CHAPTER 23

BRANDING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN AN UNEQUAL WORLD

MELISSA ARONCZYK

This chapter looks at how inequality and status differences are maintained through the branding and marketing of place. In keeping with the sociological idea that culture is not just a static set of objects but is dynamically revealed through social practice (Calhoun and Sennett 2007), I focus here not on the place-based brands themselves but on the work of place branding—the mediation of value by intermediaries who create, format, and manage a market-based imaginary of place as part of their professional lives. Such intermediaries can include location consultants, tourism offices, heritage site administrators, investment promotion agencies, ratings agencies, and media companies.

Intermediaries engaged in the promotion of place play a constitutive role in the cultural economy. Investigations into the cultural dimensions of economic practices have taken a number of forms. Scholars have considered, among other themes, the globalization and diversification of cultural forces and flows (Appadurai 1990); consumption as a cultural or ethical practice (Miller 1995); the performativity of economics (Callon 2007); the cultural impact of economic information practices (Wherry 2012); and culture as an economic resource for development (Yúdice 2004). Pryke and Du Gay (2007) define cultural economy as "a variety of approaches to the analysis of economic and organizational life which exhibit a shared focus on the heterogeneous ways in which objects and persons (firms, markets, consumers) are 'made up' or 'assembled' by the discourses and *dispositifs* of which they are supposedly the cause" (340). This definition recognizes the distributed role of power in economic and cultural arrangements. It can encompass an ethnographic approach to economic life, such as that contained in Cochoy (2007), but it also points to the interrelationship among social, spatial, and material factors in organizing our everyday habits of thought and action, and in the potential of all of these factors to reinforce unequal social relations.

Brands are a compelling expression of the cultural economy, an "assemblage" in their own right (Lury 2009). Brands are economic devices to manage risk and assert ownership.

They are also cultural forms, in that they are always products of their environment; they are inherently undefined spaces that use culture to build meaning. Celia Lury (2004) calls brands the "logos" of the global economy, referring to the meaning of logos not only as symbols and slogans but also as the "kind of thought or rationality that organizes the economy" (5). Brands are designed to simultaneously represent economic value and cultural values. They are both quantitative—economically valuable for their owners, monetizable on company balance sheets—and thoroughly qualitative, a cultural expression of distinction and reputation.

The phenomenon of nation branding is particularly rich as a topic for investigation because of the historical, political, and symbolic value of the nation concept. National identity, while a socially constructed and contingent analytical construct, is nevertheless "felt" by its members as a unique, permanent, and deeply inspiring attachment. The metaphor of nation as home and of personal identity as closely tied to national origin persists in intellectual reasoning, economic decisions, literary genres, and media treatments (Morley 2000). Regardless of the historical or political uses to which national identity has been put, the power of this symbolic resource to appear as a primordial or innate set of beliefs and attachments is not to be dismissed (Calhoun 2007).

When joined to the "discourses and dispositifs" of branding, the nation concept is interpreted through principles of market-oriented strategy and coordination, and this seems to reveal its thorough "inventedness" and its capacity for commodification (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). I suggest that there is more than commodification at work. "Branding" the nation involves a reorganization of symbolic and material practices that modifies the cultural boundaries of what gets to be called "national." The cultural theorist Homi Bhabha, writing about the nation form, describes the potential for hybrid or alternative identities to emerge in this boundary work: "What emerges as an effect of such 'incomplete signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated" (Bhabha 1990:4). In the nation-branding paradigm, however, where the boundary work is largely given over to market considerations, political and cultural negotiations are subject to the rules of economic transaction.

Nation branding is justified by its proponents and practitioners as a fairer and/or more sustainable effort by governments and private organizations to capitalize on national assets. In this frame, national culture offers both domestic and foreign populations a natural, essential, and unique identifier, a set of symbolic resources that belong equally to all members of the national society. These symbolic resources—collective narratives, affective attachments, dedicated rituals, expressions of loyalty and pride, external reputations—are presented as potential sources of economic wealth for nations, cities, communities, and regions. It then appears "right" and "necessary" that this wealth potential ought to be exploited to appeal to consumers, tourists, investors, and other interested populations. In its ability to marry tropes of heritage and modernization, domestic and foreign concerns, and market and moral ideologies in the projection of national identity, a nation's brand appears to be a highly rational yet meaningful way to unite culture and economy.

The tourism industry, for example, makes considerable use of cultural resources such as heritage, local traditions and rituals, or biodiversity (e.g., eco-tourism) to promote territorial distinction and affective connections for consumers. Marks indicating unique conditions of emergence, including geographical indicators like country-of-origin certifications (think of Champagne or Parmigiano cheese), link goods and practices to their territories not only for reputational purposes but also for the enforcement of cultural and intellectual property regimes (Coombe, Ives, and Huizenga 2014). Such cultural assets can then be commercialized and internationally exported as place-based goods or services that are unique by virtue of their country-of-origin designation.

For a range of market actors, including national governments, corporations, and transnational investment agencies, such symbolic resources are believed to provide developing countries with a leg up in the international marketplace. Though countries all over the world engage in nation branding, the practice is most often promoted as a form of economic development for less developed regions on the basis that it gives them a more level playing field to compete with their counterparts and succeed in the ongoing competition to attract globally footloose capital. One of the arguments in this chapter is that the "level playing field" perspective is highly misleading. There are a number of reasons why this is so.

First, as Centeno, Bandelj, and Wherry (2011) have observed in the realm of tourism, nation-branding efforts are not only strategic markers of "fitness" for global capital needs but also social performances where countries attempt to manage domestic and international impressions of their "true" nature. In so doing, some places expressly seek hierarchical positions above, at, or below those of other countries, searching for a position that will best display their chosen meanings, symbols, and rituals in a way that corresponds to expectations both within and outside their homes.

Second, the "level playing field" metaphor does damage to our recognition of the severe structural and material divisions between low- or middle-income territories and their high-income counterparts. On the one hand, tourism receipts are the primary driver of economic development in low- and middle-income countries (Bandelj and Wherry 2011:4). On the other hand, tourism narratives can reinforce problematic stereotypes, hollow out local community, or redirect investment away from local projects to more high-profile or tourism-oriented ones. Every place has an origin story, and this story can be marketed as a differentiating feature of attraction to international consumers. But the story is contingent on multiple factors out of its narrators' control. Moreover, the narrative possibilities are extremely limited in scope when the objective is to advance economic well-being.

Third, the exigencies of capital and material needs can sometimes trump any sophisticated branding or marketing initiative when it comes to site selection. For instance, when a multinational company seeks an American city in which to locate its headquarters, the Chamber of Commerce, city planners, and marketers may develop a branded strategy and a set of promotional narratives to invoke cultural diversity and quality of life, but it is typically structural factors like preferential tax rates and cheap real estate that determine the decision (e.g., Bloomberg 2017).

Does this mean that branding is mere window dressing, a sheer surface covering the more solid infrastructural, institutional, and political-economic factors that determine the status of place? To the contrary, researchers are continually surprised by the degree of attachment people feel to the stories, symbols, and values that make up place-based brands. Rather than seeing immaterial and material features as opposed to one another in their own hierarchy of value, the argument advanced here is that symbolic and material systems are co-constitutive in the production of place. As Centeno, Bandelj, and Wherry (2011) put it, "collective emotions, meaningful narratives, and the accomplishment of meaning through marketing and consumption are not dismissed as secondary to the 'real action' of material exchange but are central to understanding how the material realities, and inequalities, of the global marketplace durably regenerate themselves over time" (46; see also Alexander 2003).

To understand how branding interacts with material considerations to inject value(s) into place, we need to take a sociological look at the actors whose very raison d'être is to create and manage these values. Focusing on the process of valuation rather than the value itself allows us to reflect on culture as a set of practices; that is, as "the integration of social organization, social action, and the production of meaning" (Calhoun and Sennett 2007:5). This approach also connects to recent studies in the sociology of worth, which interrogates how economic activities are made meaningful. In other words, to understand the *market* for nation branding, we need to understand the *marketing* of nation branding.

In the next section I briefly review some aspects of the transformation in scholarly thinking about market intermediaries since the 1960s, from an information economy approach to a more cultural approach rooted in the sociology of worth. At the heart of this transformation is an attempt to reconcile the constitutive role of trust and reputation in market transactions, a role that microeconomics has tended to discount until relatively recently. I then consider some recent work on the material and structural lopsidedness of place-based consultancies. The "uneven geography" of location consulting is one explanation for the inequalities that persist in the branding and marketing of place. The chapter then discusses how market intermediaries in the realm of nation branding promote intangible benefits such as trust among investing actors and build their reputation as experts. Branding consultants strive to balance their cultural and economic roles through practices that demonstrate explicit links between national identity and material advantage. At the same time, they look for ways to promote their own unique position as advisors whose counsel bestows an additional dimension of value. Through this portrait, we may see how market intermediaries maintain status differences and inequality among their national clients. Despite the heterogeneity of values, behaviors, and allegiances that may constitute national identity, the enforced rationality underlying branding practices reinforces a distinct hierarchy of values. And despite the claims to uniqueness that branding consultants advance, the advice offered is strongly homogeneous. This further reinforces a status divide as not all places will benefit from the nature of this homogeneous information.

Why Market Intermediaries? From the Information Economy to the Sociology of Worth

In microeconomic approaches to market transactions, a prevalent argument for the use of market intermediaries such as nation-branding consultants is to reduce search costs by providing relevant information about the decision or transaction at hand. The economics of information paradigm focuses on the means by which the fundamental asymmetry of information between seller and buyer is resolved in the marketplace (Stigler 1961). The basic premise is that information has economic value; yet there is always uncertainty as to the quality of that information. Advertising is the obvious intermediating solution; but even then, the rationalizations required to posit advertising as a streamlined means of information provision puts this paradigm through a number of contortions. Not all consumers require the same types of information; and not all kinds of information are even comparable, let alone of similar quality. For decades, a key issue with this paradigm was that "quality has not yet been successfully specified by economics, and this elusiveness extends to all problems in which it enters" (Stigler 1961:224).

More recently, considerable research has sought to address the quality uncertainty of economic transactions in the market. Building on Stigler, Akerlof (1970) sketched a more complex portrait of information asymmetry that includes the problem of quality variations, with reference to his now-famous "market for lemons." Realizing that variations exist both in the quality of the product and in the quality of information provided for market decisions, Akerlof gives us a prototype of the importance of symbolic resources such as reputation in market transactions. What would come to be called the "new economics" of uncertainty and information was reflected in the work of Hirshleifer and Riley (1976) and Phillip Nelson (1974, 1975). These texts introduced concepts of signaling and screening to account for non-content-based understandings of information in the marketplace (Spence 1981). *Signaling* refers to the idea that different types of information convey status and/or suitability for different market decisions. For example, levels of education can signal an individual's aptitude to succeed in the job market. Advertising offers a kind of signal as well, sometimes by its sheer existence: "Quite apart from any informational *content* of such promotion, the essential message being conveyed is that *the product is worth advertising*" (Hirshleifer and Riley 1976:11).[1] *Screening* (Stiglitz 1975) is a closely related function conferred by, for example, certification processes, or other means of "labeling," to indicate quality (Spence 1981).

In the next wave of economic studies of information, economists like Williamson (1993) brought in the question of trust, bringing in social relations as a feature of economic organization. In debating the role of trust against "calculativeness," however, he found the former wanting. For Williamson, professor of business, economics, and law at

UC Berkeley, "the relentless application of calculative economic reasoning" will always yield superior results in decision making than will "the elusive notion of trust" (453).[2]

With the emergence of the economics of convention (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) and sociology of worth (Stark 2009) approaches, the seeming opposition of calculation and trust is addressed head on. Stark sought to reconcile economy and society by demonstrating the thorough interpenetration of value and values. If economic transactions appear to be characterized by an attempt to constantly mitigate uncertainty, Stark sets out to demonstrate that uncertainty is in fact a structuring feature of all market transactions.

What is the importance of this transformation for the way we think about market intermediaries? Marketing texts have described the role of the "middleman" in market coordination and distribution for over a century (e.g., Shaw 1912). But economic arguments about the role of information in market transactions, even when quality of information was considered, retained a focus on the information without tending to the information *brokers* and their role in creating and managing this information. Recent work on the performativity of marketing and branding has tried to rectify this lack of attention to the agents engaged in information practices. The contributions in Callon (1998) explore the ways that economic forms and concepts are not only socially constructed but also shaped by the cultural and moral backgrounds of their interlocutors. Nation-branding consultants are engaged in active processes to manage and even instantiate markets for the consumption of qualities. As Lury (2004) writes, "it is through the use of information about the market, both about competitors but also, crucially, about consumers, that the discipline of marketing has come to play an active role in the (ongoing) production of markets" (17).

Stark (2009) suggests that the true role of the intermediary is not (merely) to broker information, in the sense of filling "structural holes" (Burt 2000) in networks of relations, but rather to exploit uncertainty for self-sustaining ends. Intermediaries (Stark calls them "entrepreneurs") manifest an "ability to promote productive friction" among competing or complementary valuation systems. This self-sustaining aspect of the consultancy profession will be explored a little further on in this chapter. First, I draw on some recent work in critical geography to demonstrate the limits of the information economy paradigm in the contemporary context. This work highlights the "uneven geography" of place-based consulting and reveals a series of paradoxes that ultimately render information economy approaches unhelpful in making sense of nation branding.

The Uneven Geography of the Location Consulting Industry

One reason the information economy model persists is its seeming applicability in conditions of information overload in the digital era. In the context of hypermediation and unprecedented production and circulation of information, the role of intermediaries in sorting and classifying this information becomes vital for clients planning to make consequential economic decisions.

This is the starting point for Phelps and Wood (2017a, 2017b) in their empirical study of the role of location consultants in reducing search costs for multinational companies in their site selections. By standardizing, codifying, and classifying information about a site decision, location consultants help to make different locations commensurable as well as demonstrate the value of their work. While an environment of increased access to multiple sources of information (e.g., online) might make it seem as though such intermediaries are less relevant, in fact their presence is essential to sift through the mountains of information and provide the "right" details for the most rational and well-informed decisions (Phelps and Wood 2017a, 2017b).

At the same time, Phelps and Wood identify a number of paradoxes in the information economy model. As we have seen earlier, not all information is equal. Information varies wildly in terms of source, quality, detail, accuracy, relevance, audience, timeliness, and availability. For this reason, information gathering by intermediaries is necessarily partial. Moreover, information that is gathered for analysis is subject to processes of judgment, evaluation, and approximation according to professional codes of conduct. Which information is made meaningful by intermediaries for their clients is precisely the "added value" that consultants are supposed to offer. Yet it is important to remember that this information-sorting process is provisional; and it is not always relevant to the transaction. At times the judgment of which information is most relevant may correlate to the intermediary's performance of value.

Phelps and Wood offer valuable insight into how the location consulting industry itself is unevenly developed; and of how this lopsidedness impacts the potential of practices such as nation branding to "level global playing fields" for capital accumulation. In principle, foreign direct investment is motivated by capital needs, and globally footloose capital may come to rest anywhere in the world. In this paradigm, the role of the location consultants is to review all information (which is supposedly available in equal measure from all available world locations) about sites and produce the best results. But this is not how it works. Phelps and Wood consider three structural challenges.

First, "some of the largest incentives are offered in the most transparent and developed markets" (Phelps and Wood 2017b:4). Knowledge of place begets knowledge of place. Location decisions are made (sometimes competitively) on the basis of other location decisions, either in a prisoner's dilemma format or in an aggregation format. For instance, if a major multinational company is already located in a particular American city, this is the information that may be more readily available to other multinational companies, prompting them (a) not to locate there to avoid competition; or (b) to locate there to take advantage of the existing infrastructure and aura. Indeed, the infrastructure aspect is important, because location consulting requires other professional services to be in place as well: real estate brokers, investment banks, venture capitalists, information technology providers, and so on (Phelps and Wood 2017b:8).

Second, certain locations are popular investment choices regardless of available information about those locations. As one of their interviewees described, "with India and China . . . the labor cost differential was so compelling that it just made people think we need to be there" (Phelps and Wood 2017b:9). The oligopolistic attraction overcame the available information.

Third, site selection in emerging markets is rarely undertaken for the same reasons as site selection in more developed markets. A good deal of the foreign direct investment in Africa is undertaken on the basis of resource seeking and resource extraction (Phelps and Wood 2017b:10). This means there is far less opportunity for the location consulting industry to develop there, and that there will continue to be far less information available about alternative reasons to invest in Africa. As the authors write, "despite much attention from international organizations in the sphere of reform of FDI policy and regulation and despite the growth of national IPAs [investment promotion agencies], this particular continent seems likely to remain largely off the map in terms of the location consulting industry" (Phelps and Wood 2017b:10). Add to these considerations the regional and geopolitical commitments underlying international lending practices and investment firms, and it becomes clear that the idea of a truly global circulation of information about location decisions is not possible.

The uneven geography of the location-consulting industry undermines the pretense of nation branding as a "leveler" in economic development. In the next section I pursue the investigation into status differences and inequality in nation branding by focusing on the performances of nation-branding consultants.

Evaluating the Transnational Promotional Class

A sociological approach can add multiple dimensions to an information economics approach, notably by asking questions about who is doing the information sorting, what beliefs and values they bring to the task, and how this impacts their classification and judgment. Previously (Aronczyk 2013, 2015) I described the transnational promotional class as a group of promotional agents dedicated to the creation of markets for place. "They do not form a self-consciously composed collective entity but rather operate as a loosely affiliated coalition of actors and institutions who are dedicated to constructing and managing international and domestic public opinion as well as the conditions in which public attitudes and values are sought and collected" (Aronczyk 2015:2012).

Since 2004, when I began studying the phenomenon of nation branding, I have conducted approximately 100 in-depth, qualitative interviews with market intermediaries connected to the promotion of place. This has allowed me to explore the contours of the transnational promotional class in terms of ideological commitments, cultural and moral background, and work product. Recent developments in the industry permit a further exploration of how this group maintains inequality and status difference over time. In the following section, I ask four questions pertinent to this exploration: How do consultants build trust among transacting parties? How do they balance their cultural role with their work's economic function? How do they link national identity and material advantage? Finally, how do they perpetuate "tournaments of value" in a materially unequal world? What follows is a sketch of some of the means by which members of the transnational promotional class interact with their national clients.

Networks

One key feature of market intermediaries is their ability to connect diverse and heterogeneous worlds; and to use this ability to simultaneously build trust among transacting parties as well as boost their own value in setting up the transaction. There are different contexts in and rationales through which market intermediaries strive to build connections (see below for a discussion of how they connect culture and economy, for instance), but as Burt (2000) has suggested, the ability to network and build connections across "structural holes" in dynamic ways is a vital source of social capital. Indeed, accumulating social capital and trust is predicated on one's ability to broker relationships across different social worlds. While this may seem like a truism in a "postmodern" context of contingent employment, fluctuating identities or subjectivities, and the dramatic effects of social media circulation, its significance for our purposes here lies in how nation-branding consultants rely on this networking ability to maintain authority over cultural information. As Bessy and Chauvin (2013) write, "in a world where information plays a vital role in the accumulation of wealth, informational advantage can be obtained by connecting entities that were previously separated . . . the power of the intermediary consists in the possibility to control the interactions or the networks of separated social actors" (93).

Consultants clearly recognize the value of networking, as is overtly demonstrated in a recent newsletter from the self-described "brand and opportunity strategist" Jeremy Hildreth to his email subscribers:

> In this year-end dispatch, instead of focusing on my own work and travels as I usually do, allow me to introduce you to Matt, Diederik, Parag, and Andy, and inspire you with their swashbuckling efforts. . . . What's in it for you . . . is that I'm on a networking tear lately, and I want to introduce my friends and acquaintances to each other, relevantly and to mutual benefit. I'm very lucky to have a huge, diverse and globe-spanning network. And though I've spent decades accruing it as a byproduct of my adventures, the truth is it's been a too-dormant resource for too long.
>
> (Hildreth 2017)

In introducing us to his sometime collaborators, Hildreth enacts a process of "cultural matching" similar to the one Rivera (2012) describes in her study of hiring practices, in which she shows how "employers sought candidates who were not only competent but also culturally similar to themselves" (1000). Hildreth's peers are "an 'overnight' success" at what they do; they are "no ivory tower pontificator[s]" but rather travelers with "boots on the ground," equipped with "visionary" ideas and "pioneering" approaches to their work. What is clear from this effort is the dual process of building up cosmopolitan, renegade values for both the work itself and the place-based consultants who can perform this role.

The corporate identity specialist Wally Olins, who developed nation-branding campaigns with his boutique consultancy Saffron until his passing in 2014, recounts his career in a 2001 oral history project on fashion, branding, and design for the British Library. His commentary reinforces the principle of the network as social capital: "I'm at a stage in my career where, in the world in which I operate, a lot of people in a lot of places know who I am. I don't like not being recognized and respected. I get invited to big conferences—the Danish equivalent of the CBI [Confederation of British Industry] the other day—about six top people in Denmark. Good stuff and I like that" (Olins 2001).

Rankings

In addition to networking, an important feature of nation branding is for intermediaries to demonstrate their capacity to judge what kinds of information are considered more valuable than others, and to use this information to maintain a hierarchy of value and values. A hierarchy suggests that some "do it better" than others, reinforcing a need for those appearing lower in the hierarchy to engage the services of a market intermediary in order to rise up through the rankings.

Karpik (2010) advances a theory of unique or incommensurable goods, in which he argues that the act of judgment is the key to valuing those goods. What Karpik calls "judgment devices"—certifications, diplomas, professional licensing, awards, prizes, reviews . . . —are at root "trust devices" (71). They allow the evaluator to determine the conditions of evaluation and apply these broadly across categories. In other words, the act of judgment is what renders incommensurable items commensurable (see also English 2005). More than this, the evaluator sets up "regimes of coordination" (Karpik 2010:96) in which "the value of a terrific action movie, a rare vintage, superior jazz, cannot be assessed apart from the equipment that defines and sustains taste and the mechanisms of distribution that make it possible for it to circulate in circumscribed circles" (Espeland 2011:798). By developing the equipment and the circulatory mechanisms, evaluators such as nation-branding consultants assert control over the evaluation itself and the evaluator's unique ability to judge.

A frequently used "judgment device" in the nation-branding consultant's arsenal is the ranking system or index, in which economic and cultural criteria are assembled and sorted by the consultant according to social categories. Categories are typically broad and undefined to permit multiple interpretations by different populations—domestic audiences, foreign investors, tourists, and so on. Simon Anholt, one of the better known nation-branding gurus, has developed a ranking system known as the Good Country Index, which uses United Nations and other established datasets (specific details are not provided) to measure the "behavior" of countries and "their impact on the rest of the world."[3] The function of the Good Country Index, as Anholt describes it, is to measure to what extent the "goodness" of a country can be measured based on its ability to contribute to, collaborate with, or otherwise cooperate with its national counterparts. If international considerations were absorbed into domestic policymaking, he opines, won't this be better for "humanity"?

The basis of Anholt's search for legitimacy lies in his continuous appeals to common sense, which are undergirded by appeals to moral rectitude. "The whole world is connected as never before, yet we still treat countries as if each one was located on its own private planet," he explains. "It's time countries started thinking much harder about the international consequences of their actions; if they don't, the global challenges like climate change, poverty, economic crises, terrorism, drugs and pandemics will only get worse" (*Daily Mail* 2014).

Key to the success of the index is the indeterminacy of its concepts. "All countries, large or small, rich or poor, have nominally got a responsibility to make the world work, and they have to pull their weight in whatever way they can according to their resources" (De Balie 2017). The mystification lies not only in the proprietary nature of the choice of datasets and how their data are used, but also in the types of values and the ways that the circulation of results ensures constant reinterpretation of their meanings. Indeed, using mainstream media as the mechanism of distribution is a technique to not only amplify but also provoke different interpretations of the rankings' meaning. In this way consultants absolve themselves of the charge of favoring one set of values over another.

For instance, Holland topped the Good Country Index in 2016, prompting a wave of self-congratulatory domestic media coverage. In one article in the *Dutch Review*, the author suggests that the stereotype of the Dutch as greedy is overcome by the "reality" of the index (Salomons 2017). In a lecture delivered to a small audience at the Dutch cultural center De Balie in December 2017, Anholt defends his ranking system as a judgment device, displacing his own interpretation of results onto a more "objective" or external moral compass:

> Yes, we're imposing all kinds of 'horrendous' Western values onto this [Good Country Index]. But generally speaking, call me naïve, but I think killing people is wrong and if you kill somebody you should lose a point, and if you send out a doctor to help people in another country, that's right, and you should gain a point. We can fuss about this endlessly but I think, yeah, we managed to do the Declaration of Human Rights so we can . . . manage to find some rough and ready, cultural neutral values that we could all buy into. And then that gives us a series of rankings.
>
> (De Balie 2017)

Balancing Culture and Economy

In the realm of the cultural economy, an ongoing challenge is to reconcile tangible (material, statistical, or economic) factors with intangible (immaterial, "soft," or affective) ones. Place-branding consultants strongly promote their ability to bring together universal features of (national) space with the exclusive features of a particular place. For Phelps and Wood (2017a:6), in their study on site selection by corporate entities, "the intermediary work of site selectors reflects this betweenness of place" as they assemble codifiable data such as labor supply and wage rates with uncodifiable data such as "the look, feel and fit of a community with the business function being (re)located and the corporate ethos and brand" (5–6). For this reason place consultants strongly emphasize their cosmopolitan credentials. Their job is to "translate" between geographical settings and understand how to navigate diverse cultural systems in order to promote those cultural resources that are most valuable to potential consumers.

A project to brand Mongolian textiles for international export reflects these qualities. Funded by the Asian Development Bank and managed by the international development consultancy SOFRECO, the project was part of a government effort to reduce the country's reliance on coal, copper, and gold mining as their primary economic export. Spurred by the formation of the Mongolian National Marketing Coordination office in 2011, a marketing campaign was launched "with the goal of giving [Mongolia's] cashmere and leather the same cachet as French wine and German cars" (Kohn 2013). Jeremy Hildreth was brought in to develop the brand communication. Hildreth worked with a Danish design firm to "adapt" some "authentic Mongolian script" (the calligraphic symbol for "Khan" [King]), and renamed the wool "Mongolian Noble Fibre."

On his professional website, Hildreth explains his motivation for taking on the project: "Yeah, Outer Mongolia, east London, it's all the same to me. If the work's interesting I'll go there." He next demonstrates his knowledge of the country's cultural codes ("So the nomads do this interesting thing when they meet. They exchange snuff bottles and whoever has the bigger, more expensive snuff bottle has rank in this situation") and then offers his clients an inside look at the "magic" he brings to the work: "Gray yak was actually 100 times rarer than cashmere. And I said don't call it gray, call it Mongolian platinum yak and put the price up 50%. Sometimes it's just a little tweak that does the trick" (jeremyhildreth.com).

Conclusion

If the history of advertising can be understood as the gradual acceptance of the profession as a legitimate provider of rational inducements to decision making in the market, this history must also be considered in terms of advertisers' ability to introduce interpretive, cultural, and psychological factors into its legitimating process. This is what Raymond Williams means when he describes advertising as a "magic system"—"a cultural pattern in which the objects are not enough but must be validated, if only in fantasy, by association with social and personal meanings" (Williams 1980:335; see also Lears 1995). All promotional professionals work according to this principle of cognitive legitimacy: the use of persuasive tools, language, and symbols to achieve social and cultural comprehensibility or taken-for-grantedness (Suchman 1995).

Branding elevates these advertising principles by creating associations among different things, offering a mix of magic and rationality. Market intermediaries "bring the outside in"—that is, they use cultural materials to build meanings for the brand; and they use these meanings to justify price. But there are two ways in which this kind of legitimation reinforces status difference and inequality. First, the economic value generated always accrues to its owner, not to those engaged in the service of meaning making for the brand. Forms of "co-creation" or "collaboration" or "partnership" mask the actual ownership structure of branding. Second, even as brands expand the boundaries of what its producers can "own," they narrow the range of cultural forms and practices that are considered legitimate in market transactions.

Branding is best seen as a form of boundary making, a creation of limits as a way to exercise cultural power. A brand is not (only) a portal through which we gain understanding of how a text or product is made to mean. It is a powerful authority, policing, and in many cases articulating, the boundaries according to which its objects acquire meaning.

Notes

1. Italics in original. Ironically, with contemporary luxury goods, distinction is sometimes conveyed through the absence of advertising.
2. Williamson is responding in this article to the Oxford sociologist Diego Gambetta's (1988) essay, "Can We Trust Trust?" Gambetta explores the concept of trust as a precondition rather than a byproduct of cooperation in [market] relations.
3. Mr. Anholt has in recent years restyled himself as a policy advisor. In practice he appears to be a kind of lifestyle consultant for nation-states and their leaders. His previous ranking system, the Nation Brand Index, was wildly popular, emulated by several other consultancies and widely circulated in international media and policy arenas.

References

Akerlof, G. 1970. "The Market for 'Lemons': Quality Uncertainty and the Market Mechanism." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 84(3): 488–500.

Alexander, J. 2003. *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Appadurai, A. 1990. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Theory, Culture and Society* 7: 295–310.

Aronczyk, M. 2013. *Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity*. New York: Oxford.

Aronczyk, M. 2015. “Understanding the Impact of the Transnational Promotional Class on Political Communication.” *International Journal of Communication* 9: 2007–2026.
Bandelj, N., and F. Wherry. 2011. *The Cultural Wealth of Nations*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Bessy, C. and P.-M. Chauvin. 2013. “The Power of Market Intermediaries: From Information to Valuation Processes.” *Valuation Studies* 1(1): 83–117.
Bhabha, H. 1990. “Introduction: Narrating the Nation.” In *Nation and Narration*, edited by H. Bhabha, 1–7. New York: Routledge.
Bloomberg News. 2017. “Philly Makes Its Pitch for Amazon HQ.” September 18. https://bloomberg.com/news/videos/2017-09-18/philly-makes-its-pitch-for-amazon-hq-video
Boltanski, L. and L. Thévenot. 2006. *On Justification: Economies of Worth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Burt, R. 2000. “The Network Structure of Social Capital.” *Research in Organizational Behavior* 22: 345–423.
Calhoun, C. 2007. *Nations Matter: Culture, History and the Cosmopolitan Dream*. New York: Routledge.
Calhoun, C. and R. Sennett, eds. 2007. *Practicing Culture*. New York: Routledge.
Callon, M., ed. 1998. *The Laws of the Markets*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Callon, M. 2007. “What Does It Mean to Say That Economics Is Performative?” In *Do Economists Make Markets? On the Performativity of Economics*, edited by D. Mackenzie, F. Muniesa, and L. Siu, 311–357. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Centeno, M. A., N. Bandelj, and F. Wherry. 2011. “The Political Economy of Cultural Wealth.” In *The Cultural Wealth of Nations*, edited by N. Bandelj and F. Wherry, 23–46. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Cochoy, F. 2007. “A Brief Theory of the ‘Captation’ of Publics: Understanding the Market with Little Red Riding Hood.” *Theory, Culture and Society* 24(7–8): 203–223.
Coombe, R., S. Ives, and D. Huizenga. 2014. “Geographical Indications: The Promise, Perils, and Politics of Protecting Place-Based Products.” In *Sage Handbook on Intellectual Property*, edited by M. David and D. Halbert, 207–223. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Daily Mail. 2014. “The ‘Goodest’ Country in the World?” *Daily Mail.com*. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-2666132/The-Good-Country-Index-Ireland-crowned-goodest-country-world.html
De Balie. 2017. “How Good Is Your Country? With Simon Anholt.” *Video Recording*. https://www.debalie.nl/agenda/podium.
English, J. 2005. *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Espeland, W. N. 2011. “One Singular Sensation.” *Socio-economic Review* 9(4): 795–801.
Gambetta, D. 1988. “Can We Trust Trust?” In *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, edited by D. Gambetta, 213–238. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Hildreth, J. 2017. “Goofballs and Visionaries.” December 16. http://Jeremyhildreth.com.
Hirshleifer, J. and J. Riley. 1976. “The New Economics of Information.” Discussion Paper #74. UCLA Department of Economics, July. http://www.econ.ucla.edu/workingpapers/wp074.pdf
Hobsbawm, E. and T. Ranger, eds. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
Karpik, L. 2010. *Valuing the Unique: The Economics of Singularities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kohn, M. 2013. "Mongolia Offers Cashmere Makers Loans to Cut Reliance on Mining." *Bloomberg News* (April 15). http://Bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-04-15/Mongolia-offers-cashmere-makers-loans-to-cut-reliance-on-mining.

Lears, T. J. 1995. *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*. New York: Basic Books.

Lury, C. 2004. *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy*. London: Routledge.

Lury, C. 2009. "Brand as Assemblage." *Journal of Cultural Economy* 2(1): 67–82.

Miller, D. 1995. "Consumption and Commodities." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 141–161.

Morley, D. 2000. *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*. London: Routledge.

Nelson, P. 1974. "Advertising as Information." *Journal of Political Economy* 82(4): 729–754.

Nelson, P. 1975. "The Economic Consequences of Advertising." *The Journal of Business* 48(2): 213–241.

Olins, W. 2001. The Oral History of Wolff-Olins (Tape 11). *British Library*. https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Branding-design/021M-C1015X0008XX-1100V0

Phelps, N. and A. Wood. 2017a. "The Business of Location: Site Selection Consultants and the Mobilization of Knowledge in the Location Decision." *Journal of Economic Geography*: 1–22. https://academic.oup.com/joeg/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/jeg/lbx016/3888825?redirectedFrom=fulltext

Phelps, N. and A. Wood. 2017b. "Promoting the Global Economy: The Uneven Development of the Location Consulting Industry." *Environment and Planning A. Online First*.

Pryke, M. and P. Du Gay. 2007. "Take an Issue: Cultural Economy and Finance." *Economy and Society* 36(3): 339–354.

Rivera, L. 2012. "Hiring as Cultural Matching: The Case of Elite Professional Service Firms." *American Sociological Review* 77(6): 999–1022.

Salomons, B. 2017. "Dutch People Are Greedy": Good Country Disagrees—Ranks the Netherlands #1." *Dutch Review* (December 12). https://dutchreview.com/news/dutch-news/dutch-people-are-greedy-good-country-index-disagrees-ranks-1/

Shaw, A. 1912. "Some Problems in Market Distribution." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 26(4): 703–765.

Spence, M. 1981. "Signaling, Screening, and Information." In *Studies in Labor Markets*, edited by S. Rosen, 319–358. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stark, D. 2009. *The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Stigler, G. 1961. "The Economics of Information." *The Journal of Political Economy* 69(3): 213–225.

Stiglitz, J. 1975. "The Theory of 'Screening,' Education, and the Distribution of Income." *The American Economic Review* 65(3) (June): 283–300.

Suchman, M. 1995. "Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches." *Academy of Management Review* 20(3): 571–610.

Wherry, F. 2012. *The Culture of Markets*. Cambridge: Polity.

Williams, R. 1980. "Advertising: The Magic System." In *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, 170–195. London: Verso.

Williamson, O. 1993. "Calculativeness, Trust and Economic Organization." *The Journal of Law & Economics* 36(1): 453–486.

Yúdice, G. 2004. *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.