
Place branding sovereignty: re-marketing Africa's investment narrative from 1619–2019

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Abstract: The enduring nature of negative branding distorts Africa's image. This is emblematic of the problematic nature of brand Africa, albeit normalised and treated ahistorically and uncritically in extant literature. This paper analyses the origins, causes and effects of negative branding of Africa and proposes novel sovereign (self-determination-based) strategies for rebranding the continent. The study practices literature mapping and historical institutionalism as a two-pronged approach for probing and highlighting the important historical stages in marketing strategies that are partly responsible for relegating Africa to the bottom of a global caste-based branding system. We synthesise extant literature about the role of imagery, urban myths, deceptive marketing and pejorative media/academic portrayal of Africa as being dependent on the eleemosynary gestures of others. We analyse the extent to which these issues obfuscate our understanding of the institutional reforms, numerous positive macro-economic indicators and political changes which are favourable conditions for MNCs and diaspora entrepreneurship to thrive.

Keywords: Africa; Africa rising; brand Africa; country of origin; racism; international business; place branding.

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1 Introduction

2019 marks four centuries since the first major arrival of enslaved Africans in James Town, Virginia, USA through the transatlantic slave trade (Africans were already in the Americas and elsewhere long before 1619). For the past 400 years, Africa has grappled with the weight of a negative narrative crafted for her by others (Curtis and Jones, 2017; Diop, 1988; Eyakuze, 2012) – subversive branding. For this paper, *subversive place branding* is the use of destructive ideological and psychological ‘warfare’ in marketing and communication strategies that requires the ritual humiliation and putting down of other places and their people in order to appear superior in the perception of consumers and investors or the perpetuation of false/one-sided narratives about others to advance one’s brand. Consequently, there is the need for Africa’s narrative to be rewritten, given the undesirable material consequences that the negative visual representation and brand perception of Africa brings domestically and internationally (Ahen and Amankwah-Amoah, 2018; Dearden, 2017; Harris et al., 2015a; Osei and Gbadamosi, 2011). These include the adverse effects of subversive branding on Africa’s international business operations, investment choices, tourism, international product branding, acceptance of Africans’ global socio-economic progress and persons of African extraction living in the diaspora. It has become increasingly easy to trivialise symbolic violence towards Africa through ads, imagery and literature (Ahen and Amankwah-Amoah, 2018; Bonsu, 2009). In spite of the multifaceted beauty and richness of the continents’ history and present (Curtis and Jones, 2017; Diop, 1989), what is mostly reported from a colonial perspective (Förster et al., 1988) is neither complimentary nor uplifting but exceedingly depressing, quaint and unethical (Bonsu, 2009; Dearden, 2017).

For Fan (2006), nation branding refers to the use of marketing and communication approaches to promote the image of a country. Other names for nation branding include destination brand, country brand or place brand but they all have slightly different meanings albeit used interchangeably (Hao et al., 2019). For Anholt (2005), nation branding is the sum of people’s perception of any nation in six major areas (competences): cultural, political, business and human capital, investment and tourist appeal. Despite the importance of the six attributes, they are not core distinguishing features or differentiating factors (what the brand stands for and or what it promises customers) (Aaker, 1997) because they are ‘imitable’. In other words, we can safely define nation/place branding as the marketing and communication approaches for strategically selling attention-grabbing features or successfully pitching/highlighting salient points, and influencing consumers’/investors’ perception and attracting them. It is about widely marketing laudable and locally acknowledged niches or differentiated features to maintain existing client/investor base, challenge and convert doubters and to create new enthusiasts around the world.

We argue, however, that for many consumers and investors, historical traces or natural phenomena and new economic opportunities are the most important perception triggers when it comes to Africa as a continent (not a country). In fact, there is a dearth of scholarly attention paid to branding a whole continent except Africa (see exceptions, Adams et al., 2018; Nothias, 2014; Osei and Gbadamosi, 2011). This is due to historical reasons (Diop, 1989; Förster et al., 1988) which will be analysed later in this paper. In general, historical, religious, natural phenomena and cultural wealth (Bandelj and

Wherry, 2011) include well-known examples such as the Egyptian pyramids (Egypt = Kemet = land of the black people/black land), the ancient city of Timbuktu in Mali, the Holy Cities of Jerusalem in Israel and Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the natural phenomena *Aurora borealis* (northern lights) in Scandinavia or the country-specific natural endowments such as Mountain Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

As part of the subversive branding, many more egregious deeds have been committed against Africa as if enslavement and colonialism were not enough: from the dehumanising exhibition of naked African women in human zoos (alongside animals) across the USA and European capitals (Putnam, 2012) to modern-day gory images of sick, hungry and emaciated children in ads by the poverty industrial complex (some irresponsible non-governmental organisations – NGOs), and some self-sustaining in/humanitarian organisations (Ahen and Amankwah-Amoah, 2018; Wainaina, 2006). This reminds us of a strangely familiar pattern of psychological torture that typifies structural violence (Galtung, 1969). This, in turn, has produced the stigma that has socially, geopolitically and economically affected brand Africa – destinations and even medical innovations (Harris et al., 2015b).

Notwithstanding the long-standing economic and psychological damage, subversive branding of Africa has received scant scholarly attention. Therefore, this paper takes a historical perspective that summarises ignored gaps in the literature about the historical profile of subversive/unethical branding of Africa by others and the ensuing consequences on trade, investments and human progress. The ignored theoretical gaps also include unequal race, unequal states in international trade negotiations, a system of polarisation (Alam, 2000; Galtung, 1969) and how these are presented in imagery, texts, symbols and institutionalised over time through structures of domination (Diop, 1989; Förster et al., 1988). Why does a study about rebranding Africa matter? As Murdoch (1999) puts it:

“Those who tell you ‘Do not put too much politics in your art’ are not being honest. If you look very carefully you will see that they are the same people who are quite happy with the situation as it is...What they are saying is, ‘don’t upset the system.’”

However, it is apposite to reiterate that the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter if the lion does not tell its own story. Labels and images are means to create meanings that affect social and economic choices. Image is an asset, and Africa has now outgrown the ghastly images presented by the western media (Nothias, 2014; Van Dijk, 1991) because they have negatively affected her most important strategic interest – Africans and their land. Furthermore, whether we are dealing with science, technology or international economics, in the end, peoples’/society’s wellbeing is the ultimate goal, not just companies or money. This is the principal reason why studying brand Africa is a serious issue.

Additionally, across the globe, whilst almost all nations are depicted and represented by iconic images and constructions of human ingenuity, Africa is mostly presented as a monolithic place, represented by a tree and a mudhouse, with the sun shining at the background and animals grazing about – presumably to depict the absence of cities and civilisation. At first glance, this seems innocuous, breath-taking vista; only that on the second thought, it puts Africa in the place of sameness and without progress. Much of the negative perceptions and imagery issues are embedded in political intricacies, propaganda-like vocabularies and the philosophical backdrop of afro-pessimists and

those with neo-colonial fantasies (Ahen and Amankwah-Amoah, 2018; Misoczky and Böhm, 2013). Such socially engineered perceptions have meant that all things Africa, unlike others, enter the global public sphere or market, whether physically or virtually with ‘ready-made enemies’ and doubters rather than enthusiasts except when they are to be pitied for raising funds for charity for a continent that is already rich (Dearden, 2017). Therefore, a study that seeks to advance brand sovereignty (independent ownership and defence of one’s national story) and renaissance of Africa is a timely and limitless aperture for confronting the economic injustices, environmental vandalism and the undermining of Africa’s economic advancement in current global capitalism (Curtis and Jones, 2017; Dearden, 2017). This paper answers the following questions:

- RQ1 How has the negative image of Africa as presented around the world affected brand Africa (African renaissance)?
- RQ2 How can the continent as a whole and individual countries within it be rebranded to reflect their 21st century status and changing realities?

2 Problematising the enduring narrative about Africa

The monotonous narrative in subversive branding started as part of the imperial formations. It was meant to justify the burden to civilise the savage (Easterly, 2006) but, most importantly, to hide the economic enslavement and serious malpractices from the European populace (Diop, 1989). Capitalising on the existing pseudo-scientific and ‘whited out’ colonial image, the media portrays southern economies as backward and miserably poor (Banerjee and Osuri, 2000; Bonsu, 2009; Diop, 1988, 1989; Wainaina, 2006). The poverty industrial complex (international charities and NGOs) increased its multimillion-dollar ads to promote and institutionalise a perception that Africa is eternally damned and in need of every western household’s alms (but not investments or to be considered as a viable option for living and working in). Such NGOs (i.e., not all NGOs) have grown like mushrooms and have also become more powerful (Rashid, 2006) as they keep perpetuating myths (Gates and Gates, 2014) to opportunistically solicit funds. Ads for the poor use strong, gory, emotionally appealing images (O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy, 2003) of the suffering (Ahen and Amankwah-Amoah, 2018; Dearden, 2017). By contrast, ads and literature for investments show potential tourists, diasporans and business people a land of endless opportunities (The Nielsen Company, 2018; Radelet, 2010; Schwarz and Yellin, 2013). To go with the latter, the ‘Africa rising’ narrative has become an endlessly appealing mantra (Adeleye et al., 2015; Dörr et al., 2010; Ibeh et al., 2012; Shapshak, 2016).

However, there are still massive gaps in the literature about longstanding threats, inconsistencies and possible incumbents’ (existing dominant business and geopolitical structures) subversive or Machiavellian response to this new dawn (Dearden, 2017; Harris et al., 2015b; Jackson, 2015). There is a body of beliefs based on manipulated logic, ideology of dominance (Diop, 1988; Förster et al., 1988; Nkomazana, 1998) and unconscious biases (masquerading as objectivity) which has been weaponised to amplify the negative connotations inherent in ads and imagery about Africa (Bonsu, 2009; Harris et al., 2015b; Wainaina, 2006). Since this is a competitive strategy, any perspective that is outside the ‘paradigm of expectation’ is vigorously challenged, violently in the past and

now in the most subtle ways possible (Van Dijk, 1991). The result is that for some centuries now this ‘bottom caste’ has been forced on Africans as their default position in the global rankings of nations. Moreover, the looting of Africa’s resources (Curtis and Jones, 2017; Dearden, 2017) has meant that for a long time, African nations found themselves at the bottom in health, infrastructure, education, medico-techno-scientific systems, innovations and research albeit being the brains behind a significant number of the inventions in these fields in the past 200 years (Holmes, 2012). This knowledge is concealed from the public.

Africa is presented as a land of resources that is only up for grabs but not highly regarded otherwise (Förster et al., 1988; Jackson, 2015; Köhler, 2014). For evidence, see for example where African countries appear in international rankings such as transparency international’s corruption index, human rights index, happiness index, world’s strong economies based on GDP measures among others. GDP, by the way, is perhaps not the best measure of health, wealth and happiness in a continent where informal markets thrive. A better measure is the purchasing power parity or even happiness index. For example, Mbaye (2014, p.3) maintains that “the informal economy contributes more than 80% of the total employment and 90% of new jobs in African low-income countries.” The informal sector plays a significant role given its magnitude and far-reaching impact on rural people and agricultural production or the distribution of food and nutrition. What about the corruption index that mostly ignores mega-corruption in which 50 billion dollars are siphoned out of Africa yearly by others but the loot keepers are not factored in in any analyses (Acosta, 2013; Dearden, 2017). In spite of the odds, there is a burgeoning corpus of literature highlighting the fact that Africa is both rising and ripening with massive economic opportunities (Adeleye et al., 2015; Amankwah-Amoah, 2016; Babarinde, 2009; Bughin et al., 2016; Ibeh et al., 2012; IMS-Health, 2012; Radelet, 2010; Schwarz and Yellin, 2013).

The implications for responsible governance and management leading to structural changes and economic development in Africa are vast (Ahen and Amankwah-Amoah, 2018). To the afro-pessimists (those with anti-African bias), this may sound like empty rhetoric, a self-congratulatory babble, an Afro-centric pride and sensationalised tale of unwelcome attention.

The official and dominant lexicon associated with Africa is poverty, weak institutions, economic backwardness or the sick continent of the world which is also associated with all the bizarre diseases (Obeng-Odoom and Bockarie, 2018; Wilkinson and Leach, 2015) with cringe-worthy nomenclatures (Asiedu, 2014; Wainaina, 2006) as well as manufactured risks of doing business (Adams et al., 2018).

All these are fairly damning labels for the brand ‘Africa’ and its share of the global market for status and prestige. However, labels are not harmless. They are powerful tools for psychological manipulations by those who have the power to initiate and maintain them. We define labels (labelling) as the use of nomenclatures, cliché-ridden narratives, colours, designs, symbols and artefacts to distinguish and structure the world of places, peoples or things, and based on that attribute respect, recognition, desirability or undesirability that affects people’s mental models about the object or place in question. Just like any other name, the noun ‘Africa’ evokes images to the mind. For Africa, those images are neither desirable nor appealing, for the most part – thanks to legal and illegal NGO and TV ads that profit from poverty (West, 2019). For centuries, Africa connoted blackness (evil) and remoteness, and both throw up images of ‘4 Ds’: stings of death, horrible diseases, dangerous despair, and widespread destruction, which are all topped

with backwardness and helplessness – undeserving of respect but pity (Ahen and Amankwah-Amoah, 2018; Branson, 2015; Knoll and Ahen, 2019) or at best to be ridiculed for personal and societal amusement of others (Dearden, 2017; Putnam, 2012; Wainaina, 2006). In TV imagery, film and textbooks, Africa is presented as the place of the mortals bereft of hope and living in endless primitivism (as in Jamie Uys' film: *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, 1980 or *Tarzan*). There is no pun about the material consequences of such exaggerated unidimensional narrative and imagery. Eventually, the socio-economic, historical and cultural wealth of Africa is degraded and relegated to oblivion (Bandelj and Wherry, 2011).

The incumbents' strategy for Africa, it appears, is that if they cannot undermine Africa's efforts then they need to underestimate her success through discourses and imagery. This has been vigorously and religiously pursued for the past few centuries (Diop, 1989). Hitherto, this remains the preferred script of those who seek to magnify the imposed inferior otherness of Africa to their advantage, and it has worked (Bonsu, 2009; Wainaina, 2006). Their simplistic broad-brush generalisations and monolithic view of Africa however, provide little insight into the complexity and depth of the African business and diverse institutional contexts. Thus, to the critical realist, notwithstanding existential challenges (of both endogenous and exogenous origins), there are facts on the ground to support a verifiable scientific claim of Africa's on-going bright change that is happening on a daily basis (Essongou, 2011; Ibeh et al., 2012). Perhaps, a better descriptor would be Africa's renaissance (Nwankwo, 2012) since the continent has a long history of economic civilisation and millennia of history of trading with other continents, thus pre-dating colonialism (Cipolla, 2002; Diop, 1988, 1989). Even the richest man to have ever walked the face of the earth from the first century to the current era of the 21st century was in the person of business man and King, Mansa Musa (1280–1337) of the old Ghana empire (present day Mali/Mauritania) (de Cesco, 2016). Only Bill Gates and Genghis Khan come close to his wealth that was based on actual gold and other tangible resources – rather than being based on rentier capitalism (profiteering from patents) (Alperovitz and Daly, 2008).

More prominently, the subversive branding of Africa's medico-techno-scientific, intellectual and economic legacy through unsavoury images has created psychological distance between the Africans at home, those in the diaspora and their common story. This is a form of structural violence (Galtung, 1969; Srikantia, 2016) because it constitutes a psychological torture and affects business from or into Africa. The images perpetuate longstanding urban myths and deceptive marketing techniques (Pech and Stamboulidis, 2010) which in turn produce very harsh realities for the economic and social ventures that Africans on the continent and cousins in the diaspora engage in (Dearden, 2017; Nothias, 2014).

3 Approach

Political economists agree that all current socio-economic issues have a historical foundation (Obeng-Odoom, 2013). Mainstream management journals tend to suppress or ignore important Africa-related management and marketing works that do not fit their narrative (Bonsu, 2009; Nothias, 2014). Moreover, while the history of all other people serves as a guide for the future, African history is mostly ignored in management studies

(Jackson, 2015). For example, southern voices and contexts are even missing or ignored in mainstream management research (Alcadipani et al., 2012). Such behaviours are not only anti-intellectual but they also constitute an elitist posture. In general, conservative IB and management research has been dominated by managerially-oriented studies (Roberts and Dörrenbächer, 2012, 2016). In their narrow (highly focused) compartment that seeks to contribute to managerial practice, they sometimes show disdain for critical IB research as almost irrelevant and non-rigorous if such research strongly engages society, ethics and sustainability issues from the perspective of progressives (Banerjee, 2000; Cairns, 2019; Dörrenbächer and Gammelgaard, 2019). Additionally, research in IB has for long missed the opportunity to incorporate the study of certain historical and contemporary issues into its focus. Reversing this trend in IB and management research could create connections between theory building, problem-centred enquiries, and critical research on issues of strategy (Vaara and Tienari, 2004) and other issues of interest to southern economies.

Interestingly, the present livelihood, comfort and privilege of those who seek to impose formal constraints on what can and cannot be said about Africa's history are dependent on their forebears' historical encounters with African peoples and their culture – necessitating looting, slavery, colonialism and imperialism (Diop, 1988; Jackson, 2015). Such historical facts cannot be described using unnecessary euphemisms in the name of academic writing. To disregard the past is to expect it to repeat. It will make little sense to project Africa's future without understanding the wider historical profile of how the continent's image got where it is now. Therefore, based on a 'post-colonial' approach, this paper combines literature mapping and historical institutionalism to present a synthesis of the history of unethical/subversive branding of Africa in order to suggest new strategies for change. The latter examines key historiogeographical points to correctly identify the locus of power and inner workings that shape and trigger un/conscious biases, their links with imagery and the crucial underlying messages. It is a lucid mobilisation of the indicative points and contours of literature in guiding the search for 'cardinal points' and concealed milestones about subversive branding. The latter, historical institutionalism is neither a theory nor a method, but an approach with an orientation towards understanding how institutions shape political behaviour in the real world of business and politics (Steinmo, 2008).

Understanding contemporary global trade is extremely difficult, indeed almost impossible, without recourse to its historical path. Steinmo (2008) outlines three important reasons why history matters:

- 1 all political events occur within a historical context with direct effects on major decisions such as the role of governments in the internationalisation of firms and their effects on host countries
- 2 historical events shape today's actions
- 3 future expectations are moulded by the past.

As an addition to Steinmo's (2008) views, Sorensen (2015) describes historical institutionalism also as a social science research method and we adopt the latter's approach as a systematic approach for assembling historical facts to make a case about the trajectory of branding Africa in the quest to make both a theoretical and practical contribution – *place brand sovereignty* as the cure for subversive branding.

Africa-content IB narrative starts tragically with slavery and the savages' contacts with the west (Bonsu, 2009; Diop, 1988). Subsequently, civilisation, Christianisation, and commerce started to open the eyes of the savage (Jackson, 2015). This accepted storyline has increased an unacknowledged self-marginalisation (Vaara and Tienari, 2004) even among some African scholars. To this end, socio-political and historical institutionalism is essential for unravelling all the matters with intrinsic institutional quality; how they emerge, diffuse and become fixed in the minds of the target consumers and investors in an enduring manner (Steinmo, 2008).

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: after presenting the main arguments, we highlight the major critical events in the socio-historical misrepresentation (negative branding) and its consequence on investments in Africa. Subsequently, we engage with the literature on the racialised history of subversive branding of Africa. We propose practical approaches to demarginalisation through brand sovereignty as the novel strategic approach for reversing Africa's image deficit while drawing conclusions/implications based on the synthesis of the theoretical and practical aspects of the paper.

4 Theory: liability of country of origin

"Just as there are different formal and informal rules that govern economic exchanges, there are also different hierarchies of value, based on the location of those exchanges. [Therefore] the meanings of what a thing is worth becomes encased in where the thing was produced, or rather in the collective stories told about and the symbols singularly attached to the place of production." [Wherry, (2013), p.185]

Consumer psychology and marketing have long established that the country of origin of a product evokes positive or negative stereotypes and constrains people's subsequent buying behaviour (Gürhan-Canli and Maheswaran, 2000a, 2000b; Hong and Wyer, 1989; O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2003). More recently, Harris et al. (2015b) found that health innovations coming from Africa stand little chance of adoption. Thus, the proverbial 'can anything good come out of Nazareth?' is the case of Africa in the west. As Harris et al. (2015b) conclude in their empirical study on popular perceptions about reverse innovations: "They hear 'Africa' and they think that there can't be any good services." Africa loses a great deal from the presumptuous view of the continent that has persisted for centuries.

The idea formation about what constitutes quality, fashionable, the best or bad product or service is based on historical accounts and prevalent narrative that the media (among others) presents to consumers (Wherry, 2013). Consumer preferences, therefore, do not exist in a vacuum – they are structured by socio-economic, political and historical traces of events, and most importantly, by subconscious biases (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2003) and stereotypes (Hakala et al., 2013). Western consumers and investors who shun Africa are neither racists nor anti-Africa. They only make rational decisions based on available knowledge from the media and education systems.

The situation whereby the origin of a product or service is not an asset but a deficit due to consumers' or investors' negative perceptions is what Amankwah-Amoah and Debrah (2017) and Bilkey and Nes (1982) broadly refer to as the liability of origin. Ramachandran and Pant (2010) argue that the country of origin of a multinational

company (MNC) poses disadvantages in three ways; home and host country contexts and organisational context. Han and Qualls (1985, p.167) conclude that “country-of-origin effects are influenced by the brand name and source country image held by consumers.” More than any other time in history, country image matters now because consumers have ever greater access to information that shapes how they relate to issues, causes, politics and products in a globalised era (Bonsu, 2009). Moreover, a strong brand is a source of competitive advantage since it has the power to influence and shape the mental models of investors and consumers (Bonsu, 2009), create value and to absorb shocks to the national image. Image matters since the whole point of an advertisement is to affect the perceptions of the consumer to associate a certain image of the self with a product and where it comes from, or by whom it is made before they settle on a preference (O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy, 2003).

Additionally, negative perceptions present barriers to cross-national learning and even reverse innovations (Harris et al., 2016, 2015b). The pejorative representation may be only symbolic but in reality, it has negative material consequences on the cultural heritage (Wherry, 2013) and markets of products with Africa as the place of origin. For example, why would most people choose to spend holidays in any African country when all they can hear about is a malaria-infested, down-trodden destination with a possible disease outbreak? The problem is that for a long time Africa’s story has been told as part of a civilising, and proselytising project (Jackson, 2015) and now by economic experts (Dearden, 2017; Easterly, 2006) and development professionals (Federici and Caffentzis, 2004). Their niche is in the specialisation in a moral mandate to manage the ‘dark continent’s’ image for profit. They tell Africa’s story in ways that create legitimacy and a cover-up for corporate irresponsibility (Hanlon and Fleming, 2009), unethical practices (Bakan, 2004; Banerjee et al., 2009; Barley, 2010) and structural violence (Srikantia, 2016) associated with trade and neo-colonial exploitation in a winner-takes-it-all neo-liberal capitalist system (Banerjee and Prasad, 2008; Easterly, 2006). From the standpoint of the privileged, these examples may be seen as accusatory but one wonders how the psychological torture and material deprivation inherent in the media portrayal of Africa affect people of African extraction as they socially and economically disenfranchise them and their place of origin.

The institutionalisation of negative perceptions about Africa and the degree to which these actions benefit incumbents and keep Africa in a permanently undesirable image have not been specifically theorised – in terms of how racial politics (Alam, 2000), domination and economic power asymmetry (Nkomazana, 1998) keep shaping IB – in spite of the burgeoning research in critical perspectives on IB focusing on Africa (see for example, Ado and Su, 2016; Ahen, 2015; Amankwah-Amoah, 2016; Ayres, 2012; De Jonge, 2016; Eweje, 2006). Assertions of power via imagery and other subtle languages as longstanding instruments through which power is practiced and reproduced are still part and parcel of afro-pessimism in the western media (Nothias, 2014).

Closely related to the ‘country of origin’ literature is ‘place branding’ literature (Gold and Ward, 1994; Kotler and Gertner, 2002). Unlike product or service branding, place branding is difficult and complex because of the different sets of factors, consumers/visitors and investors take into consideration when making decisions. Nonetheless, place branding shares many similarities with products and service branding (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009; Rainisto, 2003). The main aim here is to increase attractiveness. On the account of Rainisto (2003), place branding ensures an added attraction to a place besides being fundamental to the building of brand identity. Similar

to products and services, a place can be branded using publicity and advertising campaigns (Gold and Ward, 1994; Kotler and Gertner, 2002). However, there is a problem. This is only possible when the place in question does not have a historical marginalisation like African and Caribbean nations do: presented as charity cases rather than places for conferences, tourism, weddings, living, working and luxury spending. When people are not familiar with a place or its products, their views are mostly based on stereotypes; either positive, negative or neutral (Hakala et al., 2013; Hao et al., 2019). A nation's image (like organisations') is complex and maybe embodied in both factual and affective traits (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2003). Rojas-Méndez et al. (2013) postulate that brand personality is the human personality traits that both outsiders and residents attach to a country's name. This might be the outcome of previous encounters/experiences with the government, firms and institutions, people and other products or things coming from the place in question.

5 Mapping the history of subversive branding practices against Africa

The strong link between racism and capitalism is incontrovertible (Alam, 2000; Köhler, 2014; Srikantia, 2016) and is expressed, in part, through subversive place branding. Strangely, it is through religions that people first got their ideas of a priesthood caste and the 'underclass nobodies'. In the west, the Bible is where people first got their ideas about the so-called 'cursed race' that must be subjugated and civilised using barbaric means. Surprisingly, Immanuel Kant (who was neither a marketer nor a businessman but a philosopher) was among the first prominent intellectuals to engage in unethical/subversive place and people branding. He wrote extensively about 'die Rassen' (races) and the strict geographic groupings of humans based on skin colour, hair form, head shape and other anatomical features (Jablonski, 2015). Arranging these groups hierarchically, he decided that all the others except the 'European race' were incapable of self-improvement, morality, and civilisation. In all these, the African was placed at the bottom of the pile. Beginning from 1775, Kant took a cue from David Hume who had earlier in 1748 stated that "there was never a civilized nation of any complexion other than white."

What is worth noting is that these were famous intellectuals whose personal and political truths (never the objective truth) were hardly challenged. It is tricky to draw conclusions on whether Kant and his contemporaries pursued these conjectures out of spite or ignorance. However, modern day racists have no justification. The German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder was in complete opposition to these ideologies but all the logical reasons he offered against these pseudoscientific and baseless race theories were ignored (Jablonski, 2015). This means that opposition to racism by some European scholars has existed as long as race theories have been in town. This opposition group deserves credit for their courage and objectivity.

In 1844, when Francis Galton (Charles Darwin's cousin) visited Sudan and Egypt, he reported that "I saw enough savage races to give me material to think about all the rest of my life" [Mukherjee, (2017), p.65]. This laid the grounds for his eugenics (good gene) theory which will later have a serious impact on Africa and the African diaspora. How could he have possibly not been awed by the African kingdoms, Nubian and Kemetic pyramids? How could he have ignored the Nile civilisations, including Egypt from which

Greeks and the Romans have learned (Diop, 1988, 1989)? All the while colonial exploitation had already taken hold of Africa and now it was being justified/legitimised by these race theories. Between 1884–1885, the Berlin Conference was held to persuade European nations from warring against each other on the African soil for the loots taken from Africans. This ended up in the scrambling and partitioning of African countries among European countries to share the resources – for example, today up to 90% of Africa’s artistic treasures are in European museums (Kimeria, 2019).

From the above, we see that the marginalisation of Africa does not exist *ex nihilo*. The colonialist Rhodes (1877) in *Confession of Faith* argued that “I contend that we are the finest race in the world and the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race.” As was pervasive across Europe and the USA, Mussolini also expressed in 1938 in Trieste, 18 September 1938, “the racial problem explains that in order to maintain the prestige of the empire there is the need for a clear, severe race consciousness which establishes, not only the differences but the absolute superiority of our race” [own translation] (Vecchi, 2017). Still today, the melanin-rich man or woman wherever he/she is found is seen by many as some biological sub-species unworthy of respect, let alone their products, services, invention or research except when it can be taken and renamed, e.g., the Ethiopian injera, the two millennia old native food was patented by a Dutch company (Allison, 2018).

The asymmetrical nature of the global economy in the 200 years preceding 1950 was not shaped by unequal markets but by two major forms of asymmetries: ‘unequal races’ and ‘unequal states’. The former is a supremacist myth to justify slavery and colonialism and a burden to civilise (Easterly, 2006; Förster et al., 1988; Jackson, 2004) while the latter is a reality based on military power for domination and resource control through unfair international trade (Acosta, 2013; Bakan, 2004; Dearden, 2017). This pattern is witnessed in the wealth discrepancies between people of African descent and other populations worldwide – from South Africa to the USA, the Caribbean and Brazil. The enduring nature of these two ideological and structural institutions has shaped the current nature of trade between Africa and the rest [Alam, (2000), p.1]. The relationship between the west and the rest of its colonies, though ‘independent’ today, remains quasi-paternalistic and asymmetrical (Galtung, 1969; Jackson et al., 2014). “Indeed, one of the main strategies of the ideological framework keeping white dominance in place is precisely to deny or to play down the prevalence of racism and to blame its victims for the persistent inequalities that are its outcome” [Van Dijk, (1991), p.10]. Kamel (2018) refers to this as ‘post-colonial possessions’. This strong statement is also valid for the relationships between firms and nation-states (Hymer, 1960/1976; Ietto-Gillies, 2002). As Jackson et al. (2014, p.12) argue,

“The motives for western colonialism, the need to subjugate periphery countries, the motive to impose a civilizing religion and more recently the neo-colonial motives to impose western liberal democratic governance structure and human rights all add up to a pejorative portrayal of local knowledge and values that appears reflected in the modernizing project in management and organization.”

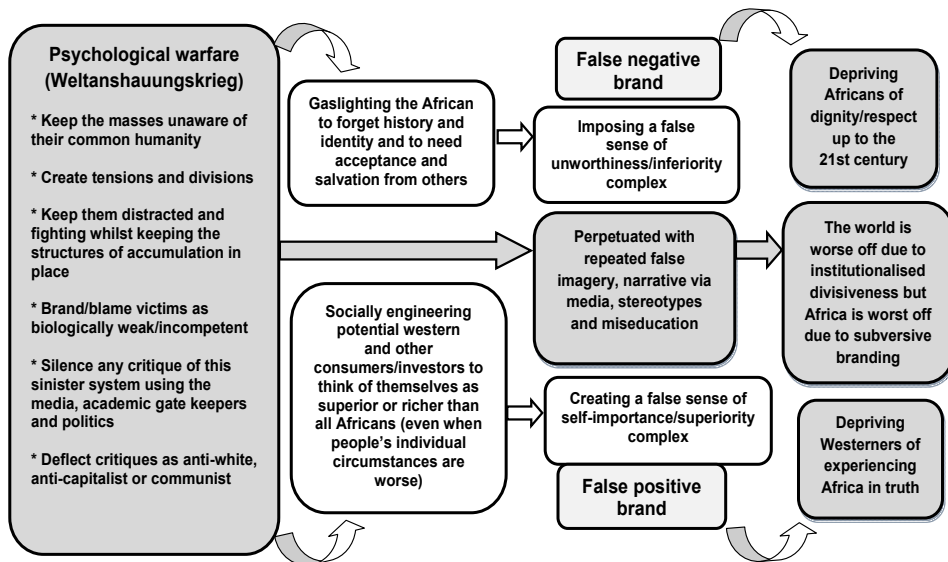
Racism (a sociological construct for structuring access to resources and justice and having the power to enforce the ideologies through laws) and prejudice are therefore a group position from which business people cannot be excluded (Bobo, 1999).

More prominently, powerful INGOs and hybrid organisations impose tricky managerial blueprints (Misoczky and Böhm, 2013) as the holy grail, with

unchallengeable models and templates which the so-called underdeveloped nations must follow (conditionalities) (Federici and Caffentzis, 2004). As variously argued, just like development experts, their personnel are educated economists who, like all others, seek to survive by maximising their utility (Easterly, 2008). For this reason, they need the poor and a never-ending debt-burden besides subversive branding. This was achieved through the introduction of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s that cut African governments' spending on infrastructure, innovation and education. Rashid (2006) argues about this by asking, 'watchman, who watches thee?' An 'unintended' effect of their efforts is that imagery about Africa conducts the masses to think of Africa as: 'the backward, needy continent we must help', not the place to place our investments or visit on holidays.

These mythologised views of Africa employ one-sided imagery and stereotypes (instruments of imperialism) (Bonsu, 2009) to derail Africa's development (Gates and Gates, 2014). Additionally, these myths are either perpetuated by those who are trying to make aid and philanthropy the staple catalyst for economic growth or those who believe in trade that is characterised by asymmetrical power relations (Oxfam, 2002; Standing, 2016). The purpose of this subversive branding through psychological warfare, 'Weltanschauungskrieg' (worldview war employed in the Nazi era) is to violently, consistently, and subliminally invade people's minds and cause enduring fundamental changes that make their perception about Africa easily controlled (see Figure 1). Moreover, Table 1 presents a synthesis of carriers of imagery that cause subversive branding.

Figure 1 The process and outcomes of psychological warfare in branding



The next section answers the second research question by advancing analysis of practical approaches to place branding sovereignty.

Table 1 Actors and carriers of diverse forms of imagery

<i>Actors and carriers</i>	<i>What they seek</i>	<i>Images brought to the world</i>	<i>Source</i>
'Explorers' Missionaries, newspapers, magazines	Resource seeking and eventual conquest Christianisation, westernisation of the 'savage'	Images of the brutish and savage Outreach missions showing images of the down-trodden help them legitimise their actions, vestiges of dehumanisation, object of scorn and derision still present today	Förster et al. (1988) Nkomazana (1998), Nthias (2014), Van Dijk (1991)
Embassies, military and the media	Occupation and show of force; whitening out anything that shows advancement in Africa and potentially challenges the narrative	Invention of political jingoism to define geographical spaces; official images that favour the official story; imposing hegemony and formal control disguised as foreign relations	Alam (2000), Banerjee and Osuri (2000), Nthias (2014)
Tourists	Curiosity, adventure, new way of discovering the world	Seeing what they want to see (confirmation bias), perpetuating dominant stereotypes or seeing beauty	A global phenomenon
Investors, MNCs and enterprises	Some engaging in pathological search for power and profits; FDI/entrepreneurs even in conflict areas	Mixed images, tax avoidance, using more expatriates, repatriating profits; keeping the chain of natural resources; some entrepreneurs emphasising change	Acosta (2013), Bakan (2004), Bougrine (2006)
Consumers (of alternative goods) cultural, historical and health products	African Americans, Caribbean and other diasporans reconnecting with roots	Mostly coming and going, now settling, with admiration; images of a great motherland, seeking soul food and being proud to be Africans again	-
Think tanks and academics	Harris et al. (2015b): "They hear 'Africa' and they think that there can't be any good services"	Institutions of learning decide to start Africa's civilisation from the time of colonialism; Africa's scientific accomplishments undermined and underestimated to advance hegemonic views	Alam (2000), Bougrine (2006), Harris et al. (2015b), Spicer and Böhm (2007)
NGOs	Professional and group survival; generally civil society organisations (CSOs) can be divided into preservers, protesters, modifiers and scrutinisers	Images of perpetually needy, poor and sick people needing everyone's help to survive; contextual oversimplification and generalisation	Ählström and Sjöström (2005)

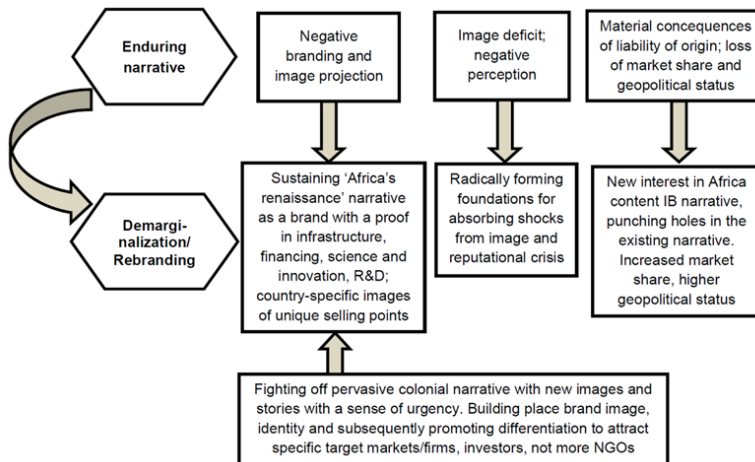
6 Advancing place branding sovereignty in Africa

There would probably be no point in advancing analysis of place brand sovereignty in Africa if there were no serious questions about subversive branding practices. Such analyses cannot be written off as less academic or simply polemical; neither can they be wished away as loose-talk by a small minority of Afro-centric(s) in the media or academia. In reality, brand sovereignty is practiced by all western nations. Americans, Germans, Norwegians, and Brits own and tell their stories, not others. They leave out what does not paint a good picture. So must Africans. This is because 400 years of humiliation have affected Africa's international competition and the value that is attached to any African related product, service or innovation (Bonsu, 2009; Harris et al., 2015a). Additionally, trained presumptuousness and comfortably condescending ways of presenting Africa is not only wrong, but it is seriously disturbing on all levels. Due to the fear of exposure, incumbents' main weapon has been to make it impossible to have an honest intellectual discourse about Africa (Köhler, 2014; Jackson, 2015). The status quo/mainstream expects critical management scholars to respect old-fashioned academic writing protocols of subtlety by faking decency, using 'diplomatic tones', and playing mental gymnastics with meaningless vocabularies so that subversive branding as a form of structural violence (Galtung, 1969) can continue under the historical mercy of gatekeepers. But does that not defeat the original purpose of academia to seek the truth that serves humanity and not narrow interests? The gravity of the atrocities committed against Africa for 400 years (including 10–15 million heinous murders in the Congo and many chopped hands for international business in rubber) is not smaller in magnitude compared to the 1939–1945 Holocaust. Judging the horrors of the past by today's standards would be wrong only if the past is not being defended and maintained (and yet invisibilised) through mechanisms of power or if the vestiges of colonialism and the historical burden are still not weighing on Africans today. However, Africa has received no compensation or reparation but disrespect. Moreover, moral persuasions and etiquettes have failed. Therefore as scholars and policymakers condemn the viciousness of antisemitism, xenophobia, racism and other evils in society, the least academics can do is to find it in our logic to condemn afro-pessimism (in trade, diplomacy, and literature, ads and imagery) in no uncertain terms and at all levels. This is the no-nonsense tone and accessible language that close to two billion Africans and all pro-justice/truth-seeking westerners around the world want to see printed, not the watered-down, elitist *academese* meant for cliques and insularly groups in ivory towers.

An intellectually honest discussion of subversive branding must start from demarginalisation. Figure 2 is a conceptualisation of the process of reversing the enduring narratives – through demarginalisation. Strategies for place branding sovereignty require building on the continuum of evolutionary milestones of important legacies by groups or individuals' whose glorious acts have over the years punched holes into the subversive narrative. Place branding sovereignty starts with the ownership and gatekeeping of an authentic African narrative. Beyond the rhetoric, structural changes are required to maintain peace and political stability. Subsequently, the focus must be on socio-economic, political, pharmaceutical/medical independence, development and ownership of modern infrastructure. This shows that place branding sovereignty vastly differs from product branding because it goes far beyond slogans, buzzwords and hiring PR firms. First, it is a civic, political and scientific investment for desirable long-term

image construction. Second, it is a bundle of serious intellectual, governance and socio-economic responsibilities meant to promote the dignity of Africans and to right the wrongs of centuries of subversive branding.

Figure 2 Demarginalisation as a mechanism for absorbing shocks from the enduring narrative (see online version for colours)



Demarginalisation refers to:

- 1 The recognition that the marginalisation of Africa is a typical *Weltanschauungskrieg* and is caused mostly by exogenous forces and reinforced by endogenous factors/actors. This means that Africa must develop strategies for absorbing shocks from formidable structural impediments to its brand's survival in global capitalism (see Figure 2).
- 2 The blueprint of mechanisms for uprooting Africa's image from the abyss of marginalisation through robust fundamental changes in its institutional underpinnings and radical policy reforms while recreating, repositioning and sustaining the brand Africa to reflect this new change and the 'Africa rising' narrative.
- 3 Management scholars, practitioners and policymakers' ability to recognise patterns of imagery and literature that have at their core, an unrelenting quest to relegate the brand Africa to the bottom of a caste system to respond appropriately and proactively.
- 4 The changes that move from aid and philanthropy to massive investments in science and technology education, support for innovation and R&D, robust economies (health and agricultural sectors) and serious curbs in waste (fighting corruption) whilst using African content (human and natural) resources at home and the diaspora. Such fundamental changes will serve as robust shock absorbers to attempts at reputational and image damage. Without these, the gory images will stick and will continue to affect the preferences and mental models of potential investors and consumers of Africa-content IB.

6.1 *Dealing with trained presumptuousness and the fetishisation of ignorance about Africa*

In what follows, we analyse the seven major ‘sine qua non’ elements which form the blueprint for rebranding a resurgent Africa based on the observed best practices.

6.1.1 *Assertive brand identity (not ‘anti-anything’)*

“You have to decide who you are, and force the world to deal with you, not with its idea of you” (James Baldwin). Finland, Singapore, and many other nations have advanced not because of foreign investors and tourists, but first for the wellbeing of their citizenry, which in turn has affected the national image. Likewise, it is imperative for African nations not to seek validation from others but assert themselves through self-advancement. This is different from populism and nationalism (anti-immigrants) because it is about patriotism and self-acceptance that does not require hating and othering but engaging in partnerships that are no longer based on asymmetrical power relations but equal playing fields. “The worth of a state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it” (Mill, *On Liberty*, Chp. 5). This is of utmost importance, because for any internally generated advert, promotion or campaign about Africa to the world, there are thousands of externally generated campaigns/trolls (even by world leaders and ‘academics’) attacking Africa, based on clichés, urban myths, sheer hate and cynicism. These afro-pessimists beat the drum of poverty, disease, backwardness and amplify common global problems (ignoring their own backyards) as if such problems were unique to African nations (Dearden, 2017; Nothias, 2014). It turns out that those fancy miseries are profitable business models for many NGOs and donors (Rashid, 2006; West, 2019). Were it not so, it is doubtful if some in the media, the third sector and academia will be so infatuated with poverty and disease that are made for Africa to undermine ‘made in Africa’, and yet seem troubled by any sight of progress in Africa. In agreeing with warnings of Ethiopia’s President on receiving the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize: “We do not want the Horn (of Africa) to be a battleground for superpowers, nor a hideout for the merchants of terror and brokers of despair and misery.” This is valid for all Africa. Brand Africa does not need those pushing the buttons of racial resentment through pseudoscientific theories. On the account of Rainisto (2003), place identity and image marketing using strategic branding approaches are among the first steps in presenting a place to potential customers/conventioners/visitors. Identity assertion in branding requires total non-conformity to the expectations of outsiders.

6.1.2 *Undoing the damage of historically negative branding*

In the case of African countries, there is a general view of the historical inertia (perceived to be stuck in the past or presented as such). This denounced prestige or ‘whited out greatness’ (Diop, 1989) deters visitors/investors and that is Africa’s competitive disadvantage (Porter, 1990) to start with. Implied here is that Africa cannot be branded following the text-book approach. Rather, Africa must first present its own narrative that seriously seeks to challenge/reject the colonial narratives in order to first undo the damage (Bonsu, 2009) that is still repeated and reproduced (Nothias, 2014; Wainaina, 2006) using subtle and subliminal marketing approaches (O’Shaughnessy and

O'Shaughnessy, 2003). This is a move from victim mentality to the architecture of ownership of Africa's own future.

6.1.3 Protecting/restoring and rebranding Africa

Rebranding Africa requires the realisation that Africa has an enviable image worth protecting. It also connotes; 'this is the voice of Africa' promising and delivering beyond expectation. Brand protection is a process of jealously guarding Africa's resources, treasures and historical icons based on Africans' own choice. A place is great because Africans say it is, and a person is a hero, not based on a foreign media's appreciation of him. It must be a 'by us, for us, with us, on our terms' approach where the focus is on the 1.3 billion Africans and several millions in the diaspora. In strategically designing a nation's brand, it is important to pinpoint the brand personality traits and the role they play in affecting the minds of potential visitors/investors. Much to our chagrin, the world knows Africa through charity campaigns and unfavourable historical accounts. A useful solution is to adopt a proactive strategy by not being silent about any misinformation and image distortion. It is imperative to individualise and 'call out' afro-pessimist organisations (like any threat), people, NGOs, news agencies and professional racists who attack and troll/misrepresent Africa in any way. This is because they have had a free pass for 400 years to both silence Africans (southerners in general) in the media and academia (as gatekeepers) from telling their own stories (Alcadipani et al., 2012) whilst pushing the narrative that puts them at the centre of the universe. This targeted approach requires African nations to stick to the positive side of things by not falling into the trap of generalising through stereotypes in a way that alienates partners of Africa. Here, telling of Africa's renaissance cannot be the function of only specialised agencies. The onus is now on the African youth to swarm the internet with videos of creative works, beautiful beaches, exotic places, medico-techno-scientific advancements by using factual narratives to discredit the media mercenaries and self-hating Africans who benefit from perpetuating colonial images.

6.1.4 Bringing Africans and the diasporans closer to Africa first

In response to this premeditated, longstanding and constant barrage of negative branding, Africa's resources must not be spent on converting avowed afro-pessimists or to be against any entity. Africa must focus on herself, above all. The low hanging fruits for attracting investments and tourism are the Africans on the continent and their diaspora. There are wealthy and less wealthy African diasporans who were once ashamed of the continent due to miseducation, indoctrination and negative branding by outsiders in connivance with the corrupt, self-hating African leaders who loot their nations and deposit their booty in foreign accounts (Curtis and Jones, 2017; Dearden, 2017). There are natural reasons for attracting the diaspora: cultural (shared culinary preferences, clothing, music and history), affective (ancestral connections) and most importantly the common experience of all Africans in the real world. The continental free trade agreement and easy travel arrangements such as visas on arrival are facilitating travel across the continent (Kazeem, 2019). For example, Black Americans consist of 14% of the US population (47.4 million) with a spending power of 1.3 trillion that is expected to rise to 1.54 trillion by 2022 (The Nielsen Company, 2018). It gets even more interesting: Africans in the USA and the UK have the highest education of all population groups and

these can be targeted for reconstruction (Cowen, 2018). They remain the best resource of Africa but the conducive environment must be created for them to come and thrive.

6.1.5 The urgency of proactive homework

It would be erroneous to assume that the entire negative image comes from outsiders when, in fact, post-colonial trauma prevents nations and their leaders from respecting and upholding their true identity and unique practices of self-advancement. Self-marginalisation is a reality. Changing the current image will require role-model leaders and responsible citizens who show the way by investing in health, sanitation, transportation and security infrastructure, as in Paul Kagame's Rwanda. That means curbing financial leakages, economic wastes, unspeakable corruption and maladministration to show self-respect so that others can also take African nations seriously. Without these, place branding campaigns (based on borrowed glory) will be self-defeating enterprises and African nations cannot blame the western media or colonialism for their own failures. In other words, branding is a political, civic, leadership and community responsibility and a promise to present an image that changes perceptions and leads people to search for further information that questions/challenges their preconceived ideas about African nations. This means there is the need to build hospitals instead of flying away for medical care, fix the education system instead of sending kith and kin abroad, invest in medico-techno-scientific innovations instead of always seeking help.

6.1.6 Using social media as a tool for enhancing brand image

The use of social influencers and celebrity endorsements seems to be a useful strategic approach for creating awareness. For example, in 2019, Ghana launched the *Year of Return* of the African diaspora. Famous Hollywood stars such as Steve Harvey and several other famous Americans such as the comedian Conan O'Brien were in Ghana. They visited interesting places and engaged in various fun activities that showcased the beauty, friendliness, peacefulness and investment opportunities of Ghana. When these videos were posted online, they received over a million views and positive comments from all over the world in a very short time. For the first time, even many African diasporans were seeing their motherland in a positive light. For example, African countries can take a cue from Rwanda which has branded itself the cleanest country in Africa and it has more than enough proof for that.

6.1.7 Avoiding old labelling traps

Finally, building brand identity requires self-confidence, self-worth, awareness of history, identity and resource ownership and responsibility/accountability *sans* external approval. There is the need to avoid branding and labelling products from Africa as ethical goods to help the poor, in the quest to appeal to the good graces of western buyers. African countries must rid themselves of all poverty, disease and suffering labels that are either from exogenous or indigenous groups seeking incentives from profitable fancy miseries. For example, Ivory Coast and Ghana produce over 60% of the world's cocoa. Therefore, chocolate made in these two West African countries must be branded as the premium quality, original, delicious and associated with organic production; not as "buy this so

that we can help the poor farmer.” This is business, not charity. When a place is presented as a charity case, the sickening stigma sticks. “If they pity you, in reality, they won’t ever respect you”. This is because it is hard to attach luxury to poverty, disease and misery. African scholars, media, ‘youtubers’/bloggers/vloggers and influencers can use what we refer to as factual narratives to present the new African reality. For example, many of the products that define the world’s current scientific and technological advancements have African and African diaspora brains behind them as inventors and patent holders (Holmes, 2012). Similarly, there is no such thing as sub-Saharan Africa. There is only west, east, central and southern Africa (WECS Africa).

7 Conclusions

Based on post-colonial theory and other approaches, this study synthesised key historical themes concerning the role of imagery, urban myths and deception in marketing and IB and the extent to which these elements are engineered to negatively affect consumers’/investors’ perception of Africa. More specifically, the paper answers the following questions:

- RQ1 How has the negative image of Africa as presented around the world affected brand Africa (African renaissance)?
- RQ2 How can the African continent as a whole and individual countries within it be rebranded to reflect their 21st century status and changing realities?

The study further sought to analyse the nature and effects of subversive branding of Africa in order to propose novel sovereign strategies for rebranding the continent. These are not silly ideas about freedom from 400 years of dehumanisation (via negative media and academic portrayal) and subversive/unethical branding of Africa and her people. Place branding sovereignty through demarginalisation is a conceptualised as profound material changes in the socio-economic, political, institutional, military, medico-techno-scientific, infrastructural, and educational underpinnings of African nations (Africa here includes the African diaspora). Place branding sovereignty is an ongoing process whereby nations make serious commitments to take ownership of their own historical narratives, their current state of development and how they represent and present themselves to the world in the future. Implied here is that unlike product and service branding, place branding sovereignty is about emancipation (building an African brand identity) and power relations first, and media campaigns second.

There are hierarchies of credibility in what we do know about international business and branding practices in Africa and how they differ either only in name or substance from the western practices. In much of advertising, policy reviews, imagery in print and other forms of media and even in academia, Africa is presented most cynically as the dangerous place that is not worth engaging with. Even when some of the challenges such as poverty are true to a certain degree, the patronising, belittling and denigrating fashion in which African nations are presented tends to overshadow any socio-economic or technological advancement or novelty in Africa. Moreover, such presentations juxtapose western superiority in everything versus Africa’s inferior otherness imposed by others. Such subversive branding strategies have direct effects on the mental models of potential consumers of African products and investors (Bonsu, 2009; Nothias, 2014).

This is because they subliminally perpetuate the narrative that equates Africa with backwardness, thereby scaring away less bold potential investors while promoting the charity industry (Rashid, 2006).

This paper makes two important contributions to the limited critical management literature on the projected image of Africa. First, we theorise the socio-historical path dependence of imagery and literature (text) and symbols and their mutation over time to yield increasingly favourable results that have privileged certain nations for over 400 years. This is especially relevant since the subversive branding practices are not registering a significant change.

Second, it also offers insights into the over 400 years of complex innerworkings of a geopolitical system that has been based on attaching labels to objects, peoples and places. This strategy has created a situation whereby economic and governance dominance (Köhler, 2014; Younge, 2014) are presented as ‘benevolence’, ‘charity’, ‘aid’ and subjugation as ‘liberation’ and ‘civilising mission’. Conquest was designed as benevolence and resource control and exploitation explained away as a resource curse. The promotion of all the above through images of savagery advances the agenda of those who control the media on a global level.

More prominently, this study sheds light on the existential threats to brand Africa. The paper also has an in-built self-criticism that emphasises the fact that the current euphoria about the ‘Africa rising’ phenomenon masks the reality of possible incumbent responses and internal threats such as corruption, maladministration and governance issues. It is also known that African businesses are affected by a liability of home-based businesses because of decades of consumer indoctrination to abandon locally manufactured products for imported goods. In spite of the historical analysis, the study puts all the responsibility on the current business and political leaders in Africa to learn from the past by putting systems in place to change Africa materially and not through lip-service or through mere advertisement and promotion – away from textbook prescriptions for place branding.

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