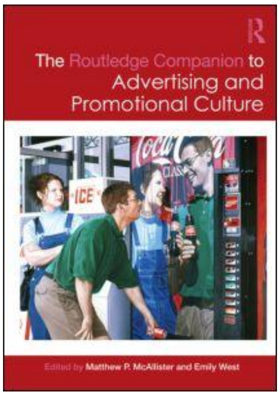

The Routledge Companion to Advertising and Promotional Culture

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Publication details
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203071434.ch12
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Published online on: 29 Mar 2013

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THE TRANSNATIONAL PROMOTIONAL CLASS AND THE CIRCULATION OF VALUE(S)

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The Structure of Promotional Circulation

In February 2011, antigovernment protests in Libya, inspired by the wave of resistance across the Middle East known as the Arab Spring, were repressed by the Libyan government's violent counterinsurgency. The United Nations Security Council approved intervention by Western forces to assist the rebels in their cause. At the same time, media reports identified another foreign intervention in Libya, one which since 2004 had been providing an altogether different form of "counterinsurgency": The Monitor Group, a strategy and management consultancy connected to the Harvard Business School, had been working with the Libyan government since 2004 to promote a positive image of the country throughout the world.[1]

The project, as Monitor described it in a letter to Libyan client representative 'Abd Allah al-Sanusi,[2] was "a sustained, long-term program to enhance international understanding and appreciation of Libya" (Monitor Group 2006: 1). The impetus for the project, and the justification for its long-term nature, came out of the consultancy's perspective that "it will take time to change perceptions of Libya that are largely based on stereotypical characterizations. Changing these perceptions will involve sharing thoughtful, accurate, honest, perceptive and in many cases surprising data with the international community" (Monitor Group 2007: 2).

There is much to be said about the origins and content of current world perceptions of Libya, as well as the degree to which these perceptions may change in the context of ongoing transformations in the Libyan state and in the broader Middle East and North African region. In this chapter, however, my goal is to interrogate how the Monitor Group, as an organization engaged in promoting national identity and interests across global networks, conceives of its work, and what the implications of that work might be for the study of promotional culture.

As a project designed to shift global elite opinion and mitigate domestic contention about Libya's political stability, trade and investment capacity, and cultural homophily, Monitor's work in Libya can be understood as part of a broader phenomenon known as nation branding. I define nation branding as the articulation of the nation—along with its conceptual cognates of citizenship, governance, and recognition—through various tools, techniques, and expertise derived from the business world, including corporate strategy, branding, and marketing. Though critics continue to decry the possibility that the bases of national affiliation can be solidified and conveyed via promotional methods used to sell soap (see Rich 2001, 2006), this view appears to have been overcome in many corners by the desire of national elites to attract capital investment to their jurisdictions in accordance with a model of zero-sum competition for increasingly scarce global resources (Brenner 2000; Cerny 1990, 1997). A nation's brand is seen by its proponents and practitioners as a modern-day version of the national flag: a metonymic marker of identity and allegiance, outfitted for the contemporary realities of global media and commerce. Or, as advertising executive turned nation-branding guru Simon Anholt puts it, "Nation brand is national identity made tangible, robust, communicable, and above all useful" (Anholt 2007: 75). Having a national brand allows national elites to signal to the world that their territory is "open for business" while rallying narratives of patriotism and pride among audiences at home (see Wherry 2006). In its ability to marry tropes of heritage and modernization, domestic and foreign concerns, and economic 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 antagonistic political "passions" (Hirschman 1977/1997).

As a failed case of nation branding the Libyan story is especially revealing, providing insight not only into the contradictory impulses of such attempts at "global nationalism" (Sklair 2001) but also into some of the patterns of promotional work and workers more generally. For example, what does the Monitor Group mean when it claims to be "sharing" data with the international community? And what is implied by the use of qualifiers such as "accurate," "honest," and "perceptive" for this data? Where does such information come from, and how is it supposed to overcome the putatively inaccurate, dishonest, and imperceptive data emerging from other corners? In this chapter I argue that these pretenses index an ongoing attempt by promotional agents to paint their work as neutral, unbiased, and transparent. Among the many rationales for the use of corporate strategy to assist efforts at national recognition and even self-determination,[3] one of the most widespread is promotional agents' self-reflexive identification as global intermediaries. By characterizing their work as the relatively passive international circulation of active processes of local cultural production and consumption, promotional intermediaries claim a space of objectivity and rationality.

A similar effect is found in cultural analyses of the concept of circulation. While critical analyses regularly identify cultural production and consumption as contested grounds, where meanings and value are negotiated and resisted, circulation is frequently left undertheorized or ignored as a cultural process in its own right. We can witness this problem in accounts of globalization that conceive of the movement of cultural goods in terms of flows and networks without problematizing the content and processes of these networks or the agents involved in the networking. I follow Lee and LiPuma (2002) in arguing that a more nuanced and pragmatic conception of circulation is required:

> If circulation is to serve as a useful analytic construct for cultural analysis, it must be conceived as more than simply the movement of people, ideas, and

> commodities from one culture to another. Instead, recent work indicates that circulation is a cultural process with its own forms of abstraction, evaluation, and constraint, which are created by the interactions between specific types of circulating forms and the interpretive communities built around them.
>
> (192)

Drawing on the work of a number of scholars who have demonstrated the performativity of circulation in economic exchange (Callon 1998; du Gay and Pryke 2002; Lee and LiPuma 2002; Lury 2004; Lury and Moor 2010; Mitchell 2002), in this chapter I explore the idea of how value, in both the moral and the market sense of the term, is implicated not only in phases of production and consumption but also in the *circulation* of cultural forms and processes via promotional expertise.

In at least one sense, this is hardly a novel observation. Critics of the cultural industries (as well as policy debates over the terms and conditions of culture and creativity in these industries) have focused considerable attention on the role of promotional circuits in adding value to cultural products. In Nicholas Garnham's view, for instance, any critical analysis of media consumption should begin with the study of how audiences are constructed as markets via advertising and marketing technologies, since media products are shaped according to the demographic and psychographic traits assigned in market research (2000). For David Hesmondhalgh, "the crucial nexus of power in the cultural industries" lies squarely in the distribution and marketing of cultural goods (2008: 554). More broadly, if we consider that the entire structure of the world's most powerful media conglomerates is underwritten by promotional industries (see for example Chapter 8 of this volume), the view that the promotional circulation of symbolic goods is somehow devoid of cultural interpretation and judgments of value is hardly sustainable.

Yet promotional intermediaries are regularly engaged in ongoing attempts to calibrate, mask, and minimize the nature and stakes of their involvement in cultural production. Taking the work of the Monitor Group in Libya as an instance of the global promotion of national identity, I argue that one of the reasons promotion is often conceptually linked to circulation, and why both concepts are still thought of as impersonal and technical, is that it is in the strategic best interests of these promotional agents for it to appear that way. By making promotion synonymous with the transmission, mediation, and facilitation of links between supply and demand, by framing their work in terms of identifying and assessing risks and opportunities rather than creating or producing them, and by painting their actions to their clients and to the public as rational, objective, and neutral rather than self-interested and status-seeking, these promotional intermediaries seek to legitimate their knowledge and expertise while divesting themselves of responsibility for the outcomes.

My argument proceeds in three stages. First, I emphasize some of the key features of the intermediaries engaged in promoting the nation. I then provide some recent historical context for the intellectual acceptance of nation branding as a standard practice of national governance in the context of perceived global exigencies. In revealing some of the techniques used by nation-branding practitioners to legitimate their work, I argue that, while purporting to ensure the global circulation of valuable assets in the nation, this promotional class is actually engaged in *creating* moral and market dimensions of national value. Finally, I return to the case of Libya to provide some empirical depth to my argument. Studying circulation in this realm is especially intriguing because it allows us to consider how provocative concepts like national identity, cultural difference, and political recognition are created and given meaning in global circulation, how they are modulated and transformed not only by claims for equal belonging but also by perceived standards of market equivalency, and how they are imbued with meaning and value between and beyond national territories in addition to within them. In other words, to borrow a phrase from Elizabeth Povinelli, nation branding allows us to consider "the intercalation of the politics of culture with the culture of capital" (2002: 16).[4]

Cultures of Circulation: The Transnational Promotional Class

Part of my ongoing research into the phenomenon of nation branding has involved examining the practices of the actors involved in producing a national brand and the kinds of knowledge applied to both perpetuate and transform the idea of the nation. My earlier writing focused on branding consultants or, rather, on the subset of branding consultants who define their work as devoted to the promotion of national territory (e.g., Aronczyk 2008). More recently I have expanded this analysis to a wider range of actors and institutions that I see as collectively engaged in the project of imagining the nation via the discipline of corporate strategy.[5] I call this group a transnational promotional class. This is not a self-consciously constituted movement but rather a loosely allied group of actors who share a common goal: to advocate for the continued relevance of the nation-state in a twenty-first-century context of global integration. For the project of branding the nation, this class includes: national government departments, consular and diplomatic representatives, and transnational institutions whose mandate revolves around the protection and promotion of national heritage, investment, and tourism; marketing and management academics at international business schools and affiliated think tanks; multinational private consultancies operating in a range of capacities related to the promotion of national territory, from location and tax advisories to place-based public relations strategists and market research agencies; advertising, design, and branding shops whose clients include national governments; and specialized media outlets that cater to international investors and tourists.

My conception of the transnational promotional class (TPC) draws substantially on Sklair's (2001) idea of a transnational capitalist class. Indeed, my use of "promotional" instead of "capitalist" to describe the experts involved in nation branding has less to do with a difference between the two classes in terms of their professional positions (which are overlapping if not isomorphic) or their perspectives on corporate ethics and strategy as legitimate sources of social and political control (which are essentially identical) than with the ways in which the TPC constitutes the object of its attention—the nation—as well as the ways these actors justify their work on the nation. Put another way, by using the term "promotional" I wish to reorient the focus from the ideological motivations of this group to the strategies and rationales they employ to advance their ethos.

In Sklair's formulation, the transnational capitalist class (TCC) is devoted above all to the perpetuation of a global capitalist system of continuous profit and accumulation. Its members "own and control the major means of production, distribution, and exchange through their ownership and control of money and other forms of capital [political, organizational, cultural, knowledge]" (2001: 17). The TCC "seeks to exert economic control in the workplace, political control in domestic and international politics, and culture-ideology control in everyday life through specific forms of global competitive and consumerist rhetoric and practice" (19). To the extent that the state plays a role in the aims and objectives of the TCC, it is as a resource to help grease the wheels of corporate interests and to remove all fetters to the "natural" market forces of trade. The concept of the nation as a cultural or political form is almost entirely absent from the globalizing work of the TCC. The TCC admits the nation into its vision on the condition of what Sklair terms "global nationalism"—the perspective that the nation's interests "are best served if it can find a lucrative set of roles within the ever-expanding global capitalist system" (137).

The transnational promotional class, by contrast, is heavily invested in the cultural and political dimensions of the nation. They see national distinctions in matters of territory, industry, or identity both as tools for generating economic value and as sources of cultural recognition and political possibility. In this version of global nationalism, national identity is put forward not only as a source of legitimacy, recognition, and value, but as actually *responsible* for the nation-state's continued legitimacy, recognition, and value. In the hands of the TPC, national culture becomes a key explanatory variable for the nation-state's ability to remain relevant in the twenty-first century.

If the members of the TPC see their work as engaged in the identification and transmission of national culture, however, they do not wish themselves to assume responsibility for its transformation. Two strategies allow them to achieve this. The first resides in the way its members situate themselves within networks of global production and exchange. Unlike the TCC, whose members seek to maintain control over their capital assets, the members of the transnational promotional class purport to occupy a decentered position. Their public profile and client communications expressly constitute their work in terms of circulating or promoting ideas rather than engineering them, as gathering and ordering knowledge rather than generating it, and as calculating or measuring value rather than constituting it. In other words, the TPC characterize their role not as national cultural producers but as global intermediaries. By assuming a mediating role of global transmission rather than a productive role of national value creation, their goal is to appear objective—as parties whose work is neither politically nor culturally motivated.

A second strategy is that this group defines its work as overwhelmingly based in communications. Activities such as advising and consulting clients, creating brand identities and advertising campaigns, developing media or public relations strategies, or ranking and benchmarking performance are characterized as ways of primarily *communicating* the vision and values held by their clients. One idea that emerges from this self-description is that the work of communicating is *not* about producing, owning, or creating anything; it's about promoting already existing facts and features (see Aronczyk 2008). Constituting their role as one of intermediation, circulation, communication, promotion, or calculation allows these actors to invent a technocratic middle ground, in which they present their skills as logistical and functional rather than political or cultural. In their ability to present themselves as "mere" communicators (or, as they describe their function in their own promotional materials, as calculators, conduits, facilitators, guides, intermediaries, managers, middlemen, promoters, strategists, or shepherds), these transnational actors claim the ability to mediate—rather than to create—forms of value across territorial space in a variety of ways. Their power lies not in maintaining control over assets but in maintaining control over asset *recognition*, and not in making things, but in making things *valuable*.

In this optic, communication is "put to work." That is, it serves as a form of labor that generates profit, but not in the sense that we might think. By making communication appear neutral and transactional, these actors can absolve themselves of responsibility for their work. Presented as "merely" economic instead of political or cultural, as "merely" about circulating value rather than producing it, and as "merely" aligning perceptions with realities, promotion is made to seem transparent, ideologically neutral, and ultimately rational, akin to outdated theories of mass communication as the linear and unidirectional transmission of information from producer to consumer. This is one possible explanation of why circulation continues to be under-recognized as productive of value.

A second possible explanation has to do with the particular kinds of knowledge mobilized in branding the nation: the tools and techniques of corporate strategy and the logic of management discipline. The claims of expertise in this realm to be modern, technologically advanced, and universally applicable have important impacts when transferred to national spaces.

Culture in Circulation: *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*

The Competitive Advantage of Nations was published in 1990 by the Harvard Business School professor Michael Porter. The book brought together a number of disparate ideas that had been circulating within business and government sectors since the Second World War about the productivity of the nation-state in the context of increasingly international economic integration. Porter's argument in the book drew on his substantial background in corporate strategy development, inspired by the work of his predecessors Kenneth Andrews and Roland C. Christensen at Harvard as well as colleagues Peter Drucker, Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., and Igor Ansoff. These figures had contributed to advancing a dominant theory of corporate strategy: that the external environment in which firms functioned contributed as much to conditions of productivity as did the internal dynamics of the firm. A company's managerial, financial, functional, or organizational capability—its "distinctive competence and resources"—needed to "fit" with its industrial context if it was to develop and maintain a competitive advantage (Montgomery and Porter 1979: xii). Porter's insight in *The Competitive Advantage of Nations* was to expand this idea to the nation as a whole. If the locus of economic productivity was set in entire national industries, it was the space of the entire nation that constituted the external environment. From this logic it followed that the focus of national policy should be not on creating regulations to shape the actions of firms, but on adjusting the terms of the national environment to "fit" the requirements of its key industries.

What Porter was suggesting, in essence, was that the instrumentalist rules governing economic institutions—to maximize efficiency and increase productivity—could be transferred from the firm to the nation-state as a whole. In this model, the role of national government changed. In a competitive global trade environment, the government's job should be to remove all impediments to industry growth—including those of government intervention itself. "Government's essential task at the innovation-driven stage is to create an environment in which firms are and continue to be innovative and dynamic," Porter wrote. "Its role must shift from actor and decision maker to facilitator, signaler, and prodder" (1990: 672). By reimagining the state as facilitator of industry instead of leader of populations, Porter—as a member of a rapidly expanding class of business and academic thinkers—also imagined a new relationship between business and the state. In Porter's formulation, states were not subjects of governance but *objects* *of management* and, as such, required the expertise and knowledge of management thinkers to function effectively. With competitiveness as the primary virtue, a virtue that governments had not previously considered in their active portfolios, the suggestion was that a new kind of knowledge and expertise was required for state administration, one that came from the worlds of marketing and management.

Porter stressed that the adoption of free-market strategies did not pose a liability for the nation. Instead, he argued, open markets and flexible labor, combined with lean government spending, could bolster rather than diminish the relevance of the nation. "Some resist open international competition out of a desire to preserve national identity," Porter wrote. "Instead of submerging national character, however, the removal of protectionism and other distortions to free and open international competition will arguably make national character more decisive" (1990: 736). Indeed, "national differences in character and culture, far from being threatened by global competition, prove integral to success in it" (30).

What Porter was suggesting represented a fundamental transformation. He saw the continued role that national consciousness could play in this new economic paradigm: as a form of added value; as part of the demand conditions he had identified; and, indeed, as a key locational differentiator. Maintaining the nation was important because of the potential it held to increase prosperity for firms. In part this was due to what business and marketing textbooks call the "country of origin effect"—the stereotypes, metaphors, and structuring fictions that are associated with the goods and services produced in a given country, such as "Swiss = banking" or "German = engineering." But it was not only these effects that mattered for the increased productivity and differentiation of industries; so did the overall national setting in which these industries operated. In order for the nation-state to become truly competitive, the role of national culture had to shift from an "external constraint" to a competitive dimension of national productivity. In other words, culture had to be made into an economic variable for the nation to remain viable in the global marketplace.

One venue in which this viewpoint was made explicit was at an academic symposium titled "Cultural Values and Human Progress," organized by Harvard's Academy for International and Area Studies in April 1999. The symposium's goals were to offer social scientific and pragmatic perspectives on economic development and political democratization, particularly in developing countries. A central theme of the symposium, as its title suggests, was to consider the role of culture in economic progress. How did cultural values and attitudes fit into processes of economic development? And to the extent that there was a causal relationship between culture and economic growth, how could these values be made conducive to economic change?

The event's participant roster featured a list of highly credentialed academics, journalists, and institutional leaders. Harvard University professor Samuel Huntington and former USAID director Lawrence Harrison organized the event; well-known academics such as Jeffrey Sachs, Seymour Martin Lipset, Nathan Glazer, and Francis Fukuyama were joined by representatives from the World Bank, the *New York Times*, and the RAND Corporation. Many of the presentations identified culture as a key independent variable in economic development, and offered potential pathways for the theoretical and applied integration of cultural attitudes and values into development models (Harrison and Huntington 2000: xxxii).

Two of the presentations, by entrepreneurs Michael Fairbanks and Stace Lindsay, made extensive use of Porter's competitiveness framework, suggesting that the key to achieving prosperity lay in inciting national citizens to develop a "competitive mindset." People make "mental maps," or models, of how the world works, they argued. The beliefs and attitudes that make up these mental maps can be either "pro-innovation"—that is, conducive to prosperity, such as being oriented toward globalization and competition—or "anti-innovation," which they described in terms of protectionism and paternalism (ibid.: 287). The ultimate goal, Lindsay and Fairbanks explained, was to "change the mind of a nation"—that is, modify citizens' behaviors and attitudes to make them more conducive to competitive behavior and, by extension, economic success.

Lindsay and Fairbanks drew on their work in Colombia, Venezuela, El Salvador, Uganda, and Bermuda to demonstrate how they had helped nations to develop a pro-innovation mindset. For instance, in El Salvador, they identified five groups with varying "mental models": the "frustrateds" (dissatisfaction with both government and the private sector), the "statists" (belief that a small group of government leaders should determine political, social, and economic issues), the "fighters" (faith in citizen efforts), the "protectionists" (support for government regulatory structures), and the "open economy" group (frustration with lack of government support for the private sector) (292–293). This last group distinguished itself by its desire "to move ahead and succeed without the help of the government" (293)—embodying the "pro-innovation" mindset they were looking for. Importantly, Lindsay and Fairbanks's own role consisted not in creating these values or attitudes but in "creat[ing] the space for nations to be introspective and to self-correct" (280), by helping countries to "stimulate strategic thinking," "communicate the vision," and "institutionalize the changes" (278–280) brought about by adopting competitiveness strategies.

By suggesting that citizen "mindsets" were the independent variable in economic change, these actors achieved three crucial conceptual moves. First, they established a direct, causal link between culture and economic progress, in effect situating culture as a "microeconomic" dimension of prosperity. Second, they situated their particular approach as the solution to changing these mindsets. If culture was "economic," and could be measured and managed as such, advisors trained in economic competitiveness policies could claim it as part of their domain of expertise. Third, by proposing that it was the values and attitudes held by the nation's people, rather than those espoused by the strategists, that led to the country's economic success or failure, these entrepreneurs could mitigate their own responsibility for the success or failure of their initiatives.

The connection between Lindsay and Fairbanks's enterprise and the argument in *The Competitive Advantage of Nations* is not a coincidence: Lindsay and Fairbanks were on staff at the Monitor Group, a consultancy co-founded by Porter in 1983 to promote his competitiveness strategies worldwide. I return now to the case of Libya to offer a demonstration of this consultancy's approach.

Mechanisms of Circulation: Enhancing Libya

The Monitor Group was founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1983 by Michael Porter along with five other entrepreneurs. The company currently has 1,500 employees distributed among 20 offices in 18 countries. It offers strategy and management consulting services to a wide range of industries, from aerospace and defense to nonprofits and philanthropies. National governments form a large subset of its clientele: in addition to the countries mentioned above, Porter's biography indicates that his firm has developed competitiveness strategies for Armenia, India, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Libya, Nicaragua, Portugal, Russia, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand, among many others (Monitor Talent 2011).

When Monitor began its work in Libya in 2004, observers questioned the company's involvement with a country whose checkered past was still prominent in Americans' minds. In the 60 intervening years between Libya's independence from Italian colonial rule in 1951 and the uprising of the Arab Spring in 2011, 42 of those years saw Libya under the leadership of Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi, who came to power through a military coup in 1969. His regime was initially popular because of its ability to reach out to a number of constituencies, using both secular and religious appeals to Arab nationalism, anti-imperialism, and domestic populism (Anderson 1986). Part of the appeal of the regime was its claim to redistribute oil revenues, its principal source of wealth, more fairly among the Libyan people. By the end of the 1970s, however, it had started to become apparent that the reforms that attended Qaddafi's "cultural revolution" corresponded more to the leader's own ideologies of power than to the good of the nation's citizens. In principle, his radical political philosophy, articulated in a tract known as the *Green Book*, advocated egalitarianism, self-government, and economic autonomy; in practice, according to the organization Human Rights Watch (2006), it revealed itself to be largely engaged in legitimating his regime's autocracy and in perpetuating human rights violations. Since 1986, when the United States identified Libya's responsibility in terrorist attacks in Europe, the country and its longtime leader had been cast as pariahs in the eyes of the West ("Executive Order" 1986). But, as Monitor's project outline for Libya explained, appreciating the country's current potential to contribute to the world depended vitally on how Libya was positioned: "The project is a sustained, long-term program to enhance international understanding and appreciation of Libya and the contribution it has made and may continue to make to its region and to the world. It will emphasize the emergence of the new Libya and its ongoing process of change" (Monitor Group 2006: 1).

By the "new" Libya was meant the country's renewed investment and trade potential as of 2004, when economic sanctions on the country by the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union were lifted following the government's moderated positions on terrorism and its renunciation of weapons programs. The main problem Monitor identified at this juncture, and that its multimillion-dollar, multi-year program was designed to solve, was that Libya "has suffered from a deficit of positive public relations and adequate contact with a wide range of opinion leaders and contemporary thinkers" (1). By acting as a "conduit" to foster relationships between Libya and the world, Monitor would replace outmoded perceptions of Libya by its modern reality, bringing the nation into alignment with the cultural, political, and economic paths and byways of global capital circulation.

As the projects carried out by the consultancy suggest, however, aligning perception with reality involved a number of interventions. One of the first projects was the preparation, in 2005, of a 200-page National Economic Strategy (NES) to "define a comprehensive and integrated approach to achieving greater and sustained prosperity for Libya" (Monitor Group and CERA 2006: v). In addition to extensive competitiveness assessments, reform recommendations, and international benchmarking studies for multiple sectors and industries in Libya, the NES included a "vision" for Libya for the year 2019, the 50th anniversary of Qaddafi's rise to power. Ten "core aspirations" (egalitarian, democratic, productive, competitive, international, entrepreneurial, skilled, connected, green, regional leader) were listed along with descriptions of a future reality that, "if achieved, would transform life for all Libyan citizens and businesses" (15). Using verb tenses anchored in the present to convey a sense of achievement, the vision statement articulated a potential future for the country:

> By the 50th anniversary of its Revolution, Libya has substantially realized its major goals and aspirations. Libya is a respected leader in Africa, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and beyond. While incorporating elements from the successful and rapid development of Singapore, Ireland, Malaysia and other countries, Libya has developed its own unique model. It has a globally competitive economy that has significantly raised the standard of living of the Libyan people, while preserving the values and ideals first defined in the *Green Book*. By 2019, Libya has created the conditions for its greatest resource—its people—to flourish. Libyans are developing world-class educational institutions to produce the best workforce in the region, providing the leadership and technical skills for all citizens to participate responsibly in direct democracy. Libyans are leaders in various fields; heading some of the world's best companies, hosting major international cultural and political events, and preserving and improving the environment—thus creating a unique and prosperous social community for the 21st century.
>
> (15)

Key to the ideological effectiveness of this Vision 2019 statement was its ability to conflate the terms of moral and market value. Yoking concepts such as egalitarianism, democracy, a strong work ethic, and heritage protection to economic growth, the consultancy articulated a future "reality" for the country via the adoption of a global competitiveness agenda. And by connecting these same concepts to the cultural and political philosophy of Colonel Qaddafi's *Green Book*, the consultancy could achieve the domestic consensus necessary to move forward with the project.

As the initiatives that followed suggest, this vision for Libya reflected to a considerable extent the vision of the consultancy and its particular arsenal of knowledge. As one way to promote Libya's aspirations, for example, Monitor consultants instituted and ran a "leadership program" in Libya starting in 2005, in which Libyan citizens underwent training to learn about competitiveness and entrepreneurship. In another initiative, in 2007, Monitor and its Libyan client launched a Libyan Economic Development Board "designed to speed government decision-making and boost private enterprise" (Reed 2007b).

Once programs were underway to foster this vision at the domestic level, further initiatives were put into place to manage international perceptions of Libya. One campaign consisted of engaging the services of prominent academics as consultants, many of them colleagues of Porter's at Harvard University, and sending them to Libya to meet with Qaddafi.[6] Upon their return, they were "encouraged" to publish positive articles on Libya in the academic and mainstream press.[7] Another campaign involved speaking directly, at times on the record, with media outlets to encourage further publication of stories on Libya, as well as reorienting "negative" news about Libya with the help of public relations affiliates. A third facet of the project was designed to convey positive impressions of the Libyan leader himself. To this end Monitor's chief executive and co-founder, Mark Fuller, and its senior vice president, Bruce Allyn, drafted a book manuscript to promote Qaddafi's political views (Monitor Group Foreign Government

Services 2007).[8] The total cost of the book project, including "subcontractor fees" for additional research visits to Libya by Monitor's network of academics and journalists, was estimated at $2.9 million.

The demise of the Qaddafi regime in August 2011 and the brutal killing of its leader two months later have made it difficult not to see the pillars of the "new" Libya, and especially Monitor's efforts at promoting it, as having rested on rather shaky foundations. Even in the absence of such world-historical events, however, Monitor's work in the country reveals that promotional interventions are about far more than the "mere" circulation of existing realities. Promoting national identities and interests via mechanisms of global market competitiveness involves considerable transformations at the local level. It is never merely a matter of adopting global strategies but of interring important ideological, cultural, and political changes, changes that may well not find favor in all spaces and at all times.

The Demanding Environment of Circulation

Why do promotional intermediaries continue to promote their work as neutral, transactional, and rational? And why does circulation appear similarly neutral in many academic treatments of cultural production and consumption? One explanation comes from the ongoing normative separation of culture and economy into distinct spheres, despite overwhelming evidence that this differentiation has always been problematic and contested. The notion of circulation as performative overcomes this distinction by demonstrating that promotion, whether interpreted in terms of exchange, mediation, or communication, is always already cultural (du Gay and Pryke 2002; McFall 2002; Slater 2011).

A second, related, explanation may have to do with the emergence of the idea of consumer "activism" in contemporary digital environments (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). Concepts like "prosumers," "service economies," and "consumer co-creation" index the seeming agency and freedom of consumers in a brave new Web 2.0 world. In this vision, the gap between producers and consumers appears to narrow, as the intermediary functions of promotion are enfolded into expanded phases of production, active processes of consumption, or even the products themselves via product packaging and design. This perspective builds on an earlier wave of business and marketing literature celebrating the general "disintermediating" properties of the Internet, where all kinds of "middleman" functions supposedly disappear with the emergence of online transactional systems for purchasing and investments (Terranova 2000).

It is important to remember that these two popular assumptions—the positing of circulation as neutral and value-free, and the claim that consumers are "king" in market activity—are not promotional actors' misunderstandings of cultural processes of meaning and value making; rather, *they are central aspects of management discipline*, and therefore structuring properties of promotional culture. Lury and Moor (2010) as well as Turow (2011a, 2011b) have explored this to considerable effect in two promotional practices. Lury and Moor demonstrate how brand valuation systems, while purporting to measure and financialize brands as a form of equity, are in fact engaged in the process of creating value for brands. This is achieved by expanding the potential for certain "qualities" to be quantified, such as corporate social responsibility initiatives, aspects of internal corporate culture, and consumer activity online. As they point out, the measurement systems can also generate value for their owner, since they are frequently proprietary and therefore promoted as a specialized, "value-added" dimension of their owner's offerings. Turow's analysis brings to light the work of media buyers as marketing agents who maintain a startling amount of discretionary power over the circulation of cultural forms in new media environments, power that is made all the more effective because of these agents' ability to dissemble the extent of their involvement in making markets for media producers. The central issue in both of these examples, as well as in the argument I have been making here, is that the emergence of these new forms of accounting is not accompanied by new forms of *accountability* for the success or failure of these mechanisms. Indeed, this lack of accountability is predicated on promotional actors' ability to disappear, that is, to remain invisible by insisting on an intermediary role.

In the context of the global promotion of national culture, this takes an interesting turn. As we have seen, members of the transnational promotional class such as the Monitor Group are engaged in the active creation of global opinion, which functions as a source of discipline at the domestic level. In the process of mobilizing foreign and domestic discourses and practices as constitutive elements of the contemporary nation, however, promotional intermediaries discount their own participation in the narratives and practices. This raises a third possible explanation for the pretensions of promotional actors to be neutral and objective. In the context of ongoing contention over what it means to be "national" in the context of global integration, the promise of modern forms of expertise to offer a form of global belonging that maintains the integrity of national forms is difficult to resist. The communicative work of the TPC serves an integral role in formulating the twenty-first-century national imaginary, but it is imagined by a group that sees itself outside of the realm of imagination.

In "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition" (2003), Gaonkar and Povinelli explore how value is determined in the power struggles between cultures of circulation, and how these power struggles contribute to turning social life into what they call a "demanding environment." By "demanding environment" they are referring to a social environment in which various intermediaries are able to demand certain forms of subjectivity and disable others, make certain texts and practices palpable and intelligible and others useless, and validate certain kinds of recognition while invalidating alternatives. This orients a productive agenda of research in this area. The study of promotional culture should consist in explaining how these demanding environments come to exist, revealing the invisible principles and practices that constitute them, and showing how, by holding the power to measure, these intermediaries have the power to materialize—and in so doing to maintain a monopoly on the sources and conditions of value.

Notes

1 In fact, a number of news outlets had reported on Monitor's work with Libya prior to this time (see Reed 2007a)—indeed these reports served at least in part to bolster the public relations strategy—but the coverage took on different dimensions when the crisis in Libya erupted in early 2011.

2 'Abd Allah al-Sanusi was the head of military intelligence for Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi.

3 For discussion of rationales for using corporate strategy to promote national recognition, see Aronczyk (2008), Aronczyk and Powers (2010), and Comaroff and Comaroff (2009).

4 It is worth reproducing Povinelli's fuller quote here: "Before we can develop a 'critical theory of recognition,' or a politics of distribution and capabilities, we need to understand better the cunning of recognition; its intercalation of the politics of culture with the culture of capital. We need to puzzle over a simple question: What is the nation recognizing, capital commodifying, and the court trying to save from the

breach of history when difference is recognized?" (2002: 16–17). By the "cunning of recognition" Povinelli is referring to ways in which the conditions of cultural recognition are made according to impossible standards of "tradition" and "authenticity" that serve global capital exigencies rather than cultural democracy.

5 For a collection of classic statements on the adoption of strategy as a management discipline for firms, see Montgomery and Porter (1979).

6 For an account of how the Monitor Group's project in Libya reveals tensions over the terms of academic engagement in global networks, see Calhoun (2012).

7 Examples of such articles include: "The Colonel and His Third Way" in the *New Statesman* and "My Chat with the Colonel" in the *Guardian*, both by Anthony Giddens (2006, 2007); Benjamin Barber's (2006) commentary on American Public Media's *Marketplace*, "U.S. Should Enlist Libya's Help," and, in the *Washington Post*, his column "Gaddafi's Libya: An Ally for America?" (2007); "A Rogue Reforms" in *Newsweek* and "Triumph in Libya for Tough Choices of Soft Power" in the *Financial Times*, both by Andrew Moravcsik (2007a, 2007b); and by Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (2007), "Tripoli Diarist" in the *New Republic*.

8 Mark Fuller announced his resignation from Monitor in early May 2011, leading one reporter to speculate that the resignation was connected to the company's admission that it had violated the terms of the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act, which required it to disclose its work with Libya to the U.S. Justice Department (Richardson 2011).

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