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National Meaning-Making in Complex Societies: Political Legitimation and Branding Dynamics in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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ABSTRACT

How does nation branding reflect state–society relations and more pertinently, what does it reveal about the way political power is legitimated by a given state and why? This question seldom receives attention in the rapidly expanding scholarship on nation branding. This article examines and interprets national branding processes in post-apartheid South Africa within the context of larger efforts by political elites to legitimate the new state and society and to address some of the complex legacies of the apartheid past. These efforts targeted domestic and international audiences in distinctive ways, intertwined foreign and nation-building policies, and sought to communicate key ideas about South Africa as state and nation and about the state's role in the wider world order. The article considers how different groups of state-linked actors participated in exercises of legitimation and the discursive mechanisms that were relied on. Three such mechanisms are highlighted: (i) the construction of a distinct African-style modernity (here termed Afro-modernity); (ii) claims of South African exceptionalism articulated in boosterist branding campaigns; and (iii) expressed, variously through foreign policy signals, diplomatic posturing and hallmark events, the projection of a national role conception as leader on the African continent and of the Global South. These compound political processes had ambivalent and incomplete outcomes, however. This article considers why and what the implications are for the South African state and its society.

Introduction

Since Simon Anholt first proposed roughly two decades ago that the concepts "brand" and "nation" can be linked, conveying the idea that countries, like products, can be labelled and marketed in distinctive ways,[1] a large body of scholarship has emerged on nation branding. Drawing on and extending earlier work on place brands and destination marketing from fields such as urban studies and tourism, the current work on nation branding represents a

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veritable array of scholarly disciplines spanning sociology, politics, geography, economics, international relations and sport, among others.[2] Although there is some contestation in this scholarship over the meaning or even desirability of nation brands,[3] there is convergence on the idea that governments engage in different forms of marketing and signalling to elevate and manage in strategic ways their country's national image – an idea which also features strongly in the derivative public diplomacy literature.[4] It is assumed that this is heightened in a neo-liberal international context where pressure to be competitive prevails,[5] and where in the era of "new geopolitics",[6] culture or other endogenous societal goods are considered important political resources in the pursuit of power and international influence.[7]

The nation branding literature appears to have much to say about what governments and other political actors in varied contexts do to create specific national brands,[8] and the literature sometimes elaborates on the substance and national effects of those brands.[9] Many scholars also point to the dual nature of nation branding in that most efforts aim to address two major audiences – that is, the international community and domestic populations – and that national marketing images may be tailored accordingly.[10] However, even though nation branding is now considered a central aspect of nearly all governments' activities, it is striking that the literature on the subject offers as yet little reflection on how these activities relate to the state as entity and how analysis of nation branding can shed light on state–society relations.

The link between nation branding – the actions of governments to project specific constructions and images of their territory and its people – and state processes can be argued conceptually and substantively. First, both involve processes of legitimation by political actors. Second, both entail the creation and relaying of narratives to give content to and validate structures of authority.[11] In the case of the state, as noted by Migdal,[12] state actors engage in deliberate actions towards legitimation – to naturalise understandings of the state's existence – as a course of survival. Key to this is the acceptance of the state-as-myth and of the state's institutions and rules by the population that the state presides over.[13] In many state theorists' view this is an ongoing and dialogical process as it involves continuous contestation among an array of domestic actors.[14] As such political legitimation is an integral and enduring part of states' activities.

Thus far the nation branding literature has offered little interrogation of how the constructs of governments' nation branding reflect or relate to their efforts towards state-making, or put differently, how nation brands can give shape (or gestalt) to the state and vice versa. What would an analysis that views nation branding through the prism of political legitimation by state actors achieve? The answer to this is twofold. On one hand such an exercise gives understanding of how something ostensibly market-based such as nation branding is in fact part of compound political processes in a given

society that reflect aspects of prevailing power structures as well as dominant interests in that society. In other words, considering nation branding as a form of political legitimation enables a thicker analysis of nation branding processes. On the other, it gives greater understanding of how political actors create and utilise multiple resources to legitimate (i.e. justify) power positions and the means they go about it.[15]

With this in mind this article examines and interprets national branding processes and politics in post-apartheid South Africa as part of larger efforts by political elites to legitimate the new state and society in becoming. Positioning itself in relation to scholarship on political legitimation,[16] the article draws on the methodology and tools of this scholarship by considering the agents and their motivations, contents and mechanisms of legitimation.[17] Hence, through a reading of key "artefacts" of rule[18] that include foreign and public policy statements and documents, political speeches, along with signals of nation branding and nation-building, the article shows that this process of legitimation had domestic and international objectives and targeted these two groups of audiences in distinctive ways. Not merely aimed at projecting a certain image to lure transnational capital, nation branding activities have been tied to the larger ambition of providing stability to the South African polis and its power-rule arrangements under conditions of domestic contestation and internal political fragility – which have grown rather than diminished over the years – and a changing international economic environment that has not always been favourable for the country. Binding these internal and external focuses for legitimation has been the use of discursive mechanisms – or rationalisations – that have reflected in the spheres of diplomacy, foreign policy, destination marketing and imaging campaigns, and the strategic use of hallmark events, specifically sport mega-events.

The article considers how different groups of actors – in particular state leaders and government-linked national marketing agencies – participated in these exercises of legitimation and the discursive mechanisms that were used. Three such mechanisms are highlighted: (i) the construction and projection of a vision of a distinct African-style modernity (here termed Afro-modernity); (ii) claims of South African exceptionalism articulated through boosterist branding campaigns; and (iii) expressed, variously through foreign policy signals, diplomatic posturing and hallmark events, the projection of a national role conception as leader on the African continent and of the Global South.

The article explores these aspects over the course of post-apartheid South Africa's life, i.e. the past 20 years. It shows that as a facet of political legitimation, branding endeavours have intertwined foreign and domestic public policy in the country in distinctive ways. It has involved discourses and practices of symbolic imagineering based on a strategically crafted,

African-centric conception of modernity and on projections of historical and political exceptionalism. The country's diplomatic orientation has tended to be underpinned by a narrative of moral leadership – strongly normative in tone, laying emphasis on the lessons that the country could teach the rest of the world due to its transition from a racially divided and unstable country to one in which the values of human rights, equity and social justice enjoyed primacy. Tied to this has been a projection of a new African future, a conception of the continent that has emphasised its achievements and potentials – a view very different from the usual imagery of conflict and mass poverty that shapes awareness of the continent internationally. These endeavours have had variable outcomes, achieving neither foreign policy nor domestic objectives completely. After two decades the projection of a new, modern African state sits uneasily with social and economic realities in South Africa and those on the continent at large. The article reflects on what these mean for political legitimation processes and future dynamics.

In what follows below, the second part of the article contains discussion of the role of legitimation in political and state activities. This is done through reflection on the actors (who?), objectives (why?) and processes (how?) generally involved in political legitimation. In this section the associations between legitimation and state power are also explored. Thereafter, in the third part, the article demonstrates how legitimation was a component of domestic and international messaging and imaging used by governmental and other elites in South Africa in various public and foreign policies as well as branding campaigns. The concluding part discusses the implications of the apparent successes and failures of South Africa's branding politics in lieu of aspects such as state stability. By viewing nation branding processes in this way, the article elaborates on a facet of post-apartheid South African political contestation that has been researched in component parts – such as foreign policy;[19] the political role of mega-events,[20] and on public diplomacy[21] – but has thus far not been addressed as a form of political legitimation. The contention is that by considering the interrelationship of these processes, as is done here, a more comprehensive view of the dynamics of the post-apartheid state and society can be attained.

Political Legitimation and State-Making

Recent years have seen a rise in interest in legitimation as process and the languages and discursive techniques that underpin it, whether these are viewed in relation to international[22] or state[23] actors. Drawing on a long and contested tradition of the study of legitimacy – shaped significantly by the work of Max Weber – the current strands of work on political legitimacy reflect two key features. The first is an attempt to resolve long-standing debates in the field on the descriptive and prescriptive dimensions of

legitimacy.[24] While Weber's definition of legitimacy (as the "belief in the rightfulness" of a given order of power – which then imbues it with the attribute of authority[25]) is representative of the first, a long line of moral philosophers have addressed the normative standards to which any assessment of legitimacy should be held.[26] The philosophical definition of legitimacy lays emphasis on sets of abstractly derived conditions which any legitimate order ought to meet. Taking their cue from Beetham's influential study of two and a half decades ago,[27] much current work on political legitimacy seems to propose that a group's consent of a given power order is proxy for the morally binding nature of that order, in other words that a moral choice of acceptance has been exercised by those who are subordinated.[28] Beetham himself has elaborated on a legitimate order as one which satisfies conditions of legality, the justifiability of rules and express consent.[29]

The greater conceptual scope that has entered discussions of legitimacy has led to a second feature, and more recent work has arisen which attempts to flesh out the processes by which legitimation takes place. This essentially entails a shift in what is being addressed by researchers, away from questions of the empirical or normative content of legitimacy – which requires answers to how legitimacy is measured or evaluated – to how legitimacy comes to be. The latter type of enquiry places emphasis on the actions of the politically dominant and the various means they may use to create or sustain power orders.[30] Conceptually, attention is paid not to political legitimacy – an "elusive" concept, as noted by Abulof[31] – but to the active ways in which legitimation occurs. As a related aspect, this encourages assessment less of how a power order is viewed or accepted, but of the constitutive nature of the order itself, such as the hierarchies innate to the order and the reasons why those hierarchies exist in the first instance.

There is wide agreement why legitimation is important in any given social context – it lies at the heart of political and social existence since it is a mechanism for the stability of that social system. Yet scholars have differing opinions on how that process happens and relatedly, how it is best captured by analysis. Political legitimation has been viewed through the lens of ruling ideologies,[32] political-institutional structuring and organisational rituals,[33] the creation of norms,[34] as well as the artefacts of rule such as policy and educational curricula or dominant moral/religious teachings.[35] A binding theme for much of the scholarly conversation about political legitimation, however, is that it is primarily discursive and semiotic, that is, it is the process of creating meaning within an intersubjective context. This has encouraged much work aimed at uncovering what prevailing discourses reveal about ruler's intentions and how narratives are weaved together, in verbal and non-verbal forms, to construct a dominant understanding of the social order as well as to justify it. Political legitimation in this regard is a

communicative act predicated on the acceptance of the justifications offered.[36] On the other hand the withdrawal of consent or contestation against the justifications point to delegitimation or rejection of the legitimacy of rule.[37]

Once analytical focus is placed on how political rule (or power-rule arrangements) is legitimated, it enables a range of questions about a specific polity and the social processes that feature in it. These include questions about the actors who are involved and what the purposes of their actions are. It also centres attention on the targets – or audiences – of legitimation and the nature of the relationship between rulers and subordinates. In addition to context, it invites examination of the content of legitimation and of the representations or imageries utilised[38] and how these may be the subject both of meaning-making and meaning-contestation. Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power aptly captures this dialectic. According to Bourdieu, "relations of power …" resort "in the symbolic struggle for the production of common sense, or more precisely, for the monopoly over legitimate naming … to impose the legitimate vision of the world."[39] For Bourdieu the state is a key arbiter, a very powerful one at that, "in struggles over this monopoly."

And indeed, as political entity, the state has well been recognised as having fixed interest in sustaining and justifying its position over society, i.e. its legitimacy,[40] in part because of the paradox of holding large concentrations of power and being constrained in how that power can rightfully be dispensed.[41] While there is still prevailing emphasis in state theory on the organisational and institutional aspects of the state as entity, a line of enquiry is arising in this field that looks at the state not merely as a geographical, but dialogical entity and as an "expression and medium of power."[42] This kind of perspective holds promise for explaining how state actors go about legitimating the power of the state. As Painter[43] notes, looking at the role of narrative and how actors engage in "telling stories of statehood" reveals much in terms of how state power is produced and reproduced. For Migdal a population's belief in the foundational myth of the state is central to the state's endurance.[44] Thus one can observe how in the pursuit of legitimacy there is the continuous use or manipulation of symbols or acts of mythmaking by the state to legitimate itself to and over the nation. This can include the use of paraphernalia of stateness – flags, anthems, and such like – to effect a sense of we-ness, what Billig termed "banal nationalism,"[45] and of tailored interpretations of a people's past presented as authoritative accounts by state actors in the contrivance of a common national identity.

While it is understood that this is a process that takes on varied dimensions in different settings, dependent on what Mansbach and Rhodes have identified as how much "push" or "pull" there is to make a nation,[46] what of contexts where identitarian bases have to be built anew, where perhaps a

common sense of the past as well as a common sense of the future lack?[47] A long tradition in ethno-nationalist analysis has tended to emphasise the rise, under such conditions, of either violent conflict or the repression of one group by another.[48] But another perspective sees political actors managing divisions within their societies by crafting or sometimes explicitly manufacturing pivotal tales around which a common identity can revolve.[49] In contexts where frail political compacts between the elite and the masses imply uncertain trajectories and futures, policy processes are often supposed to offer identitarian pillars for national endeavours towards social harmony, and state actors may use a variety of narratives to try to engender this. This can take numerous forms, comprising discourses which draw heavily on historical analogies[50] or political idioms that evoke visions of future or past glories.[51]

It is this perspective that informs the discussion below of political legitimation in post-apartheid South Africa. The argument is that processes of legitimation took shape through various spheres, primary among these were state-led branding programmes, Africa-based and other diplomatic platforms and hallmark events, specifically sport mega-events.[52] Various discursive techniques were applied by state actors, such as claims to exceptionalism and the creation of a national role conception – a self-view of the nature and place of the state and its role in the wider world – that emphasised the moral and political leadership of the country in regional and international contexts. Linking these discursive projections was a master narrative of African modernity, encapsulated in the post-apartheid state's "African Renaissance" project. The institutionalisation of these projections in various forms underpinned South Africa's branding endeavours in the post-apartheid era. It pivoted on an aspirational conception of modernity that was aimed to serve as a unique selling point internationally and as the crux for domestic nation-building. These top-down processes of meaning-making, however, have had ambivalent outcomes and sometimes evoked bottom-up contestation.

Meaning-Making and Political Legitimation in Post-Apartheid South Africa

As a society with a complex past and facing uncertain future trajectories South Africa demonstrates the necessities of legitimation par excellence. After the demise of apartheid and the first democratic elections held in 1994, major socio-economic and socio-political shifts made for a highly changeable environment which, through policymaking, South Africa's post-apartheid authorities attempted to shape towards a nationally unified, democratised and internationally competitive society. Of note is that the process of dismantling apartheid coincided with fundamental ideological and politico-economic

alterations in the international arena. The latter dramatically shaped developments in South Africa. Facing an increasingly globalised, competitive and interdependent international environment, South Africa's new leaders had to consider how to most effectively re-incorporate the country into the world economy. At the same time national policymaking had to respond to pressing internal conditions that featured high levels of poverty and material and social inequality.[53]

This led to an ongoing process of state and societal reconstitution in the post-apartheid era. National and foreign policymaking can be said to have focused on addressing three major areas, that is, democratic consolidation, socio-economic change and national and racial unification, and international competitiveness.[54] However, as many observers of post-apartheid politics have noted, it has not been easy for policymakers to combine goals related to globalisation with national transformation.[55] Rather, multiple, overlapping and sometimes conflicting national narratives have characterised South Africa's political developments since 1994 that have been mirrored in the tone and content of policymaking and in overarching political programmes. These narratives have ranged from the emphasis on redress and redistribution (reflected, for instance, in the early post-apartheid macroeconomic policy of Reconstruction and Development), to national unity based on transitional justice (which has been a consistent theme throughout and has influenced major political processes such as the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the late 1990s), to international competitiveness, that prioritised policies with strong neo-liberal objectives.

Afro-Modernity as Legitimation: Constructing Diplomatic and Domestic Narratives

Given the context for South Africa's reintegration into the international arena and the new political elite's appraisal of the domestic imperatives they faced, it is noteworthy that they constructed an internationalist and activist foreign policy that was legitimated in terms of South Africa's socio-economic and developmental priorities. An early post-apartheid discussion document by the African National Congress (ANC), the governing party, for instance, noted the complementary nature of South Africa's domestic and international goals, suggesting that "the more the international climate is sensitive to the developmental and democratic aspirations of developing countries like ours, the more we will be able to consolidate the National Democratic Revolution (NDR)"[56] (with the NDR primarily defined in relation to a pro-poor transformation agenda). Further, in a 1993 article by South Africa's future president, Nelson Mandela, in the influential *Foreign Affairs* magazine, Mandela outlined the ANC's international vision.[57] This vision centred South Africa's foreign policy around the concerns and

interests of the rest of the African continent (or an "Africa agenda") and signalled main pillars to be international cooperation, the promotion of human rights and democracy and a commitment to political and economic development through regionalism and regional integration.[58]

With this as point of departure, South Africa's early post-apartheid diplomacy was strongly advocative and reformist in nature. The country's authorities embarked on a course of exteriorisation and multilateralization, joining a range of international organisations and multilateral forums in which it typically adopted positions calling for global redress and equity.[59] A post-colonial narrative underpinned this early activism, and a hallmark of South Africa's participation in global governance structures was the country's strong push for a global reformist agenda.[60]

As such it is significant how newly crafted national ideological discourses centred on large-scale social transformation and based on the principles of equity and social justice fed into the language used by elites in the diplomatic sphere. This was apparently based on a self-view – or national role conception – of South Africa as a role model for the rest of the world, given its largely peaceful political settlement and the moral leverage it had as a result to bargain for a more stable world order.[61] This self-view also related to how South African state elites sought to consolidate the country's position within an increasingly competitive international economic and political milieu, which expressed South Africa, variously, as regional power or aspiring middle power.[62]

Binding these endeavours was a highly distinctive and at the time unique projection of African potential and capacity. This projection, defined here as Afro-modernity, conveyed an idea of an African continent and people that were progressive, innovative and capable, not tribal and backward, as was the prevailing view in the international arena.[63] It had an appealing aspirational message, aiming to upend stereotypes of African despair, ethnic violence and mass poverty and to replace them with imagery of a modern, forward-looking and entrepreneurial populace. It projected a vision of a continent that has functioning states capable of fulfilling their roles as citizens within the modern world system, not burdening this system. And it contained a provocative message of Afro-pride, built on the traditions of Negritude of the early African post-colonial era, as well as the later Black Conscious movement centred on the work and life of anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko.[64]

While drawing on these historical analogies, the projection of Afro-modernity also had a distinctively contemporary flavour, containing visions of an economically competitive continent that enabled its population to reap the fruits of globalisation – ideas that updated the historical, early post-colonial discourses by appealing to new consumerist sensibilities arising on the continent.[65]

Without a doubt the key proponent of this idea of African potential was former state president Thabo Mbeki. During his incumbency (1999–2008) he sought to build on the international moral legacy of Nelson Mandela and he fashioned his presidency on a casting of himself as pan-Africanist and African statesman. The philosophical grounding he developed for his politics centred on the notion of "the African Renaissance", which he defined as "… the beginning of our rebirth as a Continent …" and a "… journey of self-discovery and the restoration of our own self-esteem"; or put differently, "… the call for Africa's renewal …"[66] The African Renaissance contained a provocative message of African unity and endeavour. Mbeki himself voiced this in an oft cited speech he made as deputy-president at the adoption of the new South African Constitution in 1996. He declared:

> I am an African.
>
> I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land … I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape - they who fell victim to the most merciless genocide our native land has ever seen, they who were the first to lose their lives in the struggle to defend our freedom and dependence and they who, as a people, perished in the result … I am formed of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home on our native land. Whatever their own actions, they remain still, part of me … My mind and my knowledge of myself is formed by the victories that are the jewels in our African crown, the victories we earned from Isandhlwana to Khartoum, as Ethiopians and as the Ashanti of Ghana, as the Berbers of the desert … This thing that we have done today, in this small corner of a great continent that has contributed so decisively to the evolution of humanity says that Africa reaffirms that she is continuing her rise from the ashes …Whatever the setbacks of the moment, nothing can stop us now! Whatever the difficulties, Africa shall be at peace! However improbable it may sound to the sceptics, Africa will prosper![67]

Mbeki's speech had a central objective to help fortify nascent processes of nation-building started during Mandela's presidency.[68] Its appeal to multi-culturalism and its celebration of the diverse ethnic origins of South Africa's population resonated with the imagery of "the Rainbow Nation" popularised during the Mandela years, which became the fulcrum for South Africa's post-apartheid nation-building efforts. Mbeki's speech therefore projected not only the revitalisation of Africa – a foreign policy signal – but also the transcendence of South Africa's past of racial disunity and inequality and of the country and its people's historical isolation from Africa[69] – a nation-building signal. The meshing of the foreign policy and domestic objectives pivoted on the envisioning of a new African continent that was sold to audiences inside and outside South Africa.

The Africa-centric nature of South Africa's foreign policy, articulated by the first post-apartheid president (Mandela), thus became even more pronounced during the time of his successor. Thabo Mbeki sought to operationalise his African Renaissance vision in various ways. Domestically he was influential in the creation of the African Renaissance Institute, a think tank set up to give shape to his vision. Mbeki's impact in terms of advocating Africa's revitalisation in the international sphere was significant and it is noteworthy how comprehensively the African Renaissance idea and its related projection of Afro-modernity underpinned South Africa's key international engagements during his incumbency.

This can be observed in the major processes and developments that defined South Africa's role in Africa and beyond, chief of which were the establishment of the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), championed by Mbeki and some other African heads of state, and the restructuring of the continent's main diplomatic organ, the Organisation of African Unity, into the African Union (AU) in the early 2000s. Both NEPAD and the AU embraced the notion of African upliftment and agency alongside newer values of democratisation, accountability and good economic governance.

African revival was also envisioned as political stability and peaceful conditions on the continent. Conflict resolution, mediation and involvement in peacekeeping operations became a key part of South Africa's role on the African continent[70] and attracted much of South Africa's diplomatic resources. Since the late 1990s, for instance, various generations of South Africa's executive leadership have been engaged in mediation efforts in conflicts in the Great Lakes, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe and Madagascar, among others,[71] and the country has contributed through personnel or finances to African peacekeeping forces in the Sudan and the Central African Republic.

This role has been legitimated as part of South Africa's Africa Agenda, contained in official foreign policy documents.[72] Pan-Africanism has been a central narrative underlying the regional and mediation politics of South African leaders and was particularly marked in the time of Mbeki who frequently used ideas of African solidarity and post-colonialism in his mediation efforts on the continent.[73]

Further, the projection of African modernity has been a feature of South Africa's South–South as well as North–South multilateral engagements. Thus, the country's participation in major South–South multilateral forums such as the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) partnership, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) alliance, as well as the G20, the G8's Outreach Five and the World Trade Organization (WTO), has persistently reflected diplomatic strategies shaped by the philosophy of the African Renaissance.[74]

A consistent message in South Africa's engagements in these forums has therefore been about both the constraints and potentials characterising Africa and the need to alter global structures to help change Africa's future. Occupying the only African seat at these forums, South Africa has positioned itself as the spokesman for the continent and has styled itself as Africa's leader. This has generally been based on assessments of its economic dominance on the continent. A powerful illustration of this claim is the statement by South Africa's foreign affairs minister, who on the occasion of the country's accession to the four-member BRIC in 2010 said:

> We [South Africa] will be a good gateway for the BRIC countries. While we may have a small population, we don't just speak for South Africa, we speak for Africa as a whole. We bring the most diversified and most advanced economy on the continent. We may not be the same size, but we can open up opportunities for them and through that, we can complete our economic integration on the continent.[75]

Based on the above, discursively the use of Afro-modernity as political legitimation has comprised four components. The first has been a projection of South Africa as representative of and spokesman for a resurgent Africa. The second, related projection has been of South Africa as gateway to the rest of the continent, consisting of a range of claims about South Africa's infrastructural and industrial advance relative to its neighbours and the resultant investment opportunities and access to the African market that it offered. It also based on an implicit claim about the African-ness of South Africa. Third has been a projection of pan-Africanism, intended to convey the idea of African unity. Finally there has been the highly captivating but vaguely defined notion of Afro-pride, offered as a counter to Afro-pessimism and based on loose constructions and imagery of progress, advance and indigenous capacity and agency. As evident in Mbeki's two decades old "I am an African" speech cited above, this has tended to emphasise and valorise the particularistic and unique aspects of South Africa's African heritages.

Exceptionalism as (Nation) Brand: Boosterist Campaigns

Sustained campaigns by national marketing and other agents to promote positive images of South Africa internationally have also been formed around notions of national exceptionalism and Afro-potential. Acting very much in the mould of Simon Anholt's conceptualisation of nation branding, national agencies from the domains of tourism and destination marketing, urban and provincial authorities, and urban boosterists have contributed to the construction of an image of the country that centralised South Africa's social diversity, its relative economic advance vis-à-vis other African states and its

history of peaceful political transition as a unique international selling point.[76]

Of particular significance have been efforts by statutory bodies to create a distinctive destination brand and the way in which South Africa has used engagements in hallmark events – specifically major sport events and diplomatic summits – as signalling platforms. Both reflect elements of Afro-modernity that link in important ways to South Africa's long-standing Africa-centric foreign policy. Further, both have at various points been promotional vehicles for the national ideology of African Renaissance.

In terms of national branding, the agency carrying primary responsibility for the management of South Africa's international image and reputation is a statutory entity known as Brand SA. This body evolved from the International Marketing Council, an entity created in the late 1990s under the behest of Thabo Mbeki in conjunction with major South African firms to promote "a unified brand image" for South Africa to draw investors and tourists.[77] Brand SA, established as a full-fledged organisation in 2000, launched its first international campaign with the slogan "South Africa … Alive with possibilities". The brand it sought to advance suggested

(South Africa), in global terms a middling nation at the foot of a maligned continent has the ability to inspire the world to new ways of doing things. Our unique historical heritage and population make-up, our creative approach and boundless optimism, all come together and find expression in the essence of the brand, "South Africa… Alive with possibilities."[78]

In the early post-apartheid era, furthermore, South Africa's tourism body reformed itself from an apartheid-era promotion agency trying to draw foreign visitors to a pariah state into one that could develop a strong and stable national tourism economy with the new opportunities offered by domestic and international changes. It rebranded itself as South African Tourism (the organisation's former name was Satour) and declared through its promotional material that "South Africa is undergoing transformation. The result is that we are exploring our image. In the process our unique selling points are becoming increasingly clearer. The … slogan, A World in One Country is more relevant now than ever."[79]

In subsequent years both Brand SA and SA Tourism built promotional campaigns targeting international as well as domestic audiences around explicit and implied messages of Africa's revivalism spearheaded by South Africa's infrastructural and economic advance. Brand SA became part of an anti-emigration and patriotism campaign to persuade especially white South Africans to remain in the country and contribute to mass upliftment.[80] It also engaged in campaigns abroad to lure back emigres through *inter alia*, the use of South African celebrities in advertisements lauding the virtues of the

country's transformation, and by organising South African cultural festivals in major emigrant cities such as London.

Today Brand SA continues to define its mandate in terms of national priorities that include supporting economic growth, social equity and transformation. The organisation sees international branding objectives aimed at improving South Africa's international reputation and competitiveness, and domestic goals to foster patriotism, pride and social cohesion, as part of this.[81] South Africa's "nation brand" is based on "ubuntu, diversity, possibility, sustainability and innovation."[82] Ubuntu, an Afro-communitarian ethic loosely translating into "humanity" ("I am because you are" or phrased differently, "my sense of existence is owed to you"), has become a value that has been more explicitly articulated in South African foreign and domestic public policies over the years.[83] Incorporated into foreign policy, it conveys the idea of South Africa's place within the African community, sharing the same historical and cultural origins as others on the continent and affirming, therefore, South Africa's African qualities.[84]

Hallmark Events and National Role Conceptions

South African authorities' use of sport mega-events as tools of legitimation can also be read through the way these types of events have been discursively framed. It is noteworthy how active the country has been bidding for and staging large-scale sport and political events. In the late 1990s, for instance, the city of Cape Town unsuccessfully bid to host the 2004 Olympic Games. In 1995 South Africa hosted and won the Rugby World Cup. In 1996 the country provided the venue for the biennial continental football championship, the Africa Cup of Nations.

Then, in 1999 South Africa hosted the All Africa Games and two further world championships in 2003 – the International Cricket Council's World Cup and the Women's World Cup of Golf. Being involved in these second-tier tournaments became part of a gradual national strategy to use success in the international sporting domain and specifically the events to stage sporting festivals as marketing tools for the country.[85] Incrementally, as South Africa hosted more and more tournaments, authorities started to view these as means to achieve a variety of international and domestic goals that included nation branding, urban development, social transformation and racial unification.[86]

The bid for and successful staging of the 2010 FIFA World Cup was a particularly significant feat for the country's leadership, not only because of the tournament's size, popularity and stature, but in the way it could enable the joint pursuit of international and domestic objectives. A clear indication of the political value of the tournament is a statement by Thabo Mbeki, then

state president, in his presentation to the FIFA executive before voting to determine the host of the World Cup took place. Mbeki stated:

> This is an African journey of hope – hope that in time we will arrive at a future when our continent will be free of wars, refugees and displaced people, free of tyranny, of racial, ethnic and religious divisions of conflict, of hunger and the accumulated weight of centuries of our denial of human dignity … Nothing could ever serve to energise our people to work for their and Africa's uplift-ment more than to integrate among the tasks of our Second Decade of Democracy and the African Renaissance our successful hosting of the 2010 Soccer World Cup.[87]

In line with this, South Africa's authorities sought to use the event, which was named "the African World Cup" to represent the continent in a more favourable light. This was mostly aimed at countering the effects of Afro-pessimism on investments and tourist arrivals to the continent. For the 2010 Local Organising Committee, the chief objectives of the World Cup were "to strengthen the African and South African image, (to) promote new partnerships with the world as we stage a unique and memorable event … (and to) be significant global players in all fields of human endeavour."[88]

By the time the tournament took place, its official slogan was "*Ke Nako*," which translates into "Celebrate Africa's Humanity." The official "Africa Legacy Programme" had several objectives, namely to "support the realisa-tion of (the) African renaissance"; to ensure that all African countries participated in the event; to further the development of African football; and to improve the international image of the continent.[89] Authorities set themselves the task to create a continent-wide legacy and to extend potential benefits to other African states.

Beyond the sport domain, South Africa has used high-profile diplo-matic summits to try to raise its international stature. The country hosted the United Nations (UN) World Conference Against Racism in 2001, the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 and the UN's Conference of the Parties focused on addressing climate change in 2011. Hosting these summits has been defined as part of South Africa's public diplomacy and major platforms to project diplomatic goals.[90]

Ambivalent Outcomes

For the best part of the post-apartheid era, South Africa's political leadership has sought to respond to perceived international and domestic imperatives by basing policies on a conception of modernity which in turn has con-structed and projected a particular image of the country and its people. This has had two goals: to generate a story about a successful and modern African state at the forefront of a rising continent and to provide a focal point for a

divided society by creating a common identity projection that might bolster nation-building.

The particular version of modernity that has been fashioned has both articulated South Africa's distinctiveness within the African setting and affirmed the country's African heritage. Further, donning the identity of a latecomer industrialiser, South Africa's version of Afro-modernity has conveyed ideas about the ability of an African state to compete successfully in the international arena at a level sufficient to engender large-scale national transformation. Paradoxically, Afro-modernity has also been crafted around an idea of exceptionalism, that despite its African roots, South Africa's tale was different from that of others on the continent. This idea of difference came to be used as a unique selling point internationally in imaging and destination marketing campaigns, while also underpinning much of the national discourse used for domestic audiences.

However, these endeavours have had variable outcomes, achieving neither foreign policy nor domestic objectives completely. First, political events on the African continent as well as within South Africa undermine and cast as false the grand vision of African unity or modernity. South Africa's continental leadership has been questioned and at times rejected outright by other African states[91] There have been competing visions of African modernity, with South Africa's rivalled by several others – such as by Zimbabwe's state elites – that lay greater accent on anti-imperialism and political autonomy.[92] There have been fallouts over how to deal with conflicts or humanitarian crises in Libya, Madagascar, Cote d'Ivoire, Darfur, Zimbabwe and Central Africa, and South Africa's rulers have persistently failed to deliver in their self-imposed roles as mediators on the continent.[93] Further, the decision by South Africa's leaders in late 2016 to withdraw from the International Criminal Court – a body whose creation the country heavily advocated for around two decades earlier on the strength of a norm-based foreign policy – drew wide international and domestic disapproval for failing to live up to the moral standards set during the Mandela presidency;[94] a criticism frequently made by outside observers is that South Africa can no longer claim to be a norm leader in the international community or on the African continent.[95]

Second, South Africa's own attempt to brand itself as Africa's major power has been undercut by a growth rate that in recent times has looked meagre next to many of its regional neighbours. The country's world competitiveness ranking has declined rather than risen in the past decade because of low investor confidence in the government's efficiency,[96] and in recent years the country faced the prospect of being downgraded to "junk" status by international credit rating agencies. The narrative of "Africa Rising" – a discursive re-creation that is now fairly popular among various constituencies across the globe: the idea that the continent is no longer "hopeless" (as

controversially described by *The Economist* in a leader article in May 2000), but "hopeful" with lucrative potential for foreign investors – appears to have bypassed South Africa as macroeconomic indicators suggest shrinkage rather than expansion, and unemployment and inequalities have increased. This would suggest that the country is no longer considered the sole gateway to the continent's markets, nor can it make a credible claim that it is.[97]

Third, in its goal to provide a common identity basis for South Africa's diverse communities and to bridge racial divides, domestic projections of national exceptionalism and Afro-modernity have also had ambivalent outcomes. The pan-African projection that marked state elites' earlier efforts at nation-building has been negated by frequent incidences of xenophobic attacks against migrants from other African countries, signalling Afro-phobia rather than Afro-pride.[98] Rather than acting as a binding discursive force, the conception "South African" seems to sit uneasily with people's other master identities (i.e. race and ethnicity). Domestic cleavages built on racial, class and other identities persist and social cohesion appears weak.[99] In this context the mythology of the "Rainbow Nation," propagated in the early post-apartheid years to foster patriotism and to give belief in a common South African nation that has transcended the racial divisions of the past, seems more distant.

In lieu of the article's main thrust of analysis, the ambivalent outcomes detailed above suggest that political leaders' long-standing efforts to construct a new post-apartheid polis widely supported and believed in by its society have only partially been successful. The efforts have centred on the fashioning of certain ideas – ideas concerning the nation, the state and the wider African continent and its potentials – as foundational myth. These attempts have aimed at providing anchors in a context where state and society have been in a continuous state of reconstitution. As exercises in political legitimation they have relied on eclectic discursive tools utilised by sets of political actors spanning the diplomatic and public policy domains as well as the branding arena. Legitimation, whether expressed through policy, political statements or branding rhetoric and imagery, appears to have had only measured success.

There are two major conclusions to draw from this. The first resonates with what other researchers have argued in relation to branding and the power dynamics involved in the elite constructions and representation of nations or places (i.e. national territory). While it is widely accepted that destination imaging and nation branding are key elements of government's activities today to draw transnational capital, it is often overlooked that elite-level processes of representation have political and social as well as spatial impacts,[100] and that top-down constructions of a place or society can substantially differ from bottom-up narratives. As noted by Paul[101] projects of imagineering can contain stories of a place and its people that emphasise novelty and distinctiveness. Very often these narratives refract from a "common sense" understanding as evident

in popular discourse and impose specific interpretations and visions – that of the most influential or powerful – on a given place.

In sum, branding processes can be viewed as the product of narrative assemblage. Whose narratives dominate and why is the result of compound processes of social engagement and intense if often concealed political battles. In the case of South Africa the success of the nation as brand – if read through the effectiveness of elites' nation-building project – seems limited. This suggests that at least one of the intended branding audiences, i.e. the domestic population, contest the symbolic construction that has aimed to give form to the post-apartheid society.

The second conclusion follows from this and relates to what this implies for people's acceptance of the state as entity. If Migdal[102] is correct, the post-apartheid polis can face instability if it is not able to generate sufficient and deep belief in its institutions and visions. This is beyond the scope of this article, which has not set out to evaluate the legitimacy of the South African state or its actions and policies, but has rather sought to explain discursive political processes, including branding, as forms of legitimation. At the very least the challenge to elites' constructs points to the fact that these constructs are contested, and even if they are not rejected outright, they are delegitimated by the existence of alternative viewpoints on nation and power-rule arrangements. It implies the need to create a different foundational myth than has been in place for the past two decades.

Conclusion

In a book that appeared some years after the first broad-based, non-racial elections that ushered in the new political dispensation, the South African intellectual Neville Alexander offered a critique of standard accounts of South African exceptionalism, arguing that far from a "miracle", as was often proclaimed, the relatively peaceful negotiated transition was reflective of long-existing historical conditions and that, if anything, South Africa was "just an ordinary country."[103] A decade later, in a separate analysis, he concluded that given political trajectories in the post-apartheid era and on the basis of persisting racial and class cleavages and the lack of a cohesive, national identity, South Africa was some distance away from reaching the ideal of "a new historical community."[104]

This article has tried to show how a specific vision of a new community has underpinned political leaders' efforts at state-making and nation-building over the post-apartheid era as part of wide-ranging processes of political legitimation. The article offered an inflection on established literature on nation branding by arguing that rather than viewing branding endeavours in isolation, a deeper understanding of the politics and processes underlying it can be gained if branding is seen as an element of

wider reaching state activities. These activities relate to some of the central pillars of power as they aim to provide justificatory basis for power distribution and the actions or policies of incumbents. They are given content through discursive constructions and stories of nation and state and offer rationalisation for the choices political leaders make on behalf of their populace.

Taking this perspective enabled an analysis of the ontological dimensions of nation branding in post-apartheid South Africa and how the latter has been part of a larger, more compound process of political legitimation that intertwined foreign and public policy. In other words, borrowing insights from Doty,[105] this enabled understanding not only "what" nation branding in the South African context has been and "how" it worked, but also how it came to be possible in the larger political framework. The article reviewed how nation branding fit in a bigger range of state processes and the spheres of actors and politics that have been involved. Various rationalisations – or discursive projections – have featured as political legitimations in the post-apartheid era that targeted both international and domestic audiences. Central has been the projection of an African variant of modernity, expressed through grand narratives of African revival and potential, and aimed at casting a particular idea of the polis and its people, as well as of the wider African continent. This projection has shaped South Africa's international engagements as well as political dynamics in the domestic arena. The legitimation it was meant to achieve, however, has been a process rife with inconsistencies and failures, suggesting the need for new pivotal tales and mythology.

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