Introduction

THERE MUST CERTAINLY BE SOME SUCH PLACE

In July 2011, two months after Syrian president Bashar al-Assad sent tanks into urban centers to crack down on demonstrators against his regime, but before the country's descent into sectarian violence, a series of billboards appeared across the city of Damascus. Each billboard featured a brightly colored outline of an upraised hand against a white background, accompanied by the words "I'm for Syria" in Arabic. The billboards were the brainchild of Ammar Alani and Rami Omran, Syrian advertisers who had shelled out four thousand dollars to pay for them. In many ways the project was just like the branding campaigns they usually worked on for products such as cereal or home mortgages. "The only difference now is that the customer, if you like, is society. The brand is Syria and it needs promoting," they said in an interview with the American media organization National Public Radio.[1] The campaign was meant to bring Syrians together, to promote democratic debate and civic engagement, to counter the polarizing effects of the political situation, and to encourage regime and revolutionaries alike to think differently about what it meant to be Syrian.

About a year earlier, and about three thousand miles due north, Iceland's government launched a media campaign called Inspired by Iceland.[2] Developed by the branding consultancy The Brooklyn Brothers, this campaign was cast as a desperate attempt to improve the country's image in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, when it came to light that Icelanders had accumulated debts worth 850 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP).[3] Using Icelanders as the "stars" of the campaign was seen as a way to raise domestic spirits.[4] It also helped the campaign's goal: to attract more positive international attention by focusing on the country's quirky culture rather than its financial and political reforms.[5] In one video, viewed

thousands of times on YouTube and Vimeo, the tiny nation's white-haired president, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, invites viewers to visit his home so that he and his wife Dorrit can "give you delicious pancakes with cream and sugar, a traditional Icelandic delicacy." Similar invitations follow from the mayor of Reykjavik, who stands awkwardly with his fingers clasped in front of him proffering Icelandic sushi, and from the federal minister of industry, energy, and tourism, who appears in the video sitting on wet rocks at the edge of the sea, encouraging viewers to join her for a foot bath in a geothermic pool at Seltjarnarnes.[6]

On the other side of the globe, as the first waves of the financial crisis roiled news headlines, a seventy-two-page report entitled "Positioning Mauritius in the World" landed on the desks of the Brand Mauritius steering committee. The wealthy African country, dubbed the "Mauritian Miracle" by the World Bank for its open trade policies, low barriers to international investment, and political stability, would largely escape the effects of the economic meltdown.[7] The report—a glossy book filled with photographs of flowers, beaches, mountains, and trees—outlined the rationale and strategy for the Mauritian brand identity. Despite the country's status as a center for international banking and finance; its well-developed infrastructure befitting a premier luxury tourism destination; and a history of consensus-making among diverse cultural, business, and political interests, the report cautioned against complacency:

> We live in a highly competitive world which means we need to fight harder for visitors, investment and business opportunities. We have to stand out and play to our strengths. We must not lose sight of what makes Mauritius authentic and unique. We must be clear about who and what we are. Developing a country brand strategy and identity for Mauritius touches every one of us. We all have an important role to play in the economic, social and cultural success of our nation. This book has been produced to help everyone in Mauritius understand what makes it so special and how we can use that knowledge to our advantage. By concentrating on our particular qualities, we will give ourselves an advantage in this highly competitive world. We will stand out—improving our image and helping our economy whilst retaining our essential character.[8]

These three countries—Syria, Iceland, and Mauritius—span three continents and as many different polities, histories, and cultural realities. They are united by their commitment to success amid the common pressures and possibilities of a globalized and competitive world, and by their apparent desire to be recognized and valued in this world under the sign of the brand. These countries are not alone. In the last ten years, national governments

of at least forty countries around the world have sought the expert counsel of international consultants and strategists to help them brand their jurisdiction.[9] Using the tools, techniques, and expertise of commercial branding is seen as a way to help a nation articulate a more coherent and cohesive national identity, to animate the spirit of its citizens in the service of national priorities, and to maintain loyalty to the territory within its borders. In short, the goal of nation branding is to make the nation *matter* in a world where borders and boundaries appear increasingly obsolete. But what, exactly, is a brand? How did branding become the favored genre, technique, and value form of national collective identity-making? And with what consequences for our understanding and experience of national belonging?

This book is about how nation branding became a worldwide phenomenon and a professional transnational practice. But it is about much more than this. It is about how nation branding has become a solution to perceived contemporary problems affecting the space of the nation-state: problems of economic development, democratic communication, and especially national visibility and legitimacy amid the multiple global flows of late modernity. In this book I chart the political, cultural, and economic rationales by which the nation has been made to matter in a twenty-first-century context of global integration.

Although I use recent examples throughout the book to illustrate the contemporary impact of the phenomenon, the story of its emergence spans a longer time frame. The seeds of nation branding sprout shortly after the Second World War, when corporate and state leaders begin to think about the space of the nation as a valuable resource in the growing competition for global investment, trade, and tourism. Seen as resources—that is, as potential sources of economic value—national culture and territory gradually become thought of as marketable and monetizable entities.[10] Like other profitable assets, these entities need to be managed. Unlike other kinds of resources, however, national culture and territorial attachments (both symbolic and material) require a particular kind of knowledge and a particular set of tactics in order to be managed on terms acceptable to their stakeholders. *Branding the Nation* examines these shifts of knowledge and practice, providing a portrait of the ways that national self-understanding has been reoriented by the experts and expertise of corporate brand strategy.

It would be possible to start the prehistory of nation branding even earlier. We could see the phenomenon as rooted in the long-standing relationship between the nation-state and the corporation, the two dominant social institutions of the last three centuries. The economics of loyalty produced between national governments and the major international trading companies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—such as the East

India Company, the Hudson's Bay Company, and the Russia Company—made both national and commercial activity integral to the making of patriotic sentiment.[11] Another piece of nation branding's prehistory could be located in late nineteenth-century forms of national display. World fairs and international exhibitions drew massive crowds to witness the staging of national culture. Through artistic renderings, buildings, performances, and other material and symbolic representations, visitors could experience the nation at once as a bounded collection of unfamiliar goods and peoples and as one among many similar units in a system of international classification.[12]

I recognize the relevance of these legacies to the contemporary context. Yet there remain aspects of the current phenomenon of nation branding that are qualitatively different from these earlier forms of national imagining and need to be addressed as such. Nation branding represents a transformation of business in the articulation of national identity. Attending to this transformation is necessary to understand what role the nation has come to occupy in our time. The primary argument in this book is that nation branding reveals how the social, political, and cultural discourse constitutive of the nation has been harnessed in new ways, with important consequences for both our concept of the nation and our ideals of national citizenship.

When I began the research for this book in 2003, public presentations of my work were met with considerable astonishment. The notion that anyone would dedicate time and effort to "brand" a nation was immediately interpreted as either laughable and impossible, or manipulative and propagandistic. In all cases, "nation branding" was dismissed; it was hardly to be taken seriously as a political or economic phenomenon, let alone a matter for sociological investigation. Less than ten years later, the idea that individuals, organizations, institutions, and even territorial places can have a "brand"—and indeed should devote a large part of their time and resources toward developing and managing that brand—is a commonplace assumption in both academic literature and mainstream accounts.[13] The ways in which branding has exceeded its original home in business and corporate management is part of the story I tell here; in the normalization of its usage we can also see the normalization of the values and assumptions associated with it.

In researching and writing this book, I interviewed many different groups of people who were all engaged at some level in determining whether and how to brand their jurisdiction: government representatives and bureaucrats, corporate executives and communication strategists, journalists, policymakers, and academics.[14] I interviewed nearly one hundred people

and collected thousands of pages of documents detailing the results of their work: trade and development plans, corporate and national investment reports, national vision statements, news and feature stories in the mainstream press, policy papers, brand books, conference proceedings, promotional resources, and advertising campaign briefs. From this material I developed a portrait of the field and an analysis of branding efforts in twelve countries: Botswana, Canada, Chile, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Jamaica, Libya, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and Uganda.

Throughout this process, I observed shifts in resource allocation within public institutions, modifications to cultural policy, and most tellingly, new ways of thinking and talking about what the nation was *for* in the contemporary era. What became clear to me was that those who determine what constitutes legitimate culture and national identity have changed dramatically. The knowledge identified as vital to maintain the nation now comes not from national governments, not from historical or social legacies, and not from civic sources of leadership, but from branding and marketing experts. These experts' particular expertise, tools and techniques apparently give them the license to determine what values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs are superior to others, and allow them to see their role as one of helping their national clients adopt these superior frames and shed unfavorable ones. Part of my story is about these new cultural experts and how their ideas have become so dominant.

There is a second component to my story, however, that appears as a kind of counterpart to the first. Nation branding also maintains and perpetuates the nation as a container of distinct identities and loyalties, and as a project for sovereignty and self-determination. Because this second component appears so antithetical to the first, it is worth taking the time to tell another narrative of how this project came to be.

BACKGROUND

The real story behind this book began a little over ten years ago, when the Montreal office of the international advertising agency McCann Erickson was hired by the government of Quebec to create a tourism campaign for the American market. As the "creative" assigned to develop the campaign, my job was to help the provincial government tourism board convince American travelers to spend their then-valuable vacation dollars in Quebec.[15] Along with the usual information detailing budget, media buy, and deadlines, the client's brief contained a curious injunction: *Do not refer to Canada*. Throughout the campaign—whether in radio spots and TV commercials or

Figure 0.1:
A view along Saint-Paul Street, Montreal, 2000. According to the Ministry of Tourism, this photograph had to be modified before it could be used in the tourism campaign. Photographer: Linda Turgeon.

Figure 0.2:
The photograph after modification. The Canadian flag in the image has been replaced by the provincial flag of Quebec.

on websites, print ads, and billboards—we were not permitted to use the word *Canada*. Indeed, this edict was not limited to the use of the word itself but extended to all symbols for which Canada was the referent, a restriction that quickly devolved into moments of profound parody as we found ourselves airbrushing red maple leaves out of trees in photographs of nature scenes and digitally removing tiny Canadian flags waved by bystanders in street scenes of crowds at a festival. One final instruction from the tourism board made the terms of this project clear. Rather than refer to Quebec as a province, we were to call Quebec a "land," a "territory," or—most tellingly— a "nation."

The tourism office's explanation for such injunctions had been straightforward. As a form of government communication, the message had to toe the line of its political mandate. The nationalist Parti Québécois was the party in power. Given its ideological stance toward its federal parent, Canadian symbology in Quebec's landscape was out of the question. Despite this official explanation, however, I was deeply puzzled by the logic behind it. What was the point of going to such lengths to promote this powerful vision of alterity, if no one within Canada was expected to see it? It was a semiotic gesture stripped twice of its political connotations: first, by the now-invisible digital manipulations of image and text, and second, by the foreign context of its reception, since the subtleties of such transformations would likely be lost on a non-Canadian audience.

A second, related question: Why use tourism as a vehicle for collective identity-making? If I had learned anything as a copywriter, it was that tourism narratives were more of a literary genre than a factual one, taken seriously only by those who actually entertained a notion of traveling to the place being advertised; and even then it seemed patently obvious that the range of experiences presented did not correspond to the lived realities of any particular place but rather to a common set of categories that, according to extensive market research, attracted the most tourism dollars. Shopping, fine dining, heritage sites, festivals, resorts and hotels, never-completely-off-the-beaten-track adventures: these are the commodities and spectacles that form the bread and butter of most countries' tourism revenue.

A third question, one that would eventually form the backbone of this study: "Why advertising?" What was to be gained from expressing the symbolic forms and specific content of national will through a medium of communication that most of us take great pains to consciously avoid or, when we cannot avoid it, are generally skeptical of? Though I enjoyed my work and devoted considerable time and effort to its craft, I strongly suspected that no one would afford tourism ads the same degree of scrutiny and

contemplation that I had applied in conceiving them. Yet the owners of the campaign, the government ministry responsible for its budget and production, clearly did. Indeed, their actions suggested considerable investment in the campaign's rhetorical and visual strategies.

These questions formed the seeds of my research at New York University, and they pursued me as I traveled from New York to Washington, DC, to Ottawa, to London, to Berlin, to Warsaw, and beyond, into an ongoing series of conversations with proponents, practitioners, and critics of the emerging field of nation branding. In each place and with each conversation, I came to understand the reasoning behind the phenomenon, the problems it was designed to solve, and the terms of its success or failure. Many of the people I spoke with will likely disagree with the portraits I provide here. While there was some consensus as to the goals and methods of the practice, my respondents were deeply divided as to its conceptual scope, institutional reach, and overall effectiveness. For me these divides speak to the particular object of their attention, the national form, and their implicit yet strongly held beliefs about what the nation represents in the individual and collective vernacular. It was a challenge for many to explain what the nation is and does for us as members of such a collective. In my view, it is in this very struggle that the nation is continually constituted as a form of identification, a symbol for loyalty and belonging, and a container of rights and responsibilities. My interviews are therefore not merely sources of information but sites of analysis and examination, dynamic instances of the national imaginary at work in both formal settings and in our everyday lives.

CONCEPTUAL BOUNDARIES

As I note above, the concept of the brand has escaped its corporate origins and now stands for an indeterminate range of political and cultural meanings. While its expansion as metaphor and metric can be taken as a clue to current patterns of thinking about identity, space, and value, it also serves to blunt the term's force as an independent variable and to mask its different roles in multiple distinct processes. Since one of the tasks of this book is to make visible the mechanisms of this expansiveness, I owe it to the reader to be clear about the boundaries I have erected in order to frame this study.

First, nation branding takes its cues from—but is not the same as—product branding. Many critics of the phenomenon have taken issue with it on this basis, arguing that its actors slap a logo and slogan on national

symbols and institutions and market them as one would a bar of soap, turning bases of national recognition into essentialized and homogenized commodity goods.[16] While there is undoubtedly some of this at play, to rest with an interpretation of this phenomenon as the commodification of the nation leaves out an account of how it is that it also, however paradoxically, maintains and perpetuates the nation as container of distinct identities and loyalties, and as project for sovereignty and self-determination.

This perspective emerged during the early stages of my research, when interviews with brand managers and business leaders revealed that the explanations offered for the social value of brands—such as community, authenticity, distinction, and recognition—were aligned with those often used to justify nationalist goals. Both national elites and business elites express their objectives in terms of ongoing attempts to mobilize diverse peoples with diverse backgrounds into collective units in order to foster material and symbolic loyalties. More strikingly still, they use similar tropes, frames, and assumptions to do so. One of the tasks of this book is to explain how and why this syncretism of perspectives emerged. Of course, I am not suggesting that the social cohesion of brand users is the same as that engendered by national institutions and obligations. To paraphrase Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation, no one is willing to die for market-generated space.[17] My aim here is rather to explain how nationalism—as discourse, as project, and as form of evaluation—has been both extended and transformed by the phenomenon of nation branding. In the multiple conversations about why nation branding is adopted and what purposes it is meant to serve, the national imaginary is created and re-created beyond the profit incentive. Recognizing these threads of conversation is part of the story.

Second, I distinguish nation branding from the branding of political parties, campaigns, or politicians (what is sometimes called "leader branding"). The use of corporate strategy to make and market distinct political values, individuals, and objectives has been fascinatingly treated in at least two important sources: Eleonora Pasotti's *Political Branding in Cities* and Rachel Boynton's documentary film, *Our Brand Is Crisis*.[18] In the context of increasingly extreme image management tactics among political groups and increased corporate spending on political campaigns in the United States (brought forward by the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling), this topic deserves ongoing critical attention.[19] *Branding the Nation* focuses on a different set of loyalties. This book is about territorial attachments and the ways that these are made and remade through ideational and material means. By making use of geographically and politically disparate examples of nation branding, I highlight how enduring cultural symbols of national

identification are brought into play in ways that are not reducible to the particular self-serving objectives of a given political party or leader. Rather than revealing itself as a strategy of the political left or the political right, nation branding entails the creation of a kind of center, a cosmopolitan center that retains an image of what it means to be nationally competitive and nationally effective *for* globalization. For this reason the polemics of domestic politics are only relevant to the extent that they mirror larger and more global tendencies that are distinctly nonpartisan.[20]

A third distinction I make in this book is between nation branding and branding at other spatial scales. Perspectives on whether there is a difference between urban, regional, national, and supranational branding vary depending on the interlocutor. Place-branding consultants, in an effort to collect potential clients into their ambit, tend to argue that there is little distinction to be made. To them the process is qualitatively the same, even if the scale is not. More critical perspectives have attended to specific cases of place branding in action, bringing out elements that demonstrate affinities among branding programs at different scales without expressly articulating relationships between them.[21] Others consider the increasingly amorphous character of the boundaries dividing urban agglomerations from their national or even global settings. Neil Brenner's influential work on state-spaces exemplifies this perspective.[22] The functions of the state, in Brenner's view, are now contained within a multitude of territorial spaces, from the metropolitan to the regional. Urban spaces engage in an approach to urban policy (*Standortpolitik*, or locational policy) in which both national and local elites recognize the importance of cities as attractors for global finance capital, and pursue strategies including branding "to enhance place-specific socioeconomic assets within their territories."[23] Such theories see the role of the nation-state in global affairs mitigated as a result of increasing authority in non-national spaces.

I take a very different perspective. In this book I stubbornly insist on the preeminence of the national and its particularity in a branding framework. It is not that the nation is a better or more enlightened space. Rather, it is that the nation is still the container for rights and claims that are not yet possible at other levels of organization. In this capacity, the origins, objectives, and desired outcomes of nation branding are not the same. Nation branding is promoted as a way to resolve old antagonisms and forms of power. It reorients attention toward cultural identities as forms of distinction rather than toward political or military might. Studying nation branding as distinct from urban or regional branding helps to reveal deep-seated tensions over phenomena that are at issue in these sites specifically, such

as multicultural policy or social democracy or the conditions of citizenship. It is in studying the national that we can expose the convictions of the global in these arenas.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Branding the Nation uses a number of devices to explore the ways and means by which nation branding is justified and applied in a wide variety of national settings. The next chapter provides theoretical ground on which to recognize nation branding as an extension of contemporary views on nationalism and national identity. It also shows how our thinking about the nation has been reorganized by distinct understandings of globalization and neoliberalization. As monolithic, business-based conceptions of globalization and neoliberalism have come to dominate public institutions and forms of governance, national identity has been mobilized as a competitive resource to narrate distinction and difference in global settings. In this context, the brand emerges as a way to manage and control this resource and create distinction and difference. To account for this rise, the chapter charts the progress of corporate brand management as it is incrementally applied to national values and identity.

Chapter two describes the political, economic, and cultural conditions through which the business of nation branding congealed. Starting with Spain's tourism efforts after the demise of its dictatorial regime and moving to contemporary efforts in Europe and the United States, the chapter explores the evolution of nation branding as a way for national leaders to rethink the contours of national identity in the context of increasing global integration and media penetration. One focus in this chapter is on the impact of postwar corporate management and organizational and marketing techniques on international diplomacy and domestic policy, from hard-power legacies to soft-power paradigms. Key to the development of this practice was the loose alliance and common orientation of what I call a transnational promotional class (TPC), a group of diverse actors devoted to maintaining the legitimacy of the national form for a range of profit-generating purposes.

Chapter three is devoted to an analysis of the particular strategies and forms of knowledge generation that members of the TPC deploy in order to do their work. This chapter presents the results of interviews conducted with nation-branding consultants, academics, and firms over a four-year period from 2007 to 2011. In some cases I interviewed consultants two or even three times, to follow up on client relations and branding exercises in

progress. I also wanted to see to what extent nation-branding consultants felt the sting of the financial crisis, and to what degree it had affected their work. This interview material is woven throughout the other chapters of the book and augmented by interviews with additional actors and interlocutors. These actors include representatives from think tanks and research centers, tourism organizations, media editors, marketing professors, federal and regional investment and trade commissioners, diplomatic and consular representatives, deputy ministers, and public relations managers. These interviews help me to show how certain assumptions about national belonging structure the decisions made over how and why to brand. That the bulk of nation-branding consultancies are based in Britain is not a coincidence; the expert knowledge and knowledge experts of these firms strongly reflect a deep-rooted and ongoing paternalism, as well as a very particular idea of the terms and conditions of "global nationalism."[24]

Chapters four and five are devoted to two extended primary case studies, one in Poland and one in Canada. Each of these cases has much to teach us about what nation branding is thought to do and what it actually does. Though Poland's story is not presented here as a comparative case to that of Canada, there are nevertheless some telling parallels. Like Canada, Poland's relationship to the geopolitical centers of world power is freighted with both symbolic and political-economic implications. Both countries seek to mitigate their neighbors' power and influence while admitting the overt economic and security benefits that accrue from their relationships. Both countries also deal with issues of continental integration—Poland as a member of the European Union (since 2004), OECD (since 1996), and NATO (since 1999); and Canada as a NAFTA partner. The two countries are further connected by environmental and territorial concerns, most recently in land and sea claims in the Arctic Circle.[25] These cases serve as empirical reminders that the strategic discourses of globalization and neoliberalism are never as monolithic as they are sometimes made to appear.

In Canada, the specter of globalization casts a long shadow over the conditions of recognition of the nation and the state. What Charles Taylor refers to as the "unstable and constantly evolving amalgamation that we call Canada" is characterized by ongoing and unresolved tension over issues of identity and citizenship in the national discourse.[26] This tension is a recurrent feature of policy debates that seek to establish a working definition of culture to incorporate divergent ideas and ideals of what it means to be Canadian. International relations scholar Jennifer Welsh calls Canada a "model citizen" for the rest of the world, a successful liberal democracy with the responsibility to represent its distinctiveness on the global stage. "Even if we haven't always been able to articulate who we are," Welsh

explains, "we have prided ourselves on being able to articulate what we believe in."[27] Yet this continued inability to articulate "who we are" underlines the contingency of Canadian identity. The efforts to brand Canada render cultural contingency into liability, as various actors compete to redefine Canada as an investment-friendly destination. In this chapter I show how the concept of "diversity," long seen as a defining characteristic of the national state, is reframed in political discourse from an asset to a liability within the context of the drive to be competitive on the global stage.

Poland's story reflects a different set of concerns over cultural distinction. In December 2003, the Polish Ministry of Commerce, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, retained the services of a British branding firm to create a new Polish national identity on the eve of the country's accession to the European Union. Polish participants saw the creation of a "brand" identity as part of its drive toward economic, political, and cultural "normalcy" after 1989. But they also saw it as a continuation of a project begun long before: to return to their rightful place in Europe, to reclaim their history and cultural memory, to reassert their national spirit in the face of the multiple antagonisms that had plagued their centuries-long history. These mythopoetic tropes infusing Poland's national narrative were tightly bound up with the branding project, and the use of a British firm to facilitate this project would prove to be intensely problematic, as revealed by the consultants' perceptions of Poland's weaknesses and how they expected the country to overcome them.

Chapter six examines the exercises carried out under the rubric of nation branding in nine additional sites on four continents. The selection of countries is not meant to be exhaustive, but it is meant to be illustrative. It covers a range of geographical settings, political-economic systems, and cultural dimensions of identity in the spirit of demonstrating the global reach of the phenomenon. Through an examination of the visual and textual tropes brought to bear in these brands, I develop a typology that reveals the epistemic framework within which nation branding strategies are deployed. Contrary to the "level playing field" promised by global capitalism, the typology demonstrates how the logics that underpin the practice maintain and reinforce historical inequalities and reify paternalist and neocolonial assumptions.

In recent years there has been much critical and popular commentary about the increasingly central role of brands in everyday life. Some of this work has investigated how the process of branding transforms national allegiance, structures of belief, and the sense of belonging. Less attention has been paid to studying how the nation—as a discourse of *identity and*

allegiance, as a political and social project of *spatial representation*, and as a producer of *value and values*—has been altered by its conception as a brand. This book comes as a contribution to the ongoing and vital conversation about what the nation is *for* in the contemporary era, in terms of both the impact of corporate thinking on national space—on the conditions and opportunities of national citizenship—and the importance of the cultural frame for claims of diversity, security, and expression. A central aim is to show how the phenomenon of nation branding expresses the contradictions within this conversation. Nation branding maintains, extends, and promotes the nation, but the elements it reinforces place it into frameworks of insecurity and what I would characterize as misplaced isomorphism—that is, what happens when governments insist on having a brand because their neighbors do rather than because it is a good use of resources.

We must not conclude from such practices that "we need to think ourselves beyond the nation," however.[28] While I agree that it is necessary to name the crises of the nation-state, and even to conceive of postnational social forms, I maintain that these do not suppose a transcendence of the nation. Rather, such crises, alternatives, and cohabitants can serve to widen the political spaces for recognition, equality, and legitimacy, while preserving the specific dignities and protections of a distinctly national frame. I think there is a future for the nation. My hope is that the reader will find this position not to be a nostalgic one, but a statement of conviction reinforced by the evidence contained in these pages.

Nation and Brand: Keywords
for the Twenty-First Century

In the vast literature on nationalism and national identity, scholars have tried to understand the complex and varied means by which nations become aware of themselves. If all forms of community are bound up with questions of identity, legitimacy, and recognition, the formation of national boundaries—and the making of national citizens within them—raises a unique set of debates. Is the nation a conscious construction, a modern exercise in social engineering devised by elites, intellectuals, and political leaders; or is it better seen as a palimpsest of older forms of social and cultural existence, which can only be uncovered through archaeological investigation and a view to the *longue durée*? Or is it something else altogether?

Though historians and social scientists continue to disagree on the origins and terms of national consciousness, they seem to have converged on the question of consciousness itself. Before the nation can exist, that is, it has to be imagined. And insofar as it does exist, it is one of the central forms of imagining of our age. Despite repeated calls and many plausible reasons for its demise, the nation remains a dominant form of political, economic, and cultural organization.

This book investigates a particular form of national consciousness that has emerged in recent years, one that tells us a great deal about the perceived function of the nation in a twenty-first-century context. This form is called nation branding, the creation and communication of national identity using tools, techniques, and expertise from the world of corporate brand management. With its attendant congeries of self-styled nation branding consultants; quasi-academic journals, textbooks, and conferences; and proprietary methods to measure, rank, and market its effectiveness, this phenomenon has grown from a curiosity to a perceived necessity in

countries throughout the world.[1] Its rationales and strategies have been adopted in countries with emerging market economies and established capitalist economies alike, and with vastly different geopolitical and historical legacies: in these pages I provide portraits of branding efforts in Botswana, Canada, Chile, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Jamaica, Libya, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and Uganda.

Nation branding can be provisionally defined as the result of the interpenetration of commercial and public sector interests to communicate national priorities among domestic and international populations for a variety of interrelated purposes. At one level, it is a conscious strategy of capital (re)generation, combining public and private sector resources to generate fiscal advantage. As such, its aim is to help the nation-state successfully compete for international capital in areas such as tourism, foreign direct investment, import–export trade, higher education, and skilled labor.

A second dimension of the practice is to convey an image of legitimacy and authority in diplomatic arenas, to earn state leaders and other national elites a seat at the table in multilateral decisions or membership in transnational institutions or organizations. In this capacity, it can be used for both proactive and reactive purposes: to repair reputations damaged by political and economic legacies, to dodge unfavorable international attention in the aftermath of unpopular domestic decisions, or to control and manage impressions in the context of unforeseen or uncontrollable events.

Third, the phenomenon serves a recursive function. By modeling national distinctions internationally, national leaders hope to generate positive foreign public opinion that will "boomerang" back home, fostering both domestic consensus or approbation of their actions as well as pride and patriotism within the nation's borders.[2] This helps to explain another appeal of this process: its professed ability to render the stakes and claims of nationalism less antagonistic or chauvinistic than its previous incarnations.[3] Nation branding is defined as a form of "soft" power, in contrast to the "hard" power of military or economic assets. Softer than sticks, less coercive than carrots, the public articulation by national leaders of a conscious strategy that draws on their jurisdiction's territorial, cultural, and commercial specificity promises to yield greater results than the narrower conception of traditional power resources.[4] Such a strategy also appeals to statecrafters as better suited to the "public" or "popular" diplomacy requirements of nation-states in the contemporary context. The unprecedented expansion and decentralization of information systems means that national interests are now broadcast to audiences at large, complicating or overriding the narrowcasting of traditional state-to-state diplomacy.[5] In its

ability to marry tropes of heritage and modernization, domestic and foreign concerns, and market and moral ideologies in the projection of national identity, a nation's brand is meant to offer a version of nationalism rooted in the unifying spirit of benign commercial "interests" rather than in the potential divisions of political "passions."[6]

As a communications strategy, nation branding promises to generate international awareness of a national client, using proven marketing techniques to break through the clutter of a saturated and fragmented global media environment. To carry influence or curry favor, national representatives must find a way to make their jurisdiction visible in the competitive attention economy of media consumption. Nation branding conveys to the world that the nation is not only visible but also well regarded in international circles. Moreover, as an intensely visual practice, the nation's brand image itself—its logos, slogans, typefaces, and symbols—is well suited to the global vernacular of modern media. It is the quintessential national shorthand for today's hyberbolic global information context.

But what actually *happens* to the nation when it is reconfigured as a brand? What happens to the form and content of national identity when policy centers and world summits hold round-table discussions on how to brand and market countries of the Middle East, Africa, and Europe? When Chile's president inaugurates a public–private foundation to coordinate the activities of the country's public institutions, on the paid advice of a branding consultant? Or when Germany shifts its image from a federation of Länder to the Land of Ideas, its flag hanging not in front of parliament but over the shapely figure of Claudia Schiffer?

This book offers a detailed examination of the role of nation branding in the representation of national identity. If the phenomenon lies at the intersection of politics, the economy, and culture, the task at hand is to identify *what kind of politics* and *what kind of economy*, for *what kind of culture*? What is the constellation of conditions that have fostered the growth of nation branding as a viable political, economic, and cultural strategy?

The most central, and determining, condition is that of globalization. I am referring less to processes of globalization as causal agents of national change than to the power of globalization as a set of ideas and discourses used to justify national change. I treat globalization as a "leading element," in Raymond Williams' sense of an organizing principle used to describe and interpret society, through which all other activity is determined. A nuanced understanding of globalization requires us to investigate not only the impact of material realities on policy and social structure but also the ways in which *ideas* of globalization become institutionalized and normalized, since policymakers and governments enact decisions informed equally by

Figure 1.1:
Land of Ideas nation-branding campaign for Germany. Posters on display at Grand Central Station, New York City, July 2006. Source: Land of Ideas. Photographer of the original images: Peter Lindbergh.

Figure 1.2:
Consultants at the May 2006 World Economic Forum on the Middle East in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, explain the concept of "Rebranding the Middle East" to participants. Top: David Brain, President and CEO of Edelman (UK), the largest public relations firm in the world. Bottom: Farid Chehab, Chairman and COO of the advertising agency Leo Burnett for the Middle East region. Source: The World Economic Forum.
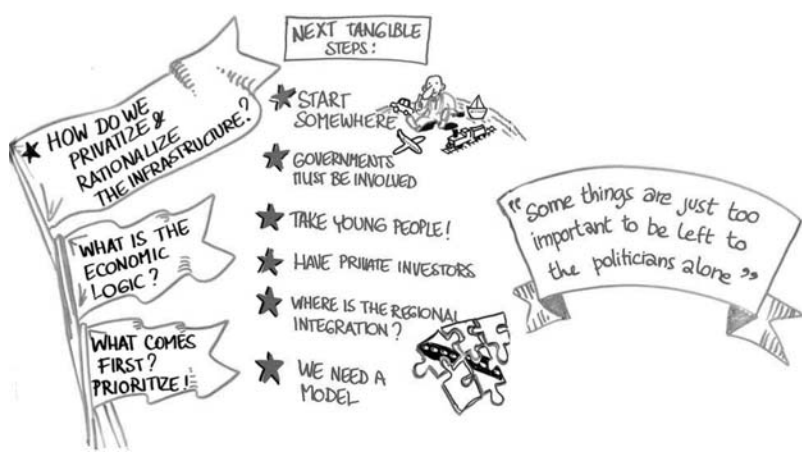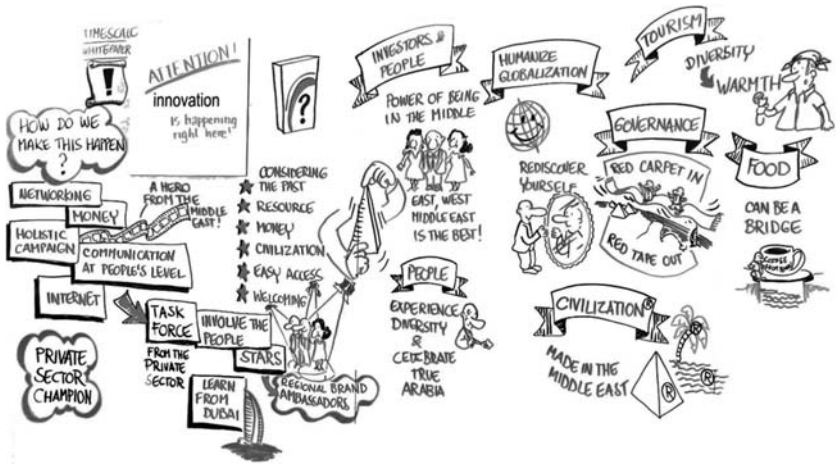
Figure 1.3:
"Hypertiles," graphic summaries of the discussion at the "Rebranding the Middle East" session of the World Economic Forum. Source: The World Economic Forum.

Figure 1.4:
Nation-branding advisor Simon Anholt with Chile's former president Michelle Bachelet. Courtesy of Simon Anholt.

empirical and ideational factors.[7] I follow Colin Hay and Ben Rosamond in the belief that "to identify discourses of globalization is . . . to point to the existence of structured sets of ideas, often in the form of implicit and sedimented assumptions, upon which actors might draw in formulating strategy and, indeed, in legitimating strategy pursued for quite distinct ends."[8]

As a flexible idiom with a variety of shorthands, globalization is wielded by a wide range of actors, appealed to by turns as threat or opportunity, and almost always presented as imperative, endemic, and inexorable. It is rarely something that anyone has directly caused; rather it is seen as exogenous to the party and therefore beyond direct control, except by providing justification for reactive measures. Globalization has come to be constructed, not as an "essentially contested term" with indeterminate and contingent

outcomes through time and space, but as a monolithic shadow cast over all sites and futures.[9] This shadow is made up of a single-minded vision of international participation and exchange, one which privileges elite agency, isomorphic infrastructural design of both economies and polities, and metrological (as opposed to cultural/historical) forms of knowledge.

In the realm of national governance, the leading element of globalization is especially apparent. Nation branding is a well-timed expression of what Leslie Sklair calls "global nationalism"—the conviction by national governments that the future of the nation consists of finding a "lucrative role" to play within a globally integrated economic system. Under the rubric of global nationalism, national identity is acknowledged more in terms of its fitness for capital attraction than for its cohesive or collegial properties; that is, cohesiveness and belonging are seen to follow from the nation's fitness for capital attraction, as state policies and corporate practices are mutually configured to favor economic growth as the engine of citizens' well-being.

When globalization is presented as an economic problem, it seems to warrant the adoption of an economic solution. The current version of this solution is most often called neoliberalism—the second leading element of this story. The conceptual apparatus of neoliberalism blends utopic visions of property ownership with individual freedoms, positing these as the "central values of civilization."[10] These precepts are embedded in the enforcement of three economic practices: liberalization, including market competition and export-dominated production; privatization, both in terms of the shifting of public services into the private sector and in terms of industry deregulation; and stabilization, by the adoption of anti-inflationary policies and the use of convertible currency.[11] Further, these technocratic measures are advocated as solutions to cultural and political problems, presented as the sole and necessary response to the inexorable forces of globalization. In this context, the state becomes involved in a kind of balancing act. It must reinforce its authority by reducing tax and regulatory structures to enforce the freedom of the market, using the "civilizing" appeals to freedom to generate consensus; yet it must cede authority in other realms of governance in order to allow the market to function without fetters. The adoption of public–private partnerships is one concrete example of this balancing act, by which businesses and corporations "not only collaborate intimately with state actors but even acquire a strong role in writing legislation, determining public policies, and setting regulatory frameworks (which are mainly advantageous to themselves)."[12] Moreover, the state's advocacy of freedom of the market does not appear to translate into similar acceptance of other forms of organization, especially those—like social movements and labor unions—which resist infrastructural decisions founded

on capital accumulation. This is why the idea of "flexibility"—of policy, of discourse, and of techniques—is a central tenet of neoliberal frames: the connotative fields of reference on which these ideas play out can be modified depending on the desired outcome.[13]

These two leading elements, globalization and neoliberalism, organize our current thinking about the nation in distinct yet familiar ways. Representations of the nation through time have revealed intimate connections between commerce and culture, between morals and the market, and between national and global ecumenes.[14] Yet there are aspects of these connections that are qualitatively new and need to be addressed as such. If indeed nation branding represents a transformation of business in the articulation of national identity, what is this transformation? Recent critiques have tried to account for what makes nation branding a "new and improved" form of national expression, pointing to the nation's thorough commercialization, corporatization, or commodification.[15] I am interested not only in these various facets; I want to demonstrate the articulation between them and the very meaning of nation-ness itself. The extension of the lexicon, techniques, and metrics of the brand to concepts of national territory, practices of national governance, and reflexive understandings of collective identity represent a new way of thinking about national identity.

To provide a perspective on this transformation, we need to understand the terms of the brand and its evolution over the past three decades. How did the idea of the brand become such a dominant medium, metaphor, and metric in the national imaginary? The seeds of the transformation grow out of a renewed relationship of mutual dependence between the nation and the private corporation. I tell this story in many layers throughout the book, but it is important to paint it in broad brushstrokes here to give a sense of the intricate intertwining of national imaginary and corporate strategy in the contemporary setting.

THINKING THROUGH THE BRAND: RATIONALITY AND ENCHANTMENT

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed massive changes to the scale and scope of the corporate firm. Key to the success of the globalizing corporation was its owners' and shareholders' ability to locate and account for new sources of economic value based in the concept of intangible assets. In earlier decades, the value of corporations lay primarily in their tangible assets: land, buildings, manufacturing materials, and financial assets such as receivables and

investments (stock in trade). While corporate managers and shareholders had already been well aware of the importance of intangible assets, including brands, technological innovations, and patents, the value of a corporation "on the books" was determined largely by its material manifestations.

In the 1980s, a series of mergers and acquisitions shook the corporate world. In the process, it became dramatically apparent that the corporate buyer gained considerably more than the acquired company's land and buildings; it also acquired the company's reputation and brands, contained in the notion of "goodwill." From the perspective of accounting, business goodwill was then a "broad concept" that included the notion of corporate reputation, the particular skills of workers, and the value of brands; yet goodwill became "visible" to accountants only when a business entity was sold.[16] Following the merger process, however, corporate owners wished to continue to capitalize on the reputation and brands of the acquired entity. Existing accountancy practices did not seem to match the desire of the globalizing corporation to rely on intangible assets as ongoing measures of corporate value.

The problem would become even more pronounced amid the decline of financial indicators as reliable sources of value starting in the early 1990s. As global reorganizations persisted and accountancy scandals captured news headlines, it became increasingly apparent that earnings data were no longer adequate prognoses of future worth. As crises at companies like AOL Time Warner, WorldCom, and Enron made clear, traditional valuation schemes such as annual reports, share options, and employee bonuses were portraits of past performance, not reliable indicators of future potential. Corporate executives sought additional devices that would inspire trust and confidence among their shareholders, investors, and consumers.

The device of reputation as a productive engine of economic value was dramatically rethought due to its instability in the aftermath of these corporate shakeups. A company's brand or identity was clearly a prime source of value for the firm. The issue lay in finding ways to both manage and account for this brand value. How could diverse features of corporate activity be seen as part of the market value of the firm? The company's relationships with its employees and stakeholders, its philanthropic activities and charitable contributions, the corner office's vision and leadership capabilities, the emotional appeal of its products and services—all of these were now considered to contribute to the corporation's bottom line.

In the context of this generalized value crisis, corporate executives found themselves with a unique opportunity. With accountancy itself increasingly engaged in debates over valuation, corporate leaders experimented with alternative methodologies to assess value.[17] Focusing on alternative

ways to value the identity of the corporation opened up an entirely new set of possibilities for corporate managers. Using methods that would include heterogeneous qualitative factors like consumer loyalty, philanthropy, or environmental practices, corporate executives essentially rethought the notion of value itself. Brand value could become "social" value—that is, value based in the perception of its various appellants: consumers, investors, shareholders, and the general public.[18] The process of valuation became cyclical, involved in a dynamic and flexible relationship with social life. While corporate brand identity sought to derive value from its "social" characteristics, it simultaneously sought—as Michael Power puts it—to "bring the outside in," to use social discourse, media treatments, and cultural relevance as sources of economic value.[19]

A second dimension of this transformation in valuation techniques was a shift in expertise. Part of the politics of brand accounting involved rethinking who was allowed to decide what was valuable.[20] By expanding the notion of what constituted intangible assets, corporate leaders effectively displaced those actors—accountants, financial auditors, and other third-party accreditors—who formerly maintained a monopoly over asset recognition in corporate settings. Those engaged in the recognition of brand value were as often as not engaged in a process of creation of brand value, as they deployed alternative forms of valuation to assess, measure, and track an organization's performance.[21] Such creative accounting practices can be understood as part of the overall shift of brand management to occupy such a central role in corporate affairs.

It is here that we can see the rise of brand consultancies devoted specifically to making and managing valuation schemes for corporations.[22] Branding firms developed alternative valuation metrics—sometimes internal, and often proprietary—for corporate firms. Reputational benchmarking and rankings systems were used to perform audits of corporate identity by determining their value according to the perceptions held of their financial stability, innovative capacity, and distinct personality by investors, consumers, and stakeholders. This served to resituate accounting within the domain of evolving business orientations toward intangible assets: they established value less as a measure of objective or "quantitative" assessment and more as a relational condition of competitive positioning in the rankings. The reputational rankings served an additional function. By establishing best practices and optimal criteria to which corporations should aspire, brand strategists perpetuated their expertise as both evaluators of intangible assets *and* as critical advisors on how to acquire such intangible assets and thereby rise in the rankings. In the process, audit itself was transformed from a regulatory to a marketing

feature—as part of the "value-added" of brand consultancies. Just as brand consultants operate to make visible hitherto invisible forms of value, a central task of this book is to make visible the often "invisible" forms of value creation and expertise of these actors in the creation and perpetuation of the national form.

Here we can also see how the brand was manipulated to contribute to the future health and well-being of the firm. The brand became a kind of "boundary object," a strategic device wielded by different actors for a range of different ends, whose borders shifted to accommodate the circumstance.[23] It offered the rational assessments necessary for corporations to anchor the value of intangible assets of brand and reputation in market terms, as well as the emotional value of connecting brands to "real" social relations and feelings, "enchanting" its various interlocutors.[24]

THE EXPRESSIVE ORGANIZATION

Brand management was rapidly adopted not only as a valuation device but also as an organizational device within the corporate firm. Using brand strategy to standardize employee behavior and output was not an entirely new idea at this time. As a classic 1969 marketing text put it, "everything about an organization talks," from its physical facilities to its employee attitudes to its stationery, and therefore should be managed with an eye to consumer perception.[25] But for the globalizing corporation of the 1980s and 1990s, this idea took on additional meaning. For if the initial problems of the globalizing corporation were technical and managerial, it soon became apparent to corporate owners that they needed to find ways to maintain the integrity of their corporate "culture" even as they diversified production and expanded their territorial purview.

Increasingly, corporate managerial training manuals and business books began to stress the "emotional and symbolic expressiveness" of everyday work within the firm, rooted in the attitudes and behaviors of its employees. As one text put it, "the behavior that supports a corporate reputation or brand needs to be more deeply rooted, it needs to rest in the organization's identity. Employees must feel the message they are sending with their behavior, not just go through the motions."[26]

By articulating the corporate identity in terms of the attitudes and behaviors of their employees, CEOs of globalizing firms could address a number of issues. First, the identity offered a unique form of discipline. Translating employee tasks, no matter how mundane, into ways to "live the brand" gave managers a way to resolve the tensions between the controlling

and communicative functions of the firm, between hard and soft forms of management, and between rational and symbolic approaches to organizational efficiency. Enjoining employees to live the brand also became a way to measure the extent of their loyalty. No longer simply workers, they were now "stakeholders," "ambassadors," and "champions" of the firm.[27] The brand became a totalizing form of organization. It incorporated strategy, marketing, accounting, and behavior into a holistic framework where each dimension was considered to have direct effects on the others. In the context of corporate expansion across geographical territory, the need to maintain a distinct and bounded communicative strategy was even more imperative. The more coherent and coordinated the activities on the inside, the more the corporation could maintain its apparent stability as a cohesive cultural form on the outside.

The question remains: how did these multiple insights get applied to national spaces? Marketing folklore, aided by overenthusiastic nation-branding supporters (and hardly denied by self-styled nation-branding consultants, who enjoy the prestige of being associated with a hot industry in development), tends to locate the origins of the nation-branding phenomenon in one charismatic figure by the name of Simon Anholt, an advertising copywriter turned national government advisor to the British Parliament as well as some forty other countries over the last twelve years.[28] While there is no doubt that Anholt's prolific output and activity have made a crucial contribution to the development of the practice, I take a more critical stance, recognizing that origin narratives, particularly those that attribute major transformations to single authorship and unique design, are themselves frequently part of the fictionalization (and "factualization")[29] of economic and cultural transformations.

Anholt's "discovery" of nation branding should instead be situated in ongoing theoretical and practical considerations of the role of the nation in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century geopolitical and economic contexts. In other words, in order to understand how nation branding emerged as a thinkable and observable phenomenon, we need to understand how different thinkers have tried to account over time for the phenomenon of nationhood itself.

THINKING THROUGH THE NATION

If there is one common point made among the vast numbers of studies of nations and nationalism, it is that defining and analyzing the concepts that structure them is an always partial and elusive prospect. The notions of

nation, nationality, and nationalism are more often seen as uncomfortable anomalies for theory rather than as lenses to sharpen our view. Despite the ongoing legitimacy of the nation in social and political thought and practice, nationalism is still viewed as pathology instead of cure.[30]

One set of debates that reveals the depths of this pathology is rooted in discussions of origin. Are nations and nationalism primordial or provisional? Part of a universal state of ancient origin or self-conscious creation and re-creation? Some theorists of nationalism see it as a natural and universal phenomenon, in which "the 'nations' are there, in the very nature of things, only waiting to be 'awakened' (a favorite nationalist expression and image) from their regrettable slumber, by the nationalist 'awakener.'"[31] Others have characterized the nation as a "historic deposit," formed by layers of knowledge embedded in the strata of earlier social formations.

At the other end of the spectrum are those theorists who see the nation as the product of invention, imagination, and ongoing reconstruction. These theorists are careful to point out that their view is not meant to suggest that the nation is merely a product of the imagination; the distinction is not "real" versus "imagined." Rather the distinction is between understanding the nation as an organic, inherited, and materialist entity or taking it as a functionalist and subjective one: as an ongoing project of making and remaking by a variety of different actors with different intentions at given moments in time and space. This is what Ernest Renan means by his famous characterization of the nation as a daily plebiscite—the production and reproduction of the nation through common discourse and practice, with the aim of establishing common recollections and understandings.

No matter in which camp we locate ourselves, whether we prefer the theory of nation as a product of social engineering or as historic deposit, each rests on four architectural pillars of praxis: rhetoric, image, symbol, and ritual. But if both camps rest on the same foundational pillars, this causes the axis of debate to shift. Rather than trying to locate nationalism along a spectrum of ideas from ancient to invented, we might better understand the terms of the debate by framing nationalism as a *strategy* for nation building that can present itself as either ancient or invented to advance certain ends: systems of belief, political goals of self-determination or legitimacy, or economic incentives.

By "strategy" I do not mean that nationalism is nothing more than puppetry or propaganda. To call nationalism a strategy is not to discount the attachments, loyalties, and affiliations of those who act in the name of the nation. Rather, it is to point to a shift in conceptualization. Instead of "What is national identity?" we ought to ask "What does it mean to claim to have a national identity?"[32] What does it mean to see oneself as having a

national identity, as being proud to be Polish, or Ghanaian, or Canadian? Such questions refer us immediately to context. We cannot universally ask what it means to see oneself as having an identity without also asking about the particular situation in which the asker finds herself and the particular circumstances that have led her to ask the question. This, I believe, is what is meant by Rogers Brubaker's characterization of the nation as a practical category and Craig Calhoun's injunction of the nation as a discursive formation.[33] The issue is what we do with the nation in a given context.

Perhaps the signal context of national articulation in our time is the year 1991, when the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall heralded unprecedented transformations of the national form. Perhaps not coincidentally, 1991 was also the year of publication of the second edition of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, one of the most enduring and most referenced texts in the recent history of nationalist thought. In his second edition, Anderson adds a chapter entitled "Memory and Forgetting." "Supposing antiquity were the necessary consequence of novelty?" he asks as a provocative prelude to the chapter. Anderson eloquently shows the intricate relationship of temporal continuity to contemporary national cultural coherence. But he also shows that to call one's collective self new, or old, requires situating one's nation not only in relation to its own teleology and genealogy but also in relation to surrounding nations. Like the identity of the person, the self-conscious identity of the nation is a fundamentally relational project. Ideas such as "modern," "progressive," or "backward" can only exist in relation to the perceived modernity, progressiveness, and backwardness of others.

If this seems like an obvious point, it is nevertheless well masked in nationalist projects, which frequently call for the reclaiming of a unique, distinctive, and inimitable national self that draws on its internal histories and memories alone for sources of pride and patriotism. Anderson's observations imply that to construct the biography of the nation is to consider the range of strategies by which certain events become "ours" (and therefore "real") and others become "theirs"—the products of impositions and interventions (and therefore "false"). This reminds us why Renan famously defined the nation in terms of forgetting and even historical error—because the nation can never be the product of a singular and indigenously conceived narrative but is rather a composite of the tortuous, contingent, and indeterminate trajectories of collective memory and forgetting both within the nation *and by other nations*.[34] It is the trajectories of its own and of other nations that create and re-create a national identity. Another way to understand this debate is to study the different claims that have been made

situating nations as producers of nationalism versus those that see nationalism as productive of nations. Does nationalism make the nation, or is it the other way around? Do nationalists use the principle of shared traits and consciousness (what Daniel Segal and Richard Handler call "similitude") to articulate the terms of national community, or can these shared traits and consciousness, these "common denominators," already exist in some objective sense and therefore require an active spirit to ignite and empower them?[35]

Overcoming this debate requires that we recognize that both sides are invested in the practical dimensions of national consciousness. How do the social acts of exchange and reciprocity in everyday life work to articulate and rearticulate national borders and boundaries? Such a conception overcomes the too-easy distinction between so-called subjectivist and materialist conceptions of the nation. It recognizes that both subjective and material factors are constantly at play in making the nation, idealist consciousness and physical structure are mutually reinforcing, and conflict and heterogeneity are not challenges to the national form but rather constitutive elements.[36]

Seeing the nation as a practical category, in Brubaker's terms, or as a discursive formation in Calhoun's, allows us to account for the contingent and processual making and remaking of the nation in both subjectivist and materialist ways.[37] It also allows us to recognize the way in which the nation, like the brand, is a boundary object—a category of discourse and practice deployed for a range of ends, whose scale and scope mutates to accommodate the claims being made in the name of those ends. The contest is one of legitimacy; and it is here that branding—a way to narrate the distinctive qualities and measurable quantities of a corporation—started to be considered the most legitimate way to make the nation matter in a global context.

INTEGRATING NATION AND BRAND

Nation branding is justified among state actors and national elites as a necessary corrective to the threatened erosion of national structures—both institutional structures and what Raymond Williams calls "structures of feeling"—in a global arena of political, economic, and cultural exchange. With globalization characterized as a "space of flows" in which products and policies, ideas and images, and capital in all its forms circulate unbound, national borders increasingly appeared as outdated and unnecessary stoppages.[38] At the same time, the increasing strength of alliances at

the sub-, supra-, and transnational levels—and widening networks of migration, mobility, and media—contributed to further undermine claims to autonomy by the territorial state. In this context, the legitimacy of national governments and other national public institutions as purveyors and protectors of the cultural specificity of nationhood was at stake. National leaders sought ways to rearticulate their importance in global networks.

Corporate branding, a process of assigning unique identification by consciously highlighting certain meanings and myths while eliding others, was rationalized as a means to promote a distinctive national identity while encouraging the economic benefits necessary to compete in a globalized world. Seeing national culture and identity as resources for global capital growth led national leaders to increasingly seek global expertise to help them excavate this precious resource. As I describe above, brand management techniques had been put to use to generate qualities by interacting with the social and absorbing those characteristics into the brand. At the same time, corporate reputation indices and other competitive rankings of performance were being tinkered with and perfected as part of the general shift of the recognition of the value of assets from accountants and other third-party verifiers to brand managers and marketers, who found ways to account for the soft qualities of capital instead of merely the hard ones. In this context, it was branding expertise that was seen as the right expertise for national public institutions.

Adopting a brand therefore allowed national leaders to entrench the perception that the best way to renew their population's interest in their identity was through renewing the use of *identity* as part of the national *interest*. Culture as resource "trades," as George Yúdice puts it, on the "currency of diversity."[39] In order to market culture for distinct economic ends, it was necessary to articulate the special and unique difference of the national client. Competing for scarce resources means that a nation must present what makes it so distinctive that its various interlocutors— investors, students, tourists, and so on—want to visit that nation rather than another. But this making and marketing of diversity is a fundamentally flawed project, one that celebrates difference only insofar as it corresponds to patterns of consumption. This is what Elizabeth Povinelli calls the "cunning of recognition," a fantasy of diversity in which the only kind of diversity that matters is one that is defanged for purposes of global trade. When the politics of culture intersects the culture of capital, we encounter "convulsive competition purged of real conflict, social difference without social consequences."[40] Although this feat of de-diversification is apparent in all the cases I examine, in chapter four I pay special attention

to the cunning of recognition in the "de-multiculturalization" of Canada via the discipline of the brand.

Indeed, the particular characteristics of nation branding I have identified above—the rendering of national culture as an auditable form, its reorientation as source of either market opportunity or risk, and the defanging of diversity in the process—are applicable to all the cases I describe in this book. I use each case as an example of a different feature of the phenomenon; but as we shall see, the process of branding, along with expectations of its effects, are remarkably similar. Such a homogenized approach is partly attributable, as I have explained, to the similar reactions from many corners to the specter of globalization and the market-oriented expectations of neoliberal economics and so-called New Public Management practices. It is also attributable to the global spread of corporate management practices. One of the reasons that nation branding appears as a coherent and analyzable set of practices is what Nigel Thrift calls "cultural circuits of capitalism"—the transnational traffic of business and management expertise made possible by the rise of multinational corporate forms.[41]

A second, related reason that branding appears as a coherent system is that despite the prevalence of the idea of nation branding in dozens of locales around the world, the stable of nation branding "experts" is surprisingly small. This profession is tightly bounded; while conditions of entry are low, the predominance of Simon Anholt's methods and metrics has meant that nearly all other contenders to the field have either adopted his methods or had to articulate highly similar methods in direct opposition to them, resulting in a strong isomorphism of theory and approach within the practice.

Before we can dive into an account of how nation branding consultants imagine their role and their practice, however, we need to have a better grasp on the ideas and conditions that led to the very imagining of nation branding itself. The next chapter gives us a postwar history of the idea of competitiveness and how it became embedded in national policy and practice. Competitiveness is a key index of globalization discourse and a profoundly powerful motivator for change. As an inherently relational concept, it highlights the deep-seated anxieties about national decision-makers' abilities to measure up to their counterparts. Initially conceived as a form of discipline for corporate firms, competitiveness is extended through a particular series of events to the space of the nation. By tracing the transfer of firm-centered strategy, expertise, and valuation devices to the space of the nation, we can see how national referents—citizen, culture, loyalty— become competitive entities in themselves. The particular actors and institutions whose trajectories I follow, from Michael Porter to the World

Economic Forum (WEF), to the World Bank, to Ernst & Young, are relevant because they emerge as central institutions and sources of transnational knowledge in the nation-branding strategies as well. As we shall see in later chapters, Porter's consulting firm, the Monitor Group, was a key player in later rebranding exercises. The WEF also hosted branding workshops and seminars. Both institutions' proprietary valuation and benchmarking tools, such as the infamous Porter Diamond and the WEF's competitiveness indices, would subsequently be incorporated into nation-branding methods as well.

The story begins in the United States, whose particular regulatory shifts affected firm behavior and strategy. By chapter three, as we will see, the scene of the action has moved to Britain. In part, as I suggest above, this is because of the charismatic pull and client reach of well-established consultants such as Simon Anholt and Wally Olins, and the subsequent rise of local competitors for the same kinds of clients. But it also has to do with the proximity, both geographical and historical, of Britain to many of the client countries it initially worked with. As chapter four illustrates in detail, one of the motivating influences for client countries in Europe and Africa to initiate nation-branding exercises is to convey to the world that they are "normal" and that they "work." In other words, they have escaped the confines of history and are ready to be perceived as modern democratic nations. That their postcolonial potential does not embrace alternative modernities and modalities but rather a single, teleological model of late-stage capitalist development is part of the story I tell here. In order for these nations to imagine themselves as unique, different, and globally competitive, they had first to be reimagined as if they were all the same.