Nation branding and development: Poverty panacea or business as usual?

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Abstract

According to nation branding, consultants problems of underdevelopment and global inequality are, to a significant extent, a product of the negative images peddled by charities and the broader development industry. While such images secure donations, it is argued, they deter more sustainable investments. In contrast, consultants argue that concerted nation-branding strategies offer much better solutions to problems of underdevelopment. This article subjects such claims to critical examination and argues that while the diagnosis of the problem may have some merit, the solution offered is more problematic. This is because nation-branding practices are inherently *status quo* oriented and reflective of a neoliberal understanding of the nature of (under)development. Moreover, nation branding also entails a troubling commodification of identity and culture as well as unsettling implications in respect of extant understandings of 'good governance'. Finally, the paper suggests that the dichotomy drawn between aid and nation branding cannot be upheld; rather, it is a device used to legitimise a market for the services of nation-branding consultants.

Keywords: nation branding, development, identity, globalisation, Africa

Introduction

In recent years, the idea and practice of nation branding have gained increased currency with multiple countries employing branding consultants (be they major marketing companies like Interbrand and Saatchi and Saatchi or independent policy advisors[1]), establishing branding commissions and producing branding strategies, all designed to enhance the profile and image of their respective nation. Aping the business world, where 'brand value' is sometimes estimated to account for as much as 40–60 percent of the value of individual companies (Jansen 2008: 125), nations are increasingly being enticed by the hope that nation branding might have a similar effect on national fortunes. Just as consumers might want to purchase certain branded products because of the reputation and image that the brand conveys, it is hoped that a strong national brand might similarly encourage them to buy products because of their country of origin, or it might encourage investors to unload capital in their country, or entice skilled professionals to seek employment there, or it might enhance the international status and influence of the country in question. In short, it is hoped that branding might provide a competitive edge in the globalised economy by helping branded nations – 'cool Britannia', 'incredible India', 'Malaysia truly Asia' – stand out from the crowd. Helpfully, the industry has also developed a range of indexes – the best known being the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, the FutureBrand Country Index and the East West Global Index 200 – all designed to measure the relative performance of different national brands and provide a guide as to whether a nation's brand value is rising or falling and providing clear incentives for governments to take action.

These developments have also begun to attract academic interest across various disciplines including business and marketing studies, economics, sociology, anthropology, communication studies and, to a more limited extent, politics and international relations. As Kaneva (2011) notes, in general, this literature can be divided into three categories: 'technical-economic approaches', written from the perspective of branding practitioners and marketing scholars seeking to better understand how to use branding to a nation's competitive advantage (e.g. Moilanen and Rainisto

2009); 'political approaches', which typically focus on nation branding's relationship to public diplomacy and in which nation branding is often tied to reputation and viewed as a potential form of soft power (e.g. van Ham 2002, 2008);[2] and 'cultural approaches', concerned particularly with the implications of nation branding for the politics of identity and with how nation branding might entail implications for the governance and disciplining of societies (e.g. Aronczyk 2008).

While drawing on all these bodies of literature, the article focuses in particular on recent industry proclamations concerning the relationship between nation branding and (under)development. Two claims stand out. The first is that problems of underdevelopment, especially in Africa, are in part caused by the negative branding of the developing world by the developed world whereby the developing world is depicted as a hopeless basket case, fit for charity but not for investment. The second is that, to resolve this problem, the developing world needs to take control of its own image through concerted efforts of nation and region branding.

Academic analyses of these claims have been limited to date; however, arguably, they require critical analysis. In part, this is because such analyses function to neutralise negative perceptions of nation branding by making nation branding appear an instrument of social and global justice. However, the article argues that such claims are also necessarily premised on very particular and *status quo* oriented notions of what constitutes development in the first place. Indeed, the article argues that narratives of nation branding function to spread and naturalise the Washington Consensus view that poverty reduction will only occur through embedding poor countries into global markets, fostering consumer cultures and strengthening their economic competitiveness (Cammack 2009). In this process, and drawing on Foucauldian insights, it is argued that nation branding also contributes to the subordination of states to market logics, while simultaneously shifting responsibility for development onto the poor states themselves by emphasising their need to take ownership of their national brands. Beyond this, however, nation-branding practices can also be viewed as a neo-colonial governmental technology, which empowers (largely Western) experts in establishing what constitutes relevant knowledge in a globalising world, which subordinates questions of national identity to market preferences, and which extends governance responsibilities beyond the state through the expectation that civil society will become actively engaged in branding processes (Sending and Neumann 2006; Larner 2002; Rose 1993).

The article is divided into five sections. In the first section, the case for nation branding is articulated, and where it is argued that in a globalised world nation branding can secure various dividends, from promoting economic competitiveness and growth to enhancing national solidarity and self-esteem. It is noted that, under the guise of branding discourse, the problem of development in a globalised world ultimately becomes one of recognition, visibility and self-esteem. In the second section, the article provides an overview of the extent to which the developing world has come to accept the claim that nation branding might well provide some of the solutions to problems of underdevelopment. This can be evidenced in the development of various nation-branding commissions and strategies. In the third section, the article engages critically with the arguments made in favour of nation branding as a solution to problems of underdevelopment. As indicated, the core argument here is that branding rests on a number of problematic assumptions about the nature and causes of economic underdevelopment, as well as about the nature of what constitutes development in the first place. In the fourth section, the article shifts focus to critically examine the role of development aid in the construction of national brands of both the states with established brands of being developed and those states seeking recognition for a developed world status. In this process, some of the inherent contradictions evident in viewing nation branding as a solution to problems of underdevelopment become crystallised. Finally, the article reflects on the constitutive role of consultants in the nation-branding process and urges caution when assessing the claims they make. This is so not least because many of the claims made about the impact of branding lack solid evidence and are, at best, circumstantial or result from correlative effects. At worst, branding consultants can be accused of hype and of being concerned primarily with carving out a new market for their services.

The imperatives of globalisation

Be they consultants, academics or policymakers, those making the case for nation branding embed their arguments in the claim that economic globalisation has fundamentally transformed the nature of world politics and the state system, changing the rules of the game. To this extent, the discourse on nation branding reflects and builds upon claims made in International Political Economy about the transmogrification of the Westphalian state into the 'competition state' over the last several decades, a transformation which has increasingly seen states promoting national economic champions and, more recently, competing with each other to be the most attractive destination for footloose global capital and business (Cerny 1990; Fougner 2006). Thus, instead of states making their mark and earning prestige on the battlefield, now national prestige is to be earned in the global marketplace (Jansen 2008: 125). Indeed, van Ham (2002: 252) speaks of the emergence of a 'postmodern world of images and influence' that is set to replace and 'emasculate power oriented geopolitics'. In this world, instead of competing over territory and material power resources, the branding consultant Simon Anholt (2007: 72) suggests countries, cities and regions will need to focus on competing with each other for their 'share of the world's consumers, tourists, investors, students, entrepreneurs, international sporting and cultural events; and for the attention and respect of the international media, of other governments, and the people of other countries'. This indicates a seismic change, in which statesmen are no longer tasked with deploying battalions and are instead reconstituted as national 'brand managers' (Anholt 2010: 14) whose primary task is to 'manage, and leverage their [national] brand equity' (van Ham 2002: 254). In a branding world, what counts is, arguably, standing apart from the crowd and identifying niche areas of expertise or a reputation for doing particular things well.

Branding is, therefore, seen to entail a range of potential dividends. Economically, it is argued that states and regions with strong brands will be able to attract foreign investment and foreign specialists to locate in the country, while strong brands eliciting a reputation for reliability, environmentalism, cutting-edge technology, chic etc. may also enhance the country-of-origin effect and, thereby, encourage global consumers to purchase products precisely on the basis of their location of national origin (Anholt 2002: 232–33; van Ham 2008: 128–29). Politically, a strong brand may also enhance a state's soft power and ability to influence international political issues. Various nations have therefore placed 'peace' (e.g. Finland, South Africa), or 'progress and democracy' (e.g. Sweden) at the heart of their national branding campaigns in the hope this might help carve out an international identity and provide them with the basis for a voice on the international stage on particular issues. Finally, however, brands are also internally oriented, with nation-branding campaigns also seen as providing the opportunity to enhance solidarity and the collective sense of national self-esteem (Browning forthcoming; van Ham 2002: 253). Indeed, in contrast to the Marxist-inspired criticisms of the alienating effects of capitalism, advocates argue that brands (whether national or product brands) can provide a renewed sense of belonging that responds to both individual and social needs, thereby helping citizens feel good about themselves (York 2011; Jansen 2008: 126; van Ham 2005: 123; Freire 2005).

Put succinctly, nation-branding advocates argue that, with globalisation having turned the world into a single global market place, everyone is competing with everyone else for market share. In this world, being visible, possessing a national reputation for having something distinctive to offer and having a brand becomes fundamental in being able to claim a slice of the global economic and political market. Therefore, branding is about claiming agency and making globalisation work for you. From this perspective, failing to play the branding game becomes depicted as irresponsible, with Anholt (2009a: 216) arguing that, in the globalised world, the fundamental responsibility of governments is to pass down the national image and reputation intact and preferably enhanced for future generations (also Freire 2005). As van Ham (2008: 131) puts it, why would anyone invest in or visit an unknown country, let alone pay any attention to its political or strategic demands. In short, 'if we have no clue what the country is all about […] why should we care'?

Even more problematic, however, is the concern that nations failing to adopt a branding strategy actively may well find their image sabotaged by others. This is where, it is argued, the relationship between branding and development becomes central. As various advocates note, while Germany and Japan might be known for technology, and Italy for fashion and food, Africa overwhelmingly conjures up images of ‘poverty, corruption, war, famine and disease’ (Anholt 2007: 72; Versi 2009). Irrespective of the fact that the reality may be often quite different, Africa suffers from what Anholt (2007: 75) terms a negative ‘continent brand effect’, in which more progressive parts of the continent become tarred with the same brush. The result is that negative perceptions come to frame the ‘reality’ for the whole of Africa.

Nation-branding advocates locate responsibility for this with the misguided activities of otherwise well-meaning do-gooders. Thus, Melissa Davis of the London-based agency True Branding comments that ‘Africa’s dominant image has been created by the charity brands: the 1985 Live Aid to provide food for Ethiopia. 2005s Live 8. “Make Poverty History”, G8 politics. Bono, Sir Bob, celebrity adoptions and Vanity Fair covers’ (quoted in Versi 2009; Anholt 2007: 76). Such images ‘create a perception of Africa as a continent that is beyond hope: too much poverty, too much death and an overwhelming sense of too many problems with too few solutions’ (Davis quoted in Versi 2009). There is, of course, a certain amount of truth in this. The development of aid into a business in its own right is well documented, with aid agencies frequently seeking out ever more shocking and stereotyped images in order to encourage viewers to fund the next relief effort (see Polman 2010). Indeed, such ‘poverty porn’ has spread to such an extent that, within the aid community, its effectiveness has been questioned because it is seen to produce ‘compassion fatigue’ in donors, but it is also seen as reinforcing paternalistic attitudes towards helpless others on the part of the West (Cameron and Haanstra 2008: 1477–79).[3] However, the key contention of nation-branding advocates is that such practices not only result in skewed images but are also central in keeping the developing world (and Africa especially) locked in poverty, the assumption being that the giving of money for aid is at odds with the giving of money for investment. Thus, Anholt (2007: 76) goes as far as to argue that ‘branding for charity and branding for economic development are fundamentally incompatible’ (also da Silva 2010).

Polarising aid and investment in this way has a couple of constitutive effects. First, it indicates that the key problem of African underdevelopment is one of images and brands. Aid, it is claimed, results in negative images which, in turn, result in the developed world responding in the wrong ways. As Ruurd Brouwer, the Africa Director of the Dutch development bank FMO, suggests, images of starving African children and the like, favoured by aid agencies, need to be replaced with 'pictures of successful African bankers driving Mercedes cars' (quoted in Versi 2009). Second, it implies that the solution to underdevelopment lies with the business rather than with the development community and, moreover, that the development community, irrespective of their intentions, actually exerts a pernicious effect on the life chances of those they claim to be helping. Such a diagnosis therefore indicates that the solution to problems of African underdevelopment should lie in a concerted effort of national re-branding, in which African nations wrest control of their national brands away from the developed world and take responsibility for creating them themselves. As such, nation branding is depicted by its advocates as having potentially emancipatory effects by helping developing nations gain control over their destinies. Moreover, by promoting economic growth, it is argued, nation branding will also promote global justice by helping close the gap between the world's rich and poor countries (Anholt 2005). Thus, contra Naomi Klein (2000), who views branding as a source of injustice and as something to be fought against, nation-branders suggest that the poor adopt this tool for their own purposes of attracting capital and competing in the global competition (Weidner 2011). Interestingly, this view has also been partially accepted by international development and trade organisations like the World Bank, WTO and UN agencies like the World Intellectual Property Organisation, which have each begun to encourage developing countries to brand themselves and their products in the name of economic growth (Aronczyk 2008: 45; Gumbel 2005; Jansen 2008: 121).

Message received: Brands in action

Importantly, this message has also been received in the developing world. This can be seen in two key respects. First, it is evidenced by the proliferation of branding commissions across a range of countries within the developing world, such as Colombia, Kenya, Ghana, South Africa and Palestine, the goal being to overcome pessimism by asserting more positive claims about these countries and thereby claiming some level of control over the politics of identity creation (Youde 2009: 127; Wanjiru 2005: 84). Moreover, attentive to Anholt's 'continent brand effect', in 2010 the Brand Africa initiative was established in order to enhance the continent's overall reputation, image and competitiveness (see www.brandafrica.net). Second, it is evidenced in the extent to which the discourse of branding consultants (usually from the developed world) is often parroted uncritically within the developing world. Again, this can be seen in terms of the perceived causes and solutions to problems of underdevelopment, but also in terms of what branding is seen to entail.

Typically, the causes are identified in terms of negative images perpetuated by the Western media. To quote Rwandan President Paul Kagame, '[o]ne of the reasons Africa is unable to attract enough foreign direct investment, which we need for our development, is the constant negative reporting' (quoted in Versi 2012: 80). Similarly, Thebe Ikalafeng, founder and chairman of the Brand Africa initiative, laments the one-dimensional stories told of Africa that depict it as a land of calamities, abject failures and poverty (Versi 2012: 94). This 'bad brand', it is argued, 'is actually encouraging a reduction in foreign direct investment' (Dambisa Moyo quoted in Brand Africa 2010: 10). However, an element of self-criticism is also apparent in this discussion. Reflecting orientalist and post-colonial critiques highlighting how colonial ideas were often normalised and domesticated by colonised peoples, with this resulting in a lack of confidence in their own views (Thiong'o 1998; Said 1978), Ikalafeng notes that '[w]e have allowed others to monopolise our story to such an extent that we have come to see ourselves in those images. We have come to believe that indeed we are powerless and backward as we are portrayed' (quoted in Versi 2012: 99). Put more harshly, the economist Dambisa Moyo chastises African leaders for being shameless in 'how they go around the world perpetuating this idea of Africa being poor and pathetic' (quoted in Brand Africa 2010: 10).

It is therefore somewhat ironic that the solution identified in order to recapture agency for Africa's future also entails drawing on 'Western' knowledge with respect to branding and marketing as the best way to succeed in a globalised economy. As Mathias Akotia (2010), the Chief Executive Officer of the Brand Ghana Office notes, while '[b]randing is part of the reason there is such an ever increasing gap between the developing and the developed countries', by adopting a professional branding programme itself Ghana might be able to close this gap. In line with the claims of Western branding consultants, it is argued that developing a strong nation brand will entice foreign investment, improve national self-esteem and, in doing so, even 'enhance citizenship behaviours'. In other words, by fostering a stronger sense of national identity and social solidarity, and emphasising citizens' responsibilities as national brand carriers, it is claimed, branding may also reduce 'crime and violence, corruption, unstable political environment, poor safety and security, poor labour productivity, poor public health and sanitation' (Akotia 2010). The potential power attributed to branding here is therefore significant, with branding depicted as a relatively uncomplicated panacea for a range of economic and social problems, and a panacea that will help nations leap up the development league tables, however, also a panacea once more premised on exporting Western 'knowledge' and governance norms.

Such claims, of course, also raise questions as to what a successful campaign of nation branding is seen to entail. It is important to note that, in this respect, significantly different perceptions exist amongst both branding consultants and policymakers. Some, for example, believe that nation branding is fundamentally about narrative and suggest that attractive and aspirational branding stories about the nation might be enough to produce concrete and material effects. Therefore, like Akotia above, Ikalafeng suggests that people are liable to grow into the national image projected: 'say "incredible India" long enough and soon the Indians see themselves as incredible and behave accordingly' (quoted in Versi 2012: 100). This view is notably at odds with orthodox views on development insofar as it privileges perception in attracting investment over the implementation of the various reforms central to the (post)-Washington Consensus agenda. Others, however, argue that branding can only work on the back of fundamental economic, social and political changes; therefore, branding is something that follows and reinforces other developments. Thus, positive brands will only emerge if corruption is tackled, good governance established and new exciting products for the marketplace created. Most notable here is Anholt (2007: 74), who argues that, to be successful, nation branding requires integrating the branding story into the development of public policy across the full range of political, social and economic activities. Thus, if a nation is troubled by poverty, corruption and insecurity, branding it as transparent, open, secure, and technologically advanced is unlikely to work unless fundamental changes are being introduced to bring this about. From this perspective, branding is best understood as a longer-term venture rather than a quick fix (Fan 2006: 11), and one where limited claims may be more credible.[4]

As highlighted below, such ambiguities surrounding the nature of nation branding ultimately work to the benefit of branding consultants while simultaneously raising questions about the relevance of branding to development in the first place. However, the key point here is that the view of policymakers and governments frequently corresponds directly with the view of the respective branding consultants hired to help them develop their nation-branding strategy. In this respect, reading nation-branding strategies and the speeches and statements of policymakers on the issue (in both the developing and the developed world) is often little more than to read a paraphrased version of the marketing spiel of the consultants hired. To give just one example, nation-branding consultant Simon Anholt is known especially for his 'hexagonal model' of nation branding, in which national brand strength is assessed within the areas of brands (i.e. products), policy, culture, people, tourism and investment, his argument being that successful brands need to elicit considerable consistency across these six areas (Anholt: 2009a: 208–209). This notion of the hexagon not only comes to inform the considerations of policymakers, but is often repeated by them almost verbatim. To cite Arthur Mutambara, Zimbabwe's Deputy Prime Minister, it is important to get the 'hexagon of branding' right, '[y]ou must be known well in those six areas of branding, and they must interact and feed into one another' (quoted in Brand Africa 2011: 15). As noted below, this emphasis on consistency is also open to question. The central point, however, is to emphasise how in the developing world (and elsewhere) the claims of branding consultants are being increasingly accepted as gospel.[5] The result is that underdevelopment is frequently reconstituted as a problem of image control and the failure to assert control over national brands.

To give a better sense of the nature of nation-branding campaigns, it is useful to look at the case of South Africa, which, prior to the end of apartheid in 1994, suffered from an extremely poor international image and has subsequently actively sought to revamp its reputation through systematic processes of nation branding. In this respect, alongside the more usual goals of attracting tourism and investment and helping the nation realise its international relations objectives, nation branding has also been understood as central to processes of nation-building in the post-apartheid era. Over time, the brand has developed from Nelson Mandela's initial emphasis on South Africa as an inclusive 'rainbow nation' embracing diversity (instead of the previous emphasis on discrimination) (Rose 2010: 255) to more recent articulations – not least linked to South Africa's hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup – of the country leading an African renaissance (Alegi 2008: 399). Central objectives, however, have been to present South Africa as a normal and democratising country, a willing and trustworthy partner, and a vibrant, young nation with a rich cultural and historical heritage. Moreover, given its post-apartheid transition, another goal has also been to establish a political brand as a mediator in seemingly intractable political conflicts, with the country offering its services in places like Northern Ireland, Israel, East Timor and various African countries (Youde 2009: 129, 134–35).

However, particularly important in systematising the branding process was the establishment of the International Marketing Council of South Africa (IMC) in 2000 to act as the custodian of 'Brand South Africa' by working with key stakeholders (government, citizens, organised labour, business, NGOs, educational institutions, the media) in crafting, coordinating and promoting a coherent brand (Youde 2009: 128; International Marketing Council of South Africa 2010/2011: 5). Key mechanisms for doing this have included targeted advertising campaigns at key international events like the World Economic Forum, the production of documentaries explaining South Africa's potential as a political and business partner for foreigners, the development of a Brand South Africa Marketer's Portal, which provides key stakeholders with information, tools and material to help them promote the country via the consistent application of the brand and, last but not least, through the marketing of South Africa as an attractive destination for major international events. Since 1994, this has seen the country host the Rugby World Cup, the African Nations Cup, the 17th United Nations Framework on Climate Change Convention of the Parties, and the 2010 World Cup (International Marketing Council of South Africa 2010/2011: 6; Alegi 2008: 399). Indeed, South Africa's successful bid to host the World Cup was seen as a unique opportunity to enhance the prestige, credibility and leadership image of the country, while simultaneously helping to dispel 'perceptions about Africa as the lost continent' (International Marketing Council of South Africa 2009/2010: 10). Aside from the opportunities afforded for the active international promotion of South Africa, the IMC also coordinated an extensive programme designed to enhance pride and patriotism amongst South Africans and to mobilise them behind the event.

As with all such branding projects, assessing the actual impact of these efforts has been difficult and it easily supports mixed conclusions. On the one hand, events like the World Cup do seem to have enhanced patriotism and solidarity over the short term (International Marketing Council of South Africa 2009/2010: 16). However, the country's performance in branding league tables has been less impressive. Thus, while South Africa has been seen as having the leading nation brand in Africa, between 2009 and 2010 its position in the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index actually dropped from 25th to 37th, a position it has more or less maintained since. All this raises questions about the actual benefit of hosting the World Cup and about the ability of nation-branding campaigns to fulfil their promise (International Marketing Council of South Africa 2010/2011: 24).[6]

Critical engagement: A sheep in wolf's clothing?

It may, of course, be that some of the claims made concerning the relationship between nation branding and development are sound. For example, it is hard to deny that images (positive or negative) are important when foreign individuals, companies and governments come to make decisions regarding potential foreign investments. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that enhancing a nation's image and brand will also improve that nation's chances to benefit from foreign investment, or that it might have a potentially positive impact on tourism and the country's sense of national identity and solidarity. However, such a straightforward understanding of the relationship between nation branding and development – as perpetuated by the industry – also warrants critical examination insofar as it entails particular and contentious understandings of the primary causes of underdevelopment, while the solution offered, that of enhanced nation branding, also raises questions concerning what development is understood to be and what it is supposed to entail in the first place.

The first point to note is that an emphasis on nation branding, arguably, implies an inherently conservative and *status quo* understanding of problems of underdevelopment. In other words, emphasising nation branding as a development strategy essentially entails upholding and promoting capitalist notions of neoliberal market economics. Thus, instead of viewing what Jansen (2008: 131) terms 'market fundamentalism' as a structural problem and potential cause of global inequalities and underdevelopment, as many post-colonial scholars, dependency theorists and neo-Marxists would be prone to do, for nation-branding advocates the market remains inherently benign, their goal being to utilise the apparently 'neutral' tools of nation branding to rebalance global economic inequalities (Youde 2009: 132). In other words, inequality and underdevelopment are not a problem of global economic structures – such as the impact of developed world agricultural subsidies on Africa's ability to compete or the renewed emphasis on Africa as a source of raw materials rather than manufacturing – or of local/national/regional problems of insecurity and corruption, but rather of images and weak national brands. Contrary to van Ham (2002: 263), then, who suggests that an emphasis on branding entails an essentially 'pragmatic and ideologically undogmatic' way of thinking, branding actually entails a fundamentally ideological view of the world, however, one obscured by the depoliticising invocation that matters of identity and development are best left in the hands of branding consultants with the requisite technical expertise (Kapoor 2013: 3).[7]

This ideological view can be teased out with reference to Foucault's account of how, over the course of the twentieth century, the idea of states directing and monitoring the economy was superseded by neoliberalism's emphasis on the market as the 'organizing and regulative principle underlying the state' (Lemke 2001: 200; Foucault 2008). This depoliticisation and naturalisation of the market, in turn, fostered a view in which subjects became seen as entrepreneurs and sources of capital with responsibility for enhancing their own wealth (Lemke 2001: 199; Foucault 2008). While at one level the emphasis on entrepreneurship can be empowering, as evident in the invocation of consultants that nations take control of their brand, it also operates as a form of (self)-regulation and domination by suggesting that one of the reasons why poor countries may be poor is because they have failed to tap effectively into their entrepreneurial capacities (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 5; Lemke 2001: 201). Therefore, responsibility for development shifts from the system to the subject, a view expressed succinctly in Mathias Akotia's (2010) lamentation of the lack of entrepreneurial initiative in his assertion that '[w]e [Ghana/Africa] continue to miss opportunities and blame others for our unfortunate situation'. Therefore, in this scheme, while strategies of nation branding may enhance the sense of national empowerment and self-esteem, they remain premised on a process in which success, or failure, is located firmly at the level of the actions and conduct of governments and their citizens.

Secondly, the claim that nation branding can provide a more general solution to problems of underdevelopment is fundamentally problematic and disingenuous in its own terms. The carrot of branding consultants is that, by adopting persuasive branding strategies, developing nations will be able to lift themselves out of poverty. This, however, is at odds with the nation-branding narrative that depicts states in fierce competition for a slice of the relatively fixed investment/tourism/status pie. For example, Brand South Africa's positioning of the country as a 'gateway' into Africa and a leader, ‘conduit’, ‘springboard’ and ‘catalyst’ of African growth in general is premised on an explicit understanding of the need for a competitive edge, which, in this respect, is signalled through the implicit message that the country stands apart by being more advanced, stable and predictable than its African partners/competitors (International Marketing Council of South Africa 2009/2010: 4; 2010/2011: 5). Therefore, at best, the implication would seem to be that, while branding might work for some, not all nations will be so fortunate in what is essentially presented as a zero-sum game of winners and losers (Mayes 2008: 130–31).

Indeed, more generally, little consideration is given to the question of who is likely to benefit even from those nation-branding programmes that are deemed successful. Given the emphasis on economic competition, it is unclear whether or not the fruits of economic growth will actually trickle down to the poorest in society, thereby enhancing social justice as opposed to benefitting corporations and an already affluent elite (Gertner 2007: 5). For instance, while the 2010 South African World Cup brought considerable economic benefits to big business and major construction firms contracted to deliver new stadia and infrastructure, the escalating liabilities were to be carried by a public purse already stretched in tackling problems of widespread poverty, high unemployment, lack of housing, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. As Alegi (2008: 400–408, 414) notes, many of these projects replicated the existing facilities, were located in picturesque locations rather than in places where they might have optimum impact on urban regeneration, and were often built in spite of local opposition, with smaller enterprises and ordinary taxpayers squeezed out of lucrative contracts. In conclusion, Alegi suggests that, for the majority of South Africans, the World Cup preparations enhanced neither their political nor economic situation (which was emphasised during the event by what was for many the unaffordable cost of tickets). Instead, the emphasis rather seemed to be on encouraging people to exercise a form of ‘cultural citizenship’ (Alegi 2008: 415), not least evident in the IMC’s ‘Fly the Flag’ and ‘Football Fridays’ campaigns – the latter being days when citizens were encouraged to wear the Bafana Bafana national team jersey (International Marketing Council of South Africa 2010/2011: 28–29).

The third issue is that, to the extent to which nation branding naturalises a market-based approach to development, it also reinforces the neoliberal tendency to view development in terms of the monetised consumption of material goods and the relative ranking of a state's GDP. This reflects a very limited way of measuring poverty and development because it generally fails to take account of the range of economic transactions that take place outside of capitalist markets (Escobar 1995: 21–54; Thomas 2005). More notably, it also entails reducing conceptions of development and wealth to how well nation branding might promote inward investment, external knowledge of a country, or national solidarity (with the latter two generally subordinated to their role of promoting the former). As Aronczyk (2008: 56) notes, other forms of wealth or development, which might be understood in terms of promoting 'self-realization, noninstrumental forms of community, mutual respect', are excluded here.

The fourth point, therefore, is that nation branding seems to, again, fall foul of Escobar's (1995: 26) orientalist accusation that, in most development discourses, Western knowledge, expectations and practices concerning the 'normal' course of development and progress are privileged over others. An example is provided by Oliver Schmitz, the managing director for South Africa at the Brand Finance consultancy, who asserts that, to develop, 'Africa as a whole needs to understand the importance of brand value and the need to track that value' (quoted in Pienaar 2011). Although Schmitz is talking primarily about branded products, the basic point is that, apparently, Africans need educating to become more brand-savvy and to understand the value of measuring African brands against each other and against non-African brands. From an Escobarian perspective, the problem with this is that, ultimately, such advice seeks to transform local societies into consumerist societies, which think in branded terms and in which development is measured, at least in part, in terms of brand performance.

The fifth point, perhaps even more fundamental, is that nation branding ultimately, in this respect, has the effect of valuing identity and culture only if they can be deployed in the service of turning a profit. Branding consultants, for example, typically depict national identity and culture as 'fixed assets' (e.g. Anholt 2008: 34) to be deployed in gaining economic and status benefits. Gary Harwood of the marketing services company HKLM thus suggests that 'national branding […] is no different from any other kind of branding' (quoted in Markessinis 2009: n.p.). Such a view reduces identity and culture to products or forms of intellectual property (Jansen 2008: 121). This, for example, is clearly the view of the World Intellectual Property Organisation, which, in a 2006 publication, emphasised that 'every country has a culture, a heritage, resources, natural beauty, and internal qualities that can be identified and defined, highlighted and captured, in a nation-branding initiative which is both pleasing and economically effective' (quoted in Aronczyk 2008: 45). The danger of commoditising culture and identity in this way is that it subordinates social life to the market (Block 2001: xxiv). In turn, this narrows the bases upon which national self-esteem and social solidarity can be constituted. Under such logics, identities, cultures, histories and places are no longer presented 'as foci of attachment and concern, but as bundles of social and economic opportunity *competing* against one another in the open (and unregulated) *market* for a share of the capital investment cake (whether this be the investment of enterprises, tourists, local consumers or whatever)' (Philo and Kearns 1993: 18, original emphasis).[8]

Moreover, this process of commoditising culture and identity and valuing them in terms of their marketability has another important consequence. Namely, national values shift from being understood as intrinsic goods to being valued insofar as they help the country sell itself, whether politically or economically (Angell and Mordhorst 2012). Ultimately, this shifts the focus from internal negotiations, concerning what different domestic constituencies think about the intrinsic or authentic nature of the national self, to attempts to anticipate the broader desires of outsiders and of the market in general. For example, in its push to develop a national brand, the Royal Government of Bhutan (2010: 6) has emphasised the need to tone down 'the brightness of our textiles' with the more 'sober colours that the affluent Western markets prefer'. In other words, national identity and culture need to be moulded and packaged with the preferences and tastes of outsiders in mind. In a similar vein, a core mantra of nation branding becomes that of emphasising how different nations can make themselves relevant and useful to the rest of the international community and to the lives of people around the globe, the view being that such 'altruism' will have a self-interested pay-off in terms of international prestige (K 2011; Anholt 2009b: 94; Henrikson 2005). South Africa's attempt to position itself as a peace mediator is one example, but many other branding campaigns make similar claims (e.g. Finland, Norway, Colombia). Therefore, as Philo and Kearns (1993: 20–21) note, place/nation branding tends to result in everyone packaging themselves in more or less the same ways, deploying similar sets of aspirational motifs, and in general avoiding anything controversial. To quote the consultant Harwood again, '[n]ational brands should assist in building a holistic, non-political reputation of a country over an extended period of time' (quoted in Markessinis 2009: n.p.). The emphasis is on being neutral and non-offensive – to global capital/international sentiment – since that is perceived as best for reputation and business. A good example is provided by Euh Yoon-dae, chairman of South Korea's nation-branding council, who suggests that helping Koreans 'become more acceptable to other cultures' should be central to South Korea's branding programme (quoted in Jeong-ju 2009: n.p.).

Thus, interestingly, whereas nation branding in principle entails identifying niche markets (in terms of products, services and identity), through which the nation becomes relevant and useful to others, in practice it ultimately undermines global diversity, since emulating the desires of others and making sure one does not fall out of fashion is central to success in a branding world.[9] At best, therefore, to the extent to which nation-branding processes promote diversity (see Freire 2005) Jansen (2008: 133) suggests it is in the form of 'global cultural stereotyping'. As she notes, Anholt recommends creating 'boutique nations' proposing, for example, that Estonia develop a niche market for hockey sticks. In a similar vein, the singer Bono (2009) has suggested that, owing to its exciting music scene and 'the conversation of Kofi', Ghana might do well to market itself as the 'birthplace of cool'. Such stereotyping not only reconfigures nations as vendors in a global department store but, as evident in the Ghana example, it also has the potential to reproduce rather typical orientalist discourses in which the developing world becomes the exoticised target of the desires of Western consumers (Jansen 2008: 133). This is nowhere more evident than in the branding associated with the tourist trade, in which attempts to appeal to the desire of visitors to consume local otherness easily result in the reproduction and enactment of legible forms of primordialism and exoticism that draw heavily on colonial imagery and are often implicitly racist (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 94, 142). The ironies here are obvious. Insofar as the critique of traditional forms of development aid, as presented by the nation-branding industry, is that it results in negative stereotyping of poor regions, the solution offered entails the clear danger of simply replacing these with other (often well-established) stereotypes (Widler 2007: 148).

Finally, it is also important to note that national branding generally entails significant disciplining elements that raise questions concerning what a nation-branding approach to development means for the promotion of democracy. Two issues stand out. The first is that, despite proclamations that nation branding can have positive social effects by promoting national solidarity through providing an aspirational story of the nation, which can enhance the overall sense of national pride, it is important to remember that such processes are not neutral. The reason is that central to nation-branding strategies is the aim of establishing social consensus around certain (usually bourgeois and corporate – Philo and Kearns 1993: 25-6) ideological commitments and around particular mandated national narratives to the exclusion of others. The second issue is that, while nation branders often assert that establishing 'good governance' is central to creating positive brands, it is important to consider what exactly is meant by good governance in a branding context.

With the two issues combined, the central criticism is that nation branding entails inherently hierarchical and exclusionary modes of governance, which are at odds with clearly open democratic debate. Nation-branding consultants, for instance, keenly assert that successful nation branding requires the sublimation of conflicting messages and the establishment of a consistent and unified national story (Anholt 2007: 74–75). As Dambisa Moyo (quoted in Brand Africa 2010: 18) puts it, part of Africa's problem is that '[t]here isn't a strong credible consistent message about this continent'. As such, the suggestion is that strong national brands require the establishment of consensus around an agreed-upon national story and identity. Hence, it is instructive to note that consultants often see their role as helping to distil (and market) the fundamental essence or truth of the nation (Aronczyk 2008: 52) from the broader diversity of contending national identity narratives. Of course, the process followed to identify such an essence can assume various levels of openness. Typical, for example, is the establishment of a national branding committee comprised of a selection of government officials, civil servants, industry leaders, cultural figures, academics and sports stars. Indeed, sometimes, these committees may engage in extensive consultations with the broader population to try and garner as many views as possible. However, evidently, rather than uncovering national essences and truths, branding commissions and consultants are engaged fundamentally in constituting them, not least through presupposing the existence of an unproblematic link between group identity and a particular place (Mayes 2008: 125). Yet, once a story and identity have been agreed upon, national identity is solidified around certain inclusionary/exclusionary components. For example, the re-envisioning of South Africa as a 'rainbow nation' embracing multiculturalism and market economy has inevitably reduced the permitted ideological diversity in the nation and it raises the question of what citizens should do if they do not identify with the values espoused by the national brand (Marsh and Fawcett 2011: 517; Widler 2007: 149).

In this respect, various commentators have suggested that nation branding is easily amenable to a Foucauldian analysis of governmentality (e.g. Sending and Neumann 2006), in which states are increasingly understood as enforcing social order, not so much through violence and coercion, but primarily through pushing citizens morally into conformity (van Ham 2002: 267; Weidner 2011). Put slightly differently, the success of nation-branding strategies is often understood as dependent upon 'getting everybody in the country to speak with one voice' (Anholt 2007: 80) and, in the words of the IMC CEO, Miller Matola (2012: n.p.), to 'live the brand'.[10] As noted by Zimbabwe's Deputy Prime Minister, Arthur Mutambara, citizens must come to assume the role of 'brand ambassadors' (cited in Brand Africa 2011: 15; see also Aronczyk 2008: 54). Likewise, Mathias

Akotia of the Brand Ghana Office not only understands national brands as representations of the 'true self', and therefore 'resistant to change', but also argues that the brand's/identity's values need 'internalisation […] through conscious citizenship programmes', which will promote 'the appropriate citizenship behaviour'. In short, 'all stakeholders [citizens, business, government, academia, political parties] should be united by the nation's brand vision and shared values to work together and align their behaviour to a common national strategy' (Akotia 2010). Citizens who fail to do this and act 'off brand' are, as such, moving into the realms of unpatriotic behaviour and subject to being criticised for putting the success of the branding strategy in question. Thus, Miller Matola (2012: n.p.) emphasises that South Africans 'need to unite with one strong voice, committed to thinking, acting and speaking positively about the many things that South Africa is getting right, instead of constantly focusing on the negative and stimulating global negative sentiment'. Despite protestations otherwise, such disciplining elements therefore indicate that, in a nation-branding context, good governance is less concerned with the promotion of a vibrant participatory democracy and is more a synonym for the creation of order and a stable and secure environment for capital investments. As van Ham (2002: 267) and Jansen (2008: 135) both note, the fact that Singapore is often championed as a successful example of nation branding, owing to the cohesion and consistency of its national message, should provide pause for thought in this respect.

Development aid, branding and the 'good state'

In examining the relationship between branding and development, the article has, so far, critically explored the argument of nation-branding consultants that nation branding, not aid, provides the best opportunity for the world's poor states to develop. According to this argument, development aid is not only ineffective, but may actually be counterproductive insofar as it reproduces negative stereotypes of the developing world, which may dissuade global capital from making investments while simultaneously serving to disenfranchise developing states from playing a significant international political role. From this perspective, aid is the problem, branding the solution.

However, dichotomising aid and branding in this way is problematic because possessing an international aid policy often plays a fundamental role in nation-branding strategies of both developed world states as well as those ‘transition’ states seeking recognition of such a status. Highlighting this point is important as it further crystallises some of the problems and contradictions entailed in viewing nation branding as central to solving problems of global inequality.

Of course, states may develop overseas development aid programmes for various reasons. For example, they may be motivated by purely humanitarian concerns, the goal being a genuine desire to assist the world’s poorest escape poverty. For instance, the UK’s Department for International Development (2012) justifies the fact that India remains the biggest recipient of British development aid – despite having one of the world’s fastest growing economies, 153,000 dollar millionaires, nuclear weapons and a space programme – on the grounds that one third of the world’s poor (people living on less than $1.25 a day) live in the country (Bidwai 2012). However, it is also clear that states often use overseas development aid to promote economic interests. Thus, for some, Britain’s generosity was tainted in 2011 when the Development Secretary suggested that the continued granting of high levels of aid was partly designed to help the UK win a bid to provide India with Typhoon fighter jets (Bidwai 2012). And, of course, in this case, it may also be that British development aid is also motivated by considerations of guilt over the colonial legacy, or the desire to retain strategic influence following decolonisation.

However, such ethical, economic, political and historical motivations are also often tied up with concerns over national image, status and prestige. For this reason, overseas development aid policies are often co-opted in debates over nation branding and an important hierarchy is re-inscribed in the relationship between donors and recipients. South Korea provides a good example. In seeking to explain why the country is still regarded as poor in many parts of the world, the leaders of the branding programme concluded that it was partly because the country ‘had failed to provide sufficient contribution to the international community and has not been active in helping poor countries' (Euh Yoon-dae quoted in Jeong-ju 2009). To rectify this – and closely reminiscent of South Africa's emphasis on providing good services through international peace-mediation efforts – it was decided that overseas development aid and the number of volunteers should be increased. As suggested by Euh Yoon-dae, chairman of South Korea's branding council, '[t]hat will contribute greatly to improving Korea's brand power' (quoted in Myo-ja 2009: n.p.).

It is important to be clear as to what the messages here are. The most obvious message is that possessing a development aid (or conflict resolution) programme is symbolic of success and a potential passport to the higher echelons of the international community – a source of status and prestige (e.g. Kapoor 2013: 26, 64–65). In contrast, being a recipient is perceived negatively. India provides another good example of this juxtaposition since it has recently discussed rejecting British development aid in view of the perceived negative publicity it affords (Gilligan 2012), while in 2011 it also created its own aid agency. As noted by Rajiv Sharma, Secretary General of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce, '[t]he creation of an aid agency is a recognition by the Indian establishment that India has arrived as a global player with strategic interests' (quoted in Patel 2011).

While, no doubt, this is true, there are three concerns worth noting when development aid is tied to nation branding in this way. Firstly, insofar as successfully branding a nation as developed is perceived as dependent upon being an active giver of overseas development aid, such nation-branding strategies are actually premised on the preservation of structural inequalities between donor and recipient nations. In other words, the creation of a positive image of a generous aid donor requires the presence of aid recipients in order to make that self-image meaningful.

Secondly, on the face of it, the giving of development aid as a central characteristic of what it means to be a developed state may appear inherently progressive. However, there is an unsettling ethical dilemma underlying this premise. The dilemma is that if, in a branding world, national prestige and status are gained by out-competing others in securing investment, tourism, attracting foreign professionals etc., the attendant sense of self-esteem is to be gained at the economic cost of others, and even, potentially, through feeling superior to them. In other words, in the all-against-all competition for investment, prestige and attention peddled by nation-branding consultants, successful nation branding is understood as gaining more of the pie for oneself. Co-opting development aid into such strategies thus shifts the rationale from a focus on redistribution to viewing such disbursements as part of a longer-term strategy for the nation's enhanced accumulation of capital, attention, prestige and power to the detriment of others.

Finally, as highlighted by the South Korea example, insofar as providing development aid is premised on enhancing one's own national brand standing, it also entails an inversion in which, in a branding world, humanitarian action is driven less by an ethical concern for others and more by the desire to preserve a particular national image that solidifies the brand. It may also feed further into the already evident practices, whereby aid is not given simply to those in greatest need, but is given in light of other considerations. Thus, along with the directing of aid in support of economic (the UK–India example) or security (see Duffield 2001) concerns, we might see aid directed increasingly towards where it is deemed liable to produce the greatest brand enhancement effect.

Overall, therefore, industry attempts to neutralise the image of nation branding, and even to provide it with a positive spin as a potential tool for advancing global justice by eradicating global inequalities, appear disingenuous. Such claims rely on juxtaposing a nation-branding approach to development with one premised on aid, but remain silent about how branding and aid are closely intertwined in many contexts, not least through attempts by donor countries to construct images of themselves as caring good states. However, such positive images remain premised on reproducing structural inequalities and hierarchies. Thus, while at first glance nation branding may appear to offer a radical alternative to aid, in practice the two are often operating as part of the same game.

Conclusion: Beware of prophets bearing gifts

The overall message of this article is that the claims of nation-branding consultants should be treated circumspectly. Although at an intuitive level the argument that negative images of Africa reproduced in the global media and by aid agencies may undermine the continent's possibilities for development makes sense, it is unclear that the solution to this problem lies simply in bringing branding strategies to work on the side of the developing world. As argued, an emphasis on nation branding has the effect of restricting any diagnosis of the causes of underdevelopment. As an approach operating within the ideological framework of neoliberalism, it suggests that underdevelopment is a problem of failing to use the tools appropriate for succeeding in global deregulated markets. The idea that this system and ideology might themselves be fundamental causes of underdevelopment is discounted from the offset. Similarly, the article has also suggested that nation branding is problematic due to its commodification of identity and culture and because the assumed need for coherent unified national brands also entails unsettling implications for our understanding of good governance – insofar as successful branding appears to favour hierarchical rather than democratic decision-making and entails notable disciplining elements. Finally, the article has also argued that the juxtaposition of branding with aid is plagued by internal contradictions of both a practical and ethical nature.

In conclusion, however, we might also suggest that none of this is particularly surprising. After all, branding consultants are, almost by definition, fully signed-up supporters of neoliberal markets. Any industry analysis of the relationship between nation branding and development is, therefore, unlikely to be particularly radical. This, however, should make us increasingly wary of the wares sold by nation-branding consultants and of the arguments they deploy to generate business. The article, therefore, ends with a health warning about the marketing rhetoric of branding consultants.

The key point to remember is that '[b]randing experts and marketing gurus may have a vested interest in telling peripheral and unbranded countries how hopelessly obsolete they appear without a state brand of their own' (Metahaven 2008: 6). As Simon Anholt (2010: 14) suggests, in the globalised market place of everyone competing with everyone else, reputation, image, standing and brand become everything. This claim, however, can be contested in several respects. First, as Fan

(2006: 9) notes, it is important to distinguish between nation brands and product brands. The point is that having a poor or weak national brand does not necessarily translate into poor sales of national products. For instance, a Chinese consumer might still prefer Japanese cameras despite having a generally unfavourable perception of the country. The opposite is also possible. This issue is important as it raises questions about causation. The claim of nation-branding consultants is that national economic development is significantly dependent upon generating a positive national brand, yet, as Fan (2006: 9) notes, this causal link is far from established, while others note that 'hyped' claims of branding consultants have often been contested (Jansen 2008: 130). In this respect, the evidence marshalled by nation-branding consultants is often circumstantial or, at best, premised on establishing correlations. For example, in a publication connected to the Brand Africa initiative, Tom Sitati, Executive Director of Interbrand Sampson East Africa, points to the correlation that seven of the top ten countries in the Anholt-GfK Roper Nations Brand Index are also in the global top ten in terms of GDP. The unanswered question, however, is whether or not this GDP performance is in any way related to the countries having adopted nation-branding strategies (Sitati 2010: 7).

Similarly, as we have seen, nation-branding consultants are also often unclear about what nation branding entails, frequently suggesting that rebranding a nation requires fundamental economic, social and political changes liable to take decades. Again, while this may be true, it also entails an interesting get-out clause for consultants whose own engagement in such projects is usually limited to months (Aronczyk 2008: 32). Consultants can thus avoid responsibility for any failure on their part, with a typical industry refrain being that branding projects generally fail because of a lack of client commitment to follow through sufficiently (da Silva 2010; Teslik 2007; Olins 2005: 178). The flip side, of course, is that such fundamental societal reorientations are usually driven by considerations of social justice, and rarely by considerations of brand image. Thus, the industry's touting of the transformation of Spain's image after Franco as an instance of successful rebranding is disingenuous (Fan 2006: 11). From this perspective, nation branding is much more likely to follow social, political and economic transformations, as opposed to leading them. If this is correct, then the role of nation-branding consultants is much less essential than they would claim and, perhaps, reduced to providing a presentational flourish.

Likewise, industry claims that national brands should be coherent are also questionable, but fundamental, since distilling coherent and consistent brands for customers is, ultimately, the essence of the nation-branding business model. Indeed, it is the wrap around notion of the concept that is seen to distinguish nation branding from simple marketing/advertising. The assumption is that nuance breeds mixed messages and confusion in the minds of the global audience. Governments, foreign ministries, tourist boards, investment-promotion agencies, companies and citizens, we are told, need to be singing from the same hymn sheet (Anholt 2007: 74, 79–80). One danger is that this treats the audience as undiscerning. Another is that, while an emphasis on a cohesive narrative across all sectors might help create an overall coherent country brand, this cohesion as such might not be particularly helpful to advancing the interests of specific national constituencies (Fan 2006: 10). Indeed, it is certainly instructive that the attempts to create nation brands in terms of being innovative, environmental, technologically advanced, trustworthy, cultural etc. are highly generic and interchangeable. The irony, therefore, may well be that the emphasis consultants place on homogeneity and conformity is as problematic as it is helpful.

Given the various critiques noted and, not least, given the difficulties of measuring the effects of nation-branding programmes accurately, the question that remains open is why states are increasingly employing such consultants to help them develop their own nation-branding strategies. It may be that governments are easily and willingly lured into believing that nation branding may provide the kind of boost promised. The suggestion of this article, however, is that, tied in with broader understandings of the inevitabilities of globalisation and neoliberal economics, nation branding has emerged as an increasingly self-reinforcing discourse that further normalises and advances ‘market fundamentalism’ (Jansen 2008: 131). Thus, while not everyone is likely to believe the hype that adopting a nation-branding strategy will solve a state’s various economic and social problems and lead a nation (indeed a continent) out of poverty, the fear will always be that if we do not, at least, play the game when all our competitors are, we will surely lose. Thus, while in the context of development issues nation-branding consultants depict themselves as offering hope and salvation, one of their wares is also, surely, that of peddling fear.

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Notes

[1] Most notable here is Simon Anholt, often described as a 'guru' of the nation-branding industry, in part because of his claim to have coined the very concept in 1996 (Aronczyk 2008: 47, Anholt 2009a: 206). He has advised over 40 countries on matters of national identity, reputation and public diplomacy, he has established the journal of *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* to debate the topic, and he is one of the most prolific and influential writers and speakers on the subject (Kaneva 2011: 117). For these reasons, particular attention is given to his work in this article.

[2] Although there are links between nation branding and public diplomacy, the terms refer to different practices. Traditionally understood, public diplomacy concerns attempts by foreign ministries to present and sell government policies to foreign publics (Potter 2002: 3; Mor 2011; Anholt 2008: 41). In contrast, nation branding entails mobilising a much broader range of governmental and social actors in order to project a nation's identity both at home and abroad (Melissen 2005: 19–21). Indeed, as argued below, nation branding is not simply about projecting national identity, but rather, fundamentally, about constructing it in the first place.

[3] One result, as Cameron and Haanstra (2008) note, is a growing shift to try and re-motivate people by presenting development and aid as sexy. For criticisms of celebrity diplomacy/humanitarianism as not only oversimplifying problems of development, but also as both indicative of the rise of private authority in global governance and re-legitimising the very economic system and relations of production that, arguably, lie at the heart of many development problems, see Kapoor (2013), Cooper (2008) and Dieter and Kumar (2008).

[4] In Avraham and Ketter's (2013: 146, 160–61) terms, the difference here is that between 'cosmetic' and 'strategic' approaches to nation branding. They invoke Nigeria's attempt to rebrand itself in 2009 without tackling the fundamental problems of governmental corruption and internal tensions as an example of a cosmetic approach, which is viewed widely as having failed and even undermined Nigeria's international image further.

[5] Indeed, this reliance on branding consultants is itself reflective of the more general trend towards outsourcing responsibility for governance to experts in the contemporary era of 'advanced liberalism' (Rose 1993; Larner 2002).

[6] The IMC suggests this is because South Africa is seen more as a tourist than an investment destination. In part, this is because South Africa is still perceived to face challenges in terms of governance, indicating that, in various respects, the alignment between the brand and reality seems awry (International Marketing Council of South Africa 2010/2011: 24).

[7] There is a parallel here with the 'Brand aid' movement exemplified by Bono's Project RED, whereby iconic brands like Nike, Apple and Armani donate a percentage of sales from certain products to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS. Unlike fair trade schemes, which seek to reshape production and exchange relations, Project RED suggests that 'consumers can save HIV/AIDS patients in Africa "simply" by shopping'. For corporations and consumers, Project RED offers a win-win situation. Corporations that sign up to the scheme can enhance their brand's ethical profile and boost sales, while consumers can continue consuming with their conscience sated by the message that they are partaking in a form of 'just capitalism' (Richey and Ponte 2012: 136–

37). Such brand aid, however, does nothing to challenge the structures of production, distribution and ownership that create global inequalities, but rather positions the poverty and illness of Africa as a marketing opportunity for corporations (Cheru 2012: 139). Simultaneously, brand aid reaffirms established social hierarchies of beneficent Westerners helping impoverished Africans (Abrahamsen 2012: 140–41).

[8] For a slightly different take on the relationship between commodification and culture/identity, see Comaroff and Comaroff (2009), who suggest that, at least in the case of branding ethnicity, commodification can also lead to important processes of self-reflection and even cultural exploration and recovery. Moreover, if identity requires the recognition of others in order to be, then commodification does provide one route for securing such recognition. The flip side, however, is that commodification may also result in a fixed and essentialised, rather than dynamic, view of culture and identity (see below).

[9] For such a critique of the logic of consumerist cultures, see Veblen (1957).

[10] In Foucauldian terms, this is reflective of a 'changing logic or rationality of government […] by which civil society is redefined from a passive object of government to be acted upon and into an entity that is both an object *and* a subject of government' (Sending and Neumann 2006: 652). In other words, while branding processes seek to devolve responsibility onto citizens, in doing so citizens also become agents of governance. However, while citizens may be willing participants in this process, it is also important to recognise how 'certain identities and action-orientations are defined as appropriate and normal' in this process (Sending and Neumann 2006: 657).

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