**Nation/City Branding in Palestine**

The term ‘Branding’ is still contested when linked to nations; colleagues in Palestine would argue that the term ‘Promotion’ could be of a more positive impact; in fact, this article will poke Nation branding in Palestinian cities. Scholars automatically link ‘Branding’ to products, business and trade, it is not easy to imagine the nation as a brand, a nation cannot re-make itself, like a company launching a new product.

Branding a nation is inspired by its national identity which started to evolve with the evolution of the nation states, it heavily relies on people’s attachment to a shared land, shared history, shared language, shared culture, religion, clothing, behaviours, values, attitudes or positions in dealing with internal and external variables. It is crucial to distinguish the identity for a nation which is usually done through studying the elements depending on which a nation promotes itself using public diplomacy. Public diplomacy is a soft power’s key instrument which we can’t ignore, in soft power, the narrative and the reality have to reflect each other. A nation’s identity is partly inherited from history and partly a continuing construction, there are aspects of national reputation which can be altered. Even the inherited parts of national reputation are open to revision as time goes by.

States have gun a long way in their nation branding and Palestine can’t remain indifferent. This piece aims to address the importance of Palestinian City Branding and to further shed light on how this could be done. Based on examples of other successful cities -case studies-, introducing a number of elements that shape a national identity, this article is expected to inspire scholars, policy makers, ministers, governors and mayors in determining what is worth promoting in Palestine that would lead to successful branding of Palestinian cities locally and internationally. In Palestine, not much work had been put on nation branding; therefore, this article will highlight its importance in serving the national cause and the strategic national goals, in doing so, the we will try to answer the following questions:

* What is Nation/City Branding?
* What is the Palestine that we aspire to promote?

**Nation/City Branding**

The concept consists of two words; *Nation*, here we are talking about the people (Citizens, Outsiders, Refugees, etc) and *Branding*, which is a purely business term that was later introduced to the area of politics and diplomacy, by applying this concept, we try to answer the questions of*What do we want to promote*? And *What do nations promote*?The theoretical framework heavily relies on the work of the pioneers of Nation Branding naming[[1]](#endnote-1): Simon Anholt, Wally Olins, Tom Fletcher and Joseph Nye.

Branding a nation is inspired by its national identity which is largely a matter of stereotypes, of familiar images and associations. Most national identities are very static, Simon Anholt, who is often referred to as the originator of nation branding, lists six channels of influence as the main elements of national identity, or as he calls it, competitive identity. Those are: 1. People, 2. Culture, 3. Investments, 4. Policy, 5. Brands, and 6. Tourism. Anholt’s list leaves out at least one important element of national reputation, and that is history. A country’s political history is a major factor, the big things that the nation has done or failed to do, the things it has stood for or perhaps betrayed.[[2]](#endnote-2)

The above list explains why Italian cities for example ranks high in nation branding surveys, given its strengths in culture, tourism, brands and the bright image of its people. However, Nation Branding is controversial, a British marketing guru, Wally Olins is one of the first to use the term “branding” for promoting a national identity, believed it is wise to adopt business terms to politics and diplomacy; nevertheless, some prefer to refer to it as public diplomacy instead, those were offended by the term as it reflected that the nation was a PRODUCT!When I first talked about branding the Palestinian nation and the nation as a brand, a number of my colleagues suggested the use of other political terms, the term is still contested among scholars in Palestine and resistance to the term is huge because of its business dimension, despite the differences, we can’t deny that the term is catchy, attractive and accommodates today’s needs and trends; Palestine can’t remain indifferent!

In a process of nation branding, it is wise to go back to the manageable elements on which we could rely and are subject to change: Leadership, Culture, Cuisine, Individual accomplishments, Fashion & Design 🡪 Embroidery, Agriculture, and Products.

Nations are already de facto brands, Olins argues as they reflect their assets, attributes and liabilities to a public at large, whether intentionally or not. Nation Branding is largely perceived as a rhetorical equivalent to national identity, hence there is nothing particularly novel about the concept of branding the nation, only the word ‘brand’ is new. National image, national identity, national reputations are all words traditionally used in this arena and they don’t seem to provoke the same hostility as the word ‘brand’. The understanding of Nye on soft power is of general attitude, perception, or image that a country’s citizens have on a foreign country, mainly conceptions of favorability toward a foreign country.

To better understand branding, let us look at different examples; in branding for Lisbon/Portugal, Cristiano Ronaldo, the soccer player was determined to be a national brand, the Portuguese chose to brand themselves with his initials CR7. Today, if you read, hear or visit Lisbon, you will find a lot related to CR7; clothing, hotels, restaurants, cafes, toys and games all under his initials. Whether we like soccer or not, CR became an attractive brand for his country. For their nation branding, Portuguese chose tourism, cuisine, culture and sports rather than their history of conquering the world.

Let’s take Italy as another example: what comes to mind at the mention of Italy, well, most of us will think of certain cities, islands and products, for example: Pasta, Juventus and AC Milan, Leonardo da Vinci and Michaelangelo, Venice, Vivaldi and Verdi, Pizza and Parmesan cheese, basil and tomatoes and mozzarella, Julius Caesar, the Coliseum, ice cream, the Mafia, Rome, Islands, and Lamborghini. Some might think of Italian clothing brands depending on personal interests but it is not likely that any of us will think of Italian politics for example! Italy has a wonderful national reputation for its culture, from renaissance painting to modern cuisine, but a very poor political reputation.

Tom Fletcher, puts the national story at the heart of what he describes as magnetic power, which is close in meaning to Joseph Nye’s attractive power: so how do nation states use their magnetic power in the digital age? Three ideas should be considered here: having a strong national story; knowing how to tell it, and knowing how and when to mix the tools. To have soft power, a nation needs an attractive national story, a narrative which encourages others to support, or not to obstruct, your strategic objectives. There is a difference between on one hand national inventions that are used and admired, and which are elements of national reputation, and on the other, soft power: the ability to set the agenda and achieve your objectives without using force. The national reputation of the United States as the source of Apple, Facebook, Google and other Silicon Valley style modern miracles, and the slogan “I have a dream”, reflects America’s cultural influence, exercised through products that almost define modern living, is what matters for a successful American nation branding, the cultural and commercial aspects of national reputation must be kept in perspective.

The astonishing success of Harry Potter, or the Royal Shakespeare Company, make Britain a soft power superpower. Like Italy, the UK has many national assets; the Premier League and the Monarchy, which are important elements in shaping the nation brand of Britain and how it is perceived by others.

Germany’s national reputation may be static year by year, but the transformation of Germany over the decades has been heroic. This change has been founded on a self-aware national decision by millions of individuals acting to break with the past by accepting guilt, the ‘moral burden’ of the barbarity of the Nazi era, it is remarkable after WWII how the guilt is internalized and becomes part of the German national identity. Germany is now the 2nd most admired country in the world after Canada, according to a BBC ‘country ratings’ poll conducted by Globescan.[[3]](#endnote-3) The elements in building that reputation include the success of Germany’s national brands, especially the cars which give Germany a strong association with positive qualities, like engineering excellence, reliability and style. There was a turning point in Germany’s reputation when Audi used a German language slogan which raises the ‘German-ness’. In other words, German-ness was negative but they decided to put the German-ness back into the brand, it worked – the German-ness of Audi helped to sell the car. It can’t be contested nowadays that Audi as a German company is indeed the national identity of Germany, the whole idea and image of Germany became positive.

**How Palestine is seen Vs. how Palestinians want to be seen: Victims Vs Heroes**

The role of Arab, regional and international players in shaping Palestinian identity has led to introducing the Palestinians as refugees, victims**,** guerrilla fighters, stone throwers, poor and beggars to the international world. Whether we like it or not, the image of a Palestinian abroad is that of a stateless, ID less, jobless.

If we look at the Anholt six elements, we will easily discover that Identity for Palestinians is not only about the nation’s image but about the political image of its leader and the human capital of its heroes. For Palestine, it is important to study the personality of Yasser Arafat as an icon and a symbol that presents a positive image of the Palestinian national narrative that symbolized resistance and perseverance, Arafat’s name succeeded to be linked to the Palestinian struggle worldwide. Leaders or personalities are a human capital for Palestine, those include poets, artists and the figures who managed to penetrate the international borders with the soft skill they are gifted; in order to counter the image of a victim, why not introduce the heroes? Palestinians are perceived poorly and with sympathy, in Palestine’s nation branding, there exist a number of already established brands naming: Trio Joubran, three brothers musicians who have taken Oud to world class music; DAM, young Palestinian brothers who focus on conflict and poverty; Reem Bana, a singer, another icon in Palestinian music that went world wide and managed to gather the love of millions around the globe; Athletes like The Speed Sisters, the first ladies only speeding race group not only in the Arab world but also in the Middle East; Poets and here it is not contested that Mahmoud Darwish, Ghassan Kanafani and others had already brought Palestine to the world in different languages; a new art is cartoons, Palestine is rich, Naji Ali, Mohamed Sabaaneh and many others, their cartoons and posters that gained the attention and inspiration of the world; artists like Nabil Anani, Bashar Hroub, Tayseer Barakat, Laila Shawa etc etc who participate in famous world exhibits and galleries, scholars like Edward Said, children imprisoned heroes like Ahed Tamimi or Shadi, Ahmad and the photographer Arine Rinawi, a young woman who managed to reshape the field of photography not only in Palestine and many others, those are humble examples of personalities that make Palestine unique and they are established brands which Palestine can utilize in its nation branding by introducing those talents and skills that Palestine can put on the international scene, things that other nations don’t have a copy of, Palestinian human capital is a major investment in building a national brand for Palestine in every city.

Tourisms is another aspect especially the old cities, registered old cities or listed cities in the UNESCO world heritage record can be a good focus, in Palestine, Jerusalem, Hebron, Jericho, Batir and Bethelehem have great significance in tourism, culture, history and religion, for Palestine to consider branding itself with focus on those cities and what makes them unique is much needed to attract attention and to show the Palestine that we wish to promote.

Culture for Palestine is nothing but a treasure, the traditional dress “Thobe” that is hand embroidered, the Dabka dance, the cuisine, delicious food and amazing hospitality are among other things that make Palestinian culture very attractive. For a nation to change its image, it needs first to change its behaviour. Then, equally important, it needs to tell the people in the world about the changes, images of a nation won’t automatically change after the changes in reality, the way for a nation to gain a better reputation is to communicate to the international audience that how good you are, this practice is called nation branding.

The office of the Prime Minister can form a strategy group to envision what each city council can adopt and apply in the different cities to create monuments, museums, theatres, statues or shops carrying out different names or stories that make Palestine unique. The government needs to focus on the treasures of talents that Palestine hosts, and communicate their stories in their own touchy tools which will positively influence the image of Palestine through adopting a nation branding scheme in every city. It is of crucial importance to shed light on the core idea of nation branding and that is to identify the ‘uniqueness’ of the country, its people, culture or landscape to identify and draw on features that differentiate ‘us’ from ‘them’

ook at the Anholt six elements, o be seen? aid, you go to Lisbon, you cant miss CR7 for soccer, lestine government under MohammTo conclude, it would be a mistake for a country not brand itself in a world of competing identities.

1. Szondi, Gyorgy. *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy, Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding: Conceptual Similarities and Difference.* Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2009. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Anholt, S. *Competitive identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions,* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *A total of 17,910 citizens across 19 countries were interviewed face-to-face or by telephone between December 26, 2016 and April 27, 2017. Polling was conducted for BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan and its research partners in each country, together with the Program for Public Consultation (PPC) at the University of Maryland* [*www.globescan.com*](http://www.globescan.com) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)