

***Systemic Propaganda and the
Branding of Nations in Central and Eastern Europe****

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Abstract:

The restructuring of the U.S. and other major Western neoliberal economies from a manufacturing to a services- and informational-based economy has brought major political, economic, financial, and cultural shifts in the process, including a rapid rise of promotional industries. The growth of employment, spending, and professional expertise in advertising, marketing, public relations, branding, sales management, and other promotional activities are among the indicators of an expansion of promotional culture in government and business. This chapter analyzes national and transnational market penetration of post-communist Eastern European countries, with a particular emphasis given to efforts aimed at “nation branding.”

The informational economy in which the United States and other leading industrial states have staked the future is profoundly implicated in a broad range of transformations, not unlike the radical changes brought about in the era of the industrial revolution. Transnational capitalism is continually reorganizing not only the system of production but also the spheres of politics, social relations, knowledge, and cultural practice. Embedded in neoliberal economic and organizational restructuring, the digital mode of development (Castells) has altered relations among nations in ways that have broken traditional boundaries among nations, territorial and other forms, and the spatial-temporal order of things. Digital capitalism, still mainly headquartered in the West and focused on the informational functions of production, circulation, and consumption, enables those in the promotional fields to push the frontiers of consumerism and the commodifying of consciousness.

For those involved in the fields of international promotion, the sacred character of nations and states poses no barrier to those wishing to bring them into the fold of spectacular consumption. The new instruments of communications and informational and symbolic transfer excite such possibilities. This chapter looks at the political economic foundations of nation branding over the past decade by considering America’s branding strategy employed to both sell its own image abroad and other efforts used to integrate Central and Eastern Europe¹ into the Western economic and military alliance structure. Within a discursive strategy of “branded democracy” (Sussman 2010), the principal forms of Western intervention in the CEE region in the most recent decade (i.e., post-

1999) have been not guns or bombs but rather technologies of propaganda. Before looking at the attempts to sell “Brand America” and the U.S. engagement in the “color revolutions” of Eastern Europe, it is important to first discuss the political economic context in which promotional activities have accelerated and come to permeate key aspects of its foreign policy.

Selling Societies

It is now well understood that Western capitalist economies, particularly that of the United States, has shifted its base from manufacturing and agriculture to informational goods and services. It remains somewhat problematic as to what an information economy actually means, a discussion of which I took up in an earlier book (Sussman 1997). But there is no question that a major part of what was once the American industrial system is now located overseas (though still heavily under American ownership). The advent of digital communications has been central to the restructuring of the economy in organizational and technological terms, and the ongoing shift from government to private sector regulation has enabled higher concentrations of capital to dominate home and overseas markets.

One of the most crucial functions of the informational economy lies in the *selling* of symbolic goods (images, data, visual games, media, and other immaterial commodities), requiring a greater emphasis on consumerism, the prevailing “religion,” and the “opening up of more and more of the spaces of everyday life to promotional activity” – from the branding of stadia and streetcar stops to advertisements printed on theater and bus tickets (Moor 2007). Most popular manufactured consumer goods (clothing, footwear, toys, computers, phones, television sets, hardware, and other items) are produced offshore, while domestic industry has come to concentrate on advertising, marketing, and other promotional occupations. In the last half of the 20th century, manufacturing employment in the United States was reduced from more than one-third of the total to just over one-tenth, while service employment rose to about 80 percent (Hagenbaugh 2002). The leading structural change in the United States, as well as in other leading capitalist economies, is its concentration on the marketing (promotion) of material and entertainment culture rooted in a growing network of production, supplier, and consumer linkages.

The informational economy is lodged at a more “superstructural” level within the regime of neoliberalism, a top-down, supply-side legal regime and discourse about generating wealth through networked subcenters and flows of capital, while dismantling or paring down the social welfare and other non-military functions of the state. Under neoliberalism, a convergence of commercial and political propaganda finds its maturity in the “post-fordist” (flexible, deterritorialized production network) political economy. With the coming of post-fordism (starting in the 1970s), politics and public administration have been reconstituted, outsourced, and privatized through professional promotionalism, branding, and intensified consumerism for those with the means to pay for it. (American elections are more than ever the best that money can buy.) The promotional and propaganda “PR state,” rooted in advertising and political marketing, incites visceral responses to government, mostly negative, once exclusively associated with commodities, mostly positive.

Once in power, the G. W. Bush administration stepped up the use of propaganda in its foreign and domestic policies. Its relief effort for the tsunami victims in Southeast

Asia in 2005 was treated within inner government ranks less as a humanitarian gesture and more as an example of “successful public diplomacy.” Washington public diplomacy practitioners hailed it as changing the image of the U.S. government – as a correction to the prevailing negative foreign opinion toward “Brand America” (Fouts 2006, 15-17). It is likely that U.S. action taken after the Haiti earthquake calamity in January 2010 will be viewed within the same moral framework. Naomi Klein has argued that crises such as these are part of an opportunistic and unabashed neoliberal policy of American “disaster capitalism” (Klein 2007).

Systemic propaganda

To analyze the origins, content, and force of (post)modern promotional political culture, I wish to consider its meaning as well as one of its discrete practices, branding.

Contemporary techniques of commercial and political persuasion are nested in what has become a broader context of what I would call *systemic propaganda*. By this I mean that propaganda is not simply a policy and project outcome but rather that it is now grounded in the system of production. The mutually constituted forces behind economic, financial, technocratic, and technological change have enabled the formation of a new international division of labor, such that leading industrial countries, particularly the United States, have moved from being nations of producers to nations of sellers and consumers. It is the seller-consumer relationship and the “offshoring” of manufacturing that compels a higher and more pervasive order of public persuasion, commercial and ideological, which has deeply influenced social interaction and given rise to a broad set of promotional practices, from the ever more ubiquitous presence of advertising to the new forms everyday self-promotion (via personal websites, Facebook, celebrity twitter, and the like).

Pre-Second World War propaganda in the United States was largely associated with government efforts to “educate” and lead a public that nationally syndicated journalist and commentator Walter Lippmann derisively described as a “bewildered herd.” Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Germany’s “Reich Minister for Propaganda and Popular Enlightenment” and also a former journalist, shared such a notion and deeply admired America’s propaganda achievements. He declared that “Propaganda must label events and people with distinctive phrases or slogans.”² But Goebbels, though extremely sinister in his objectives, by current standards would be considered an amateur propagandist in terms of volume of output, reach, and technical sophistication.

Under the lead of the corporate commercial sphere, post-War propaganda became more deeply commodified. In 2008, even with declining revenues total U.S. advertising investments were \$232.9 billion, a figure significantly higher than the GDP of Nigeria (with some 155 million people) and in fact larger than all but 36 countries. Total U.S. investments in advertising, direct marketing, promotion, event, and public relations that year were \$751.8 billion, which when compared to national GDPs would make it the 18th largest “country.” Modern systemic propaganda, political or commercial, does not rely alone on the imagination of professional marketers. Aided by advanced panoptic collection and sorting technologies, propaganda draws far more systematically on the surveillance of citizen-consumer databases to “co-construct” effective messages, though usually without the permission or awareness of the surveilled. Indeed, the tolerances and preferences of audience-responders in the data mining process are *intrinsic* in shaping promotions. This renders data providers (consumers) as indispensable, informal, and

largely uncompensated *labor* in the value creation of the informational commodity, be it public policy or toothpaste.

A U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics study in 2003 calculated that over 15 million people worked in overall sales positions alone (Lambert 2003, 8). And the U.S. Department of Labor estimated in 2006 some 583,000 people working in advertising, marketing, promotions, public relations, and sales management (U.S. Department of Labor 2007). The Institute for Public Relations called this figure a gross underestimation (Falconi 2006). Indeed, many job classifications would not be counted in either index – check-out counter clerks, radio show hosts, call center employees, window display and graphic designers, commercial illustrators, professional athletes, and many others, including densely patched Nascar drivers, who are required or incentivized in at least part of their working lives to pitch products and services. The pervasive presence of promotion is discussed in a *Wall Street Journal* article, which found that in NFL games lasting an average of 185 minutes, playing time actually occupied only 11 minutes, while advertising took up an hour (Biderman 2010), which doesn't include the logos and stadium advertisements that informally show up on TV screens. The branding of space and the people involved in it are taking up and conditioning ever greater proportions of our visual and cognitive space.

In the new promotional economy, among those U.S.-based transnational corporations still manufacturing tangible goods, many focus more of their energies on marketing and branding than on actually producing them. Pharmaceutical companies, for example, spend more on advertising costs than on R&D. And in the public sector, with much of the state's functions now farmed out to private contractors, the business world has considerably more of a direct hand in influencing if not managing governmental affairs – from producing public informational goods, to providing mercenary soldiering abroad, to organizing the political campaign process. Intensive surveillance and analysis of citizens' personal data and consumer habits is conducted by companies such as Acxiom³ and sold to private vendors and to political campaign consultants who then target customized, interest-focused direct mail to potential voters for their candidates.

The culture of consumerism also bears evidence of relentless profiteering through simulacra. There is a line of clothing malappropriately called “Society of the Spectacle,” which not only treats spectacle as a fact of contemporary life but claims to be responsive to the “critical issues” in the world by “propagating social awareness” and offering “casual-luxury apparel designed for fashion savvy individuals” (Society of the Spectacle 2009). Its entrepreneurial founders offer no reference on their website to the author of their eponymous rip-off, Guy Debord, who was anything but enthused about the image conscious consumerist emphasis of fatuous modern bourgeois culture.

But this is not unusual within anything-goes postmodernist capitalist mores. An online clothing company markets its products under its label, “Propaganda,” but a U.K.-based branding and marketing firm for companies and their products also calls itself “Propaganda” and claims to have a registered trademark on the name. In Portland, Oregon, a department store, Meier & Frank (owned by May Co.), introduced a new line of women's clothing in 2003 called “Ideology” (McInerney 2003, C-1). And far from Portland's shores, a Russian “political technology” (consulting) firm plied its campaign management talents under the name “Niccolo M” (for Machiavelli of course). The corporate market has few scruples about stealing and reworking classics from historical

memory, often into their signifying antonyms (as in the lexicon of the Ministry of Truth in Orwell's *1984*). The lyrics of earlier *anti-systemic* songs are now casually patched into the systemic propaganda of branded advertising.

Nation branding

One of the derivatives of neoliberalism and systemic propaganda is a hybrid of advertising and marketing – *branding*. Branding is a form of public relations or spin, which took off in the post-Soviet era and the rise of “market fundamentalism.” It adds to exchange value of a commodity, concept, person, space, or place by establishing a lifestyle identity and a loyalty among customers to its brand name. Branding specialist Wally Olins, celebrated within the promotional community for creating “Brand Poland,” asserts, quite candidly, that “branding is propaganda . . . what it boils down to is manipulation and seduction. That’s the business we’re in. That’s the business of life” (cited in Jansen 2008, 133). Such a cavalier moral declaration represents the postmodern arrogance of an industry habituated to the exaltation of frivolous consumption (*homo consumens*) and fetishization found in advertising and other promotional media. It recalls Guy Debord’s critique of “the world of the autonomous image, where deceit deceives itself” (Debord 1994, 12).

In its relentless pursuit of the conquest of spatiality, entrepreneurial branding is not limited to the promotion of consumption of material goods and intangible services. It is now part of a strategic set of discursive practices intended to bring more public land masses (and even water) under the regulatory and ideological administration of international capital. Branding spaces, indeed nations, is an aggressive assertion with legal and coercive underpinnings in what Lefebvre (1991) identified as the ownership over spaces of consumption and the consumption of spaces. The professional branding of space has extended itself beyond the spectacle of theme cities, with their convention, sports, and entertainment centers, urban renewal, high rise condominiums, pedestrian-friendly commercial malls, new businesses, theaters, tourist amusements, restaurants, and other built amenities, along with heavy policing and surveillance – intended to breath life into declining downtown districts of major metropolises. Branding reconceptualizes the nation state, denuded of much of its governing function, as a more dedicated partner in production or as an object of fancy or fantasy. Even charities, which take up much of the state’s diminishing social assistance, employ branding, assisted by consultants who advise on the creation of institutional logos, campaign paraphernalia, tactics, and strategies (Moor 2007). Capitalism, Lefebvre notes, has turned from production *in* space to the production *of* space (Lefebvre 1991). There is no limit to the marketing and commodification of place and space, much as the Italian autonomista Mario Tronti, writing in 1962, had anticipated:

The more capitalist development advances . . . the more the production of relative surplus value penetrates everywhere, the more the circuit production-distribution-exchange-consumption inevitably develops . . . the relationship between capitalist production and bourgeois society, between the factory and society, between society and the state, become more and more organic . . . and the whole society becomes an articulation of production. In short, all of society lives as a function of the factory and

the factory extends its exclusive domination over all of society (Mario Tronti, cited in Dyer-Witheford 1999, 263n2).

With the deepening of neoliberalism and the enabling capacities of new informational technologies, propaganda is increasingly undertaken by or outsourced to private commercial actors. A business-friendly image is regarded as a *sine qua non* to nations' survival as viable economic entities in a transnational corporate-dominated economic system. For PR firms, nation states are now registered as simply "accounts," little different than those of beer producers or toy manufacturers. Simon Anholt, a British journal editor and international marketing adviser, runs an indexing service for foreign governments that he calls "nation branding," a term he claims to have invented and which he defines as "the business of applying corporate marketing theory to countries" (Teslik 2007). According to Wally Olins, chair of London-based Saffron Brand Consultants: "The word brand excites a great deal of contentious discussion." But he prefers the term "reputation management" (Olins 2005) to describe the spinning of the nation state as a production unit and trade generator – as if that were somehow less contentious.

A former PR specialist for Hill and Knowlton (a Washington firm known for its work with pro-Western regimes, including those in the Middle East),⁴ in Budapest and London and more recently a British business university lecturer in much demand on the speaker circuit, Anholt insists that nation branding or reputation management in Central and Eastern European countries turns on their ability to institute neoliberal reforms, a precondition for attracting foreign capital. "Having a country brand is necessary to attract investors but not enough; there must be an infrastructure, a skilled workforce, favourable tax policies and returns on investment" He adds that "for countries whose image is better than reality (Poland, Czech Republic or Romania), the challenge is to transform their superior image into concrete investment projects while the countries that score higher on reality than image (Hungary, for example) should improve their perception in the market and level of notoriety." Even better, he offers, the Czech Republic would be well served to change the English version of its name to make it easier for foreigners to vocalize. Estonia, too, he says, would be well served to adopt the German name Estland (for its association with high ranking Finland on the attractiveness scale) (cited in Szondi 2007).

Clearly, Anholt has put his resume in the service of Western state and corporate interests and sees nation branding as part of a larger neoliberal economic strategy. But he is not simply a hired gun for industry. One journalist discovered that he sits on the advisory council of Business for Diplomatic Action, a group of marketing, academic, and corporate veterans – which counts intellectual heavyweights like Joseph Nye and Jeffrey Garten, as well as corporate titans like McDonald's and GlaxoSmithKline, among its ranks – organized in 2004 to combat anti-Americanism abroad (Risen 2005).

Anholt identifies six areas of nation branding interest: tourism, exports, governance, investment and immigration, culture and heritage, and people (Kaneva 2007). Most typically, nation branding is used to promote tourism and foreign investment. Anholt insists that nation branding is a force for good, involving "the intelligent and judicious application of marketing and branding techniques upon countries [which] can be a powerful force for global wealth distribution and cultural as well as

economic development” (Anholt 2002, 59). There is simply no evidence that such an outcome has occurred. Indeed, the recession in Western Europe led to a meltdown in Eastern Europe. Five years after joining the European Union, nation branded Estonia “has gone from boom to bust” (Stokes 2009). Perhaps, its economic results would have been more favorable had it following Anholt’s renaming strategy.

Some of Anholt’s other findings are also rather murky. In partnership with the Roper marketing firm, his firm found in late 2009 that on the basis of their selected markers, America was ranked the world’s most “beloved country” – which, he says, had much to do with Obama and the end of the Bush administration (Sherman 2009). This finding is likely to have been overstated. In 2008, a U.S. Congress report found a precipitous drop in the image of the United States abroad during the G. W. Bush administration (U.S. House of Representatives 2008). Richard Lugar, former chair of the U.S. Senate foreign relations committee, wrote in February 2009 (already into the Obama administration) that polling in 21 countries indicated that 43 percent of respondents “had a negative view of the United States” (Lugar 2009). It is unlikely that a country’s image can radically switch in the space of just one year, or, even if in some way correct, it merely indicates the fickle and unreliable character of such a finding. Moreover, his claim that the degree of branding success in a country correlates with economic improvement and wealth distribution does not appear to hold up in the case of the “beloved country,” which continues to suffer from massive real unemployment and growing income inequality, the worst among the major industrial countries – even worse than Ukraine (World Bank 2008), whose real GDP fell by more than 7 percent in 2009.

Anholt nonetheless believes that nation branding starts with the marketplace and the consumer (Mayes 2008, 127). As he argues, the unyielding law of comparative advantage requires nations to compete for status and symbolic advantage in order to survive. A “brand strategy” and a “brand image” is a necessity if they want to be attractive to the transnational corporate community and compete as viable neoliberal economic entities. He even advises governments to develop cabinet-level branding ministers – which indeed, could be seen as a postmodern equivalent of a ministry of propaganda. And he is taken seriously by the corporate business community, which undoubtedly appreciates his devotion to the preservation of Western hegemony.

In Anholt’s view, for many countries (*pace* Thatcher), there is no alternative: “Countries have to play the market rules just as companies do, like it or not” (Anholt, cited in Kaneva 2007). Otherwise, they are “doomed to fail” (Anholt, cited in Mayes 2008, 128). States find their place in the world economy by competing with one another to become a desirable destination. A “strong positive image has the potential of giving a powerful and distinct competitive advantage for a place” (Seppo Rainisto, cited in Andersson 2007, 121). Anholt claims that up to a third of all global wealth is derivative of branding (cited in Jansen 2008, 125). But, he admonishes, while “an economic tool of critical importance,” nation branding is different from branding products and requires a higher order of representation (*International Trade Forum* 2005, quote from Anholt).

Nation branding is an extension of city branding and theme parks, involving a spectacle of promotion intended to attract foreign investment, tourism, and trade to states collaborating with international capital and development institutions. In each of these branded environments, social and cultural diversity is obliterated by the value put on

homogenized spectatorship and consumption. A Dutch academic elaborates on how branding integrates the identity and business interests of the state:

Tiny Estonia now not only takes exception to the label "post-Soviet state," it also dislikes being called a "Baltic" country. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the country's foreign minister, refers to Estonia as a "pre-Eu" or a "Scandinavian" country. Lacking blue-chip brands such as Finland's Nokia or Sweden's Volvo, Estonia may also try to push itself as a "green country" to attract environmentally conscious individuals and foreign direct investment. Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, meanwhile, has set up a special promotional program aimed at improving the country's image, which most EU citizens still associate with devout Catholicism, backwardness, and conservatism (van Ham 2001, 4).

PUT ESTONIA BRAND IMAGE HERE

Efforts at nation branding have the effect of depoliticizing the nation and decoupling it from the authority of the state. It disregards internal conflicts that inhabit all nations; it attempts to neutralize what is at a nation's core, difference and often discord. Indeed, nation branding is not as much about (re)constructing a nation as creating a spectacle by which transnational elites attempt to reappropriate the "nation" as a signifier of consumption values. Nation branders are like missionaries – who represent not a people and their culture but the nation as an appendage, a surface environment for generating exchange value.

Fostering the interests of transnational corporations (TNCs) trumps other aspects America's international relations. According to the former director of the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy, the American diplomat is expected to be "[p]art activist, part lobbyist, and part street-smart policy entrepreneur" (Fouts 2006, 22). Nation branding and other PR initiatives serve to lay the groundwork to make new regional markets safe for foreign investment. To that end, an international accounting and auditing firm, Ernst and Young, conducts "attractiveness surveys" for Central and Eastern European countries to assist them to attract TNC capital.

Has the idea of the nation been transformed into intellectual property? What exactly is a nation? For Anthony Smith (2001), it is a named people usually living in a historic territory (or homeland) with a common language and ancestry as well as shared myths and a sense of unique history. In other words, nation is an internal "imagined" if not organic affinity. For Benedict Anderson (1993), nation is a sense of "community" constructed largely out of a vernacular literature, derivative of "print capitalism" (and therefore a modern evocation). Nation is not a "branded" identity that can be organized by professional wordsmiths or image makers. It is a set of social, cultural, and political, not professional or economic, relationships, a collective expression of its people.

Instead of people defining themselves, nation branding is outsourced to domestic and foreign corporations, enabling the latter to determine national identity: the "Brand Estonia" account was handled by British Interbrand (a branch of Omnicom Group, one of the world's largest advertising conglomerates) and designed and developed in New York City (Jansen 2008, 123). What branding firms do for nation states is deliver them to the

forces that seek to denationalize them economically while boosting their national identities for the purpose of pushing inter-national competition and patron-client relations – not unlike the way that a political system brings in foreign consultants to promote and manage a money-driven electioneering process and build links to international capital.

Nation Branding and U.S. Public Diplomacy

Those who find nation branding an effective way to alter a state's image tend to regard public consciousness, per Lippmann, as a *tabula rasa* waiting to be inscribed by propagandists. But even the United States, an advanced center of the promotion industries, had little success in a "public diplomacy" strategy called "Brand America," created by the G. W. Bush administration and backed by a Congressional budget appropriation of \$520 million – "the biggest public-relations effort in the history of United States foreign policy." The money was part of an effort "to 'sell' America to the world" through a media propaganda blitz in the Middle East and South Asia (Snow 2003, 24). Naomi Klein noted that this particular propaganda project rested on individuals such as advertising executive, Charlotte Beers, the "queen of Madison Avenue" (Critchlow 2004, 85-86), who, with no previous foreign policy portfolio, was chosen by then secretary of state Colin Powell to be undersecretary for public diplomacy and public affairs (PDPA). Beers brought with her an extensive background as a former executive at three ad agencies, J. Walter Thompson,⁵ Tatham-Lair and Kudner, and Ogilvy and Mather.

In 2002, Beers was put in charge of a particular State Department propaganda effort officially called the "shared values initiative" (SVI). This program focused on trying to counter the highly critical views of U.S. policy in the Arab region. The idea was to try to win over hearts and minds toward U.S. military initiatives, focusing mainly "on beaming US propaganda into the Muslim world, much of it directed at teens" (Cockburn and St. Clair, 2004, 320). At a cost to taxpayers of some \$15 million, one of its objectives was to purchase local broadcast time on Arab channels to promote a favorable image of the United States as a country as well as its foreign policy (Kendrick and Fullerton 2004, 297).

To assist her, Beers brought in Cari Eggspuehler, head of the American private sector interest group Business for Diplomatic Action (*Brand Strategy* 2004). She also hired the consumer marketing services of advertising agency McCann-Erickson Worldwide to help produce television spots about American and Muslim "shared values." These were intended for on-air circulation in various Islamic countries. Beers described the project as "the most elegant brand I've ever had to work with" (Kuchment 2001).

By almost all accounts, "Brand America" was a flop. There is little evidence to show that the Middle East's negative opinion of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, with the extraordinary violence that has engendered (over 600 thousand Iraqi violent deaths by mid-2006, according to the British medical journal, *Lancet*), has been placated by U.S. attempts to persuade people in the region of America's good intentions. With few stations willing to run the promotions, the U.S. mainstream media reported that SVI was poorly received (*Brand Strategy* 2004). SVI ads were soon suspended, and Beers promptly resigned her post.

The State Department's misguided attempts to convince the Arab world of its positive objectives "likely stemmed," Klein argued, "from the fact that Beers views the United States' tattered international image as little more than a communications problem" (Klein 2002). Beers' preparation for foreign policy work was based on her established reputation as a brand specialist for Uncle Ben's rice and Head & Shoulders dandruff shampoo (Dumenco 2001). Working with Powell, with whom she had been a co-board director at Gulf Airstream Aircraft, pitching Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" was quite another matter. Against critics, Powell defended her appointment, asserting that "We are selling a product. We need someone who can re-brand American foreign policy, re-brand diplomacy" (cited in Klein 2002). Beers remained in the PDPA position from October 2001 until March 2003. Powell lasted another year.

Beers' replacement, Margaret Tutwiler, had little more success with "public diplomacy" in the Middle East. Prior to assuming the PDPA assignment, Tutwiler had worked on media relations for the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association, a trade lobbyist for the wireless communications industry. In 2000, she coordinated media for George Bush from Florida as the vote counting controversy was unfolding. She lasted only 6 months at PDPA, abruptly departing just as the Abu Ghraib scandal became public to assume a position as a government relations specialist with the New York Stock Exchange – seamlessly passing through the revolving door between government and big business to ply her contacts in the convergent public and private worlds. She also lent her talents to the International Republican Institute, which is the overseas "democracy promotion" branch of the Republican Party. In 2007, she became communications director at Merrill Lynch.

Tutwiler's replacement was Karen Hughes, a former communications adviser to then governor of Texas, George Bush. A member of the White House Iraq Group, she, together with spin master Karl Rove, Republican political consultant Mary Matalin, and others, helped design and market the rationale for the 2003 invasion. John Brown, a 22-year foreign service veteran, who quit the State Department in protest over the invasion, described Hughes as a "key person in the creation of the crude propaganda that led our country into war" (Press Action 2006). Hughes' "compassionate conservative" photo ops failed to reach or convince Middle East audiences, as most Arab media outlets refused to air her propaganda videos featuring happy Muslims living in America (Barber 2007, 207; Rich 2006, 223). With plummeting support among Arabs for the intervention, Hughes resigned her position as coordinator of war public relations at the end of 2007. In 2008, she joined the PR firm Burson-Marsteller, headed by Hillary Clinton's former chief presidential campaign strategist Mark Penn, to return to her more familiar role as a domestic political spinstress.

Benjamin Barber writes that the PDPA "not only treats America as a brand, but argues that the country's fortunes may depend less on policy realities or traditional identity and behavior, than on brand marketing by experienced advertising and marketing executives." The migration of branding to foreign policy and politics in general reflects the enormous influence of the informational and marketing economy and the authority of agencies of the neoliberal state to privatize and professionalize these critical public domains. Foreign policy is conceived as a selling activity as if it were just another product to be pitched, like Cola-Cola, and the State Department and key Congressional members involved in foreign policy are expected to support a privately organized

marketing model of politics that deprives citizens of the right of public deliberation (Barber 2007, 200, 205). There is no precise measure of how much the U.S. government spends on “public communications” overall, but, according to a minority staff report, private PR firms alone (not including projects performed by internal government agency employees) received \$88 million in public relations contracts in 2004 alone (Kosar 2005, 7-8). The State Department’s budget for public diplomacy for FY 2009 was \$37 million (\$36 million in FY 2008) (White House 2009). The official Congressional budget for all forms of public diplomacy in 2005 was increased to \$1.2 billion (Johnson, Dale, and Cronin 2005).

Branding Eastern European “Revolutions”

The Bush administration had more success in putting propaganda to work in Eastern Europe. In the uprisings that took place in the region starting in 2000, symbolic forms of protest took center stage in Western-assisted efforts to sequentially depose vulnerable and recalcitrant nationalistic political leaders in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine without recourse to armed intervention. (They also tried but failed to overthrow Belarus president, Aleksandr Lukashenko.) With the direct advice and financing of numerous U.S. “democracy promotion” groups (and some support from Germany and Britain), local youth activists were taught how to tactically use posters, buttons, logos, graffiti, slogans, citizen mobilization, revolutionary-sounding lexicon, and the branded term, “color revolution,” which created a sense that the momentum was more than just a political campaign – but, rather, a transformational movement.

Working closely with Western European and particularly American agents and advisers, the youth movements, *Otpor* (Resistance) in Serbia, *Kmara* (Enough) in Georgia, and *Pora* (It’s Time) in Ukraine, which precipitated a set of non-violent *coups* against, respectively, Slobodan Milošević, Eduard Shevardnadze, and, at least momentarily, Viktor Yanukovich, are now all but vanished, some of their leaders having taken on establishment political identities on their own. Gone are the silhouette clenched fist logos, the catchy slogans, the Gene Sharp-inspired non-violent political destabilization tactics,⁶ and the numerous other marketing tactics that the rebellious youth took to heart with a lot of support from USAID, Freedom House, the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Democratic Institute (NDI),⁷ George Soros and his Open Society Institute, and other American institutions.

The democracy promoters’ “revolutionary” template involved a “flexible” array of political, financial, technical, branding, and marketing tactics to foment a militant public mood, get people into the streets, and force either an election or a post-election surrender of power to rid the region of the West’s undesired incumbents (Sussman and Krader, 2008). As a Kazakhstan researcher analyzed it, political marketing tactics operate in the following fashion:

“[B]randing” technology is a tool of psychological manipulation. The counter-elite works hard to synchronize public consciousness by imposing behavioral and identification matrices on society as a form of fashionable behavior: external and internal forces employ psychological, semiotic, and other mechanisms to plant conscious and subconscious identification with the opposition and its aims in the minds of the people. This makes it much easier to plant political ideas later (Tastenov 2007).

In advance of the elections that were to be held in the three countries, Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), and Ukraine (2004), IRI helped instigate and choreograph large street demonstrations, as well as design branded symbols of resistance, such as the clenched fist (Traynor, 2004). IRI's Iraq program personnel in fact received *their* training through the Institutes's CEE programs; NED 2006, 36). The uprisings and their icons were reported by jingoist mainstream American media as indicators of a sweeping popular, pro-Western tide. The same media, often acting as much like a handmaiden to government as the semi-authoritarian-controlled press that they criticized, all but ignored the massive street protests in the United States, Britain, and many other countries on the eve of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

The first of the color revolutions took place in Serbia shortly after NATO prepared the ground with a massive air assault designed to destabilize the country, support the breakaway Kosovo region, and arrest the state leader, Milošević. Serbia's *Otpor* youth movement leader Srdja Popovic boasted that the struggle for power centered on the manipulation and control of branding and "propaganda":

A battle for "media space" began, with Otpor producing low-cost propaganda materials, such as posters, handouts, stickers, and graffiti, using only black and white shades on all propaganda material to solidify "brand recognition." The movement was able to cover every available physical space and "managed to a surprising extent to shape, if not to control, the terms of the debate."... The strategy of presenting Otpor as the national victim of government repression drew conversions, as stated here, even from within the ranks of the government (Popovic 2001).

In the branding and propaganda effort, Otpor was not alone. With the support of American PR firms, which generated most of the "news" about the Yugoslavian crisis (Salander 2007), Otpor's political campaign was toasted in the West for its masterful marketing and branding techniques.⁸ In fact, the slogans that Otpor activists recited and spray painted on walls were pre-tested by opinion polls and vetted by American advisers. Otpor and Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) spokespeople were tutored on how to handle journalists and "stay on message." DOS marketing specialist, Milan Stevanovic, acknowledged the joint nature of the propaganda effort: "The foreign support was critical ... this was the first campaign where our strategy was based on real scientific research." Some of the "scientific" campaign tactics behind Otpor came from a Serbian company Strategic Marketing (currently a joint venture with the American market research firm, A.C. Nielsen, and British PGM Consulting), "which ran a series of focus groups on behalf of the opposition coalition and the Otpor student resistance movement with financial support from Western democracy groups" (Dobbs 2000).

Strategic Marketing displayed the markings of an American style branding campaign. Each of Otpor's and the other opposition groups' pre-tested "core messages" was designed to "sell" regime change in much the same way that soft drinks are marketed. The CEO of Strategic Marketing, _____, declared: "We approached the process with a brand to sell and a brand to beat... The brand to sell was Koštunica. The brand to beat was Milošević" (Dobbs 2000).

Among the keys to a good "revolution" brand were logos. Otpor graffitied a black-and-white fist logo on walls, printed it on stickers, and emblazoned it on t-shirts (an image and set of tactics later copied by Georgia's *Kmara* youth movement). USAID paid

for 80 tons of stickers reading ‘*Gotov je*’ (He's finished), which young Otpor activists pasted on flat surfaces throughout Belgrade and other Serbian cities (Dobbs 2000). Peter Ackerman and associates, American producers of a propaganda film about the fall of Milošević, “Bringing Down a Dictator,” boasted that “Otpor became a ubiquitous brand-name, as familiar as Coca-Cola and Nike” (“A Force More Powerful,” no date; Sussman 2010). Ackerman was concurrently head of an interventionist group called the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict and later became board chair of Freedom House. Otpor’s co-founder, Ivan Marovic, echoed Ackerman: “Our idea was to use corporate branding in politics.... The movement has to have a marketing department. We took Coca-Cola as our model” (quoted in Traynor 2005).

Reasoning that brands were more critical to success than even charismatic, but vulnerable, leadership, Otpor organizers enlisted twenty-odd revolving surrogates (Stefanovic 2000), who took turns standing in for the organization with prepared logos and rehearsed messages. Marovic told National Public Radio’s Bob Garfield:

In the 20th Century, branding was done by connecting a movement to the leader, so everybody remembers Lech Walesa, or Nelson Mandela, or Mahatma Gandhi. In Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, branding was done not by connecting to leaders. Leaders could have been blackmailed or bribed or even maybe killed. You can't do that with brands or ideas (Garfield 2004).

That is to say, brands are more durable than citizen organizers and that people can be more efficiently mobilized by canned inanimate symbols than by a living, breathing, and vulnerable leader.

The “revolution” brand soon became used as a transferable template. In its training of the youth movements in Georgia (Kmara) and Ukraine (Pora), Otpor reproduced the marketing tactics it employed in Serbia. Pora, “supported by the [British] Westminster Foundation, brought in Serbian agitators to train 200 [Ukrainian] activists” (Lane 2009, 129). Otpor activist Aleksandar Maric boasted: “We trained them [Ukrainian youth opposition] in how to set up an organization, how to open local chapters, how to create a ‘brand,’ how to create a logo, symbols, and key messages” (quoted in Bransten 2004). Freedom House provided Pora \$500,000, while another Ukrainian opposition group, *Znayu*, received \$50,000 from Freedom House and an additional \$1 million from the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation to initiate a teaser-type advertising campaign in seventeen Ukrainian cities. “Znayu was one of our larger projects in terms of visibility, but it was really just a small part of our whole work,” explained an election specialist from Freedom House in Kiev, Juhani Grossman (MacKinnon 2007, 174).

A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reporter, Carol Off, who helped produce a CBC documentary, “Anatomy of a Revolution,” looked at the events in 2004-2005 that led to the Ukraine uprising and subsequent election of Yushchenko. She found that foreign money, especially from the United States, was central to that “revolution,” which she described as a “carbon copy” of the events staged a year earlier in Georgia. This had much to do with the “Madison Avenue-style branding” efforts of professionals from the United States. When Serbian, Georgian, and Ukrainian student leaders were brought together in Hungary to study techniques of non-violent conflict, the funding and technical support came from the International Republican Institute, George Soros, and Colonel Robert Helvey, a former U.S. military intelligence expert. In Kiev, Off found that “so

many of the same tactics, so many of the same kind of procedures happened in Serbia, but I [also] realized that so many of the same people were there, so many of the same funding agencies were there” (Off, 2005).

What these interventions mean for regional democracy and national sovereignty will take some years to determine. But the early evidence, based on the political behavior of the Western-based successors to power, does not suggest that the color revolutions lived up to their promise. Indeed, there was nothing at all actually revolutionary about the uprisings in these countries, as they can be seen as little more than intra-elite transfers of power, world capitalist integration of their economies, and expectations of their membership in NATO. There were no radical social or political transformations to justify calling them “revolutionary.” The appropriation of the term in these cases is mere promotional in character.

Branded State Identities in Central and Eastern Europe

Since the “orange revolution” in Ukraine, the election of Yushchenko, and the government’s turn toward joining the European Union, its state leaders have more actively taken up the baneful arts of modern political promotion. Leading up to the scheduled 2010 election, all three major candidates for the presidency, Yushchenko, the prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, and former prime minister Viktor Yanukovich, all imported heavyweight American political consultants to manage or advise their image campaigns. Tymoshenko had the services of the consulting firm AKPD Message and Media, founded by David Axelrod, which ran the Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign. She also brought in American pollsters, John Anzalone and Jeff Link of Link Strategies. Incumbent president Yushchenko employed the services of the American polling and political strategy firm, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, and political consultant Jordan Lieberman and as of 2009 had advisers in his camp who are linked to Bill Clinton. Yanukovich, the bête noire of the Americans in 2004, hired the Washington, D.C.-based Republican Party firm of Paul Manafort, which advised the 2008 presidential campaign of John McCain. The persuasive lobbying power of these firms in Washington is clearly a major factor in their selection (George Washington University 2009; Stern 2009; Sussman 2010). But in 2010, it was Yanukovich who prevailed, and his presidential victory was sweet revenge for the humiliation he previously suffered, ending the saga of the U.S.-backed “orange revolution.”

Central and Eastern Europe’s national identities, subdued in certain respects but not suppressed during the Soviet period under communist party rule despite its official “internationalism,” have been refocused in recent years. Most states in the region seek either a more Europeanized identity or realignment with the center of the former Soviet Union, the Russian Federation. Many people in the region still associate national identity with a time when social welfare was an accepted public function of the state. With the onslaught of privatization, the notion of “public” has been largely discarded through the commercialization and “balkanization” of public spaces and institutions, a conversion to private automobile transportation, largely unplanned, big box consumerist culture and institutions, and a garish importation of corporate logos. In recent years, most Eastern European cities, for example, have experienced a dramatic reduction of public transit, leading to “increasing levels of congestion, pollution, and social isolation” (Stanilov 2007, 277). The so-called “free market” has taxed the poorer Eastern European states in ways unimagined in the initial eagerness of several state leaders for liberalization.

Nation branding among the CEE countries began to take off with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its allied regimes, creating an almost unobstructed pathway to neoliberal penetration of the region and elsewhere. From the public relations industry perspective, what the CEE countries immediately required in order to integrate with the West was an image makeover in order to remove the taint of socialism, bureaucratism, and the Western “orientalizing” of its “balkanized” cultures. The region now has the fastest advertising growth rate in the world (*Campaign Magazine* 2007). CEE’s nationhoods are circumscribed by the prevailing desire of state leaders to integrate their economies with that of the European Union and the larger transnational economic order. Nation branding is part of this strategic initiative. From the E.U. perspective, branding also serves to modify historical nationalism, particularly of Eastern European states, thereby “contributing greatly to the further pacification of Europe” (van Ham 2001, 3). But it also forces the region’s nations to compete against each other for branded supremacy, inducing each to outdo and denigrate the other.

PUT ESTONIA AND SLOVENIA NATION BRANDING IMAGES ABOUT HERE

Several of the CEE countries have attempted to refashion themselves to appeal to the E.U. members, to the larger foreign investment community, to tourist trade, and other industries. The Hungarian government in 1998 briefly created a “Country Image Centre” to help promote itself abroad. But it lasted only until the next government came to power, which dismissed the initiative as not nation but political branding (Szondi 2008, 201). Of all the countries in the region, Russia clearly remains the holy grail of the international business community and of the pursuers of *realpolitik*, a term with which Simon Anholt identifies his work (Jansen 2008, 133).

Russia’s absorption into the world economy has been made more certain by the presence of transnational consumerist enterprises, including Coca-Cola, McDonald’s, Ikea, American Express, Nestlé, Wrigley, Proctor & Gamble, Unilever, Nike, Levi Strauss, PepsiCo, Philip Morris, GM, and others. These corporations in turn are supported by the consumer marketing data delivered by such brand research companies as WPP’s TGI and TNS Gallup (O’Leary 2008). People like Rory Davenport, a leading Western PR consultant in the region and managing director of the Washington-based Qorvis Communications, is a big reason for Russia’s accelerating market status, whose annual advertising market expanded at an average rate of 41 percent from 2000 to 2006, when it reached sixth place internationally.

With an eye to joining the competitive surge in attracting foreign investors and tourist currency, branding and place marketing have become important concerns of CEE state policy. In the Czech Republic, for example, this is aided by “a group of internationally renowned consultancies and producers in the form of the Association for Foreign Investment.” Poland has an “Institute of Polish Brand,” with close ties to the government, that has collaborated with the British branding company, Saffron, to sell its national image (Capik 2007, 156; Saffron 2008). A far off second world competitor, South Korea has a presidential council on nation branding.

Nadia Kaneva, who looked at how Bulgaria attempted to burnish a brand image for both Bulgarians and Western Europeans in its efforts to make the country a desirable candidate for E.U. membership (which it achieved, along with Romania, in 2007),

expressed skepticism about the compelling necessity of nation branding. For one thing, as she found, a country's actual social conditions and relations of power matter little to image makers. Nation branding, she argued, ignores the historical foundation of the state: "Generally, the goal of marketing research is *not* to critique social relations but, rather, to identify modes of action that would improve the strategic positions of agents within specific competitive fields" (Kaneva 2007, italics in original). State-sponsored advertising that sells the nation to E.U. audiences is lodged within certain assumptions about Western Europe as a "developed" and "civilized" model to which Bulgaria must aspire and thus represents a form of "self-colonization" (Kaneva 2007), an assimilation to a notion of a unified, albeit superficial, "Europeanness."

But, as another author put it: "Nation branding does not allow for citizens to play a significant [civic] role in the branding process" (Widler 2007, 144).

PUT BULGARIA BRANDING PROMOTION HERE

Branded Nations, Sovereignty, and Democracy

The maintenance of the corporate state requires an intensification of public persuasion through various forms of promotional speech and text in order to divert citizens from the cognitive dissonance that follows from the unwillingness of the neoliberal state to protect public interests. Producers and consumers, more than citizens, are the constitutive elements of a neoliberal state. Indeed, the notion of consumer is becoming convergent with labor, as the informational economy breaks down the separation by treating the data extracted from and produced by citizens as a (largely uncompensated) form of created value intrinsic to informational goods and services. It is but one more step to treat the nation as a branded commodity.

Branding is an attempt to bring order in a networked informational economy that is unleashed from the more structured nexus of fordist era production and consumption and requires a stable system of networking to maintain and expand its reach and power (Lash 2002, 149-150). As such, there can be no genuinely organic or democratic character to nation branding, as it reconstitutes the state as the "intellectual property" of an integrated elite set of domestic and external actors. As nation branding is intended primarily for external legitimation, there are important implications about its use with regard to state sovereignty and domestic democratic development. For many, nation branding represents a profaning of the sacred idea of national identity.

Its use is premised on the identification of a country by calculations of its most competitive image, not what its own people regard as the useful pursuits of its state. The principal objectives of nation branding are concerned with attracting foreign investment, encouraging trade, and supporting domestic tourism. Trade and investment designs of branding clearly point to a small class of transnational executives and stock owners seeking networked profit opportunities through ties with local compradors who are likely to engage in corrupt practices to secure the relationship. And tourist-oriented branding is "conducted from uneven power bases as encoded in commodified identities," fortifying hegemonies of class, race, and gender (Mayes 2008, 127-128).

Nation branding involves techniques similar to polling. It's regarded by its defenders as a means of capturing authentic internal and external images of a country. But as external polling is not a substitute for or even a supplement to deliberative

democratic discourse, neither can branding be a genuine reflection of what images citizens wish to project of themselves – or whether citizens even desire to sell themselves through marketing measures to outsiders. Branding can only simplify and homogenize; Central and Eastern European nations are a vast imbricated mosaic of peoples, cultures, histories, and nations within nations that require sophisticated understandings of their great diversity and internal struggles for identity.

It is hard to determine how seriously to take “nation branding,” as it appears to be an exaggerated extension of neoliberal globalization and commodification – the notion that everything is for sale and that the potential market value of a nation (which some economists actually calculate) can be traded on international exchanges like stock equity. The presumption is that if the brand value of the nation declines, so does the nation itself. As the U.S. leaders discovered, it is hard to sell its national image in the Middle East and elsewhere when unemployment is growing, income for the majority is falling, higher education and medical care are the most expensive in the world, and where nearly 20 percent of America’s children live in poverty. The real “product” of a nation is derived from the energy discharged by its citizens, not the fetishized logos and ideological objectifications of marketers. Nations with happy and well-cared for citizens do not need to have themselves marketed or branded. Their actions and degree of well-being speak much louder than their images. As Henri Lefebvre noted, drawing on Hegel and Marx, “there can be no thought, no reflection, without language, and no language without a material underpinning” (Lefebvre 1991, 402).

Moreover, the severe recession in the world economy in recent years has had a devastating impact on Central and Eastern Europe, leading to spiraling downturns in production, exports, finance, tourism, and GDP, not unlike the trauma unleashed by “shock therapy” in the years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is not a favorable condition for nation branding efforts – or for advertising and marketing of any kind, whose spending in fact has declined in recent years. It has also led to greater skepticism about the democratic claims of the “color revolutions,” resulting in the delegitimation of several governments in the region, including Saakashvili in Georgia and Yushchenko in Ukraine. What their elections demonstrated is that marketing and branding do not have lasting impacts when the claims of leadership itself are found suspect. The citizens of Central and Eastern Europe and the governments that assert their leadership would be better served concentrating on the substance of democracy and development rather than creative images that mask current real conflicts, inequalities, human suffering, and the decline of social services.

*This chapter draws in part from my book, *Branding Democracy: U.S. Regime Change in Post-Soviet Eastern Europe*, Peter Lang publishers, 2010.

¹ Central Europe in this study refers to Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, and Eastern Europe includes those countries further to the south and east of Hungary ending at the borders of Russia, Turkey, Italy, and Greece.

² This is actually an item from Goebbels’ diary notes as summarized by Leonard W. Doob in *Public Opinion and Propaganda* (accessed through <http://www.psywarrior.com/Goebbels.html>).

³ In November 2001, Acxiom Corporation offered to conduct for the the U.S. Department of Justice Internet surveillance of web sites dealing with sensitive political issues, such as abortion, white power, religion, immigration, and foreign policy and to include contact information from such sites. In 2003, the

company passed on personal data on millions of JetBlue and other airline customers, without their consent, to a firm conducting an anti-terrorism study for the Department of Defense (Gunn 2006).

⁴ In Uganda, Hill & Knowlton did services for the state at a cost of \$650,000. Uganda's per capita GDP in 2004 was a mere \$300. CNN network contracted with the Ugandan government an advertising purchase of \$1 million (Kahn 2006, 90).

⁵ Richard Nixon's close political advisers, H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, and Charles Coulson, had come from J. W. Thompson. All three were eventually convicted for their illegal activities in the Watergate scandal.

⁶ Sharp's most influential work, and the one used in Serbia to instruct the youth movement on non-violent methods of overthrowing governments, is *From Dictatorship to Democracy*.

⁷ The IRI and NDI are foreign-focused "democracy promotion" organizations of the two respective U.S. political parties, which in turn receive their money from the government-funded National Endowment for Democracy and from private corporate sources.

⁸ Peter Ackerman, while on the AEI board praised the symbolic actions of Otpor in his made-for-television documentary, "Bringing Down a Dictator." He later became more actively involved in the region through his strategic non-violent action training organization, the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict.

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