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# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Louis Clerc, Nikolas Glover, Paul Jordan, eds. *Histories of Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding in the Nordic and Baltic Countries: Representing the Periphery*. Diplomatic Studies Series. Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 2015. 348 pp. \$149.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-30548-9; \$149.00 (e-book), ISBN 978-90-04-30549-6.

Reviewed by Martina Topić (Leeds Beckett University)

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Commissioned by Seth Offenbach

*History of Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding in the Nordic and Baltic Countries* is an edited volume with 337 pages, encompassing twelve chapters, an introductory study section, and a concluding reflections chapter. The introduction is written by two of the volume editors, Louis Clerc and Nikolas Glover.

In the introduction, the editors set out a case that public diplomacy is a branch of foreign policy and can also be tied to the famous framework from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983): a nation does not exist until it is imagined by its members who start interconnecting and creating a feeling of belonging to a nation. In the same vein, the authors argue that public diplomacy and the representation of the United States abroad can be analyzed in this way; they note that the United States turned to public diplomacy after military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is a good point, and we can indeed agree that using Anderson's framework of imagined communities is a good idea for studying the complex field of public diplomacy, as well as other fields, such as cultural diplomacy and popular culture. In the case of the United States, public policy has created an imagination of the American dream and lifestyle. The United States has been very successful in public diplomacy and in using its popular culture to sell the American dream and way of life as a desirable pattern for the rest of the world.

Clerc and Glover, however, also argue that "closer historical examination is needed to understand the connections between contemporary practices of external national imagining and the broader cultural and political processes of imagining national community" (p. 3). In addition, they correctly claim that nation branding and attempts to more effectively present countries abroad are current endeavors; many countries invest major efforts to present themselves abroad as well as to attract invest-

ments through building their reputation. This can be demonstrated with budgets that countries spend on foreign promotion via cultural institutions abroad, tourist-related initiatives, etc. However, Clerc and Glover also maintain that "in smaller states, an intuitive urge to see one's nation through the eyes of others has translated into debates over content, organisational framework, methods and goals" (p. 4). It is not clear what they mean by this statement: are they just making the case for their book, which is centered on smaller countries, or are they making a general argument? For example, the United Kingdom is certainly not a small country lacking importance on the global map, and yet the British Council has published a study on how others see the UK and what this perception means for Britain's economy and the country as a whole.[1] Later in the book under review, some authors argue that larger countries are keen to enforce their influence abroad while smaller countries are interested in building their image and presenting themselves to the world. While this is true, it is also true that large countries closely monitor how others see them to further promote themselves not only to preserve influence but also to attract investments, such as with the case of the UK.

Clerc and Glover place representation at the center of their discussion, which brings coherence to their argument. For example, they make a good point about the use of public diplomacy in the United States in the creation of the concept of the so-called American dream. Because of the strong imagination of America in the eyes of the rest of the world, many scholars engage in studies of Americanization. The authors argue that nation-states have been represented by both their citizens and in foreign discourses, particularly in small Nordic and Baltic countries where "practices of representation have involved a

two-way dialogue between national imaginings and foreign images of the nation.” In other words, the volume provides “examples of how, over time, Baltic and Nordic nations have been represented through an often fraught, two-way process of aligning domestic imaginings of the nation with external images of it” (p. 6). This objective is met by offering a historical overview of the development of public diplomacy in the Nordic and Baltic region. This is done by dividing the book into periods. Part 1 encompasses essays covering the period from 1918 until 1945, part 2 covers 1945 to 1989, and part 3 covers the period after the Cold War. This breakdown also allows the contributors to capture the main ruptures in world politics, and multiple studies from the same country (for example, Sweden) allow deeper understanding of the issue and increase potential for further research in this field.

In the last part of the introductory chapter, Clerc and Glover argue that similarities between Nordic and Baltic countries exist, and that these similarities make a comparison possible despite the fact that Baltic countries were occupied by the Soviet Union while Nordic countries were independent and able to join international organizations, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union (EU), earlier than Baltic countries. They contend that all countries in this region followed similar trajectories of development, and “their diplomacy is often one of survival, of attempts to affirm one’s interests, to justify one’s existence, to elaborate one’s identity at home and in the eyes of foreigners. Historically there has therefore been what we choose to identify as a common ‘toolkit’ for representing the Nordic and Baltic nations abroad” (p. 9).

This book is a well-written introductory study that offers many avenues for further exploration of the case studies. The focus on foreign politics is interesting because only a few books have taken that perspective due to the rise of studies on culture and cultural diplomacy. While it can certainly be argued that exploration and acknowledgment of cultural diplomacy is missing in the introduction’s understanding of foreign representation abroad and the way culture was used to foster nation branding, this does not undermine the quality of this book because historical perspective and in-depth exploration of foreign policy and foreign efforts of various actors in representing countries abroad is certainly missing in the current literature on nation branding and public diplomacy. Nevertheless, cultural and public diplomacy are used interchangeably in the scholarship in general because many scholars see cultural diplomacy as a subset of public diplomacy, and this is apparently the case for

this book too.[2] In addition, cultural diplomacy historically has been viewed through the exploration of cultural agreements and not as part of public diplomacy, which I believe is an incorrect view, and the fact that the authors of this book consider cultural efforts as part of public diplomacy is a good starting point for the discussion.

The chapters engage in discussions of the history of public diplomacy and efforts countries of the Nordic and Baltic region took to ensure independence and establishment on the world scene. Contributors discuss activities of various actors and their roles in national public diplomacy from a historical perspective, from before World War II to the postwar period and the post-World War II era. As the authors demonstrate in their case studies, national policies changed between these periods due to changes following the two world wars.

All of the chapters make important contributions to the understanding of historical circumstances that brought more institutionalized national representations abroad. Some chapters go a step further by incorporating such topics as cultural diplomacy and nationalism into their discussions. They open a possibility for further exploration and lead to greater understanding of other issues, including nation formation and the position of Jews in international nation branding.

For example, the outstanding chapter on Sweden by Andreas Åkerlund (chapter 1) offers important information that can be useful for studies in nationalism. In the Swedish case, a privately founded “Enlightenment board” existed until 1945 and collaborated with the state in its cultural activities and representation, which Åkerlund calls “cultural propaganda.” The author explores whether this board has shaped the Swedish public policy not just in the postwar period but also in the contemporary one. In other words, it was a non-state organization that initiated cultural policy abroad, and the organization was centered on the so-called enlightenment, which is visible from its name. One important activity of this board was organizing lectures in the Swedish language abroad, which connects this discussion to Anderson’s imagined communities and further validates the use of his approach for studying public (or cultural) diplomacy and nationalism. The choice of the name for the organization certainly attracts attention as enlightenment is not usually associated with any form of nationalism. Furthermore, this case study is important because it demonstrates that Swedish cultural efforts have been focused on the preservation of Swedishness and the Swedish language, which confirms that it is not only small countries

of Central, Southeast, and East Europe that centered their national policies on language, as some authors in theories of nationalism argue, but northern countries also used similar types of nationalism.[3]

On the other hand, in the chapter on Lithuania, Chiara Thessaris comments on the role Jews played in attempts to secure unification of Lithuania. Lithuania was struggling with the founding of the League of Nations in 1919 as the country had difficulties in presenting itself on the international scene. Lithuania attempted to use minority rights as a way to meet two foreign objectives: achieving legitimacy for territorial claims over Vilna and obtaining *de jure* recognition. While the Lithuanian policy of claiming the right of statehood was based on the long history of statehood of some other countries (for example, Croatia still has a similar statement in its constitution justifying the right to have a sovereign nation), the fact that officials involved Jews in the process is interesting as this was not the case in many other countries. Tensions between Lithuania and Poland arose over establishing Vilna as the Lithuanian capital since Poland considered it Polish and since Poland gained the right to incorporate Vilna into Polish territory; the league was seen as the only avenue through which to achieve recognition of Lithuania's claim. To fight Poles, Lithuanian officials invited Jews to collaborate and enforced the Declaration on the Right of Jews in Lithuania asking Jews to support them at the Paris Peace Conference in August 1919, while Lithuanian officials introduced this declaration to the constitution. The intention was to prove that Lithuania guaranteed and respected minority rights as requested by the league and that the Jewish minority had a prominent role in Lithuanian efforts. Lithuanian Jewish representatives and the international Jewish community supported Lithuanian claims over Vilna and refused to participate in Polish moves to ratify inclusion of Vilna into Poland. After failure to secure Vilna in the League of Nations due to the refusal to grant minority rights nationally and after the change of power following Lithuanian elections, collaboration with Jews lost importance and Jews were left disappointed. This chapter opens a whole set of other interesting and relevant questions: What was the position and role of Jews in other countries during this period in respect to nation formation and nation branding? What was the role of international Jewish communities in these international processes? Was this failure one of the reasons for the growth of Lithuanian anti-Semitism?

Finally, the chapter on Estonia (chapter 10) by Paul Jordan, one of the volume editors, offers another possi-

bility for further research. Jordan presents an original insight into the notion of public diplomacy and foreign policy. He discusses Estonia's public diplomacy by using the Brand Estonia campaign and Estonia's hosting of the Eurovision singing contest in Tallin. While many readers in the UK and the United States will perceive this contest as an insignificant, low quality music contest full of politicized voting and neighbor vote sharing, in the Estonian case, Eurovision was seen as something more. The contest became a test of whether other European nations perceived that Estonia belonged in the EU or, if they failed, the Soviet. While the Estonian narrative of the return to Europe is shared among many countries of the post-Communist bloc (for example, this narrative can be found in Croatia as well[4]), Eurovision's presence in Estonia can be seen as an attempt to prove that the European narrative opens a whole set of additional research questions for further projects. For example, is Eurovision more than just a music contest? How do different countries see this contest? Are there similar views in other countries about the importance of this contest regarding a country's representation globally? Is there a pattern between the West and the East in the perception of Eurovision? How do different countries represent themselves in this contest, and is there a pattern between representation in the contest and official political narratives in a country?

In summary, while this book ignores views of cultural scholars according to which cultural diplomacy is more than just a branch of foreign politics, it also presents a valuable contribution to the field as it increases our understanding of nation branding and public and cultural diplomacy.[5] This book can easily find a place on reading lists for modules covering public and cultural diplomacy, international and cultural relations, nationalism, and Jewish studies. It is also a must read for everyone interested in national histories of the Nordic and Baltic region.

#### Notes

[1]. Kieron Culligan, John Dubber, and Mona Lotten, *As Others See Us: Culture, Attraction and Soft Power* (London: British Council, 2014), <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/as-others-see-us-report.pdf>.

[2]. Robin Higham, "The World Needs More Canada: Canada Needs More Canada," in *The Handing Down of Culture, Smaller Societies, and Globalization*, ed. Jean-Paul Baillargeon (Ontario: Grubstreet Editions, 2001), 134-142; Simon Mark, "A Greater Role for Cul-

tural Diplomacy,” *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael,’ 2009), [http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2009/20090616\\_cdsp\\_discussion\\_paper\\_114\\_mark.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2009/20090616_cdsp_discussion_paper_114_mark.pdf); Mark Leonard, Catherine Stead, and Conrad Smewing, *Public Diplomacy* (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2002); Benno Signitzer, “Public Relations and Public Diplomacy: Some Conceptual Explorations,” in *Public Relations Research: European and International Perspectives and Innovations*, ed. Ansgar Zerfaß, Betteke van Ruler, and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008), 205-218.

[3]. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986); and Anthony D.

Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[4]. Martina Topić, “Nation Formation and Europeanization as a Conflict of Tradition and Modernization: Croatia’s Case Revisited,” in *Europe, Nations and Modernity*, ed. Atsuko Ichijo (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 132-157.

[5]. Mette Lending, *Change and Renewal: Norwegian Foreign Cultural Policy 2001-2005* (Oslo: Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000); and Martina Topić and Cassandra Sciortino, “Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Imperialism: A Framework for the Analysis,” in *Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Imperialism: European Perspective(s)*, ed. Martina Topić and Siniša Rodin (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2012), 9-49.

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