

## BORAT (Larry Charles, 2006)

Comedy is commonly used in shocking cinema as a way of creating some sort of release from the aspects considered shocking to the audience. These comic moments can either be offered to the audience by the makers of the film or can be created by the audience themselves. BORAT (Larry Charles, 2006) is no exception to this rule, but at the same time, it uses comedy as a means of entertainment. This not only helps the audience detach themselves from the shocking issues dealt with in the film, but at the same time it can make us question our own set of morals.

Sasha Baron Cohen portrays Borat, a Kazakhstani news reporter who travels to America to make a documentary hoping to teach people back in Kazakhstan how to become more civilised. Borat is a character who holds many narrow minded views on the world and those who live in it. He is extremely homophobic, anti-Semitic, sexist and racist amongst other things. So why is it that we find ourselves laughing for the majority of the film?

Borat, along with Baron Cohen's other comical creations, Bruno and Ali G, are known or suspected by most people to be false. We therefore laugh either at his characteristics because we believe them to be false creations of a false character, or we laugh at the situations he puts others in, because they believe him to be real. When Borat takes a driving lesson the instructor is convinced that he is real. Throughout the lesson, Borat attempts to drink vodka, shout abuse at numerous other drivers, and suggests following a female driver so that he can "make sexy time". The instructor remains remarkably calm despite the obvious desire to finish the lesson. This man knows he is on film and chooses not to show himself up, and instead he must tolerate Borat's manipulation. He is put in a very difficult situation, and we find it funny to see how the instructor, and others like him throughout the film, react to the comedy antics of Borat.

As we progress through the film we begin to realise that Borat's ideas are in fact believed by others. Of all people, his views are shared by those who are supposed to help Kazakhstan to become more civilised. We do not at any point really stop to realise this. This is illustrated in the scene where Borat is due to sing the national anthem at a rodeo in Texas. The rodeo manager is telling Borat that he should shave off his moustache because of the stereotypical images that people in America receive from the media of Muslims and supposed terrorists in Iraq and Afghanistan. Grateful of the advice Borat had just received he goes to kiss the man on both cheeks. The manager stops him and says that only homosexuals kiss each other in America. Borat states that in his "country we take them out we finish them", and the manager replies "that's what we're trying to get done over here". This is very unnerving and yet we laugh in shock and disgust. It is shocking to see that people would have such views, not only this but would be unafraid to express them on camera. This is the magic of what Baron Cohen's character aims to do, and

this is the real comedy, by getting people to associate or compare themselves to this obvious half wit and clown, they have shown themselves as who they really are. For this to work effectively, it makes no difference whether the audience believe Borat to be real or not, because either way he is a total fool.

I think that the most important point of the film is that it is difficult to accept that Borat hosts many views that are believed by real people across the world. BORAT, as stated before, uses comedy in the same way as many other shocking films, but for very different means. Not so much as a release from shock or disgust, but to help us broaden our minds to the hypocrisy in Borat and the people he meets; and as we become increasingly aware of how similar some of them can be. So once the film is over we realise the error of our ways and although we may laugh again for old times' sake we look upon the issues in the film in a very different way. I fear however there will always be those who remain ignorant to the topics and views in BORAT, and it is after all this ignorance or disbelief why we find it ok to laugh in the first place. Is this therefore a problem with the film, or has BORAT done all it can do in challenging our morals, and the responsibility to change lie now with the audience?