

BOOK REVIEWS

Dunja Fehimović and Rebecca Ogden (eds.), *Branding Latin America: Strategies, Aims, Resistance*

(Lanham, MD, and London: Lexington, 2018), pp. xiii + 232, \$100; £70.00, hb.

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In 2013, garishly coloured posters began to appear in airports and magazines featuring beaches, jungles and coffee plantations and emblazoned with the slogan ‘Colombia, Magical Realism’. I was fascinated by how the country’s biggest literary export, together with exoticised images, was being used to lure tourists. This, it transpired, was a prime example of nation branding. Such attempts to position nations (or regions or continents) as distinctive, competitive and worthy of the attention of tourists, consumers and investors are theorised in the volume *Branding Latin America: Strategies, Aims, Resistance*. Edited by Dunja Fehimović and Rebecca Ogden, scholars whose work centres on the formation of national imaginaries through cinema and tourism respectively, the collection is a significant contribution to the growing field of nation branding, which was pioneered by the British policy adviser Simon Anholt. The book skilfully balances detailed analyses and valuable new insights with enough background information to appeal and make sense to both Latin Americanists new to branding and branding experts unfamiliar with Latin America.

The key strength of the volume is how it conveys the extent to which branding intersects with a number of topics central to the concerns of Latin American studies. Chief among them are preoccupations with nation-building that have existed since before independence, especially the tensions between the ambition to imagine the nation as a coherent whole in order to centralise power and maintain stability, and the palpable class, racial and geographical inequalities within each nation. Not for nothing is Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 1983) referenced in more than half of the chapters. The volume suggests that nation branding is the latest iteration of attempts to shape a narrative of the nation, using the tools provided by neoliberalism. Moreover, the outwards focus of nation branding – the fact that nations must make themselves marketable to others – is portrayed as a consequence of neoliberalism. The volume engages with the central tenet of neoliberal ideology, that choice equals freedom, asking who gets to choose. Despite Anholt’s famous suggestion that nation branding would ‘level the playing field’, allowing smaller nations opportunities for economic gain, it is evident throughout

the collection that nation branding reinforces global power dynamics, as Latin American countries compete for the attention of the rich West. In doing so, they perform a kind of neo-colonialism, offering their land, industry and people to be enjoyed and exploited, often repeating tropes of the exotic, sexual availability and abundant natural resources. While these branding strategies are contested in a number of ways by artists, writers and musicians who draw attention to inequalities and exploitation, resistance is itself marketable, appealing to foreign consumers' appetite for 'heroic victimhood' (p. 177), as Fehimović astutely observes in her chapter on the paradoxes of the national brand in Cuban cinema.

There is an impressive breadth to the collection, emphasising the core message that branding is not restricted to the worlds of business and advertising. This breadth reflects the interdisciplinary selection of contributors, from cultural studies, media and communications, ethnography and sociology. The nine chapters, together with the introduction and epilogue, scrutinise a range of countries and actors, from official, centralised campaigns through citizens to foreign journalists. The historical antecedents of official nation branding are illustrated in Andrea Paz Cerda Pereira's analysis of Chile's participation in world exhibitions since 1851, while César Jiménez-Martínez demonstrates how the image of a nation in international consciousness can be an unintentional secondary effect of editors' demands for sensationalism to sell newspapers. Discussing Cuba and Colombia respectively, Ogden and Paula Gómez Carrillo highlight the motivations for individuals to actively engage in branding their own nation, that is, in improving the international reputation of the nation, given that negative national associations can bear significant personal and professional consequences. The resistance of the subtitle comes in the form of the appropriation and subversion of the official Peru logo by graphic artists to highlight rural poverty and police brutality, as explored by Félix Lossio Chávez, and a critique of the very nature and language of branding by Spanish-Argentine net-poet Belén Gache, analysed by Claire Taylor. Andrew Ginger's chapter on the 'Latin' music brand, epitomised by Pitbull, meanwhile explores branding strategies as simultaneously commercialism and resistance. In its global success, Ginger argues, this music brand effects a reverse colonialism, albeit one that perpetuates a 'rampantly sexualised patriarchy' (p. 164). In the final chapter, Brett Levinson argues – via Saussurean linguistics and tennis shoes – for the impossibility of dividing the state and the market. Levinson invites us to question our own academic practice in labelling 'Latin America', maintaining that the terms we use endlessly to differentiate in our critiques 'are no less brands than Nike or Colombia.co' (p. 211). There are occasional repetitions throughout these chapters, such as definitions of soft power or reflections on Anholt's role in the birth of nation branding, but these foreground the links between chapters from diverse disciplines.

The collection ends with a series of provocations from the editors in relation to the imbrication of cultural production and nation branding, including 'how cultural productions contribute to the unofficial brand of a place or community' (p. 214). These are very pertinent questions for cultural studies, as well as for those involved in the translation, circulation, marketing and reception of cultural production. I hope answers will come in future studies, with this collection providing a strong foundation.