

Screening Nation Brands: New Zealand and Spanish Perspectives on Film and Country Image

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Introduction

Not long ago I was talking to a colleague, a Shakespeare scholar, about the progress of my research on the international image of Spain when he, quite casually, made a link that left me puzzled. 'It is curious,' he said, 'how Spain has become such a popular destination when only a few decades ago it was for many little more than an exotic and unsophisticated land in the periphery of Europe.' 'A bit', he added, 'like New Zealand in this part of the world . . .' I never knew if he was implicitly suggesting a noble lineage for less peripheral countries like Britain, France or Australia, which the 'unsophisticated' Spain and New Zealand could never aspire to emulate. Leaving aside the geopolitical implications of my colleague's comment, the fact that Spain and New Zealand could be spontaneously compared struck me as a rather uncommon idea.

And yet, only a few weeks later I came across another spontaneous comparison of the two countries, this time by New Zealand historian Nicholas Reid, who, in his 1986 book *A Decade of New Zealand Film: Sleeping Dogs to Came a Hot Friday* states: 'the fear persists in much of the New Zealand industry that productions with some offshore backing can soak up the available local private investment, create unrealistically high wage-rates and costs of services, and kill off any wholly indigenous venture. In the process, the argument goes, a distinctively New Zealand national identity in film is stifled. New Zealand becomes merely a 'cheap backlot' for Hollywood – what Spain once was to the American and European film industries.'¹ It must be merely a coincidence that both my Shakespearean colleague and Nicholas Reid compare Spain and New Zealand on the rather negative notes of being peripheral and subservient to others.

In contrast, I would like to explore in this essay a more positive point of comparison, and one in which both countries have come to command international respect and admiration. That point is country image, and the reason why both Spain and New Zealand have become world leaders is that

both have successfully transformed a relatively poor (or small) image into a reinvented, energizing nation brand.

In my own discipline of Spanish Cultural Studies the concept of country image does not elicit many sympathies. It is widely used in Sociology and Marketing, where it receives various working definitions. But from a Cultural Studies perspective, 'country image' combines two rather amorphous non-entities: country, which could mean anything from nation to state to landscape; and image, which could mean anything from physical appearance to visual representation to mental idea. Country image, in fact, can be taken to mean anything from the ways a land is depicted to the public opinion about a national community. The concept emanates a suspicious essentialist stench and conjures up ideas of over-generalization and stereotyping that Cultural Studies as a discipline has always tried to resist.

And yet, there are two reasons why, in my opinion, the notion of country image is likely to have a central role in the next wave of Cultural Studies. One is the rise of the brand as a critical concept in the Humanities. The other is the coalescence of postmodernist and post-national critical paradigms into the redefinition of key concepts such as authenticity, virtual reality, and visibility/readability. As Cultural Studies grows more concerned about the mediated perceptions that communities elicit in other communities and the ways these perceptions influence in turn other perceptions, a detailed articulation of notions related to country image is now becoming an urgent priority for the discipline.

The three sets of concepts that delimit the notional field of country image are:

1. Concepts related to image, such as the visualization of physical entities (landscapes, cityscapes, etc.), the coinage and dissemination of stock images (topoi, stereotypes), and the traffic of intangible values such as the prestige and reputation of a country. Contributions from semiotic perspectives such as Iconography/Iconology, and more recently the so-called Imagology School are crucial in this regard.
2. Concepts related to authenticity and the modes of validation of representations. The Frankfurt School, the existentialists and Heidegger's hermeneutics provided the basis for Baudrillard's work on the relations between the iconic and the symbolic. More recently, the cultural politics of advanced capitalism has created notions such as 'fabricated authenticity'.²
3. Concepts related to branding, such as consumer choice, value proposition, product differentiation, brand equity, country-of-origin effect, etc. This paradigm, originated and fully developed in Marketing Studies, is yet to be fully appreciated and assimilated by Cultural Studies. The

ground breaking work of Martin Kornberger and Adam Arvidsson on the cultural dimension of brands and branding offers much hope for future developments.³

It is in the intersection between image, authenticity and branding that the branding of countries and nations occurs. And, as I will show, it is here where New Zealand and Spain surprisingly seem to have enjoyed strikingly similar experiences.

Brand

I will begin with a short discussion of nation branding upon the premise that of all productive sectors in developed economies, tourism has been implicitly or explicitly identified as responsible for the formulation of key messages. Although nation brands are meant to encapsulate the values, proposition and differentiation of the whole nation, it all seems to start with the message to potential tourists. This is particularly true of countries where the tourism sector is of strategic economic significance – such as Spain and New Zealand.

Place branding strategies assume that countries, regions and cities have some form of collective identity that exists in the minds of both local dwellers and potential visitors. The purpose of branding strategies is to manage the emotional feelings associated with a place in the same way as conventional brands manage the emotions associated with goods and services.

The key notion in brand management is that emotions are associated primarily with an abstract idea (the brand), and only secondarily with a given good or service. The role of the brand-idea is to channel the consumer's emotions towards a range of goods and products; effective branding is all about modelling positive emotions around the brand and about channelling those emotions towards the products. Branding a city or a nation follows the same logic: fostering positive feelings about the place and using those feelings to redirect the consumer towards the goods and services associated to that place.

Successfully branding a nation or a city requires that all agents involved in the branding exercise (i.e. government departments, private corporations, members of the public) be in agreement about what the place stands for: who they are, what their values are, what their history tells about them, what their aspirations are, etc. The grand narrative thus constructed is then translated into all aspects of government, city planning, social cohesion planning and cultural activity. Strong, attractive place brands are those which successfully create and communicate a set of values, beliefs and practices their citizens live by and that are perceived by locals and foreigners as positive, exciting and enabling.

A brand is nothing more than an instrument that channels cognitive and affective associations about a given entity - a commercial good or service, an organization, a whole country. Brand marketing does not operate with those objects, but rather with the end consumer's expectations and emotions. This is why branding concerns itself primarily with the psychology of emotions that drives the consumer's choices. And this is why branding has become so important in today's transition from national identities to national reputation as the main form of symbolic capital. Countries that invest wisely in creating and projecting a positive image of themselves are more likely to inspire positive emotions both within the country and abroad. Such positive emotions do play a central role in the psychology of choice. Whether it is about choosing a film to watch on a Sunday afternoon, a beach resort to spend a summer holiday, or a location for a new business branch, a positive image of the place is usually a precondition for choice.

Simon Anholt, one of the main advocates of the nation brand concept, warns about the risks of reducing branding to a mere marketing campaign. The branding strategy uses a wide range of instruments, including advertising campaigns. But a place brand is not a slogan or a campaign: it is an intangible discourse about a place, an affective idea about the place. According to Anholt, the three most defining features of the idea of nation brand are:

1. Its long-term span – decades and generations, not necessarily the short term benefit typically associated with advertising campaigns.
2. Its aim is to create reputation.
3. Its content is made up of, firstly, the current values and assets of the nation and secondly, the nation's aspirations.

Although the formulation of the nation branding theory is relatively new, the practice of managing national images and perceptions is as old as humankind. National symbols, foreign legations, overseas commerce, art and literature – all these discourses and practices have been used for centuries to convey mediated images of human communities. Consciously or unconsciously, nations, cities, societies and corporations do send out messages about themselves.

In order to dispel some common misconceptions about nation branding, I would like to spell out three of its key features. Firstly, a nation brand, contrary to the popular conception, is not owned by the country's government. A brand is made up of all the public messages and discourses about the nation – many of which are of course in the hands of the State and its ideological apparatuses, but others come from private corporations, from individual citizens in their daily interactions, from the media, from artists and celebrities – and yet many others come from foreign countries that may be allies or competitors. Notorious cases of sustained negative propaganda include the Spanish Black Legend, orchestrated by England and Holland, or

the American and Soviet film industries during the Cold War. I emphasize the role of society and the individual in branding places and countries because there exists a widespread belief that it is governments and marketing agencies that have full control of brand management. While it is true that brands are closely associated with logos and slogans disseminated through marketing campaigns, in the end the success of a brand is determined by what people think and say about it. In this sense, there is no fundamental difference between place branding and public diplomacy, as both rely on the messages and attitudes that individuals communicate about the place. Each member of society is perceived by potential visitors, tourists and investors as an ambassador for its city or nation, one who constantly sends out signals about the place, deliberately or implicitly.

Secondly, nations that have embarked on serious branding campaigns have little to gain from the quick fixes and the shallow claims commonly associated with traditional media campaigns. Slogans in glossy brochures and TV commercials add little or nothing to the deep self-work required by serious place branding. In the 1980s and 1990s Spain managed to rebrand itself as a modern, competitive, attractive country by, literally, reinventing itself according to a new, grand, national narrative and, simultaneously, de-authorizing the image of a backwards, traditional, religious, poor country that had been prevalent for most of the preceding two centuries. Spain's rebranding was only possible because all the major agents, including the vast majority of individual citizens, agreed upon the basic features of the aspirational national brand.⁴ The new Spain was felt as an authentic aspiration of its people. The same can be said of New Zealand, a country that had to de-authorize an image heavily influenced by notions of distance, small size, and social disharmony – and did so brilliantly by repositioning itself in the international scene as an attractive tourist destination and a harmonious society that has learned to ask itself the hard questions about identity and purpose. New Zealand's rebranding success prompted by the '100% Pure' and the 'New Thinking New Zealand' campaigns (of 1999 and 2003, respectively) has become a model for many other countries with visibility issues. Korea's Trade-Investment Promotion Agency, for instance, identified Brand New Zealand as the perfect model for Brand Korea. For the Koreans, it is not only New Zealand's selling points as a 'clean and green oasis, 100 percent pure and the land of the "Lord of the Rings"' as some of its 'signature images that have been shaped over the years transforming the southwestern Pacific dairy country into the world's fourth most desired place to visit in 2006',⁵ but also its branding model. Although the original campaign targeted tourism, farming and the dairy industries, 'the government allowed private corporations to extend the campaign to fit their industries, such as "100% Romance" and "100% Pure Adventure"'.⁶

Thirdly, nation branding is used for all sorts of economic and corporate purposes, but it always starts with a compelling and attractive national narrative which is often sold in brochures and graphic campaigns. Spanish branding revolves around the ideas of uniqueness ('Spain is different'), happiness ('Smile, you're in Spain') and adventure and sun/sand ('Everything Under the Sun'). New Zealand's '100% Pure' branding is based on the country's most recognized assets: landscape, people, adventure and culture.⁷ A quick commentary of these promotional videos would highlight the striking similarities of the Spanish and New Zealand strategies: both focus on geography, history and people, both identify mythical animals (bull, fish), both define who we are, both emphasize the multiplicity of landscapes and tourist activities. From a visual-rhetoric point of view, both make frequent use of aerial shots and the post-card editing typically found in promotional documentaries. In conclusion, while the national narratives are specific to each country, the means used to convey them are strikingly similar.

If nation branding relies on the effective communication of a grand narrative that is genuinely shared by society and stakeholders, articulating deeply-felt issues such as national identity, history and aspirations, it is then obvious that branding is not an exercise in make-believe. A nation that embarks on this costly and difficult journey has nothing to gain from inaccurate or misleading messages as they will be exposed by its own competitors sooner or later. History tells us that many countries have successfully disseminated negative messages about their enemies in an attempt to damage their international reputation – and, while this is certainly a key aspect of nation branding that is beyond the scope of this essay, the fact remains that a nation's exercise in self-branding must rely on being absolutely genuine and authentic to itself.

The politics of place branding is a corollary of the poetics of authenticity. Interestingly, both Spain and New Zealand share a strong sense of authenticity and, accordingly, their branding strategies seek to capitalize on the uniqueness of their pure, authentic experiences. In the words of Maurice Saatchi, a founder partner of M&C Saatchi (the advertising company that developed New Zealand's global campaign in 1999),

[a]s the world becomes increasingly 'manufactured', the world's nations have become more and more homogeneous. It's become almost impossible to find meaningful differentiation. But New Zealand is different. It's an authentic country. New Zealand doesn't come pre-packaged or prepared. New Zealand is real.⁸

The notion of a 'pre-packaged country' could well be applied to the experience that many British tourists have of Spain through the mass-market of packaged holidays – which could be thought to have impacted negatively the image of Spain as a de-humanized, inauthentic holiday destination. The

subtle anxiety generated by the desire to be seen as authentic that emanates from Maurice Saatchi's comment is a common trait of all branding strategies that can be perceived all around the world regardless of the degree of massification brought about by predatory tourism.

Spain's ranking as the world's second/third tourist destination has profound implications for its culture and its creative industries. The rapid modernization of the country in the second half of the twentieth century has been linked by historians and economists to the 'impact' of tourism. The word 'impact' to describe the effect of mass international tourism on a conservative society rightly suggests that the process was, in a way, traumatic. Mass tourism not only changed the demographics of the nation, creating spaces for social interaction between locals and foreigners on a scale never seen before; it also changed the economic landscape by creating a whole new productive sector. But more importantly, tourism transformed traditional customs and artefacts, places and locations, religious rites and folk traditions into commodities. For Richard Peterson, authenticity is socially constructed; the process of authentication, when applied by tourism promoters to countries, does typically involve reimagining the country's past and its popular mythical narratives: 'Authenticity . . . does not inhere in the object, person or performance said to be authentic. Rather, authenticity is a claim that is made by or for someone, thing or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others.'⁹ Societies that have been subject by predatory tourism to massive socio-economic transformations tend to display authenticity anxieties that adopt a variety of manifestations (i.e. trivialization of their cultural heritage, cultural cynicism and so on).

The year 1992 marked a unique milestone in the creation of Spain's new brand, with a combination of global events (Olympic Games, World Expo), historical celebrations (Columbus' first voyage, the Conquest of Granada and end of the Christian Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula) and a massive global image campaign focused on tourism and foreign investment. An analysis of Spanish social discourses – including Spanish cinema – in the years that followed 1992 shows that Spanish society was growing used to mass tourism and was becoming a nation of international tourists itself. However, at the same time, Spanish society was fast developing other anxieties about the way it was perceived and experienced by others. Prominent amongst these new anxieties is the authenticity syndrome: the fear of being unfairly misconstrued along the lines of its own past. This fear has to do, in part, with the interiorization of the inferiority complex that many Spaniards discovered in the early years of mass tourism (late 1950s and early 1960s) in the form of what a famous branding slogan of the time coined as 'difference'. That Spaniards, living under a conservative, military dictatorship, were 'different' to the rest of the Europeans was

obvious to both the Spaniards and the tourists, but not in any positive way. When modern, secular, Europeanized, post-1992 Spaniards find out that the old pre-modern, backward images of Spain are still prevalent in many countries around the world, they conclude in dismay that their extraordinary modernizing enterprise has failed to liberate them from oppressive, negative stereotypes.

Cinema

Cinema is indeed a privileged vantage point for the study of nation branding – in particular through the lens of tourism – thanks to its representational and discursive nature (unlike other selling points such as sports, adventure, food, etc.). The experience of watching a foreign film has been sometimes theorized in terms of virtual tourism. The spectator's experience involves the activities of listening to a language, visualizing landscapes, identifying with characters and witnessing a plot, all of which are packaged as 'coming from' another country and somehow 're-presenting' it. The more 'authentic' the cinematic experience, the more satisfying the virtual tourist experience will be. Since for many real-life tourists the first experience with a foreign country is likely to be in the form of watching a film, it should be of little surprise that today's tourist campaign designers and film producers are working together as never before.

However, coining a country image to be embedded in international films is not an easy task, as many Spanish directors know well. Films destined for the export market face the impossible task of addressing the demands for an 'authentic' Spanish experience that satisfies both domestic audiences and international audiences with varying degrees of knowledge about Spain (and different beliefs and values). The first consequence of this disparity is that the image of Spain contained in a given film is necessarily decoded according to different 'authenticity' criteria depending on the culture of reference of the spectator. But there is a second consequence of the disparity of levels of proximity to the country whose image is being coded and decoded, which has to do with the fact that images of Spain are not the monopoly of Spanish cinema and culture; hetero-images of Spain are coined and circulated worldwide simultaneously by many other national cinemas. Images of Spain disseminated by Hollywood are credited in some markets with a higher level of 'authenticity' than those exported by the Spanish film industry.

The wide range of ideological and theoretical registers mobilized by the notion of country image makes it difficult to establish sharp and definitive separations between the different meanings of 'image' – if only because landscapes, stereotypes, national narratives and reputation do operate in relation to each other. Probably for this reason it is not uncommon that

national images are so often the object of ideological manipulations for political, economic and social advantage. Agencies with vested interests in country image are quick to acknowledge that image is a kind of symbolic capital, and that an investment in good images always pays off in ways that go far beyond the symbolic. Many Spanish companies invoke Spain's reputation in order to establish good mental associations in potential consumers when seeking to position themselves in overseas markets (although many others avoid this association in markets where Spain does not have a good reputation). Over the last couple of decades, several Spanish administrations, including the central government and various Autonomous Communities, have implemented plans to strengthen Spain's international reputation and visibility. Cultural initiatives like Instituto Cervantes, geo-strategic initiatives such as Plan Asia and Plan Africa, and marketing strategies such as Brand Spain are all signals that the Spanish public sector is well and truly committed to fostering a positive national image that will ultimately benefit the private sector and civil society at large.

The role of the cultural industries in this kind of image intervention is not minor. Despite the very different size of their industries, New Zealand and Spain share common experiences – similar to those of most developed economies. The role of Spanish cinema in providing the basic storylines and visuals of the new Brand Spain is huge. More than literature or any other visual discourse, the feature film is able to capture the imagination of Spaniards and non-Spaniards in 'telling Spain' and showing them where it comes from and what it aspires to become. National and regional governments, as well as city and local councils all over Spain, are now more committed than ever to the promotion of their places through the international medium of film. In 2008, the Spanish film industry received more money from public agencies' investments than from box office sales.¹⁰ Almost every Autonomous Community and large city now has a Film Commission whose job is to liaise with potential film producers and marketers. There seems to be a general consensus on the importance of projecting a positive image on the global arena – and it seems that projecting a good image on the silver screen is an excellent first step.

More than any other sector of the cultural industries, contemporary Spanish cinema is credited as being one of the most powerful mechanisms of dissemination of Spain's reconstructed identities and national image. Over the last two decades, government officials of all political persuasions have consistently asserted the relation between cinema and Brand Spain.¹¹

And it should not be forgotten that Spain's film industry is one of the largest in the world. Despite a huge difference in size, New Zealand cinema is seen by government and public agencies as playing an equally central role in the international dissemination of the new New Zealand brand. This is

how Ruth Harley (Chief Executive of the New Zealand Film Commission until 2008, when she joined Screen Australia) described it:

Cultural industries are based on national identity. National identity is key to creating a unique positioning for our goods and services. Take film for example. It creates culture, builds identity and markets that identity to the world. Film is important not just as a potent advertising medium for New Zealand; not just as a way of creating and personifying our country as a brand in all its diversity; not just as a high growth, high margin knowledge based business. It is all of these, but it is also as a statement to ourselves. It is a central ingredient in constructing our identity for ourselves, as a lever to help New Zealanders get the confidence and boldness to foot it aggressively on the international stages.¹²

In 2000 Prime Minister Helen Clark argued that the New Zealand Film Commission and the Film Production Fund would yield many economic benefits while simultaneously continue to provide a means for New Zealanders to ‘express our cultural identities and to take pride in our diverse cultures’. Moreover, she continued, ‘[w]e are not a suburb of Los Angeles, London or Sydney. We can express our differences, our uniqueness, so positively through our creative people. Film [. . .] has a big role to play in that, and in promoting New Zealand’s distinctive identity to a wider world.’ Here is how Gregory A. Waller summarises this position in the context of his history of the New Zealand Film Commission:

The New Zealand film industry would remain a key target of opportunity in subsequent Labour economic policy statements, like *Growing an Innovative New Zealand* (February, 2002), which underscores the new ‘brand’ New Zealand internationally ‘as being technologically advanced, creative and successful’. In the economic if not in the cultural realm, Peter Jackson had become the poster child and entrepreneurial seer of the New New Zealand.¹³

Experiences in other countries suggest that cinema’s branding potential is huge: Hollywood’s role in branding the United States is a paradigmatic and unique case; in France, the national film industry is nothing less than a *question d’état*; even a smaller country like Australia gave a great lesson in tourist promotion and country image with the *Crocodile Dundee* phenomenon, which set the conventional image of Australia worldwide for a generation.¹⁴

***The Lord of the Rings* and Pedro Almodóvar**

Peter Jackson’s trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (New Zealand, USA, 2001-2003)¹⁵ has become one of the most successful nation branding exercises ever, and has resulted in a much enhanced visibility for New Zealand as a

tourist destination and, therefore, in economic and reputation benefits for the country. The impact of the trilogy has been felt most dramatically in Wellington, which, in the week before Christmas 2001 was temporarily renamed 'Middle-Earth'. Although the fictional narrative and the imaginary Middle Earth are quite transparently English symbols and the production of the films is largely a United States venture, New Zealand's presence in the audience's imagination is strongly asserted by the clever use of scenery by Wellington-born director Peter Jackson and by the concerted promotional efforts of the NZFC and Tourism New Zealand – the national tourism promotion board which created and exploited the connection New Zealand / Middle Earth in the context of the '100% Pure New Zealand' campaign. For many analysts, the LOTR-phenomenon has become the classical example of film-induced tourism.¹⁶

LOTR's fictional world makes no claim whatsoever about New Zealand. The relation between on-screen landscapes and the real New Zealand occurs outside the text (extra-diegetic). There seems to be no authenticity anxiety: since the film is a fantasy epic there is no claim of realism and therefore there is no cause for major concern by the New Zealand public about the country being portrayed inaccurately or inauthentically. There are several obvious correlations between Tolkien's narrative and NZ brand: the geography in both cases is distant, exotic, dreamlike, paradisiacal; both rely on a strong sense of adventure; and both convey a strong sense of cultural heritage, of cultural roots going back in time to some remote past. The LOTR project was seen by the New Zealand government as a unique opportunity to profile the country internationally. In 2001 Prime Minister Helen Clark identified these possibilities:

promoting New Zealand as a film location and investment in film industry infrastructure; the promotion of New Zealand-made films; media technology innovation; tourism promotion; attracting New Zealand talent to return home; profiling of New Zealand globally, particularly talent, creativity and innovation profiling, through the media and through other appropriate means.¹⁷

In a similar vein, Deborah Jones and Karen Smith explain the tremendous importance of LOTR for Brand New Zealand in these terms:

The LOTR project has become the poster child for a new kind of New Zealand national identity, one which draws on traditional narratives of low-key but unique national ingenuity, while reworking them in terms of an emerging narrative of creative entrepreneurship. At the same time, LOTR has been central to debates over whether there is a 'genuinely' local film industry, as opposed to a world-class service facility for Hollywood movies.¹⁸

But Jones and Smith's point is actually not about the film's narrative nor is it about its relation to the New Zealand film industry. Instead, they turn to what I consider as one of the three pillars of genuine nation branding: authenticity. The great lesson regarding national branding to be drawn from Peter Jackson's trilogy is precisely one in authenticity. The idea of marketing New Zealand through Tolkien's epic – and not, say, through a Maori storyline – would seem in principle highly unlikely, but this is precisely what the project achieved. By selling the film as an example of New Zealand talent and creativity and by making explicit the connection between Middle Earth and New Zealand, the project managed to create a sufficient degree of 'authenticity':

The second key tension is between the 'new' creative New Zealand, a sophisticated skilful nation with its own culture and ability to produce world beating filmmaking and special effects; and, on the other hand, New Zealand as a pure and pre-historical place where an imaginary Middle-earth (and by implication any movie world) can be placed, a 100 per cent pure destination that tourists will want to visit. Government policy initiatives have staked a great deal on being able to reconcile these tensions, and we argue that the rhetoric of the film-making process has been effective in bringing convergence to these seemingly disparate and at times opposing strands.¹⁹

Director Pedro Almodóvar has become one of Spain's most recognizable cultural icons. Yet, his films describe a world filled with characters, storylines and sentiments that leave many Spaniards cold, when not overtly perplexed. 'Is this the way we are?', was a common reaction when films such as *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) became popular hits. And even more worrying, 'Is this the way we are seen abroad?' The Almodóvar phenomenon has been repeatedly analyzed and dissected from the perspective of the relations between national reality and its fictional rendition. While foreign commentators highlighted the obvious Spanishness of these films where irrational passions and a touch of insanity tastefully combined with a sense of humour and a glossy *mise en scène*, many Spaniards voiced out their concerns about the grotesque, twisted nature of Almodóvar's 'realism'.

While LOTR's fictional world makes no claim whatsoever about New Zealand, the fictional world of *Volver*²⁰ is immediately related to the real La Mancha; the film was shot on location and there is therefore an appeal to the local audience to validate the film's realist stance. There is a claim for authenticity, and therefore many responses to the film in the Spanish press showed a fair degree of authenticity anxiety.

Relations between the narrative of *Volver* and Brand Spain are very different to those between LOTR and Brand New Zealand. An iconic

notion of modernity is the only element of the Brand that can arguably be detected in the film: wind, women and ghosts can be read as Almodóvarian symptoms of modernity; windmills are no longer Don Quijote's giants but rather sources of clean wind energy, women are empowered and active (not submissive as in patriarchal, pre-modern Spain), and ghosts are rationally explained away (not accepted as supernatural, as in Catholic pre-modern Spain). Despite these thematic elements, however, modernity in this film is far from sustaining the sort of socially progressive and cinematographically avant-garde discourse that became Almodóvar's auteurial signature in his early films. *Volver's* geography, on the other hand, does not reproduce the sunny image of the Brand, nor its promise of sand, romance and fiesta. Instead, the film features a different kind of Spain, far removed from the coastal resorts, which *could* be interpreted to stand for a more authentic part of the country – or at least a part of the country that, somehow miraculously, was not greatly affected by predatory tourism. In general, it would seem that *Volver* is at odds with Brand Spain.

From the point of view of nation branding, Almodóvar's *Volver* is a disconcerting text. On the one hand, Almodóvar's own brand name had become synonymous with the image that Spain felt comfortable projecting abroad in the years leading up to the iconic 1992. Almodóvar's early hits provided domestic and international audiences with much of the imagery of the New Spain, rich in assertive femininity and reconstituted masculinities, irreverent deconstructions of popular traditions and above all, an exuberant display of urban modernity and its many myths. His films were hailed as a perfect on-screen version of the 1983 Marca España [Brand Spain] campaign, with the now famous logo by Miró and three core values: break away from traditional topics and stereotypes, the use of the word 'Spain' as essential part of Brand, and tourism as Brand Spain's competitive advantage. But, on the other hand, *Volver* can hardly be seen as an instance of newness. From the very title to the setting of the story (a village in backwater La Mancha, echoed by glimpses of a no-longer cosmopolitan Madrid), the film is keen to establish an anti-modern climax. Moreover, it seems to position itself against the main selling points of Brand Spain in its various manifestations: 'Todo bajo el sol' [Everything under the Sun], 'Pasión por la vida' [Passion for life], and 'Sonríe, estás en España' [Smile, you're in Spain]. And yet, there is an element of authenticity in this film that has captured the imagination and the approval of Almodóvar's fellow Manchegos. The paradox here is that, while the film situates itself in the antipodes of Spain's institutional branding campaigns, domestic audiences seem to have embraced the return to traditional lifestyles and local customs that the film reconstructs.

Following the success of LOTR in promoting New Zealand by seamlessly aligning itself with Brand New Zealand, the regional government of La

Mancha tried to use a scaled-down version of the same strategy. A campaign called ‘Territorio La Mancha’ proposed a tour of the main scenarios used by Almodóvar, together with some other iconic places such as the so-called Don Quijote route. Unlike New Zealand with the ‘100% Pure’ slogan, however, the government did not license the use of its campaign symbols for private use. Ultimately, *Volver* sells an image of Spain and La Mancha that goes against the main promises of Brand Spain. This, together with the severe damage suffered by Brand Spain since the beginning of the 2007 global financial crisis, should be taken as a serious warning that Brand Spain needs to be urgently revisited. Ultimately, Almodóvar takes Jackson’s lesson on the authenticity of Brand New Zealand one step further: *Volver*’s implicit critique of a Brand Spain that has become fairly self-complacent and repetitive for several decades represents a powerful reminder that nations cannot and should not be reduced to mere commodities in an advanced capitalist economy – on the contrary, nations in a post-national world are increasingly seen as contested spaces where competing discourses seek legitimacy and hegemony.

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- 1 Nicholas Reid, *A Decade of New Zealand Film: Sleeping Dogs to Come a Hot Friday*, Dunedin, 1986, p.16.
 - 2 Richard Peterson, ‘In Search of Authenticity’, *Journal of Management Studies* (JMS), 42 (2005), p.5.
 - 3 See Martin Kornberger, *Brand Society: How Brands Transform Management and Lifestyle*, Cambridge, 2010; and Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture*, Routledge, 2006.
 - 4 In 2010 President Rodríguez Zapatero summarized Spain’s national brand as ‘a country that is diverse, modern, rich in traditions and concurrently committed to technological innovation’ <http://aguasdigital.com/actualidad/leer.php?idnota=24644>, accessed 26 August 2011.
 - 5 Jane Han, ‘New Zealand Picked as Model for National Branding’, *The Korea Times*, 9 October 2007. <http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/include/print.asp?newsIdx=9881>, accessed 26 August 2011.
 - 6 Ibid.
 - 7 Nigel J. Morgan, Annette Pritchard and Rachel Piggott, ‘Destination branding and the role of the stakeholders: The case of New Zealand’, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 9, 3 (2003), p.292.
 - 8 Ibid., p.292.
 - 9 Peterson, p.1086.
 - 10 According to financial reports produced by the Spanish Ministry of Culture, <http://www.mcu.es/cine/MC/CDC/Anio2008.html>, accessed 26 August 2011.
 - 11 The Minister of Culture famously declared in 2006 that ‘[c]urrent Spanish laws might be seen as more or less radical in social issues, but the international public gets to know them and to appreciate them through the films of Almodóvar and other cultural

- creations'. Cit. in Carmen Calvo, 'La imagen-país de España', Real Instituto Elcano, 2006.
- 12 Ruth Harley, 'How we created world class performance', *Innovate*, 2 March 2002. www.innovate.org.nz/speakers-notes/harley.html, accessed 10 December 2010.
 - 13 Gregory A. Waller, 'The New Zealand Film Commission: Promoting an Industry, Forging a National Identity', in Ian Conrich and Stuart Murray, eds, *Contemporary New Zealand Cinema: From New Wave to Blockbuster*, London, 2008, p.30.
 - 14 Julia Redwood, *Selling Australia: Part 2: The Brand*, Sydney, 2001.
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