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Zala Volčič and Mark Andrejevic (Eds.), **Commercial Nationalism: Selling the Nation and Nationalizing the Sell**, London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 202 pp., $54.50 - $95.00 (hardcover).

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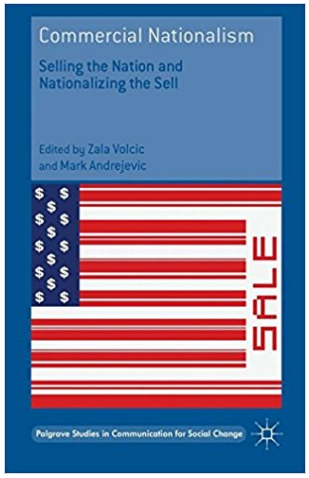

This edited collection uses the concept of *commercial nationalism* to address an apparent paradox in the relationship of media to the contemporary global economy. It has been argued that we are now in an age of the global, where, as Graeme Turner describes in his scene-setting chapter,

> the influence and relevance of the nation state would dramatically decline in the face of the rising momentum of media globalization, the consequent expansion of international trade in media products and formats, and the impact of the supposedly borderless characteristics of the online environment. (p. 14)

At the same time, however, we see what Volčič and Andrejevic describe as "developments typically associated with the term 'globalization' go[ing] hand in hand with assertive and resurgent nationalisms—both enhancing and reconfiguring national identities" (p. 1). The authors of this edited collection propose—in a variety of ways and with varying degrees of success—that commercial nationalism is the way to bring together these seemingly contradictory tendencies into a new synthesis.

Volčič and Andrejevic begin by noting that the media has been given a significant place in constructivist accounts of nationalism and national identity, with recent literature increasingly focused on the role played by commercial popular culture (e.g., Mihelj, 2011) partly in reaction to the emphasis on "high" culture as providing the cultural symbols of national identity in the classic accounts of authors such as Ernest Gellner (Gellner, 1983). Volčič and Andrejevic build upon these insights to propose that commercial nationalism involves a two-way movement between nation states and commercial markets in an age of globalization. Commercial businesses have noted that "nationalism sells," and in increasingly global markets, associating a brand with a national identity provides a cache of distinctiveness or "a means of channelling affective sentiment around a floating signifier" (p. 2). Nation states also seek to reconstitute themselves as national "brands," and the ways in which they do so "come increasingly to rely on commercial techniques for self-promotion, diplomacy and internal national mobilization" (p. 4). The authors emphasize that their primary purpose is not to contribute to the growing literature on nation branding, but rather to consider how such exercises are emblematic of states increasingly thinking about themselves in an "enterprise form," seen as the application of the logic of the market, or neoliberalism, to contemporary forms of national government.

Graeme Turner's chapter develops an argument that he has made in more detail elsewhere (Turner, 2015): that the significance of nation states and national culture has been written off too quickly

in media and cultural studies literature that proposes—and in some cases celebrates—that globalization is associated with the irrevocable decline of the nation state. He associates commercial nationalism with entertainment media strategies that appropriate the forms and symbols of national identity for commercial purposes, but empty them of substantive historical content. In such an environment, Turner contends, associations of the nation state with conceptions of the public good, civic education, and the public sphere largely disappear.

Other chapters in the edited collection engage with commercial nationalism in varying and at times disparate ways. Despite the editorial injunction that the book is not about nation branding, it is clearly the central *motif* in a number of chapters. Examples include Nicholas Carah and Eric Louw's textual analysis of Australian film director Baz Luhrmann's work, Juan Sanin on Colombian nationalism, Magdalena Kania-Lundholm on the "new patriotism" in Poland, and Michela Ardizzoni on the transnational branding of Italy's RAI broadcasting service. Sanin's observations of how Colombian governments have used crowdsourcing to develop "passion" as an alternative national narrative to the global association of the nation with drugs and crime is significant in this regard, as is Eric Louw's account of South African nation branding in the context of hosting the 2010 FIFA World Cup. At times, however, these chapters can feel like "Cultural Studies 101" exercises in deconstructing nationalistic tropes in the media, which has been a staple of the field since Benedict Anderson's (1991) account of nations as "imagined communities" took root. In her concluding chapter to the book, Nadia Kaneva alludes to this problem, arguing for a political economy of nation branding that relates competition between nation states for economic and symbolic resources to such exercises, rather than locating critical work largely on the plane of textual and ideological critique. If Turner is right to argue that the nation state is not going away, then textual deconstruction of national identity can only go so far.

Two of the more engaging chapters in this collection are Fan Yang's on the "Chinese Dream" and Giang Nguyen-Thu's on the Vietnamese television program *Contemporaries*, which profiles successful Vietnamese businesspeople. Both work within the context of socialist governments, where it is taken as a given that the state actively uses the media to construct and reconstruct notions of national identity. Yang points to the scale of Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" as a new discursive formation for Chinese national aspiration, and the very different communities it seeks to appeal to in contemporary China. What Yang illustrates is the extent to which a "Chinese Dream" in an age of globalization does not stand alone within the Chinese imaginary. It competes with other forms of imagining a modern identity—most notably the "American Dream"—and with the idea of a postnational cosmopolitan identity. Nguyen-Thu proposes that *Contemporaries* highlights ambiguities in socialist Vietnam, as its focus on entrepreneurs who draw upon personal strengths to successfully develop Vietnamese brands in international markets is clearly presenting a very different notion of national identity to that which forged socialist Vietnam.

In both chapters, the authors attribute these contradictions to neoliberal globalization, yet the significance of neoliberalism is asserted rather than argued. As is common in the literature on neoliberalism, the protean and all-purpose nature of the concept can obscure as much as it reveals, particularly when it functions largely as a synonym for "the market" or commercial activity.

References

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