demonstrating modern buildings, people doing business, and children at technically equipped schools, which links it to so called Western society. Additionally. ‘Welcome to Kazakhstan’ promotional video created in the light of EXPO-2017 describes Kazakhstan as the country ‘that combines best European and Oriental architectures’ and that ‘absorbed the best and preserved its history and tradition’. Thus, using already existing stereotypes of East and West these campaigns demonstrates the country possessing both of those traits, hence, meeting the expectations of audience by exoticizing and at the same time presenting familiar images.

Such presentation of the country located at the crossroads of East and West has been widely used technique of many post-communist countries. Kaneva and Popescu (2011) found that Balkan countries exoticize themselves in order to create distinctive image of ‘the internal Other of the European continent’. They have been criticized for self-orientalisation and self-exoticization as it also appears as ‘self-colonization’ as they sell the image that the West is familiar and comfortable with. Torchin (2008) claims that the meeting of the East and West in World Fairs legitimizes and reinforces ‘the imagined superiority’ of the modernized culture.

Nevertheless, Kazakhstan seems to have adopted such strategy to convey the messages of being the same as others to be accepted by ‘developed’ communities.

In summary, the themes that appear in the branded image of the nation deal with promoting Kazakhstani nation and the country itself as a peaceful and sustainably developing country that values diversity in everything. Moreover, the country is also presented as meeting requirements of the global market showing innovativeness and positioning the Kazakhstan as a country that is open for new opportunities and discoveries. Finally, geographic location of the country shows the state’s will to find commonalities with all international actors whom the national image is being presented for consumption.

2.3. Final Analysis and Discussion

It was previously mentioned that the notion of nation has been disappearing in globalized neo-liberal world. If we take globalized world here and present it as one global nation we can see the applicability of Ghassan Hage’s arguments about ‘paranoid nationalism’. In his work “Against Paranoid Nationalism” Hage (2003) describes how ‘paranoid nationalism’ rises. To develop his argument, he brings the notions of caring and worrying that emerge, when society generates hope or increases insecurities, respectively. Thus, when nation changes from caring to worrying, paranoid nationalism emerges. He then analyzes White nation to illustrate White ‘worrying’ stating that in neo-liberal world when any corporation can be mobile, develop the way they want, and position themselves in international arena, paranoia talking about which Hage (2003) refers to the fear of losing Europeanness or Whiteness, and socio-political power that come from that develops. Therefore, because of ‘White paranoid nationalism’ dominant culture which is White culture – or historically referring to it, West culture – tries to manage and control other groups integrating and assimilating them in their mainstream society.

In this sense, nation branding is also a Western discourse. Referring to the definition of nation branding discussed in Chapter 1, where it is a process of creating an image compatible and favorable in the world, it is crucial to think back whose world is this world. From the discussions earlier in this paper and above it seems that the social order that has been formed in modernization era has been preserved, hence, nation brand is an image favorable and desirable by Western thought. According to Wallace (2008), Western societies have different stereotypes about post-communist countries that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which usually point to Otherness of those nations and their negative image. ‘Ex-Soviet’ nations are perceived to be backward, which hence, tells about their ‘primitiveness’ and naivety and anti-Semitic with their bad past with Jews. Moreover, those nations are expected to be tribalist and ethnonationalist communities that generate their violent behavior. All those stereotypes were presented in the movie *Borat* as an identity of Kazakhstani nation. Furthermore, Wallace (2008) pointed out the depiction of Westerners in *Borat* that want him to act like they do and obey their established rules and world structure. It seems that eventually Kazakhstani government has followed these rules and embraced ‘good’ identity in its nation branding campaigns that is favorable in social structure of the world.

Kazakhstani government decided to take the advices of ‘Western critiques’ and brand the nation through educational campaigns about the country alongside demonstration of ‘living the brand’. Though Kazakhstani state’s purpose in promoting nation through EXPO-2017 was not combatting the image created by *Borat*, it can be seen that generally that the project portrays Kazakhstani nation in exact opposite of what the mockumentary did. The messages of the country rapidly developing according to modern views of development, and population being well-educated, innovative, respecting diversity, and living harmoniously can be found from promotional materials of EXPO-2017.

Despite some of these images seeming generally desirable and beneficial for a mankind, these are the only images that are being branded in nation branding narratives. Nation branding mostly dismisses other identities that might make up an imagination of a nation, thus, undermining already existing identities within a nation. The fall of old economic regime and emergence of neoliberal system re-established Kazakhstan as a market-driven economy and capitalist society. Now, the imaginary of dominant views within global marketplace and economic promises of the market shape the way how Kazakhstani nation is imagined and continuously re-imagines. Such approach makes difficult to imagine nation in different terms.

The image of Kazakhstan still seems to be two-sided – one side is branded and fitting into international marketplace, the other is unbranded and ignored in imaginations of the nation. The branded Kazakhstan is a complete opposite of what Borat has shown. Borat has depicted Kazakhstan as comprised of people who are illiterate, sexist, and possessing all other traits unfavorable in modern world. The Character Borat Sagdiyev, Kazakhstani reporter that was created by Baron Cohen, touched sensitive side of the state, showing it as backward and uncivilized. The movie shows the country as stuck in medieval ages with undeveloped infrastructure which is far from twenty-first century reality. However, the image that the state has presented in the last decade and in the light of Astana EXPO-2017 rejects all those negative connotations, and showcases the nation that is on its way to global economic prominence, the country that ranks 35th in Doing Business out of 190 countries (The World Bank, 2017), and has healthy investment and business environment and open economic future; the country whose products are sustainable, of high quality, and meet international requirements; the nation that has been involved in solving globally important issues, such as nuclear non-proliferation, religious and ethnic tolerance, and is still ready to contribute to sustainable development of the globe through hosting Astana EXPO-2017 “Future energy”. Kazakhstan’s branded nation is

modern, reliable, innovative, tolerant, generous, hospitable, and always ready to learn and take up new heights.

On the other side of the image of the country is unbranded nation of Kazakhstan that has to comply with branded version of it or just be lost in imaginations. Unbranded Kazakhstan is a glorious Astana with inglorious rest, where infrastructure is not developed as in the capital city. Unbranded Kazakhstan is the state where government works for reaching recognition from foreign societies, but where voices of native people are silenced because of unwanted narratives. Unbranded Kazakhstan is the country without national brand.

Astana EXPO-2017 is to be closing the decade of struggle for favorable national image presenting brand new positive identity. It was designed to demonstrate that the country is not backward and stuck in the past. The campaign wants to present ‘modern’ hub for innovative ideas. It showcases Kazakhstan emerging in global marketplace, developing rapidly keeping up with the developed world, and Kazakhstan on the way to economic glory. While the branded image is made up by the government and officials, brand experts, and consumers of the brand, it excludes the narratives of Kazakhstan – of the nation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was to take a critical approach to the analysis of the practice of nation branding that is to be claimed to economically develop emerging nations and advance their position them in international arena. Nation brand practitioners use different techniques of marketing and public diplomacy to create a favorable image of a country or a nation to gain benefits that the global market offers. They assert that in this globalized world where all the nations have something to offer to compete, nation branding is essential as it gives competitive advantage in being recognized in global marketplace. These claims have been universalized and nation branding has been legitimized as necessary tool to reach economic stardom for newly emerged developing nations such as Kazakhstan.

In this thesis, I have tried to discuss how these claims about necessity to brand nations for economic empowerment were normalized and naturalized, and show the imposition of Western national identity to the nation for branding it through analyzing World Expo and its constituents as Kazakhstan's nation branding campaign. I have analyzed the way channels of nation brand communication use some features of nation and national identity, and dismiss the others, hence, presenting the identity bracketed in market language and in economic justification of Western neoliberal world order. The state attempted to re-brand the nation of Kazakhstan after the release of the comedy Borat, and passed the decade of image reconstruction of the nation as rapidly developing in pace with global market, innovative, modern, possessing global values that are also seen in local representations, peaceful, and tolerant. Nation branding chooses material, modern, present, and homogeneous imagination, leaving out spiritual, premodern, past, and heterogeneous dimensions from the discourse. All these features reflect the nation branding practice of other states, hence, implying that Kazakhstani state is using the same techniques, leaving out creative imagination, and embracing the narratives of global

marketplace. I have thus argued that as long as characteristics that describe Kazakhstan's nation are exhibited to be imagined through the language of and for the market, the imagination of the nation otherwise is impossible.

It can be seen then that normalization of nation branding discourse that has been developed by Western parts of the world implies the indirect control of the producers of the discourse. With the emergence of new competitive nations during the Global Age favored by Appadurai and Albrow, there is also a threat to the world power structure where Western discourses still dominate. Thus, it is likely that nation branding discourse might become one of the tools to retain power creating 'nation brands' that are similar to each other to some extent, but still puppets in hands of powerful nations. In this respect, Anderson (2006) refers to 'official nationalism' as the type of nationalism that came with the necessities of dynasties to retain the power when European dynasties were 'naturalized'. The only successful example of it was Czarist Russification that combined two political orders – dynasty and nation – in one Empire, thus, imposing its own culture and language to the heterogeneous nation under its rule. Similarly, nation branding discourse is imposing identities and values of the West, hence, facilitating sorts of imperialism where again there are controlling bodies and those who are being dominated. Therefore, though the state is the one that is exercising power and manipulating national image, the way it presents the nation is dominated by Western view, hence, the state is the one being exercised symbolic power on by Western.

Due to the limitations of the scope of the research, this thesis has not extensively focused on nation branding as a possible imperial project. Therefore, as Kaneva (2011) has suggested the 'political economy of nation branding practice' can be studied looking at agents of nation branding discourse through theories of Bourdieu about capital accumulation (Kaneva, 2011). Looking at the different actors involved in nation branding process, it is recommended to

analyze their relationships and power structures to probe the above-mentioned critique of the practice and discourse.

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Appendices

Interview

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