

# Place Branding: The State of the Art

By  
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This article examines the relevance of place branding as a political phenomenon in international politics. After setting place branding in a historical and conceptual context, it maps out the connections between branding and international politics by looking at three examples. First, it examines the challenges facing the European Union to strengthen its image as a global player. Second, it analyzes the efforts of the United States to deal with its collapsing image in the aftermath of its failing “war on terror” and military intervention in Iraq. Third, it examines negative place branding by focusing on the *Borat* movie that upset Kazakhstan in 2006 and the cartoon crisis that erupted in Denmark in September 2005. This article also aims to situate the practice of place branding in a broader analytical context. It argues that place branding is part of a wider spectrum of postmodern power, where soft power and public diplomacy also have their place.

*Keywords:* place branding; public diplomacy; American foreign policy; European Union; soft power; constructivism

In the academic discourse on soft power, the concept of place branding has acquired its proper, although still somewhat awkward, place. Joseph Nye (2004a, 256) has defined soft power as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. . . . Soft power arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies.” According to Nye (2004b, 6), soft power should be considered a significant asset in influencing others, not by using “hard” military power, but by “the ability to attract,” which goes beyond influence or persuasion. Place

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branding can be considered an effort to use strategies developed in the commercial sector to manage, if not necessarily wield, the soft power of a geographical location (Placebrands, <http://www.placebrands.net>; Earthspeak, <http://www.earth speak.com>; Brandchannel, [http://www.brandchannel.com/features\\_effect.asp?pf\\_id=206](http://www.brandchannel.com/features_effect.asp?pf_id=206); Whisperbrand, <http://www.whisperbrand.com/blog/category/nation-place-branding>).

Place branding goes beyond mere slogans or old-fashioned ad campaigns; it involves more than gloss or spin or the placing of a territory on the map as an attractive tourist destination. It is more fruitful to consider a place brand as intellectual property, that is, “the totality of the thoughts, feelings, associations and expectations that come to mind when a prospect or consumer is exposed to an entity’s name, logo, products, services, events, or any design or symbol representing them” (Lindsay 2000). Anything can be branded: water (Perrier), credit (American Express), and computer components (Intel). The same product can be used to develop two very different brands, for example, Marlboro and Virginia Slims cigarettes. But how exactly does *place* branding work, and why is it rapidly becoming such a hotly debated—because still controversial—concept, both amongst policy makers and academics?

This chapter examines the relevance of place branding as a political phenomenon in international politics. It offers a comprehensive overview and critical examination (“state of the art”) of the practice of branding territorial entities (“the art of the state”). Of special interest is the intersection between media, marketing, and brand asset management, on one hand, and the world of international politics, on the other: two spheres with little contact with each other while sharing an interest in concepts such as globalization, identity, values, and power. After setting place branding in its proper historical and conceptual context, I will map out the connections between branding and international politics by looking at three examples.

The first case examines the challenges facing the European Union (EU) to strengthen its image as a global player. The EU is still perceived as a “civilian power,” a notion that forms the core of its institutional identity. But can the EU alter this image—its brand—now that its policies are increasingly in the area of security and defense? Second, this article analyzes Washington’s efforts to deal with its collapsing image in the aftermath of its “war on terror” and military intervention in Iraq. American soft power has been an important foreign policy tool, but it seems to be a casualty of the unproductive use of American military might. Both examples show the predicament of finding a balance between hard and soft power and the relevance of branding. Third, I will briefly examine negative place branding by focusing on the *Borat* movie that upset Kazakhstan in 2006 and the cartoon crisis that erupted in Denmark in September 2005. These two rather diverse cases of negative branding confronted both countries with surprisingly new challenges to manage their reputation and image.

This article also aims to situate the practice of place branding in a broader analytical context. Place branding is part of a wider spectrum of postmodern power, where soft power and public diplomacy have their place. The international

relations theory of constructivism sheds some light on the functioning of place branding, whereas classical political science tools fail to come to terms with its implications for international politics. Concepts like “brand state,” “competition state,” and “postmodern state” are all closely linked to the basic notion that the role and behavior of states (and by implication other territorial actors) is changing. What, exactly, is driving this change is usually clustered under headings like “globalization.” It is beyond the scope of this article to probe the nature of this globalization–brand state link, but it is one of the key research questions that form the academic backdrop of my analysis.

## The Art of the State

Image and reputation may be said to have become essential parts of the state’s strategic equity. Similar to commercial brands, image and reputation are built on factors such as trust and customer satisfaction. Similar to Nye’s soft power resources, a country’s brand is determined by its culture, political ideals, and policies. As we will see later in this article, territorial entities such as countries, regions, and cities are now branded like companies and products. It is well known that the corporate brand has become an essential part of the business identity that helps audiences to identify with a company and encourages them to buy its products and services. In a similar way, branding has become essential to create value in the relationship between territorial entities and individuals. For political scientists, one of the interesting questions is whether place branding also entices people to “buy” the “products” of brand states, that is, their foreign policies.

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The practice of place branding has taken off at a time when the role and power of states (and other territorial actors) are changing. States as well as international organizations (IOs) vie for political authority and loyalty in a dense and highly competitive market, embarking upon a quest for the hearts and minds of people both at home and around the world. The emerging brand state is not a brand new state, but a political player that promotes itself more assertively than before. Just

as religious faith no longer has a monopoly in giving purpose to people's lives, the state can no longer claim the loyalty of its citizens. Patriotism—let alone nationalism—cannot be taken for granted.

Place branding is also required to make a country's image work for its economy and its citizens. Although many places offer the same "product"—territory, infrastructure, educated people, and an almost identical system of governance—they must compete with each other for investment, tourism, and political power, often on a global scale. Globalization and the harmonizing effects of European integration put further pressure on territorial entities to develop, manage, and leverage their brand equity. To stand out from the crowd and capture significant mind share and market share, place branding has become essential.

Global economic forces make developing a good brand more important than ever. Now that the market has moved manufacturing to the developing world where labor is cheap, what distinguishes the West from less developed countries may be the brand labels they can claim, such as "market economy," "stability," "democracy," and "security." States also realize that their political and commercial images and reputations interact as in the so-called "country-of-origin effect" that plays an important role in consumers' purchase decisions (viz., "German cars" and "Japanese cameras"). Since many companies remain associated with their countries of origin, the images and reputations of brands and states tend to merge in the minds of the global consumer. In many ways, Microsoft and Coca-Cola *are* America, just as Nokia *is* Finland (and vice versa).

As these cases indicate, place branding is no static game—quite the contrary. To do their job right, politicians all over the world have to find a brand niche for their state, engage in competitive marketing, ensure customer satisfaction, and—most of all—create brand loyalty. As a result, the art of politics pursued through old-style diplomacy has been shifting to encompass the new art of brand building and reputation management. This logic applies to all economic and political actors around the world, no exceptions.

Numerous professional branding consultants offer their services to states, regions, cities, and IOs, who all doubt whether they can survive the demands of a mediatized global economy without adopting new strategies and tactics. These branding agencies tell their customers that anything for which one can construct a mental inventory, is, in principle, a brand. Their argument is straightforward: "Contemporary brands succeed by getting close to the dreams of their audiences. They promise a better world, and they strive to deliver one. Since nation-states today need to reengage popular support and understanding, they should use the power of branding to deliver a message about their value and values to the widest possible audience" (Wolff Olins n.d.).

Brand managers offer four arguments for why branding is both necessary and beneficial for commercial and political actors alike: (1) Products, services and locations have become so alike that they can no longer differentiate themselves by their quality, reliability, and other basic traits. Branding adds emotion and trust to these "products," thereby offering clues that make consumers' choice somewhat easier. (2) This emotional relationship between brand and consumer

ensures loyalty to the brand. (3) By creating an aspiration lifestyle, branding offers a kind of *ersatz* for ideologies and political programs that are losing their relevance. (4) The combination of emotions, relationships, and lifestyle (values) allows a brand to charge a price premium for their products, services, and locations, which would otherwise hardly be distinguishable from generics (van Gelder 2002).

Although these four branding qualities apply most directly to commercial products and services, political actors find themselves facing similar pressures, particularly since commercial brands compete with states for the allegiance and loyalty, as well as the money, of the customer-cum-citizen. Especially now that public authorities adopt business-speak when addressing citizens—who are often called (if not often treated as) clients—and some companies take on tasks that traditionally fell within the domain of states (like education, policing, and even health care), commercial and place brands become harder to distinguish. As one branding consultant argued, “One simple truth is that governments don’t want to run things any more—whether it’s the railways, the Bank of England or the Health Service. The role of Government today is to inspire rather than control” (Williamson 2001).

These developments also play an increasingly important role in an area where the very idea of branding remains alien: the “high politics” of security. Like commercial brands, we talk about a state’s “personality,” describing it as “friendly” (i.e., “Western-oriented”) and “credible” (“ally”), or, in contrast, as “unreliable” (“rogue state”). Commercial branding gives consumers the means whereby they can make choices and judgments, relying on the brand to guarantee certain standards, quality, and service, and thereby reducing the risk of failures in purchase. Brands are a guide for consumers and citizens facing complexity and information overload. It has become common knowledge that in a turbulent market, brands are critical to customer loyalty, a company’s growth, and ultimately, its long-term survival. Similar assumptions now encourage countries in the development of place branding.

However, it should be noted that countries can also be at the *receiving* end of a branding process. One could argue that states like Iran and North Korea have a negative image in light of U.S. President George W. Bush’s clustering them in an “axis of evil.” America’s active branding of rogue states brings to mind the origins of the word “brand,” which derives from the Texan practice of working cattle on a roundup ground, branding and marking them with the decorations employed by their owners. In a similar way, the marker “axis of evil” brands Iran and North Korea as the “gangsters” of the world community. Where such an image may bring instant stardom for gangsta rappers like Snoop Dogg and 2Pac, it is much more difficult to sell on the political market. As a rule, being “bad” is not cool in international politics, does not reap economic/commercial benefits, and is politically detrimental.<sup>1</sup> Being a failed or pariah state is a label every country can obviously do without.

Place branding should not be viewed as a luxury that only wealthy and powerful states can afford. Middle-sized and small countries are under pressure to join

the “brandwagon” as well. One has to recognize that the *unbranded* state has a difficult time attracting economic and political attention.<sup>2</sup> Why would we invest in or visit a country we do not know, and why would we pay attention to its political and strategic demands if we have no clue what the country is all about and why we should care? Assertive brand asset management may be viewed as central to keeping both a competitive economic *and* political edge. States, regions, and cities now adopt proactive branding strategies in the knowledge that as a strong, attractive place brand, they can charge higher prices, achieve higher profit margins, and expand their market and political share by creating a brand premium. The argument is quite simple. By managing their location’s brand equity, politicians do two things. Externally, they aim at attracting more clients, charge more for their products/services, and generate overall economic/political advantage for themselves. Internally, they are making their citizens feel better and more confident about themselves by giving them a sense of belonging and a clear self-concept. Branding is therefore about both power and identity, and these two sides of the concept should be kept in mind during our analysis.

Philip Cerny’s (1997) concept of the “competition state” is especially relevant here, since it argues that the traditional welfare state reinvents itself as a “quasi-enterprise association.” Cerny claimed that today’s state constitutes the main agency of the process of globalization, driven by its intent to remain relevant to its people. These so-called “postmodern states” now aim at attracting economic activities, thereby making themselves more competitive in international terms. Cerny considered it a paradox that the trend toward the competition state “in turn hinders the capacity of state institutions to embody the kind of communal solidarity or *Gemeinschaft* which gave the modern nation-state its deeper legitimacy, institutionalized power and social embeddedness” (p. 251). The emerging dominance of the competition state certainly undermines the achievement of the communal goals that have constituted the *raison d’être* of the (European) state since the late nineteenth century. The Western competition state now values efficiency over equity; it merits competitiveness over solidarity. By doing so, it utilizes the universal discourse of commerce, which now more than ever dominates the public sphere.

As this article will examine, constructivist explanations of international politics that focus on the role of values and ideas as driving factors obviously play a central role in understanding and explaining the process of place branding. This internal, identity-shaping facet is especially important and represents a unique aspect of place branding. Whereas the concept of soft power asks the classical questions about influence and control, place branding is vital due to its contribution to identity formation. In his book *Trading Identities: Why Countries and Companies Are Taking on Each Others’ Roles*, British branding guru Wally Olins (1999) suggested that global companies are led in the direction of “internal marketing,” a process that is better known under the political guise of “nation building.” He argued that traditionally nation-based companies (like Philips and Toyota) are mutating into multinational, multicultural organizations without clear national roots and mores. Such centrifugal companies require branding as a means of suggesting coherence,

cohesion, and unity. Olins claimed that therefore one of the key targets of the branding process today is internal. Branding gives a sense of direction and purpose to the organization's own staff all over the world, rather than reaching out to the traditional customer audience. Branding, therefore, is not only about "selling" products, services, and ideas and gaining market share and attention; it is also all about managing identity, loyalty, and reputation. This should be understood and kept in mind during the discussion about the relevance for the changing dynamic of international politics. One could therefore see place branding as a crucial and necessary component of today's competition state.

## Place Branding and Postmodern Power

Place branding stands in a long tradition of reputation management, "spin-doctoring," and propaganda. One could label all these different strategies and practices manifestations of social or postmodern power. The main characteristic of postmodern power is that it exercises power (generally considered to be the ability to alter the behavior of others to get what you want), without using coercion and/or payments. As Nye (2006, 11) argued, "In an information age, it is often the side which has the better story that wins. In the recent [2006] fighting in Lebanon, for example, Israel was militarily stronger than Hezbollah, but many observers believe that Hezbollah won because it was better able to shape the post-war narrative."

The notion of postmodern power has come under much criticism. For example, the very idea that states are, or should be, considered brandable entities, unsettles those who believe that their beloved nation should be beyond branding and cannot maintain its dignity as a marketed product. Critics of the concept of soft power further maintain that it has many inherent limitations. Barry M. Blechman (2005, 680) argued that "soft power exists, and may be influenced by governmental choices, but it is more an existential factor in the policy environment than something policy makers can utilize to their advantage." Blechman further claimed that soft power "will never be shaped fundamentally by the government, nor can it be tapped for use in particular situations" (p. 681). This is a serious point of critique, since it is true that policy makers can wield hard power (from economic sanctions to military interventions) but may find it difficult to react in a concerted effort using soft power tools.

Similar criticism has been aired toward place branding. Political analysts remain weary about branding since they find it difficult to connect the intellectual dots between "the state" and the commercial practice of image making and reputation management. It is certainly an issue where most debates produce more heat and confusion than illumination and is therefore in need of more intense academic study. Still, political analysts understand that if countries as diverse as the United States, Finland, and Qatar are actively engaged in it, the practice of place branding must have some relevance to them.

Measuring the success of place branding remains difficult, as does establishing a list of best practices. Still, a few general guidelines have emerged which can be summarized as follows: don't expect rapid and significant success; don't hire overpaid consultants and impose their ideas; don't be too "aspirational" or too simple. It is, however, advisable to consider a place as a corporate brand (like Nestlé, or Unilever, who set a wide variety of products in the market) and not as one simple product. It is also important to distill a place's identity without losing sight of its complexity. Place branding involves multiple stakeholders, often with competing interests; unlike product branding, place branding is seldom under the control of one central authority. What is more, few in government have the skills required to design major and long-term branding campaigns, which is why most place branding campaigns fade away—probably too quickly. Given these problems and pitfalls, place branding consultants are increasingly under pressure to prove, or at least make likely beyond any reasonable doubt, that their efforts have reaped success. This is difficult, but doable. For example, the agency Scholz & Friends has tried to "prove" that its effort to rebrand Germany as the "land of ideas" (which was launched during the FIFA World Cup in Germany in 2006) has been successful (Land of Ideas, <http://www.land-der-ideen.de/>). Another branding consultancy, River Path, has provided a solid assessment of how influential public diplomacy and branding strategies may be (River Path Associates 2007).

In the light of today's place branding frenzy, it is also important to note that place branding has a longer and more mixed pedigree than expected. Images and reputation have been important throughout history, where available media channels have been used as modes of communication. Until quite recently, it was the *lack* of information that shaped people's image of other places, rather than information overload. Germany's perceptions about Russia were shaped decisively in the sixteenth century by diplomatic reports and travel stories about the despotic rule of Czar Ivan IV ("the Terrible") (Kunczik 1997). Since then, Russia's image in Germany has long been that of a cruel and servile people. Russian perceptions of Europe have been equally skewed. As Iver Neumann (1996) has argued, Europe has functioned as a mirror for Russians, reflecting their desires and hopes, as well as their anxieties and fears. This stereotyping (and occasional wishful thinking) influenced cold war politics and perhaps even Europe's present policies toward Russia (and vice versa) (Little and Smith 1988).

Since the world may be understood as a massive and complex communication network with multiple transaction streams (e.g., tourism, business, immigration, etc.), attempts to influence image and reputation are both difficult to achieve and near impossible to measure. Over the centuries, a great many events at the international level have had an indisputable symbolic communicative character, and states have done their best to improve their image abroad for specific reasons. In a world where the state functions as the gatekeeper of the flow of information (as well as the flow of people), propaganda has been standard practice, especially in times of conflict and war. Being part of the soft power family, propaganda can be considered a rather unsophisticated forerunner of place branding. Just as merely selling a product through advertising differs from contemporary commercial branding practices, traditional propaganda is a world apart from today's branding

strategies. Branding's unique qualities, especially the mediagenic creation of emotional ties between the citizen-cum-consumer and the (place) brand, make any comparison with past efforts of image management problematic.

Still, history is replete with vignettes that are reminiscent of place branding. Wally Olins (2002, 241-48) has argued that the French state has undergone regular rebranding exercises, from Louis XIV to the Republic, from the Republic to the French Empire under General Bonaparte, on to the Bourbons and the restored monarchy, into Vichy France and the contemporary Fifth Republic. As Olins claimed, "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 wasn't a new brand I don't know what is" (p. 242). France has changed its colors so often, Olins argued, that "by the time the Third Republic emerged from the ashes of the Second Empire, French politicians had become the world's specialists at branding and rebranding the nation" (p. 244).

Other countries have, although with less regularity and enthusiasm than France, rebranded themselves as well. Ceylon reinvented itself as Sri Lanka, the colonial Gold Coast became independent Ghana, and Southern Rhodesia changed into Zimbabwe. Other examples include the remarkable transformation from the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's modern Turkey and from the USSR to the Russian Federation. In all these cases, the change of political system was accompanied with a change of name, flag and other symbols, as well as basic matters such as clothing style (Atatürk abolished the fez in 1925), and even language. It was not called (re)branding at the time, but the link with place branding is obvious.

As noted earlier, propaganda is part of soft power's historical heritage. The comparison with Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union with their strong logos (swastika, hammer and sickle), slogans, emotive identities, and ideological manifestos raises questions about the risks and drawbacks of these practices. Leni Riefenstahl's movies glorifying Nazism remain so powerful that their distribution is restricted in some countries out of fear that they will still touch people's souls. (Strangely enough, most Soviet emblems have quickly disappeared from our collective minds and sensitivities.) But the conceptual link between propaganda and (place) branding seriously damages the latter's credibility, especially with a wider public. Propaganda in the public mind equals disinformation, lying, and deceiving. And it is an interesting paradox that the concept of "branding" has a rather bad image itself.

Due to this blotted track record, place branding consultants are, almost without exception, subject to much opprobrium. Most notably, Naomi Klein (herself a remarkable antibranding brand), has warned of the emergence of "a fascist state where we all salute the logo and have little opportunity for criticism because our newspapers, television stations, Internet servers, streets and retail spaces are all controlled by multinational corporate interests" (*The Economist* 2001). Place

branding specialist Simon Anholt realizes that the public's suspicion of his line of work is not new and that since the publication of Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), "the population has always been ready to believe that there is something innately corrupt or even sinister about an industry that panders so effectively to people's vanity, aspirations and simple desire to better themselves. Somehow, when these fiendish tricks are applied to something as sacred as the nation-state, insults are heaped on the head of brands, marketers and policy makers alike with references to terms such as 'spin,' 'gloss' and 'lies.' In my own work, helping to improve the prospects of emerging markets through better branding of the country and its products, I am often accused of 'rewriting history,' 'social engineering,' 'exploitation,' 'condescension,' 'neoimperialism' and worse" (Anholt 2002, 229-39).

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These public suspicions gradually subside when we move to the opposite end of the soft power spectrum and consider the aims of public diplomacy. Public diplomacy comes in many shapes and guises but can be brought back to the strategy of appealing to the core values of foreign audiences by using new techniques that are frequently directly derived from commercial practice. Public diplomacy is a relatively new notion and perhaps therefore still more or less untainted by past performances (Melissen 2006; Cull 2007). It clearly is less intrusive than propaganda and lacks the internal identity-shaping functions of place branding. To be successful, public diplomacy—like commercial marketing and public relations—needs to identify target audiences in each country and/or region and tailor strategies and tools to reach these audiences in a variety of different ways. Conceptually, public diplomacy can be compared with place branding since they both combine foreign policy goals with internal soft power strategies and objectives. The challenge of place branding and public diplomacy is to attract and satisfy these two, often radically different, objectives with one, coherent set of images and messages. For both place branding and public diplomacy, a key element is to

build personal and institutional relationships and dialogue with foreign audiences by focusing on *values*, setting them apart from classical diplomacy, which primarily deals with *issues*.

As the case study on the United States will show, America's efforts to reach the hearts and minds of the Muslim world have shaped the discourse and practice of public diplomacy over the past five years. As Richard Holbrooke (2001) argued one month after 9/11, "Call it public diplomacy, or public affairs, or psychological warfare, or—if you really want to be blunt—propaganda. But whatever it is called, defining what this war is really about in the minds of the 1 billion Muslims in the world will be of decisive and historical importance." One can therefore conclude that the theory and practice of place branding is part of a wider discourse that involves propaganda at one end of the spectrum, and public diplomacy at the other.

The following two case studies examine the role of place branding within an international politics realm still dominated by more traditional hard power concerns. The opposing foreign policy styles of the EU and the United States will tease out the different approaches that can be employed. The cases show that the brands of these two key players in international politics are shaped by history and images, as well as their foreign policy agendas and actions. They also illustrate that these brands may change and should be managed. Whereas the EU remains reluctant to take its brand into its own hands, the United States seems more aware of the need for reputation management and more at ease with branding and its foreign policy implications.

## Branding Europe: From Soft to Hard Power

Obviously, the EU is not a state but a community of member states. But like states and regions, international organizations have their own image and brand. Where NATO stands for (military) security, the EU may be viewed as the ultimate affluence brand, radiating material comfort and family values. Since Europe is unlikely to acquire the kind of affection from its citizens that has been enjoyed by nation-states, the EU faces a serious branding challenge in working to develop emotional ties between the citizens of its constituent countries, as well as with the outside world.

The starting point for the EU is certainly promising. Like NATO, the EU has a powerful logo (a blue flag with a circle of twelve yellow five-pointed stars), which is inconspicuously omnipresent across Europe. The EU has a currency named after it, which makes it one of the most frequently used names across the continent ("That will be two euros and fifty cents, please"). The numerous "Euro"-prefixed products and events (e.g., the Eurostar-train, the Euro 2008 soccer championships, the Eurovision Song Contest) make Europe one of the most competitive place brands in the world (van Ham 2005).

The EU may be considered a master brand, offering its name, style, and character to all the policies, events, and ideas it generates. It has a highly visible

identity offering many possibilities to position itself in the competitive marketplace of ideas. As a place brand, the EU stands for the idea of “Europe,” which is associated with a wide variety of concepts and notions, ranging from Christendom and the Enlightenment to the Holocaust and football hooliganism. Historically, the story of *Europa* has been an inspiration for politicians, artists, and entrepreneurs. After summarizing the Greek myth of the captured and raped Europa, the historian John Hale (1993, 48) exclaimed, “What a subject this was! Sex, and violence, seascape, landscape, beauty and the beast, gestures of alarm and affection. In every medium, from painting to pottery, relief sculpture to enamel, the story soared on.”

The European Union’s task is to find a new, postmodern *raison d’être* that inspires its own populace and appeals to the wider world as well, which is where branding comes in. Younger generations are no longer convinced by the myth that “European integration brings peace”; the prospect of another Franco-German war (or *any* intra-EU war) is too ludicrous to serve as Damocles’ sword begetting both discipline and respect. For most non-Europeans, the EU’s influence derives from its affluence, its continuous peace and prosperity. Europe’s younger generations are predominantly postmaterialist, which implies that they are well off enough to highly value tolerance and diversity, and all care more about self-expression than deference to authority. European citizens long for an EU that reflects and stands up for their values, be it gender equality, the abolition of the death penalty, or avoiding market access to genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Branding the EU is therefore a major identity-shaping project.

But it is the EU’s policy *style* that is considered its best asset—what might be called its “unique selling point”—both at home and abroad. The EU is the only international political space in the world where *realpolitik* has been assuaged by a dense network of law, civility, and a commensurate high level of mutual trust. Surely, European political life is not perfect, but for Arabs, Asians, and Africans alike, the EU model may serve as a powerful dream for their own regions (Ortega 2004). For if Germany and France can become friends after fighting three bloody wars within one century, why can India and Pakistan, or Israel and the Arab world, not emulate this remarkable success story? The EU therefore faces a unique opportunity to brand itself as a beacon of civilization and prosperity in an otherwise disorderly and disoriented world.

The EU’s Constitution (which remains in political purgatory due to the Franco-Dutch popular rejection of the treaty in 2005) illustrates that the Union hesitates to formulate clear-cut “European interests.” Instead, the EU prides itself for the normative foundations of its foreign policy. The EU promulgates and defends its basic *principles* (like peace, democracy, and the rule of law), *ideas* (sustainable development and the social market economy), and *norms* (good governance and institution-building). The Constitution summarizes the EU’s global mission as a fighter for and contributor to “peace, security, the sustainable development of the earth, eradication of poverty and protection of human rights and in particular children’s rights, as well as the strict observance and development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations

Charter” (Art. 3.4). Europe’s normative power derives from its ability to shape the notions of what is to be considered “normal behavior” in international politics. Intra-European politics now more resemble “domestic politics” (where order and solidarity are feasible) than classical “international politics” (where anarchy and mistrust are said to roam). In sum, the European Dream is to domesticate global politics.

At the same time, the European Commission makes no bones about its role as a model that other international institutions might—perhaps even should—emulate. In its report *Shaping the New Europe* (2000), the European Commission argued that “Europe’s model of integration, working successfully on a continental scale, is a quarry from which ideas for global governance can and should be drawn.” The EU does not merely stand for good governance (encompassing the rule of law, transparency, democracy, etc.) but also for an alternative to the classical norms of Westphalian statehood (Manners 2002). As Ben Rosamond (2005) argued, “The EU stands—self-consciously sometimes—as a beacon of what it might mean to engage in the post-Westphalian governance of globalization. It is in this sense a normative transmitter to the rest of the world.” So how does the EU think about branding and about using its already existing brand as a policy tool?

The European Commission, and EU Commissioner for Communications Margot Wallström in particular, briefly considered asking the input of brand consultants to evaluate the EU’s image and brand identity. In May 2006, Simon Anholt, one of the leading British brand specialists, was asked to shed light on Europe’s identity and to think through the possibilities of devising a strategy for improvement.<sup>3</sup> But when the story hit the news that the EU was engaged in rebranding, the Commission spokesman immediately denied this idea, calling it “fantastic” (i.e., in the realm of fantasy, rather than great) (Sain 2006).

Rolf Annerberg, Ms. Wallström’s head of cabinet, made it clear that “the EU is a brand but it is competing with 25 national brands. It is very seldom you use them as a unit. The Ryder Cup golf that plays against the US is about the only case” (Bounds 2006). It is already quite something to acknowledge that the EU, and “Europe” in particular, is a major brand to be used as a valuable policy asset. Still, branding plays second fiddle to more conventional communications strategies within the European Commission. In 2006, following the failed effort to enact a European Constitution, Ms. Wallström launched a so-called Plan D—Debate, Democracy, Dialogue, which aimed to reconnect the EU with its citizens using modern media like Internet chat sessions, as well as by recruiting sports and music celebrities as EU ambassadors. The European Commission has even expressed interest in setting itself up in the *Second Life* virtual community (with some 5 million members in 2007) to bring the EU closer to young people and make them more aware of its policies and objectives (see European Commission n.d.; *Second Life* Web site, <http://www.secondlife.com>). Still, member states seem reluctant to create a European masterbrand that may ultimately compete for taxes and loyalty with their own citizens.

Branding is not merely an internal identity-shaping process, since it also aims to boost Europe’s credibility and attractiveness vis-à-vis the outside world. Why

would the world listen to what the EU has to say? Why would others endorse European policy proposals? Now that the EU is transforming itself from a mainly civilian and regional power to a full-blown global player, we should not be surprised that its old image lingers on and no longer reflects today's European reality. Geopolitically, the EU is reaching adolescence and is rethinking its role as a mature, global actor. The EU already is a superpower in areas such as trade, finance, agriculture, and humanitarian aid. As a security actor, the EU is testing the waters with military missions in the Balkans, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Aceh (Indonesia).

The EU therefore faces a serious branding challenge since its foreign policy and its subsequent identity are in flux; the EU is morphing from a regional *Zivilmacht* into a more fully fledged global superpower. But how can this transition be made if both EU citizens and outsiders still associate the Union more with subsidies and trade negotiations than with worldwide military operations? The EU is making an effort to shift its identity from soft power to hard power, which requires a rebranding exercise of major proportions. The European Council and the European Commission are aware of this challenge, but member states remain reluctant to embark on serious rebranding strategies. Still, the most important element of such a strategy would in any case be the Union's new foreign and defense policies, since all branding works on the premise that actions speak louder than words (van Ham 2006).

Interestingly, the EU and United States confront each other not only in the Ryder Cup, as Mr. Annerberg claims, but also as foreign policy actors with often conflicting agendas and sharply contrasting foreign policy styles. But whereas the EU is moving from soft to hard power, the United States is making the opposite shift.

## Brand USA: From Hard to Soft Power

After having won the cold war, the United States neglected place branding for a decade, presumably in the belief that its own societal model was no longer seriously challenged by an ideological competitor. The events of 9/11 have been a rude awakening to the fact that this societal model remains vulnerable and that continued efforts are required to neutralize critics and sway skeptics. Place branding and public diplomacy are now seen as the keys to making up for a decade of complacency by reinvigorating America's unique and underutilized soft power.

In America's new quest for sympathy and support across the globe, media, public relations, and marketing specialists are no longer a sideshow to traditional, government-to-government diplomacy. The brand thinking and brand asset management that now dominate American life have come to affect the nature and dynamics of U.S. politics as well. Former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell famously defined American diplomacy as follows: "We're selling a product. That product we are selling is democracy" (*Foreign Policy* 2001). A clearer illustration of a brand-dominated U.S. diplomacy is hardly imaginable.

American place branding is a complex phenomenon aimed at conveying U.S. commitments, goals, and intentions in the world through a wide variety of means and channels. The social construction of the US as a political/strategic brand is evident. The U.S. brand radiates cultural superiority, political power, and military dominance. In many ways, Mickey Mouse, Madonna, and Brad Pitt are on-screen role models for an America that not only overpowers the hearts and minds of people around the world but also one that sets the global political and military agenda.

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Richard Haass, formerly the U.S. State Department's director for policy and planning, has argued that his country should assume "the role of international sheriff, one who forges coalitions by posses of states and others for specific tasks" (Haass 1997). The moral basis of U.S. sheriffhood is not merely abstract values (like individual liberty and democracy) but also the packaging and visual imagining of these values in Hollywood epics such as *Pearl Harbor* and *Saving Private Ryan*. It is frequently argued that hard and soft power are at odds, as if hard-nosedness detracts from attractiveness. Indeed, soft power can be defined as the ability to achieve the policy outcomes one wants by attraction and persuasion, rather than by force and coercion (Nye 2004b). Hard and soft power, however, go hand in hand since America's popular culture "writes" and imagines the United States as a superpower. In a way, the U.S. practice of global intervention is enabled by America's superpower brand.

As Cynthia Weber (1995, 5) has argued, "The form of a justification in effect participates in the constitution of both the state as a sovereign identity and the interpretive community to which the state's justifications are directed." Weber further claimed that "intervention is understood to be the flip side of sovereignty," turning "sovereignty and intervention [into] the boundary of a sovereign state's authority." The bottom line is that "to speak about intervention practices is to imply the existence of sovereign states. . . . [O]ne way to assert the existence of something (sovereignty) is to insist upon the existence of its opposite (intervention)" (pp. 18, 19, 27).

It is little surprise, therefore, that much of global anti-Americanism feeds on the image of the United States as a trigger-happy capitalist crusader. The trend of mounting anti-Americanism within Europe, Asia, and other parts of the world

is an element of that same process (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2007). Opinion polls conducted by the German Marshall Fund and the Pew Charitable Trusts (GMF Transatlantic Trends, <http://www.transatlantictrends.org>) indicate that America's image has declined precipitously in most European countries due to Washington's foreign policy conduct after 9/11. For example, more than 80 percent of the populations of Germany (83 percent), France (85 percent), and Spain (81 percent) disapprove of U.S. foreign policy—only in countries like the Netherlands (60 percent) and Poland (36 percent) is popular displeasure and distrust less pronounced. And as the Pew Report of 2007 pointed out, "The U.S. image remains abysmal in most Muslim countries in the Middle East and Asia, and continues to decline among publics of many of America's oldest allies." Today, just 9 percent of Turks and 30 percent of Germans have a positive view of the United States.

Place branding and public diplomacy are widely seen as an essential tool to win over the hearts and minds of foreign audiences and convince them that their values, goals, and desires are similar to those of the United States. Since 9/11, the Bush administration has therefore initiated several initiatives to rebrand the United States from what might be viewed as a "global bully" to something akin to a "compassionate hegemon." In an effort to touch ordinary citizens of Muslim countries (and especially the so-called Arab street), public diplomacy is considered crucial to exercising America's ample soft power assets. The argument is that "millions of ordinary people . . . have greatly distorted, but carefully cultivated images of [the United States]—images so negative, so weird, so hostile that a young generation of terrorists is being created" (Beers 2003). U.S. policy toward the Muslim world is based on the assumption that these negative ideas should be neutralized and, in the end, changed by a focused effort of branding and public diplomacy. This approach has quickly become a central plank of America's "war on terror." Washington now realizes that you cannot kill ideas with bombs, however precision-guided they may be.

Regardless of its attitude toward branding, Washington's foreign policy seems to follow Machiavelli's dictum that it is far better to be feared than to be loved, and better to compel than to attract. But how valid is the claim that the (successful) use of military (hard) power generates the requisite (soft) power of legitimacy? Looking at today's Iraq and the dismal standing of the United States in public opinion polls across the Middle East, the opposite argument seems more likely, namely, that ostentatious (hard) power play simply eclipses low-profile public diplomacy. For the United States, it has proven difficult to brand itself as a force for good and democracy, with stories about torture and human rights abuses in Abu Graib and Guantanamo hitting the headlines of newspapers all over the world. Marketing experience has learned that it is more important to *show* than to *tell*. For U.S. branding, this implies that America's performance on the global stage will speak louder than any smooth words it may voice simultaneously. Only one conclusion can therefore be drawn, namely, that (as Simon Anholt has also argued), "You can't smash them with your left hand and caress

them with your right. If you're going to war you should suspend diplomacy because if you're attacking a nation that's all there is to it" (Lewis 2003).

## Being Branded: From *Borat* to Mohammed

In November 2006, the movie *Borat, Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* hit American cinemas. The film was distributed by 20th Century Fox and opened first in the box office in the United States, taking in \$26.4 million on a limited release of 837 screens in its first weekend. Following the major controversies the film raised, the release was widened to 2,566 screens the following weekend, becoming a major blockbuster in the United States and Western Europe. The controversy centered on the main character of the movie, played by British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen. In the film, the actor poses as a fictional Kazakh journalist traveling across the United States to make a documentary to bring back findings for "benefit of glorious nation of Kazakhstan." The movie makes the audience believe that Kazakhstan is a backward and anti-Semitic country. Although the main goal of the movie is to show how easily ordinary Americans go along with his racist, homophobic, and sexist jokes, the country of Kazakhstan comes across as a boorish place, the armpit of the world, so to speak.

*Borat* was widely acclaimed, and Cohen received the 2007 Golden Globe for "Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture—Musical or Comedy." However, for a country like Kazakhstan, bearing the brunt of all the hilarity, *Borat* was anything but funny. Kazakhstan, although the size of Western Europe, was basically unknown to most people in the West, and their first "information" about the country came from watching *Borat*. How does a country react when people are made to believe that their people are addicted to drinking horse urine, enjoy shooting dogs, view rape and incest as respectable hobbies, and take pleasure in pursuits like the "running of the Jew" festival?

Kazakh officials reacted nervously and took serious offense. Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry spokesman Yerzhan Ashykbayev told a news conference that Cohen's behavior was deemed "utterly unacceptable, being a concoction of bad taste and ill manner which is completely incompatible with the ethics and civilised behaviour of Kazakhstan's people—We reserve the right to any legal action to prevent new pranks of this kind." Ominously, the spokesman further claimed that "we do not rule out that Mr. Cohen is serving someone's political order designed to present Kazakhstan and its people in a derogatory way" (Grossberg 2005). Interestingly, Russia's Federal Agency of Culture and Cinematography banned *Borat*, allegedly due to the risk that it might stir religious and ethnic dispute.

This episode also immediately started a debate among place branding specialists about the impact of *Borat* on Kazakhstan's image and reputation, as well as, of course, the country's edgy and less than amused reaction to the movie. Does

*Borat* prove that “there is no such thing as bad publicity” (Sauer 2006)?<sup>4</sup> Was it wise of the Kazakh authorities to block the Web site borat.kz? Obviously, the site was registered under Kazakhstan’s two-letter national domain to feign authenticity—and the site is now running under borat.tv (Cukier 2005). But most specialists acknowledged that for Kazakhstan, it was a lose-lose situation: not reacting would look complacent, whereas reacting would look very silly, especially since they were followed by Cohen/Borat’s official response: “I’d like to state I have no connection with Mr. Cohen and fully support my Government’s decision to sue this Jew” (*Daily Mail* 2006).<sup>5</sup>

So how can you win this new game of brand-hijacking? Kazakhstan hired two PR firms to counter *Borat*’s claims and also ran a four-page advertisement in the *New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune* for the same reason. Furthermore, Kazakhstan ran a campaign on CNN to show the world the country’s “real face” (Radosh 2004; *International Herald Tribune* 2006). But since most people have not visited Kazakhstan; know no Kazakh brands, artists, or sports personalities; and have no other forms of contact with the country, *Borat* lingers on in the background as their main frame of reference. A few ads in pages of U.S. newspapers and on CNN (International) has accomplished little to alter this situation. It should be noted that Cohen could have easily made a fool of other unknown countries (like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), pointing up the fact for all unbranded countries the risk of not being in charge of their image and reputation and the inability for a country to be in full control on one’s own brand.

“Humor” of a totally different nature hit a small, European country’s image in September 2005, when the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published an article titled “Muhammeds ansigt” (“The Face of Muhammad”), which, amongst others, showed cartoons of the prophet wearing a bomb as headgear. After an angry reaction from Danish imams, eleven ambassadors from Muslim-majority countries (including Turkey) asked for a meeting with Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen in October 2005 to discuss what they perceived as an “ongoing smearing campaign in Danish public circles and media against Islam and Muslims” (BBC News 2006b). What could have remained a modest controversy quickly escalated into a worldwide row. Consumer boycotts against Danish products were organized in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Middle East countries; and demonstrations against Denmark took place worldwide. On February 4, 2006, the Danish (and, remarkably, also Norwegian) embassies in Syria were attacked; in Beirut, the Danish Embassy was set on fire. The protests cost the lives of an estimated 150 people, mainly in Nigeria, Libya, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The whole cartoon crisis (also called the “cartoon intifada”), escalated further when U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice accused Iran and Syria of organizing anti-Danish and anti-Western protests in their own countries as well as Lebanon.

The Danish people and their government were flabbergasted that a rather innocuous page of cartoons in *Jyllands-Posten* could cause serious damage to their image as a tolerant, open, all-in-all liberal society. Seeing Danish flags

burned by angry crowds on CNN caused a stir in Copenhagen, and the Danish government did not know how to react to such a sudden attack on their reputation, in the Muslim world and beyond. Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen even called the cartoon crisis “Denmark’s worst international relations incident since the Second World War” (*TimesOnline* 2007). Obviously, being branded as anti-Islam by outraged Muslim world opinion was the mirror image of President Bush’s “axis of evil” label stuck on Iran and company, with similar political and economic costs involved.

In September 2006, Danish export figures showed that the Muslim boycott of Danish goods had led to a 15.5 percent drop in total exports between February and June 2006. Danish trade to the Middle East fell by half—exports to Saudi Arabia fell by 40 percent and to Iran by 47 percent. The cost to Danish businesses was estimated at 134 million euros (US\$170 million) (BBC News 2006a). Interestingly, the cartoon crisis also evoked opposite reactions from consumers showing their support for Denmark by buying Danish brands. The “Support Denmark Movement,” for example, encouraged a worldwide audience to buy Danish produce and display stickers and Web banners with supportive slogans and Danish flags. Numerous Web sites and blogs sprang up, listing Danish products that people could buy. As *The Guardian* noted, “While Danish milk products were dumped in the Middle East, fervent rightwing Americans started buying Bang & Olufsen stereos and Lego. In the first quarter of this year Denmark’s exports to the US soared 17%” (Harding 2006). Interestingly, some Danish brands replaced the “Made in Denmark” label with “Made in the EU,” hiding their true identity behind the broad back of Europe.

As one blogger remarked during the crisis, “A week ago when one thought of Denmark one would likely conjure an image of a breakfast pastry or Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Now Denmark is in the midst of a real life epic tragedy but its people are holding steadfast” (*The American Daily* 2006). More scientifically, this change in Denmark’s reputation, both in the Muslim world and beyond, has been mapped by place branding experts who came to the unsurprising conclusion that Denmark’s national image weakened significantly in 2006. The country’s image as “democratic, strongly oriented towards human rights” had suffered severely (*Anholt Nation Brand Index* 2006). The 2006 *Anholt Nation Brand Index* also showed that Denmark dragged other Nordic countries with it, since Norway and Sweden were all put in the same “Scandinavian” basket by Muslims around the world.

Like *Borat*, the Mohammed cartoon crisis took the country by surprise. Like Kazakhstan, the Danish government has become more conscious of the vulnerability of its image and the frailty of its brand. The Danish government has also started an internal debate about the management of its place brand and the lessons that could be learned from this episode. Both cases indicate the impact of globalization and the bearing of new media on a country’s brand. Place branding is not always “high politics,” and state officials are not in full control of their own brand.

## Conclusion: Place Branding and Political Science

My concluding question is whether established schools of international relations theory have the theoretical tools and concepts to shed some light on a relatively new phenomenon like place branding. Scholars interested in the meaning of anarchy and the balance of power may well find debates about *Borat* and public diplomacy frivolous and trivial.<sup>6</sup>

Place branding, as a part of soft power, centers around concepts like values, norms, and rules in international politics. Until a decade ago, neoliberal institutionalism and international regime theory were the dominant approaches in this field. Both neoliberals and regime theorists argued that norms play a key part in facilitating cooperation among self-interested political actors. Scholars like Stephen Krasner and Robert Keohane have claimed that although norms may constrain the behavior of states (agents), they do not affect their identities or interests. What is more, these scholars also argue that the norms themselves are dependent upon (or reflecting) the underlying power distributions. Given the limits of this approach, constructivism now comes to mind as a more fruitful avenue of thinking in which place branding may find its theoretical place (van Ham 2002).

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The constructivist research agenda has questioned many established arguments and assumptions by seeking to explain interest and identity formation. Many constructivist scholars argue that international norms carry social content and are often independent of power distributions; they provide agents/states with understandings of interests and do not merely constrain behavior. Although constructivism remains embedded in the realist mind frame of states and structures, its emphasis on norms, values, and identities as vital and necessary elements in international politics ensuring stability and predictability, is an important point of departure in the study of place branding.

Scholars like Alexander Wendt argue that structures and states have multiple meanings for different actors based on their own intersubjective understandings and practices (Wendt 1999). Similarly, states have (at least a margin of) freedom to choose/modify their identity. It is argued that state identity performs the

important function of telling you and others who you are (or want to be). Whereas realism (and its neorealist offshoot) assumes that all states pursue their egoistic self-interest, constructivism “instead assumes that the selves, or identities, of states are a variable; they likely depend on historical, cultural, political, and social context” (Hopf 1998, 176). These insights are extremely relevant to place branding since they assume that identities are contextual and malleable. Although it should be kept in mind that as a school of thought constructivism is internally diverse (and at times even contradictory), it nevertheless comes closest as a possible theoretical home for place branding, mainly since it offers brand states (as well as other place brands) the option to construct their own image, role, and identity.

In the footsteps of thinkers like Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci, constructivism also argues that ideas are a form of power, not of a material but of a discursive nature. However, although under constructivism states have more agency, their choice of roles/identity is not unconstrained. As Ted Hopf (1998, 177) argued, “[State] choices are rigorously constrained by the webs of understanding of practices, identities, and interests of other actors that prevail in particular historical contexts.” In other words, territorial actors find themselves entangled in a web of social practices, expectations, political settings, and institutions that limit their choice in the roles they can adopt for themselves. Constructivism offers insight in the power of structures and especially how state actors reproduce their own constraints through daily practice.

Hopf (1998, 190) summarized the relevance of constructivism and place branding by claiming that “identities are a congealed reputation. . . . Identities subsume reputation; being a particular identity is sufficient to provide necessary diagnostic information about a state’s likely actions with respect to other states in particular domains.” Thus, for the state (and by implication also for international organizations), choice of brand (or identity, or role) is limited by existing power structures; it can not conduct branding in a vacuum, or by assuming a *tabula rasa*. Mental maps of states are filled with notions of trust, suspicion, history, and reputation (Rengger 1997).

While constructivist scholarship has broadened our understanding of the role played by norms, two main weaknesses remain that are relevant to our understanding of place branding as a concept that should be conceptually clarified within international relations theory. First, constructivism says very little about the mechanisms through which international norms reach the domestic arena. Constructivism does not offer causal arguments of how norms are transmitted to states and have constitutive effects. This makes it difficult to trace how place branding affects the expectations and behavior of other actors, both domestically and internationally. Second, constructivism fails to explain the fact that the same norm (or place branding strategy) will have a dramatic impact in one state but barely affects the political scene in others (Checkel 1998).

Given the attention paid to reputation and reflectivity, place branding is conceptually most at home within the constructivist school of international relations theory. But there are still many loose ends and many questions that remain to be

formulated and examined. Further work is required to explore the details of the connection between place branding and international relations. Further research could focus on the following areas and questions. First, how far is the emergence of the brand state fitting into a general trend from the “high” and “hard” politics to the new “soft” and “low” politics of today? In this respect, how is the brand state affecting realpolitik in world affairs? In short, more research has to be done on the role of postmodern power in international politics.

A second field of research is philosophical and historical in nature and involves the processes of state building and nation formation that are involved in the internal process of branding. Although primordialists cherish a romanticized picture of every nation’s deep and sacred roots, modern nations are based on invented traditions and the continuous mobilization and adaptation of history. Ernest Renan famously argued that France was merely “une ensemble d’idées” (McCrone 1998, 45). One could say that with its flag, anthem, and constitution, the modern state is nothing more than a brand with a logo and a mission statement. Although this would be too simplistic for comfort, place branding—and especially the rise of the brand state (van Ham 2001)—forces us to revisit the debate on identity and the prevailing postmodern condition of world politics.

Still, the bottom line remains that the dynamics of international politics are affected by place branding, and that a new “great game” of politics is emerging, this time not about oil and trading routes but about image and reputation. Managers and their gurus seem to be aware of this change, but the international relations research agenda has yet to take this new development on board. Just remember that Coca-Cola estimates the value of its own trademark at US\$67 billion (*Businessweek* 2006). In fact, a successful place brand may ultimately do without any territory whatsoever. Do we really care whether the “Rive gauche” exists at all, as long as one can sell fashion and perfume under that name? The time may not be far away when countries will resemble these ephemeral brands, and De Gaulle will finally be right that there is “une certaine idée de la France,” but nothing more tangible than that.

## Notes

1. Although the Bin Laden name has already been granted a trademark (given to Yeslam Bin Laden, one of the terrorist’s siblings), and may be used to brand casual clothing around the world, politically this brand of “evil” is unlikely to be profitable (Day 2002).

2. Some states are new (like Slovenia), or want to be new (like Kosovo). To reflect these changes, these states have rebranded themselves, using (and abusing) all the paraphernalia of statehood by all the media available and pursuing these efforts relentlessly.

3. Simon Anholt told the author (in July 2007) that the meeting did not ultimately take place but that the rumor of the European Commission even *thinking* about hiring a branding expert was obviously sufficient to cause a stir.

4. It should be noted that the Borat-Kazakhstan controversy was a bit older than the actual movie since Cohen had already used the character in earlier TV shows such as *Ali G Indahouse*.

5. It may be useful to note here that Mr. Cohen is Jewish.

6. Since 2005, the peer-reviewed journal *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* (Palgrave/Macmillan), edited by Simon Anholt, has made a serious effort to encourage the academic debate.

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