

5 New and improved nations

Branding national identity

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When Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs hired an advertising agency in 2002 to create a new face – logo, slogan, and symbol – for its national persona, observers wondered about the agency's choice of a red-and-white toy kite as Poland's metonymic mark of identification. Why a kite? After all, the country already has a red-and-white flag as a stock symbol of national identity. And the flag has been around for centuries: history texts note that a red flag decorated with a white eagle accompanied King Władysław Jagiełło during the Battle of Grunwald in 1410.¹ But according to an interview with branding expert Wally Olins, “flags have nationalist, military or political connotations.” The kite is “postpolitical.” It represents “a break from the past,” he added. “It is joyful, modern” (Boxer 2002).

The shift from political to “postpolitical” representations of national identity appears to signal a change in the way we think about the idea of nation. It suggests that it is now possible to form allegiances with regard not to shared traditions and rituals, kinship and ethnicity, language or geographic proximity, but to the profit-based marketing strategies of private enterprise. The interpenetration of corporate and state interests in creating and conveying national identity through a specific branding and marketing process is a growing trend, one that has been adopted in countries with emerging market economies and with established capitalist economies alike. If we were to judge solely from the number of countries that have adopted this technique, it would appear to be effective. Nations whose governments have engaged the services of advertising or branding firms in the last five years to create and promote a national image include Latvia, Romania, Finland, New Zealand, the states in the former Yugoslavia (Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia), India, Estonia, Turkey, Hong Kong, Singapore, Rwanda, Puerto Rico, Ireland, Scotland, the United States, Canada, and Britain.²

Though the idea of branding is an accepted, or at least tolerated, feature of modern consumer culture, the idea that nations can be produced, branded, and consumed in commodity form is somewhat less palatable. National identity, a concept that is notoriously elusive and difficult to define, can at least be defined by what it is not: a conference of meaning, uniqueness, and

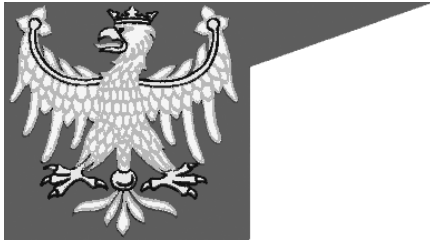


Figure 5.1 Banner of King Wladyslaw Jagiello (1351–1434), circa 1410

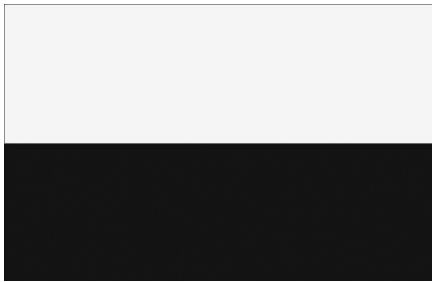


Figure 5.2 National flag of Poland constituted by Polish Parliament, circa 1919



Figure 5.3 Polska kite logo created by DDB Corporate Profiles, circa 2002. Courtesy Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland

legitimacy by the marketing techniques of corporations. National identity is not like yogurt; it is not a concoction that can be packaged and displayed among identical items in a grocery aisle, differentiated essentially through a process of conscious design and artificial flavoring. We are aware that culture in our time has become thoroughly commodified (Harvey 2001) but whether a nation, with its history, population, systems of practice and belief, material and symbolic structures, and geographic coordinates can be also constructed and conveyed by current branding processes is a more contestable point. Here I want to explore this theme, and to suggest a possibly surprising conclusion: that it is possible to view nation branding not as a new or *necessarily* nefarious process, but rather as a logical extension of a particular way that national (or other territorially bounded) identity has long been construed and communicated in time and space.

Let me explain what I mean by “logical extension.” I mean to refer to two historical trajectories. One charts a way of thinking about community and the terms of belonging to a community that sets up an opposition between nation as ancient and nation as invention. The second trajectory charts a short history of mass communication in the United States that actually trails off in two directions, both of which inform current strains of thought in mass communication theory. My view is that the site of critical thought at which these trajectories intersect suggests that the phenomenon of nation branding can be understood historically and as part of previously existing social and cultural practices. Note that by “logical” I do not mean necessary or desired or beneficial. I simply mean to show that there is continuity in this way of thinking and that this phenomenon may be seen as representing a current stage of this pattern of thought.

My intention in this chapter is not to account for the full range of ideas of communication over time which may have led to the concept of branding, nor the full range of ideas of community in space which may have led to thinking about national identity. Rather I am interested in examining a *particular* way in which the ideas of community and communication have come together to create and convey a shared existence. The goal is to establish a dialectical setting for the topic that widens the scope of argument about its perceived role in contemporary society. Certainly, there are vast implications for cultural specificity and nationhood in the context of such conditions. These remain to be examined later in the chapter.

Nation as brand

To begin, we must gain purchase on the concept of a nation brand. What is nation branding, and what claims do its proponents make about the relationship between a nation brand and national identity?

Spain is considered the “success story” of nation branding (Gilmore 2002), and most countries now contemplating the process look to Spain as proof that it works. In the late 1970s, the democratization and decentralization of

the country's institutions were part of Spain's aim to raise its population's standard of living and create new ties to the rest of Europe following the demise of the Franco regime. Aside from the major changes in political structure, the next twenty-five years saw revolutions in the areas of cultural production (the Bilbao museum, the films of Almodovár, the fashion of Agatha Ruiz de la Prada), architecture (Santiago Calatrava's Telefónica communications tower, the Velodrome by Esteve Bonell and Francesc Rius, the Agbar skyscraper), economy (the revitalization of cities through increased spending by the public and private sectors on infrastructure and institutional and tourist advertising; the privatization and transnationalization of Spanish multinational companies such as telecommunications group Telefónica, oil company Repsol, and Unión Fenosa) and international attractions (the Barcelona Olympics, the 1982 Soccer World Cup, the 1992 Seville International Expo). Accompanying these changes was a national promotional program, initiated in the early 1980s, which stamped virtually all of the country's innovations with a colorful logo (Figure 5.4).

The logo and the impact it came to have on the national imagination are widely considered to have been instrumental in the "repositioning" of the country. Once an impoverished and isolated nation emerging from dictatorship, the country now put forward an image of an effective democracy and a cultural and cosmopolitan destination. Indeed, the logo symbolizes Spain's entry into modernity. In particular, Spain's economic development has been widely celebrated. In 2004 the *Economist* noted that Spaniards "have seen their economy grow faster than the European average for nearly ten years." As of May 2005, Spain was the second most popular tourism destination in the world, a position it has held since at least 1990. Its market share of international tourism arrivals (the percentage of international tourists visiting Spain) has hovered near 11 percent in Europe and 7 percent globally (Ivars 2004, World Tourism Organization 2005). The Tourism



Figure 5.4 Spanish Tourism Institute
"Sol de Miró" logo. Courtesy Dirección
General de Turismo

Impact Index, which “measures the direct economic effects of the international tourism industry in the economy,” more than doubled in Spain between 1990 and 2004 (World Bank 2004).³

Of course, the very idea of “repositioning” is loaded with irony when referring to a place. Is it even possible to redraw the coordinates of a place – if not in geographic terms, then in ideological ones? Recent writing around the topic of branding and identity has been divided over its significance in the context of wider political and sociological trends. Some highlight this relationship as symptomatic of the waning power of the state to impose and maintain a uniform sense of identity (Billig 1995, Woudhuysen 2004, Klein 2000, Van Ham 2001) in democratic societies. According to these analyses, the legitimacy of government and other public institutions as purveyors and protectors of the cultural specificity of nationhood declines as ongoing processes of globalization, which operate according to the economic logic of capital flows, produce and reinforce cultural homogeneity. Nationally imagined identity is thus compromised by producer-consumer patterns of identification, which override political and administrative boundaries in favor of a “free market of identities” (Billig 1995: 133). In this context, corporate “branding,” a process of assigning unique identification by consciously highlighting certain meanings and myths while ignoring others, is increasingly justified by governments as a means of promoting national identity while encouraging the economic benefits necessary to compete in a globalized world: tourism, trade, investment, and job creation. The criticism of this phenomenon is obvious enough: by selling themselves, these countries are selling out, as their governments hand over their exercise of authority in the jurisdiction of culture in exchange for a position on the newly drawn map of mass politics, transnational institutions and global economies.

Other commentators, most noticeably those involved in the marketing consultancies and public relations firms themselves, identify the phenomenon of branding a nation as nothing more than a manifestation of the ways cultural affiliation and social cohesion have always been formed and practiced. Their argument goes something like this: Branding is coterminous with the shaping and reshaping of identities in symbolic ways, ways used by nations throughout history. The term merely reflects the most efficient strategy in the current capitalist context, in which “consistency” and “coherence” are key factors in the formation and maintenance of identity. In other words, corporate techniques of valuation to differentiate products in competitive realms have been proved effective; is it not then appropriate to apply these methods to nations, which are currently striving to articulate their unique identities in a widening sphere of global knowledge and competition?

One of the most vocal proponents of this point of view is branding consultant Wally Olins. In an opinion piece in the *Journal of Brand Management* he describes the “violent” reaction he encounters when discussing branding as an effective means of communicating national identity. He cites the

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criticism leveled by the Sorbonne academic Michel Girard, who insists that a country carries “specific dignity” and cannot be branded like a product. Olins’s reply encompasses his view:

The France of the Revolution was a completely different entity from the France of the Bourbons. Not only was the traditional nobility exiled and dispersed, the royal family executed, a republic proclaimed, religion excoriated, and an entire social and cultural system turned on its head but every little detail changed too. The tricolour replaced the fleur de lys, the Marseillaise became the new anthem, the traditional weights and measures were replaced by the metric system, a new calendar was introduced, God was replaced by the Supreme Being and the whole lot was exported through military triumphs all over Europe. In other words the entire French package was changed. You may not like the term, you may prefer to talk about a new or reinvented nation or state, but if revolutionary France was not a new brand I do not know what is.

(Olins 2002: 242)

Since the days of the French Revolution, Olins goes on to argue, the branding and rebranding of France has continued apace, to match the shifts in leaders, republics, and political regimes. “Each time the reality has been modulated the symbolism has changed with it. And each time France has presented a new version of itself both internally and to the outside world” (2002: 243). From this point of view, nation branding does not itself attempt to correct or mitigate a nation’s reality; rather, it acts as the “symbolism,” the “package,” or the *representation* of a new social and political reality. Olins concludes that the disjuncture between his own view and that of Girard or other critics is brought about by semantics (it is merely the term “branding” that raises ire), snobbery (“nations should not seem to be associated with any activities in which commerce is engaged”), and ignorance (academics deny that businesses, like nations, also create loyalties, and that they rely on “very similar techniques to those of nation-builders” to do so). In sum, Olins argues that, if the term has commercial origins, the practice does not (2002: 241–248).

Here I intend to examine the claims made by Olins and other proponents of nation branding, to investigate the ways in which the phenomenon can be understood as part of a longer historical trajectory. Olins suggests that “branding has moved so far beyond its commercial origins that its impact is virtually immeasurable in social and cultural terms” (2004: 14). If we are to accept this proposition, we need to investigate the nature of these social and cultural terms, to derive some working conclusions about the impact of branding on the practices and beliefs of a given community.

Gastronomy, geology, or banality?

The title of Anthony Smith's 1995 article, "Gastronomy or Geology? The Role of Nationalism in the Reconstruction of Nations," brackets a way of looking at the history of ideas concerning the origins of national identity. Are nations and nationalism primordial or provisional? Universal state of ancient origin or self-conscious creation and re-creation? Defining nationalism along this spectrum seems to depend on what we see as inherent and inevitable in human nature and what we see as brought into being by various social and cultural formations; it is in a way the age-old debate of nature versus nurture. Herder, for example, saw community formation as a "basic human need." Isaiah Berlin paraphrases Herder's view: "To belong to a given community, to be connected with its members by indissoluble and impalpable ties of common language, historical memory, habit, tradition and feeling, is a basic human need no less natural than that for food or drink or security or procreation" (Berlin 2001: 12). Some theorists of nationalism see it as a natural and universal phenomenon. Gellner, for example, offers the position of certain theorists who see nationalism as always having existed, though at times in a dormant state. In this view, "the 'nations' are there, in the very nature of things, only waiting to be 'awakened' (a favorite nationalist expression and image) from their regrettable slumber, by the nationalist 'awakener'" (1983: 48). Smith describes the position that sees the nation as "historic deposit," where the idea of nation is formed by layers of knowledge embedded in the strata of earlier social formations (1995: 12). This view claims that the nation of Israel today, for example, is invested with the historical meanings of Israel from previous eras. In its current incarnation, Israel is still and will always be beholden to its ethnic heritage (Smith 1995: 12).⁴ Though the idea that nations can be "perennial" like this has been largely discounted by academics, according to Smith, Israel is one of the important examples of how this form of belief can contribute to the battles waged over nationhood in the twenty-first century.

At the other end of the nature–nurture spectrum are the theorists who see the nation as a product of invention, imagination, and ongoing reconstruction. Benedict Anderson's definition of nation as an "imagined political community" is well known: "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1991: 5–7). We can also look to Craig Calhoun's observation that nationalism never exists apart from the discourse that constitutes it. Nationalism as discourse is "the production of a cultural understanding and rhetoric which leads people throughout the world to think and frame their aspirations in terms of the idea of nation and national identity, and the production of particular versions of nationalist thought and language in particular settings and traditions" (1997: 6). Seeing the nation as a product of such "social engineering" (Smith 1995: 3) opens up the possibility that

even the rituals and symbols of tradition so vital to a nation's sense of history and community can be manufactured. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) documents a series of symbolic and formalized rituals that we tend to think of as drawn up from a distant past but that are in fact invented much more pragmatically – and much more recently. Hobsbawm notes that the thirty-year period before World War I saw the invention of several traditions, such as public ceremonies, monuments, and holidays. These new “traditions” symbolized the emergent political and social realities. In this period of intense social change, “social groups, environments and social contexts called for new devices to ensure or express social cohesion and identity and to structure social relations.” As Hobsbawm points out, “there is probably no time and place with which historians are concerned which has not seen the ‘invention’ of tradition in this sense” (1983: 4).

What we start to observe is that no matter in which camp we locate ourselves, whether we prefer the theory of nation as a product of social engineering or as historic deposit, each rests on four architectural pillars of praxis: rhetoric, image, symbol, and ritual. But if both camps rest on the same foundational pillars, this causes the axis of debate to shift: rather than trying to locate nationalism along the spectrum of ideas from ancient to invented, we might better understand the debate if we frame nationalism as a strategy for nation-building that can present itself as either ancient or invented to advance certain ends: systems of belief, political goals of determination or legitimacy, or economic incentives.

This allows us to reframe the discussion at hand. Rather than asking, “What is national identity?” we might instead ask, “What does it mean to claim to have a national identity?” (Billig 1995: 61) That is, rather than interrogating the idea of national identity as something that is either “always already there” or pure invention, we need to ask, what does it mean to see oneself as having a national identity, as being proud to be American or British or Canadian?

This is the question sociologist Michael Billig poses, and it allows us to introduce a third term into the debate over the nature of national identity. The title of his book, *Banal Nationalism* (1995), refers to a “collection of ideological habits (including habits of practice and belief) which reproduce established nations as nations . . . Daily, the nation is indicated, or ‘flagged,’ in the lives of its citizenry. Nationalism, far from being an intermittent mood in established nations, is the endemic condition” (Billig 1995: 6). What banal nationalism suggests is that nationalist activity does not occur in a heightened moment of attention. It is not an outpouring of feeling which is summoned in times of need or passion. In Billig's view, nationalism is reproduced and reinforced daily in established Western nations, in ways that function primarily because they do *not* capture our attention. Banal nationalism is not a flag vigorously waved in a spirit of national pride; it is the flag hanging on the front of a post office building (1995: 8). Thinking along the

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lines of banal nationalism allows us to imagine how rhetoric, symbol, image and ritual display the nation in seemingly innocuous ways. The earlier discussion of Spain illustrated this. Its cultural production in the realms of art and architecture, film and fashion, sporting and other international events provide daily, visible, yet ordinary manifestations of a nation's enterprise, neatly summed up by Spain's colorful logo. The creation and implantation of symbols and images allow us to form standards of taste, in order to critique, distinguish, and differentiate one culture from another. When these symbols and images are constructed by authoritative forces, they assist in the formation and recognition of the self as a member of a particular culture. And when these symbols and images are constructed by branding and marketing firms, with their adeptness at creating consistency and coherence, backed by financial clout and their practiced art of persuasion and pervasiveness, their potential is indisputable. Consider the following argument from a short document prepared by the chairman of the international branding firm Interbrand:

Principles of branding apply in equal measure to countries as they do to corporations . . . Creating a branding program for a country demands an integration policy that most countries do not possess – the ability to act and speak in a coordinated and repetitive way about themes that are the most motivating and differentiating a country can make. Which countries bother really to understand and act on this? The identification of key issues is an emotionally charged debate as who can really decide whether tradition or radicalism is the more motivating?

(Brymer 2003)

According to this text, nation branding has two constitutive features: an “identification of key issues,” or an assembly of particular rituals, images, and symbols that situate the nation somewhere along the spectrum from “traditional” (ancient) to “radical” (invented); and an “integration policy,” a uniform discourse that communicates this composite structure in a cohesive and efficient way. Of course, neither of these features is unique to nation branding; the discourses and practices of legitimacy have long been assembled and communicated by authoritative forces. The question that arises here is the nature of such authority. What does it mean to have the authoritative forces of national identity located in private enterprise? If allegiance to the flag presumes an acknowledgment of government as the locus of authority, does the nation brand suggest a shift in allegiance to the authority of private enterprise and expertise in the maintenance of the nation? Or is this, too, part of a more profound historical pattern? This brings us to the second trajectory we intend to examine.

Communication as expertise and communication as culture

At this point I wish to tie the ideas of nation we have been examining to a second trajectory of thought that will allow us to see nation branding as a logical extension of earlier ideas and practices. If the nation can be seen as a collection of different rhetorics, images, symbols, and rituals operating at different moments in time and in a variety of spaces, we need to look at how branding, as a form of mass communication, functions to maintain and perpetuate the nation through time and across space. I will summarize here a version of the story of mass communication's evolution in the United States that draws heavily on the ideas of James Carey. Carey's story relates two independent currents of thought, one derived from liberal theory in the United States, and one from German counter-utilitarian theory, which have been instrumental in forming current ideas of mass communication.

According to Carey, mass communication in American society was not a cohesive concept in the nineteenth century (1996: 27). The liberal-utilitarian theory that dominated at the time saw mass communication (at that time essentially newspapers) primarily in terms of its ability to procure freedom of expression, especially the freedom of public opinion, against the political and institutional forces that might undermine it. As Carey explains, "When the entire public was conceived as a rational body engaged in discussion through printed media, the press was directly involved in the formation, maintenance, and expression of liberal society" (1996: 27). The early twentieth-century offspring of this idea is represented by Walter Lippmann, whose 1922 book *Public Opinion* is considered by Carey to be "the originating book in the modern history of communication research" (1996: 28). The book was written following Lippmann's experience working for U.S. President Woodrow Wilson during World War I. During this time Lippmann wrote the first draft of the "Fourteen Points" peace program and accompanied President Wilson to Versailles to participate in the peace negotiations. Beyond his disappointment at the outcome of the negotiations, the scene he observed there upset him immensely. For Lippmann, the "pathetically limited education" of the assembled officials, combined with the perceived threat of the peace process to their established ways of life, led to pandemonium at the conference. Rumour and gossip spread like wildfire, and Lippmann felt that the issues at hand became irrevocably distorted. Lippmann concluded that intelligent and informed public opinion was not a feasible project. The only way to ensure democracy, in his view, was to assemble a small team of experts, whose intellect and mastery of events would ensure democracy for the general public. He observed:

The burden of carrying on the work of the world, of inventing, creating, executing, of attempting justice, formulating laws and moral codes, of dealing with the technique and the substance, lies not upon public opinion and not upon government but on those who are responsibly

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concerned as agents in the affair. Where problems arise, the ideal is a settlement by the particular interests involved. They alone know what the trouble really is.

(Lippmann 1925)

For Lippmann (and later, Harold Lasswell and Edward Bernays, whose work on propaganda would give new meaning to the idea of mass communication), communication was about disseminating ideas to the public, not engaging them in dialogue. Moreover, the “inventing, creating, executing” of the “technique and the substance” of political life should be relegated to the domain of private, specialized interests (quoted in Carey 1996: 29). The experts in Lippmann’s day were scientists, whose claims to neutrality and objectivity seemed to form the rational calculi of knowledge on which society ought to draw. Yet these views also form the foundations on which the contemporary industries of advertising and public relations are built. Indeed, in our day, the role of the expert appears to be filled by the chief executives and decision-makers in the corporate sphere, where the “identification of key issues” and the devising of “integration policies” provide the means to ensure the legitimacy and rationality of communication. Let us look again at remarks on the subject of nation branding by Interbrand’s chairman:

The business of country branding is deeply serious, starting with the example of the Romans, it’s always been with us. Those who employ professional skills with a determination to measure, evaluate and communicate can achieve outstanding economic results. With over twenty-five years of brand consulting behind us, Interbrand would go so far as to say that a well-engineered program has the potential to transform fortune and create a lasting value for the country. It cannot, as a consequence, be the property of one administration and it must as a consequence have the ability to outstrip political issues to focus on significant and compelling aspects of differentiation.

(Brymer 2003)

For these experts, the political realm is problematic. Its inherent messiness – diverse and competing interests, struggles over policy and regulation, not to mention the short time spans that government representatives are allowed to remain in office – interferes with the cohesive, coherent images that experts attempt to convey. The perception here is that image differentiation will beget social and political determination; if only those pesky politicians would get out of the way, and leave the “work of the world” to the experts, their mastery will establish the legitimacy of the discourses and practices offered up to the political stage.

At around the same time as Lippmann’s early writing appeared, another current of thought was developing in the United States to address the new social and intellectual problem of mass communication (Carey 1996: 30).

The Chicago School of Social Thought was represented by John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, along with a number of theorists who shared the same intellectual leanings (Charles Cooley and Robert Park, among others). In a way this group represents the antithesis of Lippmann's views. The views of the Chicago School, heavily influenced by the German academic traditions of Hegel, were preoccupied with the central concerns of power, legitimacy, and social cohesion. Thus the problem of mass communication was interpreted by the Chicago School not as the need to ensure freedom of communication but rather the need to examine how social cohesion, control, and power were balanced through communication. As Carey puts it, "They turned from the liberal question – What are the conditions of freedom – to the inverse question – How is it that the social order is integrated through communication?" (1996: 31).⁵ But the conditions in which the Chicago School examined this question were vastly different from those in which the German tradition had previously functioned. The shift from German to American soil, in Carey's view, is at the root of the ideas they fostered in mass communication. The formation of new communities and associations on the American frontier led to new ways of thinking about the nature of social cohesion, shared tradition, and institutional formation. In the absence of previous tradition, kinship, language, or ethnicity, the population of nineteenth-century America had to develop a way to establish a shared reality. Whereas European populations could draw on generations of community structures, in the New World the absence of common language, ethnicity, and background meant these associations did not yet exist. Communication came to be seen as a way of forming community. This view lets us see communication not only as integral to culture but *as* culture, in Carey's terms.⁶ It reminds us of the ways in which identity is practiced in and by communication, as a symbolic and ongoing process of reality-making. Understanding how communication can be substituted for tradition in the creation and maintenance of a collective social imaginary helps us to imagine another way in which nation branding can be situated as a logical extension of these practices.

Identity and innovation: creative destruction

What we start to realize here is that to see nation branding as new is to fall prey to the logic that informs much of modern-day production: that the methods and ideas of our age are continually new and improved, on an endless march of progress toward greater efficiency, power, and capacity. At the beginning of this chapter, Olins was quoted as saying that the choice of a kite as Poland's new logo instead of the national flag was valuable insofar as it represented "a break from the past." Both of these patterns of thought – the progressive march and the break from the past – are part of what David Harvey calls the "myths of modernity" (Harvey 2003: 1). In *Paris: The Capital of Modernity*, Harvey demonstrates how Baron George-

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Eugène Haussman, the civic planner commissioned by Napoleon III in the mid nineteenth century to implement vast reforms on the city of Paris, helped to perpetuate this myth:

[Haussman] needed to build a myth of a radical break around himself and the Emperor – a myth that has survived to the present day – because he needed to show that what went before was irrelevant; that neither he nor Louis Napoleon was in any way beholden to the thinking or the practices of the immediate past.

(Harvey 2003: 10)

Modernity, Harvey says, is a constant process of “creative destruction” (2003: 1), where old ideologies and infrastructures are torn down and new ones instituted in their place. The term *creative destruction* is usually credited to Schumpeter. His landmark text on economy and society, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, describes capitalism as a kind of virus, moving from commodity to commodity and technology to technology in an “industrial mutation,” revolutionizing from within in a constant quest for new bodies of competition. This process was integral to the “history of revolutions” of the modern age:

So is the history of the productive apparatus of the iron and steel industry from the charcoal furnace to our own type of furnace, or the history of the apparatus of power production from the overshot water wheel to the modern power plant, or the history of transportation from the mailcoach to the airplane. The opening up of new markets, foreign or domestic, and the organizational development from the craft shop and factory to such concerns as U.S. Steel illustrate the same process of industrial mutation – if I may use that biological term – that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one. This process of Creative Destruction is the essential fact about capitalism. It is what capitalism consists in and what every capitalist concern has got to live in.

(Schumpeter 1942: 82–85)

For Schumpeter the “creative destroyer par excellence” was the entrepreneur, whose desire for constant innovation in social and technological realms were instrumental to progress (Harvey 1990: 17). The idea of creative destruction is actually borrowed from Nietzsche, who used it to portray the dual nature of the human essence: “Whoever must be a creator always annihilates” (Nietzsche 1968).⁷ Understanding the term creative destruction as infused with the ideas of Nietzsche and Schumpeter allows us to understand its dual meaning: creative destruction can refer both to markets and to myths; and in both physical and aesthetic realms. We can view the creation and

promotion of a new image of nation as its own form of creative destruction, in which old myths and memories are swept away and new ones instituted in their place. The aura created is even, at times, more valuable than the physical reconstruction. This is another way of conceiving nation branding as more than a recent corporate invention. In branding lingo, the work of undoing and rebuilding an image of a product is sometimes called “deconstruction” and “reconstruction.”⁸ The entrepreneurs, always looking for new spaces and strategies, expand their markets and methods. Globalization is this process of expansion writ large. Value can be affixed to a locality through the deconstruction and reconstruction of the locality’s aura through branding techniques.

If nation branding can be seen as the creation of value (or value-added, in corporate terms) by private “creative destroyers,” we need to understand how this value gets extracted for the benefit of these enterprising types. We can observe this practice through the category of *monopoly rent*, a term borrowed from the language of political economy by Harvey to demonstrate its significance in cultural and social contexts, or, in Harvey’s words, to “generate rich interpretations of the many practical and personal dilemmas arising in the nexus between capitalist globalization, local political-economic developments and the evolution of cultural meanings and aesthetic values” (2001: 394–395).⁹ Monopoly rent, in a social and cultural context, is the modeling of difference, authenticity, and uniqueness of a “tradable item” in the interest of acquiring surplus value and profit. Those who control this resource can extract “rent” from those desiring to use it for its “unique,” “authentic” and “non-replicable” qualities. The owner of a unique work of art, for example, can charge considerable amounts for the privilege of viewing it; or exact a high price when selling or trading it. Monopoly rent can apply equally to a geographically defined space, not by directly trading it, of course, but by “trading upon” it through marketing practices (Harvey 2001: 395). This is the *raison d’être* of place-based branding, a process which constantly seeks methods to make a particular region appear more attractive than that of its neighbors. Each place brand boasts more luxurious hotels, better food, more pristine natural settings, whiter sand on its beaches, and so on. But as Harvey points out, the category of monopoly rent contains a vital contradiction.¹⁰ Although uniqueness and particularity are crucial to the rate of monopoly rent, the commodity cannot be so unique as to be outside the realm of tradability. In other words, in order to function as a commodity, the item must have a price, which presents its value as exchangeable rather than as truly authentic or unique. To maintain these terms of exchange, the number of categories in which to display uniqueness is restricted to accommodate the perceived desires of those wishing to visit or invest. As Harvey says, “the more easily marketable such items become, the less unique and special they appear” (2001: 396). Here is a simple example to demonstrate this phenomenon. Below are the introductory texts from the tourism websites of five locations throughout the world. Each of the websites

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chosen is endorsed by the government-sponsored tourism board of the locality. For the purposes of comparison I have removed the geographic names but left the rest of the text intact. As we will see, the texts suggest there is little difference from one place to the next, though they are located at diverse spots on the world map and have vastly different histories, cultures and social environments:

You can find more or less everything in (LOCALITY): alpine mountains, wide beaches, clean lakes, deep forests, world-class historic monuments, and friendly people. The climate is temperate, and the people warm and hospitable. (LOCALITY)'s cities with a thousand-year history invite their visitors to encounters with culture, and (LOCALITY)'s villages and small-time towns offer the opportunity to get away from the bustle of modern life. And all this comes with a backdrop of breathtaking natural landscapes, because (LOCALITY)'s greatest attraction is nature. Wild, untouched, more diverse than in most countries either in Europe or the world and, what's more, easily accessible.

(Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Tourism 2006)

(LOCALITY)'s beauty is intertwined with a colourful history, rich culture and the renowned friendliness of its people. From the wild and rugged beauty of the (MOUNTAINS) and the majesty of the (NATURAL LANDSCAPE) to the magnificent (LAKES), one of the most unspoilt landscapes in (CONTINENT), the six counties: (COUNTY), (COUNTY), (COUNTY), (COUNTY), (COUNTY) and (COUNTY) are just waiting to be discovered and offer a wide range of activities, from horse riding and golf to fishing the unspoilt waters in beautiful places. Golfers can get into the swing on the windswept dunes of world championship courses at (VILLAGE) and (VILLAGE), and enjoy the unparalleled challenge of lesser known links courses at (VILLAGE) and (VILLAGE). Indeed for such a small place, (LOCALITY) is bursting with things to see and do.

(Tourism Ireland 2005)

Whether you are an art and history buff, an archaeology nut or a nature lover, enjoy browsing through markets or going diving, the different regions of (LOCALITY) offer endless possibilities all year round. Each area has its own personality, history, landscape and even cuisine, and with so much on offer to visitors it is not surprising that one trip to (LOCALITY) is never enough. Surrounded by four different seas, (LOCALITY) is a beach paradise with over 8000 km of sunny strips of sand. It also has an abundance of plant and wildlife species that can be enjoyed while camping or trekking in the many national parks which are dotted around the country.

(Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2006)

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The closest seaside resort area to (CONTINENT), (LOCALITY) has a sun that shines almost all year round; its great and historic museums, its natural sites of great beauty, its natural parks and the reserves; its large rich fauna and flora, the warm welcome of its population resulting in the constant increase in the number of tourists each year interested with the discovery of the internal richness of the country, the encounter with the inhabitants, customs and habits of the local population and a real contact with the diverse cultures.

(Senegal Tourism Bureau 2006)

Experience why (LOCALITY) is one of the most special places on earth. Immerse yourself in our culture. It's as vibrant as our art, as unique as each sunset and as diverse as our people. Truly a nation "out of many, one people" (LOCALITY) is a multifaceted mosaic of international customs and traditions.

(Jamaica Tourism Board 2005)

It is all too easy to imagine that these texts were written by the same hand. It is also abundantly clear what is perceived as attractive to the visitor: natural settings, cuisine, the friendliness of its people. The key term in these texts, it should be noted, is diversity – the irony being that, as each place markets its own brand of uniqueness and diversity according to the same criteria, there is less and less of it to be found. Branding applies the logic of best practices in business – efficiency, consistency, and coherence – to keep competition operating on a restricted scale. It symbolically flattens the social, cultural and physical topography that makes a place inherently unique, then reshapes it until it fits into preordained market categories. Here the expression "creative destruction" attains its full meaning.

Branding and the national imaginary

Up to this point, I have attempted to situate nation branding as a logical extension of earlier practices and discourses that constitute national identity. Here I want to introduce a second register to my hypothesis. Although in many ways nation branding can be seen as a logical extension of older forms and practices of nationhood, the phenomenon is qualitatively different from other conceptions of nation in some important ways. It would be spurious to suggest that nation branding has somehow replaced or superseded other forms of loyalty to the nation. But I think it is possible to say that it constitutes a barometer of some of the challenges facing the nation-state and the collective sense of identity in the contemporary era.

For some, as I discussed briefly above, an unmistakable shift has taken place. International relations scholar Peter Van Ham argues that the use of branding techniques to create and promote national identity represents a

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“shift in political paradigms, a move from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the postmodern world of images and influence” (2001). Not only are concerns over image and reputation taking pride of place in a state’s administrative agenda, he asserts, but nation branding is a tool that, well used, can defuse the antagonisms of nationalist agendas:

[The] preference for style over substance is increasingly shaping Europe’s political landscape, affecting even NATO and the European Union (EU). Although no doubt unsettling to conservative thinkers, this is actually a positive development, since state branding is gradually supplanting nationalism. The brand state’s use of its history, geography, and ethnic motifs to construct its own distinct image is a benign campaign that lacks the deep-rooted and often antagonistic sense of national identity and uniqueness that can accompany nationalism. By marginalizing nationalist chauvinism, the brand state is contributing greatly to the further pacification of Europe.

(Van Ham 2001)

For Van Ham, national loyalty can be replaced by brand loyalty, since branding is merely a modern, peaceful incarnation of more incendiary forms of nationalism. What to make of this proposition? Can we observe a transformation in allegiance from the Polish flag, with its “nationalist, military and political connotations,” to the Polska kite, with its “joyful, modern” evocation of commerce and leisure? Or is the new logo merely an innocuous encouragement to outsiders, a package that conveys wealth and prosperity to foreign eyes, but that does not affect its internal contents?

To address this question, we need to consider the distinction between the discourses and practices that constitute the nation and national identity internally, among its citizens, and the discourses and practices that present the nation in an international context. These are not mutually exclusive categories. Both are basic to the development and maintenance of national allegiances; but they are not, and indeed by definition cannot be, the same. Though the substance of local and regional actions and engagements is critical to maintaining a sense of national identity, nation-state boundaries operate in part to organize communities on the scale and scope required for transnational interactions and global markets. It is in this sense that Calhoun says that the idea of nation is inherently international (1997: 93). Nationalists, decision-makers and other arbiters of national identity are thus faced with an ongoing dilemma: they cannot ignore without consequence internal differences at the local level; but they must prepare an external discourse that presents a united front in order to engage with other nations. And this external discourse has consequences for internal activities. Referring to the late twentieth-century reconceptualization of China in a world system of nation-states, Calhoun writes: “To use the international rhetoric of nationalism to claim local self-determination was not only

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to commit oneself to representing local distinctiveness in internationally recognizable terms. It was also to make the local nation a token of a global type, to construct it as equivalent to other nations” (1997: 94).

How to reconcile these two integral components? Local distinctiveness is one thing; but local distinctiveness in an international context is quite another. When local difference is set up as a “token of a global type,” it is largely, and fundamentally, determined by economic interests. Though the end result may be to foster exchange in political or institutional infrastructure, public or consular diplomacy, or human rights and understandings, equivalency becomes a question of substantively determining equal offerings in trade, foreign affairs and investment. Goals of interaction are interpreted through economic exchange. Here the category of monopoly rent slides more clearly into view. “All rent,” Harvey reminds us, “is a return to the monopoly power of private ownership of any portion of the globe” (2001: 397). Market processes in a capitalist economy operate according to the terms of this monopoly. A contradiction arises when the uniqueness, authenticity, and difference of a tradable item is modeled for the purpose of capital gain, because these differences are channeled through restricted zones to allow private producers to maintain their monopoly. When national identity is conceived in economic terms, as it is in an international context, it contains the same contradiction.¹¹ The struggles, contention, and conflict that characterize national distinctiveness are risky to the international discourse; they must be contained if channels to trade, tourism, and diplomacy are to remain open. Let us return to the case of Spain to grasp the complexities of this issue. Spain’s Miró logo is considered emblematic of the Spanish nation. But we are not surprised to learn that the unity conveyed by this symbol is in many ways disconnected from the country’s political and social realities. For centuries, Spain has been characterized by both its distinct linguistic and cultural identities and the struggles waged to maintain them.¹² Today the federal boundaries of the Spanish nation-state contain seventeen “autonomous communities,” each with its own rules and desires of self-governance. Spain’s sense of itself is as a series of nations within a nation, and its pluralism is a source of ongoing debate (“Second Transition” 2004). Ironically, the brand symbol itself is representative of this complexity. Certainly, using the figure of Miró as a metonym for Spain’s distinctiveness as a nation is fitting, as no other country can claim Miró as its own. But while Miró might say “Spanish passion” and “artistry” and “liberty” to the rest of the world, his biography reveals fundamental tensions with his **home-**land. The region of Catalonia claims him as its own, calling him the “Catalán genius”; to use him to symbolize the whole of Spain might be seen as problematic in this regard. It is potentially even more problematic when we consider that the artist was deeply ambivalent about his roots: in his early career, Miró’s work was unappreciated in Barcelona. He spent much of his artistic life in Paris and the United States. Today, most of his artistic production is housed in museums and galleries outside Spain, a reminder

– at least to those who live there – that he was not always such a congenial ambassador (“Artist Miró” 1993, Rowell 1986).

Clearly, there is a fundamental difference between internally generated and externally communicated conceptions of nation and national identity. These dual conceptions are not contained within a nation brand and logo. When the nation is conceived as a unit of economic exchange, a nation brand functions as a handy symbol of external, economic viability. But if we want to conceive of the nation as an ethno-historical project, as a palimpsest of discoveries and interpretations of the past, as a site of ongoing contention and struggle, as a receptacle of heritage, or as a multiplicity of identities – all of which make up a nation’s distinctive culture – then conceiving nationalism in terms of a brand identity is a lopsided and necessarily partial project. Branding is not a new “package” that can represent the changed social and political realities of a nation. Neither can it be appraised as a shift in political paradigms from geostrategic articulations of power to the more ephemeral influences of image management. Rather the phenomenon must be seen as an intervention into the social and cultural fabric that constitutes the nation, one which challenges our “social imaginary” (Taylor 2002). In Taylor’s terms, the social imaginary is “that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (2002: 106). This is more than a theoretical conception. It has to do with the way we navigate through the world, and the way our experience structures our common understanding of how the world works and how we want it to work: “It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations that we have of one another, the kind of common understanding which enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life” (2002: 106).

As Taylor points out, the modern conception of Western society and the polity has been since the seventeenth century fundamentally economic, in both the metaphorical and the pragmatic senses of the term. Metaphorically, because the modern era has been characterized by a sense of equality, exchange, and mutual benefit, a view that countered the premodern, hierarchically structured social order; and pragmatically, because prosperity and economic wealth in modern societies has become a central and collective concern. From the outset of this new moral order, “governing elites gradually became aware that increased production and favorable exchange were key elements of political and military power” (2002: 103).¹³ This modern view of society as a network of mutual benefit and exchange is now so deeply engrained in our social imaginary, Taylor notes, that we have trouble imagining society in any other way.

Seen in this light, nation branding may reflect a certain political and social reality of our time – not necessarily the best or most desired reality, but one in which economic power is valued above other forms. Certainly this appears to be the case in the international context. If the eagle on Poland’s fifteenth-century flag commanded a sort of subjectivity to the hierarchy of the military or monarchic order, the modern-day kite in the Polska logo appears to signal

our existence in a community of equals, with a prosperous economy and a democratic nation achieved through the principles of mutual exchange and benefit. The difference, perhaps, lies in the products of such exchange. If flags set up nations as equivalents in war and diplomacy, brands and logos set up nations as equivalents in commerce and leisure.¹⁴ Yet this is not the crux of the issue. The larger debate needs to center not on what the nation brand reveals about a nation but on what it obscures. What are the consequences when “real” differences – historical practices, cultural memories, conflict and disparity among classes, ethnicities and forms of belief – are subsumed by the conscious differentiation of the place brand?

At the outset of this chapter I suggested that there had been a shift in our time from political to postpolitical representations of identity. It might be more accurate to describe a twinning of political and postpolitical representations to create a totalizing picture of a nation and what it stands for. Can we deny that Spain’s Miró logo is at least as familiar a marker of national identity as the country’s flag, if not more so? Which symbolic forms might become most legitimate remains to be seen. For the moment, my intention is to help us consider what it means to conceive of branding as an effective means of creating and communicating national identity. First, we need to shake off the hasty assumption that branding is inherently superficial, tawdry, or just plain bad, especially if we are to understand its role in the production of social relations and the changing practices and beliefs of a culture. Second, we need to abandon the idea that it represents a waning of the longstanding antagonisms of nationalist sentiment. It is false to imagine that nation branding is responsible for eroding the relevance of politics, erasing our systems of memory, or collapsing history into ruins. The proof of this, if there can be such a thing in this context, is that at a time when the current phase of capitalism leans precipitously toward globalization and the reduction of spatial and temporal barriers, and when branding represents the apex of efficient and coherent communication, nationalism and nations are assuming greater roles than ever before. Anderson is categorical: “The ‘end of the era of nationalism,’ so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” (1991: 3). Though our traditions may be invented, our memories selective, and our identities formed and reformed by forces and relations we cannot predict, our desire to maintain, communicate, and perpetuate the nation across time and space marks our existence in a form we seem unable to forget.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, the website <http://www.1uptravel.com/flag/flags/pl_royal.html#wj> which provides an extensive history of flags in several countries. According to this source, the red-and-white banner in fact existed as early as the twelfth century, but King Jagiello was the first to brandish it as a flag.

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- 2 This is a very partial list. For further information on the branding of the countries mentioned, see Ad Council 2002, de Vicente 2004, *Branding Romania* 2004, Fraser et al. 2003, Lindsay 2000, Ivars 2004, Preston 1999, Hall 2002.
- 3 See Harvey 2001 for a discussion of this perspective as it relates to urban entrepreneurialism, where collaborations between corporate and state entities give rise to the development of city infrastructures and bids for Olympic Games, sports teams, and arts and cultural incentives as part of an effort to attract visitors and investment. I am greatly indebted to the discussion in this text in the argument I am making here.
- 4 See this text for a considerably expanded and much more comprehensive version of this debate.
- 5 Jeff Pooley puts it in a slightly different way: "The so-called 'problem of order' has preoccupied much thinking about society, especially the nascent European sociology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The point has been to answer what Talcott Parsons later dubbed the 'Hobbesian question': Why isn't society a 'war of all against all'? How is a stable social order maintained, and why do we come together to cooperate in the first place? . . . Western Marxists latched onto the Hobbesian question too, but turned it on its head: How are the working classes integrated into societies that remain fundamentally exploitative? How . . . does capitalism reproduce itself over and over? In place of other social theorists' fixation on 'the problem of order,' these Marxists took up the 'problem of consent'" (Pooley 2001).
- 6 See Carey 1989.
- 7 See Reinert and Reinert's discussion (2006) of the relationship of Nietzsche to Schumpeter, and to Werner Sombart.
- 8 See, for example, Lodge 2002.
- 9 In many ways monopoly rent resembles the idea of aura advanced by Walter Benjamin in his seminal essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." I have chosen to use the category of monopoly rent here because it strikes me as better suited to the particular features of geographic space and the economic determinism of those who control it in branding processes. Perhaps we can conceive of monopoly rent as a kind of geographically specific aura.
- 10 Harvey in fact identifies two major contradictions in his category of monopoly rent. The second contradiction is related to the first: the significance of uniqueness can be measured not only in terms of marketability but also in issues of legitimacy and relevance in the politics of national identity. If monopoly rents rise in proportion to the degree of uniqueness and non-replicability of the nation being branded, then the promotion of a place as culturally distinct opens up the potential for political and social claims of distinction as well. I discuss this second contradiction in Aronczyk, "Place as Brand: Lessons from Two Canadian Cities," European Science Foundation Conference Proceedings, Linköping University E-Press, 2007.
- 11 Again, see Harvey 2001, who makes this argument in terms of urban entrepreneurialism, in particular regarding the case of Barcelona and its accumulation of collective symbolic capital at the expense of collective memory.
- 12 And of course, these struggles are not relegated to history textbooks. On 23 March 2006, the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA, or "Basque Homeland and Freedom"), finally declared a permanent cease-fire, after carrying out terrorist acts within Spain for nearly forty years, killing over eight hundred people in its stated desire to achieve self-determination for the Basque region (McLean 2006).
- 13 See also Hirschman 1977 (whom Taylor cites) and Colley 1992, among others, who offer excellent expositions of this argument.
- 14 I am greatly indebted to Craig Calhoun for his contribution on this topic; the insight here is his, not mine.

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