

## Chapter 2

# The Making of ‘Brand’ Uzbekistan as Symbolic Capital

*What actually will the future be like for mankind? What kind of an era will it open? Will it be capable of overcoming a heavy burden of the past? Will it reach the level of openness and sincerity in inter-state relations, which will be able to eliminate mutual suspicion, distrust and diktat? The future of the community of nations depends on answers to these questions. Uzbekistan is determined to persistently advance towards the achievement of its top priority national objectives in organic harmony with the common interests of the world community in the wake of deep democratic processes characterizing the current level of its development. The Uzbek people are aware that hard times still lie ahead but they are assured of a great future for themselves in a single family of mankind.*

*From The Address of H.E. Mr. Islam Karimov,  
President of the Republic of Uzbekistan  
at the 48th session of the United Nations General Assembly.*

**Abstract** This chapter looks into the shaping of post-Soviet Uzbekistan where the projection of aspects like a common ancestry and history play a significant part in creating the image of an ancient state with a homogeneous people. In this, the performative role of the state in the face of the reality of a multiplicity of histories and identities in the region is evident. In fact in a number of cases it results in rhetoric or policy that takes note of this multifarious heritage and recognizes its significance in the wake of a homogenizing global tendency. However, imperatives of state building within the global arena is also evident in the irony of a state that proclaims its existence as an ancient state, retrieves its Turkish identity yet speaks of its promises and potentialities in the language of the newborn. Therefore one finds in this phase of transition the juxtaposition of a cultural rediscovery of the past and a projection of the state as a developmental state. The chapter highlights the fact that while parts of the nationalist discourse was intended for a domestic audience, part of it was aimed at the international arena with the aim of capturing global attention. Public diplomacy and the creation and promotion of ‘national’ images were attempts to raise the prestige of the country and primarily aimed at the international business community and the global political leadership. The images

and rhetoric that accompanies Independence Day celebrations in Uzbekistan, for instance, not only articulates the existence of a cohesive state, for the domestic audience but a prosperous one attractive for both international tourism as well as investment. Similarly, the rhetoric of 'nation under threat' is not just a projection for unity within the state but also a call for international recognition of the fact that Uzbekistan is both a victim and part of a global 'fight against terrorism'.

**Keywords** Uzbekistan • Performative state • Rhetoric and policy • Cultural legacy • 'Image' and legitimacy

A characteristic feature of modern world is the networks of interconnections and interdependences that permeate every aspect of modern social living. This connectivity, with its global-spatial proximity in the sense of shrinking of distances through a reduction of time taken to cross such distances, has become the hallmark of globalization. At another level of analysis connectivity shades into the idea of spatial proximity via the idea of 'stretching' of social relations across distance. There are enough metaphors of global proximity of a 'shrinking world' in the discourse of globalization to illustrate this point. The creation of globalized spaces also inevitably implies the creation of a degree of cultural 'compression'. The resulting de-territorialization is then taken to fundamentally transform the relationship between the places that one inhabits and cultural practices, experiences and identities.

Yet, paradoxically, this world of expanding de-territorialized boundaries is also one of many more, and in numerous cases, stronger states. And the politics of identity is even today largely determined within the old structure of the state. The relationship of culture to territory, that is, the extent to which groups have boundaries and conversely the extent to which cultures have borders, remains a significant part of the discourse on identity. This is especially true in regions such as Eurasia given the complex ways in which frontiers, even those determined by imperial partitions, continue to influence the determination of cultural identities here. Yet, the question as to whether there is an essential correspondence between territory, nation, state and identity remains unanswered. The cultural permeability of borders, the experience of people who are more comfortable with the notion that they are culturally tied to many other people in neighbouring states and the rigidity of states in their efforts to control cultural fields that transcend their borders demands that a variety of political and cultural boundaries be constructed. In fact the durability of cultural frontiers long after the political borders of the state has shifted implies the widening of perspectives to take note of the formal and the informal ties between local communities and the larger polities of which they are a part.

It has been 20 years since the emergence of the post-Soviet states, and over the course of the last two decades, there has been significant reflection on the direction that the politics of the region has assumed. The transformation from being part of the 'Soviet' to 'independent integration' within the global system has

been an ongoing process with multifarious manifestations. These have involved both attempts at reconnecting with the past as well as movements towards new definitions of identity. In all of this the state has played an important part—in the forging of new nations out of disparate identities, in the making of national languages and the reinterpretation of historic events or portrayal of personalities. Politically transition in this region is projected as a transformation from 'partially communized societies' to 'new political orders' (Anderson 1997, pp. 28–53). This would imply a ritualized appeal to democratic norms evident in the frequency of consultative exercises, which legitimize political elites in varying degrees. The assumption is that the major tasks of economic development and nation building are best served in this process. Paradoxically this fails to take into account the tensions between economic modernization and political freedom that exists in the phase of transition.

Such simplistic definitions also ignore the fact that each phase of politics carries certain elements of the previous stage with it and just as the Soviet phase could not have transformed the region completely the post-Soviet phase cannot represent a complete break with Soviet times. A closer look would indicate that the new states that declared their sovereignty in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet system did not break out of the territorial confines of the Soviet times (Sengupta 2014). National elite groups of all the Central Asian states clung to the existing map of Central Asia as sacrosanct. 'National borders', drawn during the Soviet times were viewed and represented as embodying ancient civilizations. The borders of Uzbekistan with all its irregularities is defended by the Uzbeks as legacies of the glorious Timurid civilization and guarded as sacred lines separating the ancient Uzbek nation from other national groups (Akbarzadeh 1997).

More importantly there was no movement out of the definitional constructs of Soviet times. The designation *Uzbek*, for instance, is being used in the Soviet sense to mean *nation*, whereas previously it had been used to mean a *tribal* classification of a dominant dynastic tribal tier, the Shaybanids (Brockhaus and Efron 1902, pp. 608–610). Similarly prior to 1924 there was no single *Uzbek* language that was prevalent in the region. In a number of instances the official Uzbek response to the new stage of politics was pragmatic. A nationalist stress on various aspects of culture became evident in the immediate post-independence period, but was rarely supported by stringent official action. Similarly, the so-called anti-minority sentiments of the nationalizing state were restrained.

The transition in the Central Asian region also cannot be circumscribed within 'transitological' reasoning applied to the transition in Eastern Europe. Here, the success of former communist regimes in East and Central Europe is explained in terms of a comparative analysis of transition from dictatorship to democracy. Such reasoning points out that the fall of the first democratically elected government is a natural byproduct of the transition and consolidation of the new democracy (Bozoki 1997, pp. 59–102). Unable to handle the upswing of social expectations that accompanies a change of political regime, the governments fall. There is disappointment in moralizing political clichés and a turning towards professional politics. The final winners are not the radical opposition but the technocrats and

reformers of an earlier era. In the Central Asian case on the other hand, changes within the older structures of the party ensured its continuance in a new form. There was no intervention of a 'democratic' party as the existing structures reemerged with a nationalistic image.

Transitions, here, also need to be examined in broader societal terms where institutions and actual transition events play a critical role. Institutional arguments show how continuity is seen at work in the everyday functioning of the structures of the state. Rapid political changes create impressions of complete change. Some time is required for the discovery of continuity and of deeper undercurrents. This phase of transition in the Central Asian region, therefore, cannot be examined as an unproblematic implementation of a set of policies involving 'economic liberalization' and 'marketization' along with 'democratization' enabling the creation of a market economy and a liberal polity (Blokker 2002). Such an explanation of change reduces the complexity of the transition and fails to underscore the need to examine the diversity of forms of transition.<sup>1</sup> The fundamental reorganization of material life, the transformations of geopolitical relations and the major discursive shifts in the way that policies are to be framed and implemented requires a more rigorous study of the specificity of the situations, and also calls for a complex model of transition. The diversity of historical experiences of these states is also a compelling factor in the determination of the trajectory of transition.

Similarly the political economy of transition itself has to be critically examined. Here, the national mode of regulation and accumulation, the historical and geographic specificity of the path taken for transition, the role of different institutional actors and social relations have to be taken into account. This will show how 'legacies' become a central component in the understanding of the possibilities and limits to transition. While the 'national road to transition' is the central focus of examination, the emergence of regionally differentiated transitions also needs to be taken into account. All these involve a study of the complex system of adjustments of various issues and the intersections of political and economic arguments in the wake of globalization.

This chapter looks into the shaping of post-Soviet Uzbekistan where the projection of aspects like a common ancestry and history play a significant part in creating the image of an ancient state with a homogeneous people. In this, the performative role of the state in the face of the reality of a multiplicity of histories and identities in the region is evident. In fact in a number of cases it results in rhetoric or policy that takes note of this multifarious heritage and recognizes its significance in the wake of a homogenizing global tendency. However, imperatives of state building within the global arena is also evident in the irony of a state that proclaims its existence as an ancient state, retrieves its Turkish identity yet speaks of its promises and potentialities in the language of the newborn. Therefore one finds in this phase of transition the juxtaposition of a cultural rediscovery of the past and a projection of the state as a developmental state. The chapter highlights the fact

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<sup>1</sup>For an examination of transitions in Eastern Europe and Russia see Pickles and Smith (1998).

that while parts of the nationalist discourse was intended for a domestic audience, part of it was aimed at the international arena with the aim of capturing global attention. Public diplomacy and the creation and promotion of 'national' images were attempts to raise the prestige of the country and primarily aimed at the international business community and the global political leadership. The images and rhetoric that accompanies Independence Day celebrations in Uzbekistan, for instance, not only articulates the existence of a cohesive state for the domestic audience but a prosperous one attractive for both international tourism as well as investment. Similarly, the rhetoric of 'nation under threat' is not just a projection for unity within the state but also a call for international recognition of the fact that Uzbekistan is both a victim and part of a global 'fight against terrorism'.

The first section begins with the rhetoric that accompanied the process of defining the 'new' Uzbek state both for its own members as well as for a wider international audience. The emerging state projected itself not as a brand new state but as a political player that sought to project itself more assertively than before. It then goes on to examine how the rhetoric that accompanies this reassertion is both a celebration of the state and a statement for the international community. It underlines how the 'art of politics' pursued through old style diplomacy has shifted to encompass the new art of brand building and reputation management.<sup>2</sup> In conclusion it seeks to come to an understanding of the relevance of the phenomenon of 'place branding' in international politics.

## 2.1 The Making of 'Brand' Uzbekistan

In his *The Modern Uzbeks: A Cultural History from the Fourteenth Century to the Present*, Edward Allworth, cites the following lines from the Uzbek poet Abdu Razzaq Abduvashidaw's ballad *The Dear Soil*,

Every Nation has its own desire  
its own song, its own epic  
It has its own place—its own garden  
so far preserved thousands of years.  
(Allworth 1990, p. 319)

This tradition 'preserved for thousands of years' has now become the focus of writings in Uzbekistan. It is a literature that looks beyond the recent past of Central Asia into a past that is glorified as the 'nation of desire'. In the Uzbek case there is an attempt at equating Turan, Transoxiana and Turkistan with the ancient Uzbek civilizational past. This theme of an ancient past for the Uzbeks that President Karimov himself emphasizes finds echoes in a large number of writings, which

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<sup>2</sup>For an article that looks into the theoretical questions around this issue see Ham (March 2008).

have been published in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. These remain interesting in terms of examining how the story of the Uzbek past is now being told. One representative example of such writing notes

Encyclopedias written in almost all languages hold to the one sided idea that Uzbeks are descended from the Uzbek Khan of the Golden horde from 1313–42, and from the Shaybanids, who arrived in West Turkestan in the fifteenth century. (Uzbek Khan brought down the Timurid dynasty and established Uzbek rule in its place) True, tribal Turks called Uzbeks did arrive with the Shaybanids, but they dwelled in the territory of Turk Stan during the Timurid era, in that of the Khwarezmshahs before that, during the Karakhanids and during the reigns of all the Turk khans, because, they, after all, were the original Turkish people of Turkestan, right? Why is this not openly acknowledged? (Qahhar 1996, p. 611)

The construction of political space in post-Soviet Uzbekistan has involved certain recurrent themes and elements that have made their presence felt time and again. One of the themes that emerged in a large corpus of literature is *ethnogenesis*. *Oz ozingi anglap et* or getting to know oneself began in the last days of the Soviet Union through carefully worded writings that departed from the usual practice of writing historical pieces in the form of fiction (Ali 1994). This meant an objective confrontation with the past and was distinct from efforts that traced a mythical history of origins of the Uzbeks. The current rediscovery of the past is also represented as a major change from the historiographical practices of the Soviet past when the possibility of studying the past independently was curtailed (Akhmedov 1996). These writings are also distinct in their attempt at implying an equation between the histories of the Turkish peoples living in the region with that of the Uzbeks. This equation remains problematic. However, it remains interesting as a representative example of the way in which the state constructs borders by using spatial strategies that homogenize identity and space.

A brief historical journey through the reading of a text that traces the development of the Uzbek state is an interesting comment on how the Uzbek space is being constructed today. The article was published in the journal *Obshestvenni Nayuki v Uzbekistane* which is the journal of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan. The article points out that till very recently Uzbeks were mistakenly identified with the Shaybanids. There was no cognizance of the local Uzbek speaking population in the region. In actuality, it is pointed out, the people of the region consist of both the Turkish speaking people of the cities and villages of contemporary Uzbekistan bearing the name Sart and also the descendants of the Shaybanid Uzbeks who had lived here in the last four centuries and assimilated with the ancient indigenous ethnic layer of the region and spoke in 'one single old Uzbek language—the language of Ahmed Yassavi, Alisher Navoi and Babur' (Askarov 1997). It has also been pointed out

The most ancient layer of the Uzbek people in the past consisted of the Sogdians, Bactrians and Khwarezmians as well as the cattle breeding tribes surrounding them—the Sakas—a part of which in the ancient time spoke in different dialects of ancient Turkish language. To this were added new ethnic components from the oasis of Tashkent, the Khidalites, Aftalites... With the advent of the Karakhanids, an ethnogenetic process began, and single anthropological type typical of Uzbeks takes place. Single territorial position started

forming... Much later ethnic components are Shaybanids... Usually the history of the people is more ancient than its name. Uzbeks inherited only name from Shaybanids. It was political to begin with and then became ethnic (Askarov 1997).

They also pointed to the fact that while the Greek invasions was an important event in the history of Uzbekistan, subsequent centuries saw the like of the empire of Chengiz Khan and the states formed by his sons, an empire which according to this viewpoint was definitely Turk and not Mongol in origin. The Timurid period is also being taken up for close analysis, as the golden age when 'Uzbek' culture, society and art developed. Amir Timur and his contributions are being examined in depth and his legacy is now being appropriated by the state as exclusively Uzbek. Timur's contribution as having put an end to 'tribal disunity' in the region is lauded as a major achievement. The fact that he represented the feudal interests of the time is being interpreted as a minor failing of the ruling classes to which Timur was no exception.

It is equally significant that having established the fact that the Uzbeks have an ancestry longer than the one usually given to them, there is a tendency to equate the history of Uzbekistan with that of Turkestan, which in its turn is equated with the much larger unit of Turan (Akhmedov 1996). This is being attempted not only in terms of historical lineage, but also in terms of its literature. It is generally said that written Uzbek literature began with the Yassavids in the eleventh century. It is now being pointed out that Uzbek literature or Turkish literature of Turkestan, (including Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uighur, Karakalpak, and Turkmen) started as written literature in the seventh century before Christ. The basis for this claim is a poem written in 626 B.C. dedicated to the death of Alp Er Tonga and which is still comprehensible to a modern Uzbek. Rather ambitiously, the *Shahnama*, where Alp Er Tonga is referred to as Afrasiab, is being held up as proof that the ancient Turks, 'the forefathers of today's Uzbeks ruled over two-thirds of the known world seven centuries before Christ' (Qahhar 1996). It is interesting to note that once again there is an attempt to equate the history of the Turks with that of the Uzbeks without addressing the question as to whether the modern Uzbeks and the Uzbek language today is to be completely equated with a general Turkish history and the Turkish language.

Another interesting aspect is the contemporary stress on linkages with the Persian language, with an onus on a cultural heritage that is so interlinked with that of the Tajiks that one can hardly be distinguished from the other. While this can be probably explained as prompted by the so called theorists of 'Greater Uzbekistan' that calls for a reunification of the now Tajik lands to Uzbekistan, the total eclipse of the Arabic linkages as also of the Arabic language is more difficult to explain. This recalls the Soviet tradition of ignoring the Arabic heritage for obvious linkages of the latter with the Islamic culture. However, while heroic traditions are being celebrated there is recognition also among the scholars that much of this is a construction. The book published on the occasion of the celebration of the 2500 years of Bukhara states clearly that there is no accurate data on the age of this ancient city. It is '... based on legends taken from Narsakhi's *History of Bukhara*'

and that 'the people of Bukhara *claim* that the city has been around for three millennia' (Azizkhodjaev 1997b).

In Uzbekistan today there is also underway an interesting reinstallation of personalities. The most interesting case is that of Sharaf Rashidov, the Uzbek First Secretary for nearly two decades, who was the main accused in the famous 'cotton affair' of the 1980s. An article written by Rashidov's Minister of Education and someone who was associated with him for more than 20 years, records his achievements in the *Obshyevyeni Nayuki v Uzbekistane*. It points out that the restoration of Rashidov's name is the restoration of 'truth and justice' for the stones thrown at Rashidov were also thrown at the Uzbek people themselves. It recognizes that he may have committed some wrongs as a leader, but despite this he is praised as a man with numerous qualities who during his 'rule' devoted all his energy for the development of education, science and economy. He also displayed immense interest in education (Shermukhamedov 1992).

However, while heroic traditions are being celebrated and ancient linkages reestablished, there is recognition among the scholars that much of this is a construction. For instance, the book published on the occasion of the celebration of the 2500 years of Bukhara states clearly that there is no accurate data on the age of this ancient city. It is '... based on *legends* (italics mine) taken from Narsakhi's *History of Bukhara* "that the people of Bukhara *claim* (italics mine) that the city has been around for three millennia".' (Azizkhodjaev 1997b). Similarly, how *Istoria Bukharii*, a recent monograph written in the form of questions and answers, looks at the establishment of Russian protectorate on the economic life of the people of Bukhara is interesting. It begins by pointing to the coercive character of the assimilation, but then moves on to describe the development of trade that accrued from such steps as construction of the railways and the advancement in economic life. It then goes on to describe the period of transition between the end of Tsarism and the establishment of the Soviet system. Here it follows standard Soviet practice in criticizing the *Emir* who would not allow reforms of the system while the condition of the people worsened (Saakov 1997, ques. 50, 58, 59).

In 1924 a fundamental redrawing of administrative boundaries of Central Asia and Kazakhstan on ethnic lines was carried out. The Republics of Turkestan, Khiva and Bukhara were abolished and the whole region was divided into five republics. The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic was constituted in 1924. It is interesting to note that today this delimitation along ethno-linguistic lines is being upheld on the ground that the language between the two great rivers was the old Uzbek language and it was on the basis of this unity of language that the delimitation created Uzbekistan (Askarov 1997). However this does not mean that there is no critical examination of the events between 1917 and 1924. A number of new dissertations that have appeared in the 1990s examine the times in a new light.<sup>3</sup> Still others seek to examine the developments of the period in terms of the larger problem of

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<sup>3</sup>A number of new dissertations written in the 1990s are looking into the question of national territorial delimitation in Uzbekistan. See for instance, Alimov (1994).



modernization of society that was influenced by external factors and not restricted to developments within Turkestan. This also seeks to look into the character of the socio-political movements in Turkestan that were stipulated by a series of external political factors (Yuldashyeva 1995).

Where Uzbek historiography has departed from the standard accounts of the past years in the interpretation of such events as the 1898 uprising in the Ferghana valley, the autonomous government that was set up in Kokand in the immediate aftermath of the overthrow of the Tsar in 1917 and the issues of Russian military conquest and the popular resistance that this faced. This deals essentially with the first phase of transition, when the Soviet system was establishing itself, between 1920 and 1924 and various alternative forms were emerging. The role of what was known as the *basmachi* movement is also being reexamined. Uzbek scholars now refer to them as the *kurbashis* and *mujahids* (Radjov 1997). They are now designated as having been leaders of national movements and though they followed different political aspirations they had the aspiration to liberate their land from the *kyzylaskers* and restore the *Emir* to power. Their sacrifice has today been vindicated in the establishment of independent statehood.<sup>4</sup> Similarly trends like Jadidism and the writings of various Jadid scholars have been taken up for study (Khudaikulov 1995; Shapovalyenko 1990). The change in the attitude towards the movement is apparent even in the course of comparison of writings on the subject between the early eighties and the post-independence days.

There is today a large body of research writings of post 1990, on Uzbek history, in the Uzbek Academy of Sciences. These are reflective of the way Uzbekistan today perceives of its history of Tsarist colonialism and the subsequent period of transitions in the 1920s and 30s. An interesting example is entitled *Kolonialnaya Politika Tsarisma v Turkestane i Vorba za Natsionalnuyu Nezavisimost v Nachale XX veka* (The Colonial Policy of Tsarism in Turkestan and the war for National Independence at the beginning of the XX century) which interprets the events at the beginning of this century as the war of independence (Sadikov 1994). Similarly other recent dissertations have examined the traces of this 'national politics' in literature (Alimov 1994). This is to be expected of each new nation as it attempts to establish a new statehood.

Similarly, the way the period of transition is portrayed is interesting. The last days of the *Emir*'s government is said to have prompted local uprisings against the *terror* of the *Emir* (Saakov 1997). This negative attitude is once again very close to the views that Uzbek political figures like Faizullah Khodjaev, who became part of the Soviet regime, gave of the *Emir*'s government in the immediate post revolution days. The period of the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic (BPSR) is reflected as one where steps were taken to nationalize the land and to distribute it among the landless peasants. The most significant incident of the period is pointed out as the

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<sup>4</sup>A large corpus of literature has now appeared on the Basmachi movement in the form of dissertations in the Historical Sciences. They point to the fact that the movement should now be viewed as an 'armed upsurge of the local population'. See for instance, Norjigitova (1995), Khakimov (1992), Khidoyatov (1993).

signing of an agreement between Russia and BPSR. In the course of this agreement Russia is reflected as having refused to follow a colonial policy and accepted the independence of Bukhara and extended a loan to it as well as equipment and technical assistance for developing industries. Along with this was an effort to increase educational institutions. The constitution of the BPSR is also said to have reflected the effort to make private rights inviolable (Saakov 1997, ques. 61, 62). This again seems to be an effort that is close to the one the Soviets had followed all along.

In this context it is interesting to examine how the period of the development of Uzbek politics from the 1930s to the 1970s is being reexamined. This was the phase that non-Soviet scholars have traditionally portrayed as one dominated by the purges of the 1930s, of regulation of Uzbek economy through 'cotton monoculture', and a period when indigenous Uzbek culture, manifest in their oral epic traditions was branded as 'nationalist' and subverted. Soviet writings on the period, however, look to this phase as one of industrial and general economic development as also as a period when the general conditions of life and literacy saw massive changes. However, though written under the subheading, '*Totalitarian System*' (italics mine), the official writing on the history of Bukhara, for instance, focuses on this familiar story of economic and social development (Azizkhodjaev 1997b). Similarly, *Istoria Bukharii* examines the Soviet period in terms of social, economic, educational and scientific development and as a period of the development of women in society (Saakov 1997, ques. 63, 64, 65, 68).

The situation, however, may in fact be more nuanced and there may well be regional differences at how history is being reexamined. The resistance of the local populace to the establishing Soviet power is more clearly expressed in the rewriting of the history of Khiva, for instance. The fact that alien traditions were imposed on the traditional way of life, faith and historical tradition, is evident from the subtitle which identifies the era beginning in 1917 as the 'the era of collapse' (Azizkhodjaev 1997a). The reorganization plan of the Bolsheviks is critically examined with the existence of the 'historically formed states' of the region being identified as stumbling blocks for this reorganization. The division of the old Khanate within the constituent states of the newly formed Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan is said to have transformed the former capital to the status of a city with merely cultural significance. The difference between the reactions to the scheme of delimitation in the two cities is not surprising. While the former khanate of Bukhara was reborn as the new socialist republic of Uzbekistan, the fate of Khiva was not so fortunate. Yet even here the decades immediately following the delimitation is identified as one where industry developed, there was movement towards electrification, and Khiva developed all amenities of a modern city. It is also interesting that history for the Khivans seems to have ended with the Soviet delimitation of the period and the disappearance of the old khanate (Azizkhodjaev 1997a).

The construction of an Uzbek identity that was undertaken in the post delimitation period, and the writing of new histories for each of the new divisions, had meant the creation of separate histories and separate languages for each of the groups. Today these projects are being questioned. It is interesting that while the

construction is being critiqued the identification is largely circumscribed within Soviet divisions. And though historic linkages are sought with such groups as the Tajiks, who now constitute a separate national group, a political movement for reunification of the Tajik and Uzbek lands does not seem to be on the agenda. In fact the reaction to this project of historical revival is pragmatic. It is pointed out, for instance, that the revival of the historic past would not only go to enrich cultural heritage but would serve '...the course of integrating our country to the rest of the democratic world on the basis of programs developed proceeding from the special peculiarities of our traditions' (Karimov 1997, October 20). The above discussion thus makes evident how the imperatives of the politics of the developmental present calls for history writing along pragmatic lines where events of the past are interpreted not just in the light of present realities but also in the light of historical realities.

Speaking on the occasion of the 2500 years anniversary of Khiva, President Karimov stressed

The Roman historian Pompey Trog who had lived 2000 years ago wrote the following about the most ancient ancestors of Turkish people: Bactrians, Sogds and Khorezmians may well compete with Egyptians by the age of their origins and genesis. They do not spare themselves both in labour and severe fight. They are extremely strong physically. They never give up a thing that belongs to them. They only go for victory.

It was in Khorezm valley where the very first stones of the Uzbek statehood were laid 2700 years ago. In this regard the history of our national statehood can be considered along with such ancient states as Egypt, China, India, Greece and Iran. The history of Khorezm is foundation of the Uzbek statehood, the confirmation of its antiquity and might. (Karimov 1997, October 20, pp. 2–3)

A significant part of the official discourse is based on the image of a paternalistic state that stresses stability and development through what is identified as the 'Uzbek Path'. This emphasizes social protection and redistribution and is based on 'folk traditions and customs'. It was clearly stated that the new social and economic policy would also *promote the social program* in the country. This policy would take note of the *unique way of life* of the various cultures and civilizations in Uzbekistan and would consist of a variety of forms and methods (Karimova 1995; Sengupta 2014). The necessity of developing the basis of one's own model of development is recognized; a model which would be based on market relations but would also take into account the national historical heritage, foundations of life, traditions and mentality of the people. President Karimov points to this when he says

We have selected an approach of rejecting egalitarianism in the system of social protection of the population and finding our own path corresponding to moral values, way of life and frame of mind of the nation which took shape throughout millennia in the East (Karimov 1995, pp. 115–116).

There is clear recognition of the fact that there can be no universal model of economic development, which can be followed. The Uzbek model would have to take note of concrete historical, socio-economical, national-psychological and

demographic aspects. This is being interpreted to mean an emphasis on stabilization.

This would mean that while on the one hand there would be an effort to move out of the administered economic structures of the Soviet system, this it would not do without taking into account the requirements of society. This in turn would entail the continuation of certain policies like the continuation of consumer subsidies on imported goods. It is interesting that G. Karimova refers to the disappearance of the Berlin wall between 'orthodox definitions of capitalism and socialism'. This is a possible pointer to movement towards a mixed economic pattern as the model of development (Karimov 1995). What is interesting is that in the course of this transition it is clearly recognized that while ensuring the macroeconomic stabilization of the society for market oriented reforms in order to ensure economic growth, is the foremost task, this is crucial for ensuring the *welfare of the society* (*Respublika Uzbekistan* 1994). There is also stress on the fact that social assistance reaches those for whom it is meant. Moreover the development is projected on the basis of the gains of the last seven decades, which has transformed Uzbekistan into a 'developed' society as far as social indicators are concerned. The emphasis here is on the transformation without *shock therapy* (Karimova 1995).

This is particularly evident in the case of monetary policy where quick transformation was postponed in favor of *stabilization with parity*. In fact in all this a *gradualist* policy is evident that makes place for the old within the new structures. The *Uzbek model of development* then goes on to point out that 'privatization is not the ultimate goal'. It is the means for ensuring competition of economic motivation. And more importantly, the fact that each man must 'improve his own position without hampering the position of others' (Karimova 1995, p. 22). The *Decrees and Resolutions* of the Republic of Uzbekistan further stress the 'social orientation (of the policies) should be reflected in every act under consideration'. The problems of protection of family with children during the reorganization are addressed (Karimova 1995). President Karimov identifies the final objective of the economic policy as the construction of a strong democratic law governed state and secular society with a *stable socially oriented market economy* and open foreign policy (Karimov 1995). This is also reflected in the fact that it is still the state that has primary responsibility in implementation of programs relating to land reclamation, irrigation, raising soil fertility etc. Since Uzbek economy is primarily dependent on the cultivation of cotton, it is important that the state has a definite agricultural policy (Karimov 1995, pp. 52–66).

There is therefore emphasis on the fact that

We have made a simple choice—to consistently advance towards market economy stage-by-stage—evolutionary, not by great leaps or by revolutionary destruction....Popular saying has it never destroy the old house before you build a new one, It is unforgivable to neglect what could be used in the interest of economic reform during transition to market relations and make this process more efficient and less painful (Karimov 1995, pp. 11–12).

Development is the most constantly growing embellishment of the Uzbek national myth propagated by the current regime. Official propaganda and cultural

production has attempted to project Uzbek cultural identity much further back in history than was actually the case. This propaganda appropriates great cultural and historical figures of early and medieval Islamic science, art, and literature and world historical figures like Timur. The use of cultural and historical figures to enhance legitimacy has meant that young Uzbeks like Hayrullo Hamidov have attempted to turn this nationalist propaganda on its head. Claiming this cultural heritage for the Uzbek people themselves, he turns this against the status quo. In his most popular work, *What is Becoming of the Uzbeks*, he cites the lost greatness and achievements of this nationalist history as a rhymed lament about the current state of the country and its chosen path

My country was free for centuries  
But now instead in total debasement  
The leading one is completely corrupted  
What is becoming of the Uzbeks? (Tucker 2014)

According to Noah Tucker the Uzbek national image created by the nationalist myth is supposed to show that the Uzbeks are heirs to the greatest heritage in the region and superior to their nomadic neighbours. Connected to this superiority to their neighbours in official propaganda is the notion that Uzbekistan is first and foremost independent and sovereign. Reflective of this central national propaganda is the image portrayed in the booklet by President Karimov, 'The Uzbeks will never depend on anyone'.

## 2.2 Celebrations and Performance

Once identities and developmental structures are constructed, states seek to institutionalize these identities both at the domestic as well as at the international level. The creation of new narratives of the Uzbek state was not just an attempt at homogenization. It was also an attempt at international projection and advertisement of the potential of the country. In Uzbekistan for instance there has been a consistent effort at promoting the image of a 'cultural gem'. The image that is portrayed is that of a culturally rich state at the 'Crossroads of Civilization'. In the 1990s a number of UNESCO sponsored events celebrated the ancient cities of Bukhara, Khiva and Samarkand at the crossroads of the ancient Silk Route. Uzbekistan has sought to accentuate its ancient traditions and modern cultures by organizing celebrations of its major public holidays and staging fashion shows of traditional clothing at embassies. Frequent cultural events at Uzbek embassies keep Uzbekistan's cultural brand on public display.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>For more information see the publications at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/>.

It has been generally argued that the Uzbek Government essentially promotes two different national images, one for domestic consumption and another for the international community (Marat 2010). Holiday celebrations like *Navroz* and Independence Day are carried out differently inside Uzbekistan and at Uzbek Embassies. Events organized for the international community emphasize traditional artifacts and modern paintings depicting Uzbek culture. These events promote national ceramics and *suzani* (embroidery) accompanied by traditional cuisine. Images of the blue domes of Samarkand's historical sites, of the Ark in Bukhara and the Fort at Khiva decorate all official leaflets, books and websites about Uzbekistan. There is also focus on promoting tourist attractions and other historical places in Uzbek Embassies and their publications. Marat (2010) argues that Uzbekistan's external emphasis is on its cultural richness built around the history of its ancient cities. It largely leaves out the Amir Timur heritage that is central to Uzbekistan's national identity and essentially supports President Karimov's state power.

*Navroz* was reinvented as part of creating a new national identity and included within Uzbekistan's official national holidays which are not religious in nature. On these secular holidays the national and local governments sponsor activities that involve all the citizens of Uzbekistan creating the basis for a civic rather than an ethnic national identity. Adams (2007) notes that while much of the content of the celebrations is related to Uzbek or Central Asian culture and heritage, the way the holidays are celebrated is inclusive of a broader civic community. She writes

Of all the national holidays of Uzbekistan, *Navroz* and Independence Day are celebrated on the largest scale in terms of state spending (more than a million dollars per holiday in Tashkent alone) and have the greatest significance for the public representation of national identity.

Large scale spectacles are organized on Uzbek Independence day and *Navroz*. Independence Day celebrations feature a wide variety of cultural elements that characterize the country as a civic nation while *Navroz* focuses exclusively on an ethnic definition of the nation (Adams and Rustemova 2010). A typical *Navroz* address by the President would stress the 'ancient' nature of the holiday and the importance of customs 'pertaining to our people'. The people are called upon to carefully preserve the 'priceless traditions and values in tune with the spirit and philosophy of *Navroz* across centuries and pass them on to the current generations'.<sup>6</sup> These are generally orchestrated by the state through carefully selected symbols of the nation. These spectacles feature historical or mythical figures, fireworks, youth in national costumes performing group dances, musical dance performance by folk groups from ethnic minorities and large scale depiction of national symbols. The performance by ethnic minorities serves to highlight Uzbekistan's ethnic diversity to the international audience and is also a declaration of civic nationalism for the domestic audience. These spectacles, however, are basically intended for a domestic audience and the dialogue and lyrics as also President Karimov's speech is always only in Uzbek.

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<sup>6</sup>See for instance *Greeting Address by President Islam Karimov at Grand Celebrations Occasioned to the Holiday of Navroz*, Press Service of the President of Uzbekistan, 21.3.2011.

Adams (2014) argues that *Navroz* is an important holiday in contemporary Uzbekistan not just because of its profound popularity but also as an exemplary case of a broader phenomenon of post-Soviet cultural renewal. National holidays are often used by states as conscious expressions of national identity, but as Adams argues, *Navroz* is especially felicitous case to examine in a post-independence context since as a New Year holiday, it is inherently a celebration of renewal. Furthermore, the holiday is one that the people themselves would celebrate even without any direction from the state which is different from a wholly invented tradition like Independence Day. Adams (2014) argues

Although the elites I interviewed did not frame cultural renewal specifically as a post-colonial or anti-colonial movement, it is clear that there was a backlash against Soviet culture in general and Russian culture in particular, and that people in Uzbekistan resented these Soviet policies that promoted Russification at the expense of Uzbek language and culture. In Osmon Qoraboev's writing of Uzbek national tradition, *Navroz* stands for a whole set of cultural practices that were repressed by Soviet power.

Uzbekistan's holiday spectacles are elaborate explorations of heritage with focus on medieval history and ethnic heritage that aims to strengthen the population's identification with the territory. The celebration today is also an important component of global modernity to the way that cultural renewal took place in Uzbekistan in the 1990s. The particular symbol featured has varied with cultural policy. State building concerns during the early to mid-nineties were addressing with a focus on the symbol of the empire builder Amir Timur. Concerns with religious extremism are being addressed with a focus on the founder of the Naqshbandi Sufi order Bahaouddin Naqshbandh (Adams and Rustemova 2010). These celebrations are also planned at the highest level, with the Prime Minister at the head of the organizing committee. The 20th anniversary of the independence of Uzbekistan was organized according to a resolution signed by the President which approved the programme of the organization, practical, cultural, educational and awareness raising activities related to the celebration as well as the structure of the creative group to prepare the holiday programme in Tashkent. The slogan for the year was 'You are great and sacred independent Motherland'. Uzbekistan's achievements are showcased in all public spaces and schools. Schools and other educational institutions in particular have posters depicting developments in science and technology, a superfast train that travels from Tashkent to Samarkand, strong armed forces, a responsible armed force, flourishing agriculture and strong family values. A number of classrooms have brief notes and photographs of Al Beruni, Al Farabi, Ibn Sino and Ulug Beg. They all also carry framed posters of the first page of the constitution, the national song and a message from the President.<sup>7</sup> The desire of the government to showcase the achievements of Uzbekistan over the last two decades has meant that neighbourhoods in central Tashkent have been flattened and several large markets like Farkhad Bazaar and small shopping centers have been demolished for reconstruction efforts. The official news agency distributed a

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<sup>7</sup>Visit to School No 10 at Bukhara (formerly Maxim Gorky School) on 8 April 2013.



statement to the effect that the 'architectural outlook of the capital ahead of the 20th anniversary of Uzbekistan has not only preserved its historical attractiveness but is acquiring new humanistic and aesthetic content' (*Eurasianet* 2011).

While in certain cases there is a gap between what is projected for the domestic audience and for the external one in others, like the projection of a 'nation under threat', the domestic and international intentions converge. The image of a sacred Motherland and particularly a sacred Motherland under threat is increasingly evident in political rhetoric. On the one hand the rhetoric seeks to rally popular feelings of patriotism and on the other seeks international legitimacy for state violence. Since the late 1990s there has been a shift in President Karimov's sense of the geopolitical identity of Uzbekistan, from a self-confident polity at peace with itself and its neighbours to a besieged island of civilization in a sea of anarchy that threatened to submerge it. Nick Megoran (2005) notes that the portrayal of 'a nation under threat' is reflected in Presidential writings, media reports and even in popular culture. One representative example is a part of the speech delivered by President Karimov on the occasion of the first session of Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Today our region is attracting attention of different extremist forces and centers that strive to undertake the expansion of religious extremism and international terrorism, to divert the states of the region from the democratic and secular path of development with a due rule of law. The drugs and arms trafficking represent a credible threat not only on the region, but also on the entire world. The current developments in the region and in the world urge us to create a system of security that would be able to guarantee in real terms the non-violability of our borders, territorial integrity of the country, stability and sustainable development of Uzbekistan. It is important that people comprehend the inseparable link between ensuring the public order, their personal safety and increasing their own watchfulness and an active participation in what is happening around them. It is necessary to promote the involvement of the population in eliminating extremism in all its manifestations, securing peace and stability in our common home (Karimov, cited in Sengupta 2009, p. 120)

It is evident that the rhetoric is aimed at both at the domestic audience who are urged to maintain public order in order to allow the state to move towards a path ruled by democracy and also at the international audience who are informed that the inability of the state to do so would be due to the threat faced by the state as a result of external extremist forces. The first channel that inculcated a sense of danger was Presidential writings themselves. The same geopolitical visions were conveyed through the national news media (*Halk So'zi*), which presented opposite images of a happy and prosperous Uzbekistan in contrast to consistent images of neighbouring states as spaces of chaos. There is also the suggestion that the chaos in the neighbourhood is threatening to engulf Uzbekistan. Megoran defines how the image of a 'nation under threat' is also reflected in popular music which is often an important site in struggles to control utilize and define space.<sup>8</sup> Similarly Mokhira Suyarkulova

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<sup>8</sup>Megoran et al. argue that the interpretation of danger, whether from terrorists or trade flows is always subjective. The portrayal of Uzbekistan as a threatened state is evident in Presidential speeches, the media even the cultural sphere like pop music has been an important discursive strategy in the articulation of the politicized version of Uzbek national identity by the current regime (Megoran et al. 2005).



(2006) argues how Uzbekistan's ideology of national independence demonstrates that the foreign policy of the state has been shaped by discourses of danger.

The Andijan incident proved to be somewhat of a watershed. In the aftermath of the incident, there was need to justify the state action to the people and also to an increasingly critical international audience. A booklet was published from Tashkent that summarized the statements and responses of the President Karimov to the local and international press about the Andijan events of 12–13 May 2005. Entitled *The Uzbek People Will Never Depend on Others*, the booklet seeks to provide an explanation of the government's actions during the incident and show that this incident had nothing in common with the 'revolutions' that had led to changes in governments in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Examining President Karimov's account of the events of May 2005, Megoran (2008) argues that four key themes have been deployed in the narrative to delegitimize the government's opponents. These are, terrorism and criminality; inauthentic Uzbekness and deviant masculinity/religiosity; constitutional illegitimacy and the subversion of the scientific laws of the state. In Megoran's (2008) opinion, the events were portrayed as orchestrated by a trained (and foreign aided) group of terrorist/criminal elements who were attempting to destabilize the state.

During the first years of our independence we thought we were free and we had something different: we became members of the UN so now we would move towards democracy and everything ahead would be perfect. We freed ourselves from the Soviet communist ideology. But what filled the vacuum left behind? Different radical religious groups, some not always peaceful, started to make their presence felt in the region. Everywhere they proposed building mosques and they did so until we started opening our eyes. Something similar has been happening to our neighbors; for instance Kazakhstan has at the moment 1500 mosques of which 500 are not officially registered. Sometimes these groups offered loans or sometimes they showed their readiness to build these mosques for free.

I want to reiterate again, using the ideological vacuum left after the collapse of communism, Hisb-ut-Tahrir put down its deep roots in the countries of Central Asia and in Uzbekistan, in particular in the Ferghana Valley. In the city of Tashkent you can find evidence of this sect (Karimov 2004, p. 18).

President Karimov's reactions following the events in Osh in April–May 2010 has been described as 'dispassionate and reasonable' by Kyrgyz state officials. Karimov argued that the tragedy was not the fault of either the Kyrgyz or the Uzbeks but was organized by 'third parties' with the key objective of drawing Uzbekistan into the conflict. President Karimov's reactions elicited keen interest among the international audience. It demonstrated the maturity of state reaction in the face of provocation and reiterated the image of 'threat'. As far as the domestic audience was concerned there was little coverage of the events in Kyrgyzstan and practically no information on the events that led to a change of government. Similarly, border control policies of the Uzbek state have been identified as theatrical/performative (Megoran et al. 2005). It has also been argued that this has in fact resulted in depressed trade flows within the region. The boundary

enforcement measures introduced at the Uzbek borders have been justified in terms of protecting the economic and political security of the state. Nick Megoran has described how the portrayal of Uzbekistan as a 'threatened state' is also reflected here. He has demonstrated how government framed the state border not merely as a legal line on the map but rather as a moral border where Uzbekistan was depicted as a realm of order, progress, stability and wealth surrounded by disorder, backwardness, chaos and poverty (Megoran et al. 2005). However, such boundaries also tend to overlook economic considerations and fail to come to terms with everyday experiences of negotiating borders. In a recent book Madeline Reeves (2014; see also Reeves 2012) shows how a border can be materialized in particular moments and settings, how it is affected by everyday acts but also challenged by movements outside its boundaries. By examining borders in the Ferghana Valley, both in a historical as well as contemporary context, she argues that geographical margins often venerated by states as ultimate markers of sovereignty may in reality be subject to various kinds of intrusion that affects the 'image' the state constructs of itself.

In recent years there is awareness that the 'image' of the Uzbek state in the international community has been influenced by the fact that large numbers of Uzbeks travel outside their countries, particularly to Russia and Kazakhstan to work. For the Uzbek state, anxious to portray an image of a strong 'self-reliant' and economically vibrant state, the large number of labour migrants to other countries becomes an embarrassment. Uzbekistan remains the largest migrant exporting country in Central Asia and therefore enjoys significant inflow of remittances. The dependence on remittances particularly in rural areas is high. Irnazarov (2015) argues even within Uzbekistan there are regions like Samarkand and Kashkadarya which show the largest number of migrants while Tashkent has the smallest as does the main industrial city, Navoi. Most remittances are sent to Syr Darya and Samarkand regions while Tashkent and Karakalpakstan have the smallest numbers.

During a trip to the Jizzak region on 19 June 2013 Uzbek President Islam Karimov commented rather harshly on the Uzbek labour migrants engaged as janitors in Moscow by referring to them as 'lazybones' and 'street beggars'. His comment clearly indicated that by travelling as migrant labour they are showing the state in poor light

Who I think lazy ones are? Those going to Moscow to sweep streets and squares. What is it about that place? This is disgusting. The Uzbek nation is demeaning itself (by doing this) supposedly one has to travel that far (to earn) for a piece of bread. Nobody is dying from hunger in Uzbekistan, thank God! I call them lazy because they are disgracing all of us by pursuing ways of earning quickly (*Ferghana.News* 2013).

Karimov's comments were met with outrage by the migrants who argued that they had traveled to survive since there were no appropriate jobs at home. There have also been comments on the state of the Uzbek economy if not for the multibillion dollar transfers from these people. In 2012 alone according to the

Central Bank of Russia, remittances provided about six billion USD to the Uzbek budget (*Ferghana.News* 2013).<sup>9</sup>

## 2.3 Conclusions

Prior to the formation of nation-states, the state was never seen as crucial for the determination of the identity of communities. It was at best seen as a guarantor of an arrangement under which all communities existed. This was transformed in an era of 'nations and nationalism' when it was asserted that identities were to be largely defined by the nation state. In fact, in a number of cases the state not only defined the boundary within which identity was to be circumscribed, but also the basis for the definition. The rationality on which this basis was determined defined the principal characteristic of groups and subsequently assumed a significance of its own. As nations were constructed within the boundaries of the state the projection of a numerical majority defined in terms of rationally delimited criteria became crucial. In this projection the state came to play an increasingly significant part not just in defining the 'nation-state' but also in legitimizing it within the international arena. It is this performative role of the Uzbek state that been the focus of this chapter. The chapter has underlined that the performance of the state was aimed at the creation of 'brand Uzbekistan'—a stable, prosperous state with a vibrant ancient culture.

The broader issue that the chapter addresses is about the relevance of branding as a political phenomenon in international politics and about how to situate the emergence of the 'brand state' within a general trend of 'soft' and 'hard' power politics (Ham 2008). It is a widely accepted idea that nation branding draws on attraction and legitimacy in a transnational network of relations. What is employed is 'soft power', the ability to obtain desired outcomes by attracting others (Velden et al. 2008). Place branding is now accepted as part of a wider spectrum of power where 'soft' power and public diplomacy have a place. It is being argued that the rise of the 'brand' state is leading to the emergence of a new 'great game', not about oil and trading routes but about image and reputation. This has encouraged revisiting the debate on identity within the prevailing condition of world politics (Ham 2008). However, much like the debates on the viability of 'soft' power as an agent of influence, there is an ongoing debate on whether a positive 'brand image' has the

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<sup>9</sup>Also according to Walker and Nardelli, 'Russia's rouble crisis poses threat to nine countries relying on remittances' (cited in Kanet and Sussex 2015), 31.5 % of Kyrgyz economy, 42 % of Tajik economy and 12 % of Uzbek economy is dependent on remittances. With the Eurasian Union bringing together Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan and now also Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, the plummeting rouble and consequent short fall in remittances will affect the GDP of all the states. Also these figures are based on official figures the real amount transferred in person by migrants is significantly larger. See also *MPC Migration Profile: Russia*, Migration Policy Centre June 2013, [www.migrationpolicycentre.edu](http://www.migrationpolicycentre.edu). The Profile provides details of migration figures, work permits, remittances all classified by state as also the legal framework governing the status of legal migrants.

power to influence international decisions. Conversely one would also have to examine whether projected images can have a constraining or constitutive effect on foreign policy behaviour. An interesting case is the Kazakh one where a negative brand image created by the film *Borat* was actually useful in generating interest in the state and increasing tourism.<sup>10</sup> There are also problems with the claims of the allegedly non-coercive nature of 'soft' power on the ground that soft power is strongly premised on the possession of military and economic hegemony and thus on a form of structural coercion. Understanding nation branding would therefore require a paradigm that goes beyond 'soft' power. It would be less focused on promotion and more concerned with a pluralistic understanding of political alternatives being developed at various levels.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>The film *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for make benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, made use of the fact that global audiences were unaware of the realities in Kazakhstan. The film reshaped Kazakhstan's image into a grotesque backwater inhabited by village idiots, interspersed with Soviet era footage of agriculture and heavy industry (Velden et al. 2008). Following the release of the film the Kazakh Government felt obliged to hire public relations firms to run advertisements in major international newspapers and television channels to inform the world about Kazakhstan, which presented an entirely different version of the reality.

<sup>11</sup>An interesting example is the U.S. which uses social networking forums to promote positive aspects of American democracy. See Velden et al. (2008).

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