

Promoting the Nation in Troubled Times

Branding, Diplomacy and Strategic Communications in a Polarised Context

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ABSTRACTS

(Symposium only)

Branding the Nation in an Era of Disorder

Melissa Aronczyk, Rutgers University

In her *Walled States*, Wendy Brown identifies three paradoxes characterizing the current predilection for walls by nation-states: calls for openness by cosmopolitans and neoliberals amidst calls for closure by national leaders; passageways and barricades, both mobilized in the name of democracy; and the erection of physical barriers as a response to increasingly immaterial forms of power (from toxins to hacks and beyond).

For Americans in 2019, the articulation of state sovereignty in the form of a wall creates a particularly challenging paradox for their country's self-image. For even as the United States undergoes unprecedented challenges to the rituals and conventions of its polity, insisting on a wall as a manifestation of sovereignty and solidarity strikes many across the political spectrum as both symbolically fraught and practically useless.

What role do national media play in resolving – or perpetuating – these paradoxes? How do the ongoing contentions over the borders and boundaries of the American nation-state contribute to global understandings of national identity? In this talk, I consider whether the symbolic and material practices that constitute nation branding hold promise or peril for notions of sovereignty and solidarity in the pursuit of a democratic world order. Should we consider nation branding in line with the wall effect, a symbol of “waning sovereignty” as Brown argues? Or is the continued self-conscious promotion of a distinct national image a panacea to rampant anxieties in an era of disorder?

Professor Melissa Aronczyk is Associate Professor of Media Studies and affiliated graduate faculty in sociology at Rutgers University. Previous publications include *Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity* (Oxford, 2013) and *Blowing Up the Brand: Critical Perspectives on Promotional Culture* (co-edited with Dr. Devon Powers). Her work on nationalism and globalization has been published in international journals and edited volumes. Recent work has appeared in the journals *New Media & Society*, *Enterprise & Society*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, and *PR Inquiry*.

Globalizing Nationalism? Transnational Commercial Media and the Remaking of the 'National'

Nadia Kaneva, University of Denver

The 21st century appears to be the century of crisis. Financial crisis, environmental crisis, refugee crisis, GREXIT, BREXIT, ISIS – the list of calamities is constantly expanding. In one way, these crises are real and material. Yet, in another way, they are products of relentless media coverage which prioritizes the circulation of images of conflict over stability and of

sensation over analysis within industrialized, profit-making media systems. In that sense, the symbolic regime of crisis that dominates the present moment may be a symptom of the pervasiveness of mediation in the construction of shared realities and identities.

The crises of this century have been linked to the processes and conditions of globalization. Yet, globalization itself appears to be in crisis. Recent anti-immigrant, anti-trade, and anti-EU sentiments in Europe and the US have been widely described as symptoms of a backlash against globalization and a resurgence of nationalism. I will argue that to understand the present moment we need to move beyond a binary opposition of the national' and 'the global.' While notions of hybridity and glocalization have sought to problematize local adaptations of globality, the opposing move towards transforming the meaning of 'the national' remains largely undertheorized. Drawing on my ongoing research on nation branding, I propose that nationalism is undergoing a process of 'globalization' and that commercial media networks have been central to this transmutation of 'the national.' This process has implications for identities as well as for notions of citizenship. I will offer several examples of the articulations of nationalism and globalization at the present moment and will outline some questions for future research.

Nadia Kaneva is Associate Professor the Department of Media, Film, and Journalism Studies at the University of Denver where she also directs the M.A. in Media and Public Communication and the Graduate Certificate in Public Diplomacy. Her research explores the intersections of nationalism, markets, and media with a specific focus on nation branding and public diplomacy. She is the editor of three books: *Mediating Post-Socialist Femininities* (2015), *Branding Post-Communist Nations: Marketizing National Identities in the "New" Europe* (2011), and *Fundamentalisms and the Media*, co-edited with Stewart Hoover (2009). Her research appears in numerous academic journals and edited collections.

Catalyst, Cause or Cure? National Belonging in Troubled Times

Fabian Frenzel and Massimo Giovanardi, Leicester University

The case for a consideration of nationalism as a force for 'sovereignty and solidarity in the pursuit of a democratic world order' is thought provoking. Evidently nationalism and tourism have a long-shared history in which tourism has sometimes promoted exclusionary and even racist notions of national superiority. Nazi Germany's state organized KDF tourism was a means to teach Germans about their racial superiority. But tourism also seems to be able to de-toxify and de-dramatise nationalism, by making the nation consumable, and by emphasizing the specialities of a national culture in a non-hierarchical relationship of difference to other national cultures. Restaurants perhaps most vividly expresses such a notion of a 'digestible nation'.

However, we would like to ask two questions:

1. In a post-colonial context, is the vantage point of the global consumer accessible to all? Or does consumerist universalism merely mask global Northern privilege?
2. What risks come with a capitalist commodification of the nation in tourism? Do capitalist relations re-produce exclusion and inequality and thus rather fuel nationalist feelings of a more toxic kind?

Fabian Frenzel is Associate Professor of Organization Studies at the University of Leicester. He research considers the intersections of mobility, politics and organization in a wide areas of phenomena such as tourism, social movements, and urban development. He is the author of *Slumming It - The tourist valorization of Urban Poverty* (Zed Books 2016).

Massimo Giovanardi is an Associate Professor at the Department for Life Quality Studies of the University of Bologna (Rimini Campus). Since the beginning of his previous activity at Stockholm Business School and University of Leicester School of Business, he has

developed an expertise in the area of 'place branding', which is an umbrella term for research in place marketing, destination image and place-of-origin effect.

Hybridity, Soft Power Statecraft and National Narratives

Paweł Surowiec, University of Sheffield

This talk approaches the changing nature of promotional discourses surrounding 'the nation', and specifically strategies of branding, from the perspective of debates about the digitalisation of diplomacy. I start by analysing the transformations to statecraft that are accelerated by digital media technologies, going beyond the adoption of social media platforms by state actors articulating soft power. I also seek to move beyond the digitalisation of diplomacy as a means of adapting statecraft to evolving media landscapes and extend my argument to the governance of soft power capabilities. Through that, the approach I develop in this talk challenges static approaches to digital diplomacy and argues for conceptualisations of soft power that account for changes to statecraft. To theorise this dynamic, I introduce the concept of 'soft power statecraft' and connect it to the notion of hybridity. The second part of my talk supports my arguments through the analysis of 'GREAT', the United Kingdom's prominent soft power strategic narrative, the architecture of which relies on strategically designed and circulated branded-content signifying national identities. The campaign analysis reveals trajectories of change elicited by 'GREAT'. My findings, drawn from interviews, policy data and media artefacts, reveal how 'GREAT' embodies a hybridised approach to soft power statecraft on the levels of governance; media technologies; as well as communicative practices and cultures. This analysis reveals how these changes translate into statecraft strategies for the articulation of soft power, and offers important insights into the effects they have on contemporary imaginings of the nation.

Paweł Surowiec is a Senior Lecturer in Strategic Communication at the University of Sheffield. He previously worked as post-doctoral Research Fellow at Charles University in Prague. His research focuses on questions relating to the reinvention of classical models of propaganda, political communication, public diplomacy, as well as changes in European politics. He is the author of *Nation Branding, Public Relations and Soft Power: Corporatising Poland* (Routledge, 2016) and co-editor of the volume entitled *Social Media and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe* (Routledge, 2017). His work has been published by *European Journal of Communication*, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, *European Review of International Studies*, *Communication, Culture & Critique*, *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*, and *East European Politics*. Paweł serves as a treasurer for the European Communication Research and Education Association.