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**“VISIT RWANDA” : A WELL PRIMED PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN OR A GENUINE ATTEMPT AT
IMPROVING THE COUNTRY’S IMAGE ABROAD?**

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Abstract

Op 22 mei 2018 wordt een commerciële deal gesloten die de wereld met verstomming slaat. Arsenal, een steenrijke Engelse voetbalclub, laat zich voor tientallen miljoenen sponsoren door Rwanda, een arm Afrikaans land dat bekend staat vanwege de genocide die er plaatsvond in 1994. In ruil, zullen de voetballers van Arsenal voor drie seizoenen, met het “Visit Rwanda” logo op de linkermouw van hun voetbalshirt spelen. Dat Arsenal zich laat sponsoren, hoeft niet te verbazen. Maar dat uitgerekend Rwanda gebruik wil maken van de voetbalclub om toeristen te lokken, dat wekt wel verwondering. Vandaar dat deze thesis poogt uiteen te zetten, waarom de Rwandese overheid het land op deze manier probeert te profileren. Om dit te doen is gebruik gemaakt van een casestudie, waarbij de contextuele omstandigheden in overweging werden genomen, die de keuze van de Rwandese overheid voor het toepassen van nation branding (kort samengevat, het toepassen van marketingtechnieken om landen te promoten) verklaren. Wat vervolgens blijkt is dat de commerciële deal deel uitmaakt van een staatsgeleide strategie voor de lange termijn ontwikkeling van het land. Echter brengen eerdere onthullingen (met name, een rapport van de non-profit organisatie Corporate Europe Observatory) twijfels bij de oprechtheid van deze strategie. Bijgevolg wordt geconcludeerd dat - ondanks dat Rwanda's nation branding het land hoogstwaarschijnlijk veel zichtbaarheid en misschien zelfs diplomatieke slagkracht heeft gegeven - de keuze voor nation branding ambigu is en het buitenlands beleid van Rwanda reduceert tot de wetten van de marketingwereld, om zo voordelen voor het land te bereiken die waarschijnlijk te mooi zijn om waar te zijn.

Keywords: Rwanda, Visit Rwanda, Nation branding, Public relations, Diplomacy, Sports

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1. Introduction

Despite having one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa, and despite often being cited as one of the most impressive cases of post-conflict recovery, Rwanda is still widely known for one horrific event. That event, of course, is the 1994 genocide, in which 800,000 people, mostly ethnic Tutsis, were killed by extremists from the Hutu majority in 100 days. Throw in the fact that there has only been one major Hollywood movie about Rwanda, “Hotel Rwanda”, and one can understand the negative perception that surrounds this small African country (The New York Times, 23/11/2019). For this reason, Paul Kagame, who became president in 2000 - but has effectively run Rwanda since 1994 - has made various efforts to improve the country’s image and standing abroad, including through multiple so called “nation branding” attempts.

Kagame’s work and approach to improve the state of affairs in Rwanda has been praised by many. For example, the World Bank praised Rwanda's "remarkable development successes", which have helped reduce poverty and inequality. But, he also faces criticism at home and abroad over his political and human-rights record (BBC, 17/9/2018). Hence, it is understandable that when on 23 May 2018 Arsenal football club announced a sponsorship deal, in which the “Visit Rwanda” logo would feature on the left sleeve of all the team’s kits for the following football season (Arsenal Football Club, 23/5/2018), this raised questions for a variety of reasons (Knack, 1/6/2018).

Critics say the money should have been spent alleviating the chronic poverty in the country (CNN, 13/8/2018). Rwanda is the nineteenth poorest country in the world - with a per capita income of around 700 dollars - whilst Arsenal is one of the richest football clubs in the world (Knack, 1/6/2018). Nevertheless, the Rwandan government justifies the Arsenal deal as being part of a broader strategy to develop tourism in the country (Knack, 1/6/2018). Clare Akamanzi, the chief executive officer of the Rwanda Development Board, defended the agreement, stating on twitter that tourism is Rwanda’s number one foreign currency earner, and that the more Rwanda earns from tourism, the more it can invest in its people (CNN, 13/8/2018). Hence, taking into account the level of poverty in the country, one wonders why the Rwandan government would engage in a sponsorship deal with Arsenal as a way of promoting a more favourable image abroad in order to develop the tourism sector in the country.

2. Study objective and research questions

Till date, there has been very little research on Rwanda's efforts to promote a more favourable image abroad, by means of "branding" itself. There is also a dearth of information on efforts by other developing economies that have done the same. Hence, the need for a better understanding of the motives of these countries cannot be overemphasized. Consequently, my research aims to address this gap in knowledge by critically assessing Rwanda's approach to nation branding.

My research takes place within the broader question of why low-income countries, like Rwanda, would engage themselves and invest in "branding" efforts in order to promote a more favourable image abroad. Consequently, the following research question is formulated:

How can Rwanda's approach to nation branding be assessed in the context of its aim to promote a more favourable image of the country abroad?

However, given the broadness of this question, the following sub-questions are formulated:

- 1) *What does Rwanda's nation branding consist of?*
- 2) *Why does Rwanda engage in nation branding?*
- 3) *How can Rwanda's nation branding be critically assessed?*

3. Structure of the study

In order to answer the main research question (and the accompanying sub-questions) of this study, the following structure will be followed.

The following chapter will first outline the methodology used in this study. Consideration will be given to the different methods used and the reasons for why they were used. Thereafter, a literature review will be presented, in which the conceptualizations of a "brand", "branding" as a practice, a "nation" and "nation branding" will be outlined. The reason for doing this, is that it will provide the reader with a common understanding of how these multifaceted concepts are used in this study, which will consequently allow for a better understanding of the analysis that will be done in this study.

Chapter six will give a short overview of the scientific and social relevance of my research. This will be followed by chapter seven, in which the contextual background of this study will be presented. In this chapter, a brief historical overview of Rwanda will be provided. It is essential to do this, as it will allow the reader to understand the long and conflicting past of Rwanda, which has led to the need for the government to engage in “branding” efforts to promote a more favourable image abroad. In order to provide the reader with a clear and full picture, this chapter will end by a closer examination of the actors involved and the various elements of the “Visit Rwanda” nation branding campaign - including the sponsorship deal with Arsenal and the ensuing one with French football club Paris Saint Germain.

Chapter eight will present a discussion on the findings of this study. The focus will be on examining the empirical arguments that allow for a proper understanding as well as a critical assessment of Rwanda’s efforts to brand itself and promote a more favourable image abroad. This chapter will be set in two parts, in which arguments will be outlined in favour of calling Rwanda’s nation branding approach “a well primed public relations campaign”; as well as for calling it “a genuine attempt at improving the country’s image abroad”.

Lastly, chapter nine will present the conclusion of this study based on the findings discussed in chapter eight. Chapter ten will then highlight the limitations of this study, as well as suggestions for future research based on this study.

4. Methodology

As set out above, my research aims to find out why the Rwandan government has engaged in a “branding” campaign, through sponsorship partnerships with football clubs, in order to promote a more favourable image abroad. Hence, I will be applying the qualitative research method of a longitudinal single-case study. This method is preferred as I will be examining a contemporary event but am unable to manipulate any relevant behaviour (Yin, 2009: 11). The great advantage of this method is that by focusing on a single and unique case, that case can be intensively examined (Halperin & Heath, 2012: 205). This will involve an up-close, in-depth, detailed examination of Rwanda’s approach to branding from different perspectives, whilst also considering its related contextual conditions. In order to do this, the following supportive methods will be needed to be used in order to obtain relevant findings of the study:

Firstly, to set the theoretical scope of my research, I will be synthesising the relevant literature, aiming to draw conclusions from the findings of authors such as Simon Anholt, Melissa Aronczyk, Keith Dinnie and others. As there has been an increase in the number of books and articles written on nation branding, various points of view allow for different interpretations of concepts such as brand, branding, nation and nation branding. These will be looked at to develop common understanding of possible approaches and possible explanations that can be used in my research. Using data from existing sources, will furthermore allow me to widen the scope of my research far beyond what I would be able to collect for myself, and make possible comparisons as well as study trends over time (Halperin & Heath, 2012: 177).

Secondly, a contextual background will be outlined in which a short historical overview of Rwanda will be provided, followed by a closer examination of the “Visit Rwanda” nation branding campaign. To do this, data will be collected from primary sources such as publicly available government documents and reports developed by the Rwandan government and the United Nations World Tourism Organisation; and secondary sources such as textbooks, journal and encyclopaedia articles on Rwanda.

Thirdly, taking into account the obtained information from my literature review and from the contextual background, I will use qualitative content analysis to examine the images, videos, symbols, text and themes linked to Rwanda’s nation branding campaign. This will allow me to look at the underlying meaning, motives and purposes embedded within them and enable a critical assessment as well as an interpretation of its effects (Halperin & Heath, 2012: 319). In addition, data will be collected and analysed from a series of semi-structured interviews that I conducted in order to probe deeper into people’s experiences on the subject matter (Halperin & Heath, 2012: 176). The interviewees were each chosen either because of their expertise on Rwanda or because of their expert knowledge on nation branding; and are: Dr. Robert Govers, Dr. Jonathan R. Bellof, Dr. Filip Reyntjens and Mr. Peter Verlinden.¹ The interviews were conducted using computer mediated communication tools (Skype and WhatsApp), and are transcribed and included - albeit in an edited version - in the annex of this study. By interviewing these people, I was able to better understand the multiple perspectives of this case, to identify the many factors involved in this case and to sketch the larger picture that emerges from their personal experiences (Creswell, 2012: 47).

¹ A more detailed presentation of each respondent can be found in the annex of this study.

Finally, it should also be underlined that, by using multiple sources of data and methods of data collection, this study will be able to approach the research problem from different angles and as such enable triangulation (Halperin & Heath, 2012: 177). This consequently will yield more complete data and result in more credible findings (Halperin & Heath, 2012: 178).

5. Literature review

5.1 Defining a brand

To understand what “nation branding” is, one first has to comprehend what can be understood by a “brand”. According to the classic definition by the American Marketing Association, a brand is a “name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers” (Bennett, 1988: 18). This definition stresses distinction as well as the complexity of concrete and intangible elements, both of which characterize a brand (Viktorin et.al., 2018: 3).

A more sophisticated definition is offered by Aaker (1996), who goes beyond the visual aspects of a brand and attempts to capture the essence of a brand. According to him, a brand is “a multidimensional assortment of functional, emotional, relational and strategic elements that collectively generate a unique set of associations in the public mind” (Aaker, 1996: 68). Similarly, Temporal defines a brand as “an idea, which lives in the imagination of the audience and encompasses feelings, perceptions, and mental associations” (Temporal, 2015: 12). Both these definitions add to the first definition by highlighting that the notion of a brand is something that resides in the minds of consumers.

A final element that characterizes a brand, is the fact that it incorporates a consumer perspective as well as a producer perspective. As such, Macrae, Parkinson and Sheerman (1995), note that a brand represents “a unique combination of characteristics and added values, both functional and non-functional, which have taken on a relevant meaning that is inextricably linked to the brand, awareness of which might be conscious or intuitive”. A similar perspective is taken by Lynch and de Chernatony (2004), who define brands as “clusters of functional and emotional values that promise a unique and welcome experience between a buyer and a seller” (Dinnie, 2016: 4).

5.2 Branding as a practice

The action of creating a brand - the process of branding - describes practices and tools related to the creation of a brand: it generates a positive image of a product and stimulates a desire to own it by way of consumption. “Branding,” writes Peterson, “is the application of a story to a product ... it is the story that makes one identify or desire a brand, more so than the product itself” (Peterson, 2006: 744).

Avery and Keinan suggest that “building a brand” refers to “the process of establishing and maintaining a perceptual frame in the minds of consumers, both individually as well as collectively” (Avery & Keinan, 2015: 210). As such, branding not only creates distinctiveness, but also involves the audience in the process of branding. A brand can thus be perceived differently by different people, but it is also part of collective discourse (Viktorin et.al., 2018: 4).

De Chernatony and McDonald (2003) provide further clarification regarding the role of branding and highlight that it is imperative to recognize that, while marketers instigate the branding process (branding as an input), it is the buyer or the user who forms a mental vision of the brand (branding as an output), which may be different from the intended marketing aim. This point is particularly relevant for this study, as pre-existing perceptions of Rwanda may be entrenched in the target audience’s minds and therefore difficult to change through the process of branding.

5.3 Identifying the nation

Taken literally, the word nation derives from the Latin expression “natio” and means “the people” or denominates “a tribe with a common derivation, language, and customs” (Viktorin et.al., 2018: 6). Scholars have, however, given further discussion to this denotation.

Ernest Gellner, for example, stresses the importance of the human will and shared culture that finds expression in political units (Gellner, 1983: 55). According to him, nationalism is an integral part of modernity and therefore a result of the transformation to an industrial society: “nationalism”, Gellner held, “creates the nation” (Viktorin et.al., 2018: 6).

Political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson, provides another definition of nation. In his book “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism”,

Anderson outlines an interpretation of the nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of the group (Anderson, 1983). He thereby emphasizes the role of the media in creating communities through spreading images. Hence, compared to the definition proposed by Geller, Anderson highlights that the nation not only constitutes a product of nationalism, but also complicated networks of communication along with visions of individual and group desires (Viktorin et.al., 2018: 6).

A more comprehensive definition - and perhaps the most suitable for this study - is the definition of nation provided by Anthony Smith. He defines a nation as “a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (Smith, 1991: 14).

5.4 The application of branding to nations

Branding has gained great popularity in public discourse nowadays. As such, it has been associated with universities, museums, churches, and even entire states. Nevertheless, state authorities have deliberately engaged in branding long before the existence of a term as “nation branding”; and various authors - who initially did not consider themselves to be scholars of international history or international relations, but shared a fascination for this interplay between countries and products - have been interested in this phenomenon since (Viktorin et.al, 2018: 6).

One of the first academic definitions for nation branding is provided by “Marketing Places: Attracting Investment, Industry, and Tourism to Cities, States, and Nations” (Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1993). In this book, a country brand is defined as a "sum of impressions and beliefs that different people hold about a certain place or a country” (Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1993: 87). Although this definition is based on a broad economic and marketing perspective rather than an explicit brand perspective, it sets the scene for much of the work that has followed in the field (Dinnie, 2016: 8).

Simon Anholt, who claims to have coined the term “nation branding” in 1996, bases his conceptualization of nation branding around six dimensions, which he put together in his Nation Brand Hexagon (Anholt, 2005: 296-297). Based upon this, he would go on to define a nation brand as “a sum of perceptions about a country in six important fields: exports,

governance, culture, people, tourism and, immigration and investment” (Anholt, 2005: 296-297). To make this more tangible for governments, he developed the Nation Brand Index (a survey using a panel of approximately 20,000 people in 20 countries to monitor the global perceptions of countries) as a tool that can help them build a strong image for their nation based on the six different dimensions. Anholt further clarified his definition by emphasizing that a nation brand consists of "the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences". He furthermore considers the process of nation branding as “the way of understanding and managing the reputation of the country” (Anholt, 2010), by “making national identity tangible, robust, communicable and above all useful” (Anholt, 2007).



Figure 1: The Nation Brand Hexagon²

Pappu, Pascale & Cooksey (2007) define a nation brand as “an identity the country creates on important international markets via name, logo and other elements of branding”. Similarly, Dinnie (2008) explains that a nation is a brand if it has a unique and multidimensional set of elements based on culture as a main distinguishing element of differentiation of the nation. He also claims that, to effectively compete in a global market, nations have turned to brand management strategies, which highlights the evolution of nation branding (Dinnie, 2008).

² Anholt, 2005: 297.

Another nation branding expert, Melissa Aronczyk, emphasises that “nation branding is to make the nation matter in a world [...] it is a professional transnational practice [...] and it is a solution to perceived contemporary problems” (Aronczyk., 2013: 3).

Taking all these definitions into account, it is possible to conclude that nation branding is a conscious and planned process of certain stakeholders (usually the government of a country) which aims to produce and transmit certain desired favourable images of the country to external and internal stakeholders using a variety of methods. Nation branding is often outsourced to branding or marketing agencies and consultants who advise governments about country branding, develop the core ideas and elements of the nation’s brand, design visuals, as well as produce a national “brand book” (Szondi, 2008: 12).

6 Scientific and social relevance

When examining the current literature on nation branding through sports, it can be concluded that its focus mainly lies with examining the motives for the organisation of major sporting events (such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup; e.g. Nauright, 2013; Lee, 2010; Berkowitz et al., 2007). As such, there is currently a lack of research concerning (developing) States sponsoring sports clubs. In addition, when considering the above made literature review, it should be noted that the current literature on nation branding has not yet examined Rwanda’s efforts in “branding” itself. Hence, my research aims to fill this gap in the literature, which will allow for a greater insight in and a better understanding of the phenomenon of nation branding in a novel and understudied context.

From a scientific perspective, my research will be relevant to academics and researchers in the fields of International Relations, marketing, development studies and African studies. Given that all these fields of study are linked to the subject matter of this thesis, it will be able to provide them with various elements that can be examined in further research - either from an intradisciplinary or an interdisciplinary point of view.

In a social sense, my research can be used by several actors. Policy makers will be able to use it in order to get more insight on nation branding. This will help them with their understanding of this phenomenon, taking into account the increasing globalisation and politicization of sports, which has become a stage in which political and/or societal ideas are exhibited. This is

particularly relevant with regard to this thesis, as Rwanda's nation branding has caused public controversy, leading to some politicians publicly calling into question the rationale for sending development money to Rwanda. Furthermore, laymen - in particular those with an interest in sports - will be able to use my research as well, to get a better comprehension of the phenomenon of nation branding through popular sports, which has increasingly become more commonplace in modern society.

7 Contextual background

7.1 Short history of Rwanda

Rwanda, formerly Ruanda, officially the Republic of Rwanda, is a landlocked country in Central Africa and one of the smallest countries on the African mainland. Located a few degrees south of the Equator, Rwanda is bordered by Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rwanda is in the African Great Lakes region and is highly elevated; its geography is dominated by mountains in the west and savanna to the east, with numerous lakes throughout the country. The climate is temperate to subtropical, with two rainy seasons and two dry seasons each year (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020).



Figure 2: Map of Rwanda³

Rwanda has a long history of monarchical rule. From the mid-eighteenth century, the Kingdom of Rwanda (ruled by the Tutsi Nyiginya clan) became increasingly dominant in the region. The

³ Encyclopædia Britannica, 2012.

Kingdom reached its greatest prominence during the nineteenth century under the reign of King Kigeli Rwabugiri. Rwabugiri conquered several smaller states, expanded the kingdom west and north, (Chrétien, 2003: 160; Mamdani, 2002: 69) and initiated administrative reforms. These reforms included ubuhake, in which Tutsi patrons (who had a privileged status) ceded cattle to Hutu or Tutsi clients in exchange for economic and personal service, (Prunier, 1995: 13-14) and uburetwa, a corvée system in which Hutu were forced to work for Tutsi chiefs (Mamdani, 2002: 69). Rwabugiri's changes caused a rift to grow between the Hutu and Tutsi populations (Mamdani, 2002: 69).

The Berlin Conference of 1884 assigned the territory to Germany as part of German East Africa, marking the beginning of the colonial era. The Germans did not significantly alter the social structure of the country, but exerted influence by supporting the king and the existing hierarchy, and by delegating power to local chiefs (Prunier, 1995: 25).

Belgian forces took control of Rwanda and Burundi in 1916, during World War I, beginning a period of more direct colonial rule (Chrétien, 2003: 260). Belgium ruled both Rwanda and Burundi as a League of Nations mandate called Ruanda-Urundi. After the Second World War, Belgium continued to rule Ruanda-Urundi as a United Nations Trust Territory with a mandate to oversee eventual independence (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020).

Both the Germans and the Belgians promoted Tutsi supremacy, and considered the Hutu and Tutsi as different races (Appiah & Gates, 2010: 450). In 1935, Belgium introduced identity cards labelling each individual as either Tutsi, Hutu or Twa⁴. While it had previously been possible for particularly wealthy Hutu to become honorary Tutsi, the identity cards prevented any further movement between the classes (Gourevitch, 2000: 56-57).

Tensions escalated between the Tutsi, who favoured early independence, and the Hutu emancipation movement, culminating in the 1959 Rwandan Revolution: Hutu activists began killing Tutsi and destroying their houses, (Linden & Linden, 1977: 267) forcing more than 100,000 people to seek refuge in neighbouring countries (Gourevitch, 2000: 58-59; Prunier, 1995: 51).

In 1961, the suddenly pro-Hutu Belgians held a referendum in which the country voted to abolish the monarchy. Rwanda was separated from Burundi and gained independence on 1 July

⁴ The Great Lakes Twa, also known as Batwa, Abatwa or Ge-Sera, are indigenous pygmy people, native to the African Great Lakes. As they are related to the other forest peoples of Central Africa, the Twa can be considered the original inhabitants of Rwanda (Minority Rights Group International, 2020).

1962, (Prunier, 1995: 53) which is commemorated as Independence Day, a national holiday in Rwanda (The New Times, 30/06/2018).

In 1973, Juvénal Habyarimana (a Hutu) took power in a military coup. Even though there was greater economic prosperity and a reduced amount of violence against Tutsis, he pursued policies that were perceived by the Tutsi as discriminatory. For example, he put in place a quota system, whereby jobs for universities and government services were allocated according to the population size of the ethnic groups (Prunier, 1995: 74-76).

In 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, a rebel group of over 4000 rebels (Melvern, 2004: 14) composed from the nearly 500,000 Tutsi refugees, invaded northern Rwanda from their base in Uganda, initiating the Rwandan Civil War (Prunier, 1995: 93). The group condemned the Hutu-dominated government for failing to democratize and confront the problems facing these refugees. Neither side was able to gain a decisive advantage in the war, (Prunier, 1995: 135-136) but by 1992 it had weakened Habyarimana's authority. Mass demonstrations in Rwanda forced him into a coalition with the domestic opposition and eventually to sign the 1993 Arusha Accords - officially known as the Peace Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Rwanda and the Rwandan Patriotic Front - with the Rwandan Patriotic Front (Prunier, 1995: 190-191) leading to a cease fire between the Tutsi rebels and the Hutu-led government.

On 6 April 1994, ethnic strife between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi factions peaked as the cease-fire ended when Habyarimana was killed as his plane was shot down near Kigali Airport (BBC, 12/01/2010). The shooting down of the plane served as the catalyst for the Rwandan genocide, which began within a few hours. Over the course of approximately 100 days, between 500,000 and 1,000,000 (The Guardian, 31/10/2007) Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus were killed in well-planned attacks on the orders of the interim government (Dallaire, 2005: 386).

The Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front restarted their offensive and took control of the country methodically, gaining control of the whole country by mid-July 1994 (Dallaire, 2005: 299). Within Rwanda a period of reconciliation and justice began thereafter, led in part by the swift establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, as well as the reintroduction of the Gacaca - a traditional village court system. Nevertheless, there have since been frequent charges of revisionism; mainly focusing on the fact that the Rwandan Patriotic Front committed human rights violations themselves (Jansen, 2014; Rever, 2018; Reyntjens, 2019).

The Civil war and the genocide left Rwanda's economy and social fabric in shambles. Moreover, the country has since struggled heavily with its legacy of ethnic tension associated with the traditionally unequal and contentious relationship between the Tutsi minority and the majority Hutus.

7.2 Post conflict perceptions of Rwanda

During the early stages of the transition out of conflict, the Rwandan Patriotic Front government ensured that official narratives about the genocide and civil war were proclaimed within Rwanda. Nevertheless, once the international community officially recognized the genocide, the international media produced racist narratives which portrayed Rwandans in two categories: perpetrators, who were hypermasculine, barbaric and uncivilized Hutu men; and victims, typically identified as Tutsi women and children, with emphasis placed on the large numbers of women who experienced conflict-related sexual violence (Thompson, 2007; Holmes, 2013; Cieplak, 2017).

Rwanda, as a country, was from that moment on no longer considered as the beautiful "land of a thousand hills", but as a bloody land of horror, littered with rotting bodies and later skeletons and poverty-stricken, helpless women, men and children, as well as thousands of incarcerated Hutu perpetrators. On the borders of Rwanda, the refugee crises in eastern Zaire and Tanzania also appeared to confirm Rwanda's failed state status and highlighted the moral imperative of the international community to step in and rebuild the country (Holmes & Buscaglia, 2019: 111).



Figure 3: A young girl overlooking a mass grave discovered in Rwanda.⁵

⁵ De Morgen, 25/4/2018.

7.3 The strategy for economic transformation and “Vision 2020”

The strategy for economic transformation of Rwanda was introduced in 2000, when the Rwandan Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning released its “Vision 2020” (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 2000). Designed to transform the country into a middle-income, service-based economy, this document outlined a government development framework, in which six priority pillars (good governance; an efficient state; skilled human capital, including education, health and information technology; a vibrant private sector; a world-class physical infrastructure; and a modern agriculture and livestock) were identified. These development pillars, were deemed to be crucial for ensuring that the necessary long term transformations in Rwandan society happened (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 2000: 3). It was considered a very ambitious plan, especially given Rwanda’s historical reliance on subsistence farming and foreign aid.

As tourism was considered a development priority in the “Vision 2020” strategy, the tourism Working Group was established in late 2001. This working group, which included private and public stakeholders of the tourism industry, was established to make consultations possible between them, in order to help with the implementation of the Vision 2020 strategy (Nielsen & Spenceley, 2011: 233).

In 2002, following the first round of consultations, the Rwandan government developed and approved the Rwanda Tourism Strategy, of which a revised version (“Sustaining the Momentum”) was released in 2007. In addition, in 2006, a complementary National Tourism Policy was outlined, of which a revision was released in 2009 by the Rwandan Ministry of Trade and Industry (Nielsen & Spenceley, 2011: 234).

In 2009 also, the Rwandan government approved the Sustainable Tourism Master Plan for Rwanda, which was developed by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation in conjunction with the Rwandan Government. This “Master Plan for Rwanda” consolidated the previous strategies and policies, gave clear and detailed recommendations, and set ambitious targets. Tourist arrivals in Rwanda were projected to increase from about 980,000 in 2008 to more than 2 million in 2020, with an expected increase in foreign exchange earnings from about \$200 million to more than \$600 million (Nielsen & Spenceley, 2011: 234).

7.4 Rwanda's nation branding efforts

Following the passing of formal tourism plans in Rwanda, a national campaign was launched to improve the image of tourism in the country. The reason for this was that the word for tourism in Kinyarwanda, the local language, means “wandering around aimlessly” and consequently has a negative connotation. A media campaign was launched to sensitize the population and convey the benefits (foreign) tourists could bring to Rwanda and the need to welcome foreigners (Nielsen & Spenceley, 2011: 234).

Strategic public relations and marketing efforts to transform the negative perceptions that existed of Rwanda abroad; and to improve its image on an international basis began in 2010, when the Rwandan Patriotic Front had stabilized its political power base and was in a better position to focus on developing its external “brand image” (Holmes & Buscaglia, 2019: 111).

Just before the 2010 presidential elections, the Guardian reported that Kagame had appointed London public relations firm Racepoint to develop Rwanda's nation brand to attract inward investment. At the time, Racepoint's managing director, Cathy Pittman, was quoted as saying:

“You used to Google Rwanda and the first thing you would see would be about genocide. Now we are feeding content and stories to journalists about the economy and culture. A lot of it is about images” (The Guardian, 3/8/2010).

A year later, Rwanda's National Export Strategy (Government of Rwanda, 2011) was released. The strategy considered nation branding as an integral to its implementation and observed that:

“nation branding consists of developing and communicating an image - both internally and externally - based on a country's positive values and perceptions relevant to export development” (Government of Rwanda, 2011: 25).

The strategy also highlighted the requirement for Rwanda to engage in niche-building:

“small developing countries such as Rwanda face budgetary and operational challenges while forging their national brands abroad. As such, Rwanda will explore creative and cost-efficient ways to create, position and communicate Brand Rwanda” (Government of Rwanda, 2011: 25).

That “Rwanda's brand is not well established internationally and suffers from unwanted associations” is a priority concern for the Rwandan Patriotic Front. The strategic plan further continued:

“Rwanda often receives unfair press through questionable sources. In a competitive global market, this association can hinder product positioning in key exports [sic] markets. A positive brand must be established

for Rwandan products internationally in order to convey the true spirit of Rwanda” (Government of Rwanda, 2011: 25).

In response, the strategy proposed that “Rwanda’s global brand image” should be managed:

“impressions about a country’s brand are formed in different ways including international media, events, academic literature, arts and culture, etc. Rwanda will develop a strategy for identifying the different channels through which these impressions are formed as well as a strategy for aggressively managing its brand position in these channels” (Government of Rwanda, 2011: 25–26).

Leading up to the twentieth commemoration of the genocide that took place on April 1994, the Rwandan Patriotic Front government appointed another London-based public relations agency, Portland Communications, to assist with placing positive stories about Rwanda and to cover the commemorations in the international media. Portland Communications held briefing sessions with several British-based academics to discuss coverage of Rwanda. However, they had limited connections with journalists on the ground and struggled to source personal-interest stories about Rwandans. Portland Communications was later dropped by the Rwandan Patriotic Front government on the grounds that the public relations agency did not understand Rwanda’s complex politics and history (Holmes & Buscaglia, 2019: 111).

In December 2014, the Ministry of Trade announced that Rwanda was to embark on a “made in Rwanda” brand to help address the trade deficit and develop Rwanda’s manufacturing sector. At home, the government launched a “Buy Local – Twigire” campaign (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 23/12/2014).

More recently, in 2017, the government appointed The PC Agency to “build its brand in the United Kingdom” at a time when RwandaAir had launched its first direct flight from London Gatwick to Kigali. The emphasis here was on developing Rwanda’s destination brand. Paul Charles, founder and chief executive officer of The PC Agency, commented in a press release announcing the deal, stating that: “Rwanda now has the leadership team, the product and the infrastructure to attract premium travellers” (PRWeek, 15/5/2017).

7.5 The Rwanda Development Board

The main actor involved in Rwanda’s nation branding efforts is the Rwanda Development Board. This government department was officially established in 2008 and started operating in

2009, to coordinate, spur and promote national economic development by promoting local and foreign investment, export, and job creation (Rwanda Development Board, 2020b).

Inspired by the Singaporean model for development, the Rwanda Development Board was drawn up to the likeness of The Singapore Economic Development Board (Verhaegen, 2011: 17); and conceived following the dispatchment of Rwandese government officials to Singapore, where they studied the various aspects that encompass the Singaporean development policies (GRIPS Development Forum, 2014: 8).

Considered a “one stop shop” for all investors, it integrated all government agencies responsible for the attraction, retention and facilitation of investments in the Rwandan national economy (Rwanda Development Board, 2020a; COMESA Regional Investment Agency, 2020). The Executive Director's position, currently filled by Clare Akamanzi, is a cabinet-level position and the incumbent is appointed by and reports directly to Paul Kagame, the president of Rwanda (iGuide, 28/3/2017).

7.6 Rwanda’s latest brand identity: “Visit Rwanda”

Rwanda’s latest brand identity - Visit Rwanda - was developed by the earlier mentioned The PC Agency. This public relations firm was appointed by the Rwanda Development Board in May 2017, and was specifically tasked to challenge perceptions of Rwanda in the media of the United Kingdom, to increase visitor numbers from the United Kingdom and to increase the average length of stay in Rwanda. Hence, they embarked on preparing a series of campaign activations for Rwanda (The PC Agency, 14/12/2018).

As a consultant for The PC Agency, Annabel Illingworth was appointed to help with rebranding the country, shifting the global perception away from the genocide and towards responsible tourism, alongside promoting Rwanda’s role as a tech hub and incubator within Africa. Her main aim was to increase the average length of stay in Rwanda, by demonstrating everything the country has to offer. The reason for this being that foreign visitors tended to come for a short period to see the mountain gorillas and then moved on to another country. Furthermore, she was to focus on the premium demographic (the so called high-end tourism), to tie in with the increased cost and restricted allocation of permits to see the gorillas (Annabel Illingworth, 24/8/2019).

Annabel Illingworth and her team consequently created the new “Visit Rwanda” brand identity for the tourism board; an accompanying new website (www.visitrwanda.com) to cover Tourism, Trade & Investment; and promotion films to be aired on African TV, online, at events and on social media (Annabel Illingworth, 24/8/2019).

The official reveal of Rwanda’s new brand identity and accompanying logo took place on May 23, 2018. As highlighted by Annabel Illingworth on her website, the logo is said to be inspired by: Rwanda’s beautiful landscape, its volcanoes, its flora and fauna as well as the famous, renowned Rwanda traditional art form, the Imigongo, which is characterized by bold, geometric designs (Visit Rwanda Instagram page, 2018; Annabel Illingworth, 24/8/2019; AFAR, 7/9/2019).



Figure 4: The “Visit Rwanda” logo⁶

7.6.1 Partnerships with Arsenal and Paris Saint Germain

The first more visible effort at branding came in the form of football shirt sponsorships. Firstly, with the English football club Arsenal and more recently with the French football club Paris Saint Germain.

Arsenal’s sponsorship deal was made public on 23 May 2018. That day, the English football club announced on their website that the Rwanda Development Board, through their subsidiary the Rwanda Convention Bureau, had become the club’s first official sleeve partner, as part of the country’s drive to become a leading global tourist destination, using “Visit Rwanda” messaging (Arsenal Football Club, 23/5/2018).

⁶ Visit Rwanda Instagram page, 2018.



Figure 5: Arsenal's "Visit Rwanda" Sponsorship⁷

As expected, as Rwanda - out of all countries in world - was going to sponsor one of the richest football clubs in the world, this raised questions for a variety of reasons (Knack, 1/6/2018). Promptly, several politicians from countries that were sending a lot of development money to Rwanda - in particular the Netherlands and the United Kingdom - started questioning the rationale for sending more development money to the country (Sport/Voetbalmagazine, 5/7/2018). For example, Andrew Bridgen, a member of the British Parliament, stated the following:

"British taxpayers will be rightly shocked to learn that a country supported by huge handouts from the United Kingdom is in turn pumping millions into a fabulously rich football club in London. If this isn't a perfect own goal for foreign aid, I don't know what is" (Daily Express, 28/5/2018).

Nevertheless, Clare Akamanzi, the chief executive officer of the Rwanda Development Board, defended the agreement, stating on twitter that tourism is Rwanda's number one foreign currency earner, and that the more Rwanda earns from tourism, the more it can invest in its people (CNN, 13/8/2018).

⁷ Knack, 1/6/2018.



Figure 6: Paris Saint Germain's "Visit Rwanda" sponsorship⁸

Rwanda signed its second football sponsorship deal with French football club Paris Saint Germain on 4 December 2019. Under the deal, the Visit Rwanda logo will be displayed on the first team's training and warm-up kit, the women's team kit, on the club's stadium installations and on backdrop banners (France 24, 05/12/2019). The deal also includes that Paris Saint Germain fans will be able to drink Rwandan coffee and tea in the stadium of Paris Saint Germain, the Parc des Princes. It is estimated that Rwanda will pay approximately ten million euros per year as part of the deal (Sport/Voetbalmagazine, 11/12/2019).

Once again, Rwanda was all over the media. In particular, because the East African country had already invested a lot, a year before, in a similar deal with Arsenal. Consequently, more and more people started questioning whether Rwanda was actually achieving what it claimed it was striving to achieve (Sport/Voetbalmagazine, 11/12/19). Nevertheless, in a statement after the signing, Clare Akamanzi, the Rwanda Development Board's chief executive officer, once more defended Rwanda's rationale for these sponsorship deals by stating the following:

"We invest part of our tourism revenues in strategic collaborations such as the one with Paris Saint Germain because we understand the positive effect they have on the overall perception of the country globally" (Reuters, 4/12/2019).

8 Discussion

Having provided a contextual background, in which was examined why Rwanda engages in nation branding and what Rwanda's nation branding consists of, a critical assessment can now be made. To do this, a distinction will be made based on the distinction that is provided by

⁸ Sport/Voetbalmagazine, 11/12/2019.

Nadia Kaneva's (2011) literature review on political approaches towards nation branding. In her literature review, she highlights how political approaches see nation branding, at worst, as an augmented form of propaganda, and at best, as a "post-ideological" form of reputation management for nations (Kaneva, 2011: 126). Applied to this case, my discussion will outline arguments in favour of calling Rwanda's nation branding approach "a well primed public relations campaign"; as well as for calling it "a genuine attempt at improving the country's image abroad".

8.1 A well primed public relations campaign?

Prior to active nation branding, Rwanda was usually negatively portrayed in the (western) news media. This generally was because of organizations such as Human Rights Watch denouncing abuses (i.a. human rights violations, a lack of press freedom and the boycott of political opposition) under the rule of President Paul Kagame; or because of the country's extreme poverty (e.g. the World Bank listed the African country in the top twenty poorest countries in the world, based on per capita purchasing power; World Bank, 2019: 3). Hence, it can be reasonably assumed that Rwanda's latest nation branding effort - as well as earlier public relations and marketing efforts - entails to a well primed public relations campaign aimed at deflecting the (western) media's attention from the "actual" situation in the country.

8.1.1 "Rebranding" despite war crimes and repression

Central to this assumption is a report entitled "Spin doctors to the autocrats: how European public relations firms whitewash repressive regimes", released in 2015 by Corporate Europe Observatory - a research and campaign group working to expose corporate lobbying on European Union policy making. In this report, a separate chapter is devoted to Rwanda titled "Rwanda: rebranding - despite war crimes and repression" (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2015: 17).

In this chapter, Corporate Europe Observatory outlines how the Rwandan government has hired several public relations firms to work on deflecting criticism, and rebranding the country. Hence, they claim that these public relations efforts, in addition to historical guilt from the international community over the 1994 genocide (in which Kagame is perceived as a key factor

in ending it), have attributed to the uncritical Western support for president Paul Kagame (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2015: 17).

The main piece of evidence referred to is a report published by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in August 2009, which noted that Rwanda has “excellent public relations machinery”, and that this has been key in “persuading the key members of the international community in believing that it has an exemplary constitution emphasising democracy, power-sharing, and human rights which it fully respects ... the truth is, however, the opposite” (The Guardian, 3/8/2010).

A first company mentioned in the report is the earlier mentioned Portland - a London-based public relations company set up by Tim Allan, an advisor to former United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair. According to Corporate Europe Observatory, this company played a significant part in this “public relations machinery” (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2015: 18).

As noted by the Sunday Times, the contract between the Rwandan government and Portland dated from early 2013 and was said to worth more than 1,25 million euros (The Sunday Times, 27/01/2013). Noteworthy is that, when the contract was closed, one of the most notorious spin doctors⁹ of Tony Blair, Alastair Campbel, was working for the company on a part-time contract (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2015: 18).

Another British firm mentioned in Corporate Europe Observatory’s (2015) report is BTP Advisers. Reference is made to a secret recording of the CEO of BTP, Mark Pursey, who used to be the international media relations adviser for the Rwandan Government. On the record, he describes building an “attack site” - a webpage targeted at people who “over-criticised” about “who did what in the genocide”. He moreover mentioned that:

“The government of Rwanda is itself enormously controversial, it is very uncertain what their role was in the deaths that occurred around the time of the genocide” (The Independent, 7/12/2011).

Pursey also describes his strategy for undermining the credibility of the 2010 United Nations report into Rwandan war crimes in the Democratic Republic of Congo, saying:

“in order to try and address it, we did not address the accusations that were made. We addressed and focused on the reasonableness of the accusers” (The Independent, 7/12/2011).

⁹ In public relations and politics, spin is a form of propaganda, achieved through knowingly providing a biased interpretation of an event or campaigning to influence public opinion about some organization or public figure. Public relations advisors, pollsters and media consultants who develop deceptive or misleading messages may be referred to as "spin doctors" (The New York Times Magazine, 22/12/1996).

A third firm mentioned in the report is the British Racepoint Group, which in 2010 and 2011 worked to “re-position” Rwanda with key audiences in Europe and the United States (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2015: 18). Reference is made to a report by The Guardian on an event at Rwanda’s embassy in London in 2010 organised by Racepoint, which involved a fake Rwandan village hut for journalists to sit in, while smart-suited young British public relations executives poured Rwandan coffee and burred about presenting “a different image” focusing on “mountains, gorillas, crops” - all part of the country’s increasing efforts to reinvent itself 16 years after it was torn apart by genocide (The Guardian, 3/8/2010).

Reference is also made to a case study published by public relations journal The Holmes Report (now known as “PRovoke”) entitled “The New Rwanda” about the work Racepoint did for its contract with the Rwandan government. In addition to placing interviews with Rwandan ministers and the President in influential international media, and placing articles on key issues such as human rights and democracy in Rwanda, Racepoint also “embarked on an aggressive issues response programme”. In other words, responding to negative and critical press, that “focused on human rights, cultural redevelopment, independence and democratic misperceptions in Rwanda” (PRovoke, 12/02/2011).

Also crucial to their effort were the “media familiarisation” tours Racepoint organised for journalists. As a result, media discussions about Rwanda increased by 4400% during the time, and - key for a country eager to rebrand - discussions about the Rwandan genocide decreased by 11% (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2015: 18).

The political strategy of Racepoint included, “stakeholder input sessions with President Kagame, various cabinet ministers, external groups including the Blair Foundation and Clinton Global Initiative,” aiming to more generally “advance Rwanda’s standing with key political influencers in global capitals” (PRovoke, 12/02/2011).

One of the more worrying aspects of Racepoint’s objectives was to “educate and correct the ill-informed and factually incorrect information perpetuated by certain groups of expatriates and Non-Governmental Organisations,” including, presumably, the critiques of the crackdown on dissent among political opponents overseas (PRovoke, 12/02/2011). This should be seen in the context of accusations that Rwanda had plotted to kill dissidents abroad. An investigation by the Globe and Mail claims, “Rwandan exiles in both South Africa and Belgium - speaking in clandestine meetings in secure locations because of their fears of attack - gave detailed accounts of being recruited to assassinate critics of President Kagame... Their evidence is

the strongest yet to support what human rights groups and Rwandan exiles have suspected for years about the Rwandan government's involvement in attacks or planned attacks on dissidents, not only in South Africa but in Britain, Sweden, Belgium, Uganda, Kenya and Mozambique" (The Globe and Mail, 2/5/2014).

Another British public relations firm Acanchi, working with high level stakeholders developed an "Enduring Spirit" brand for Rwanda launched in March 2010 (Sierra Express Media, 1/11/2012). Acanchi is a small British firm, led by Fiona Gilmore, that specialises in country branding, saying it has "taken on many assignments with Governments and leaders to position their countries, regions or cities in the world." Clients have included the governments of the Dominican Republic, Mauritius, Hong Kong, Lebanon, and Israel (Acanchi, 2020).

On a side note, a quick google search shows that, after working with Rwanda, Fiona Gilmore started a web-based, pro-United Kingdom campaign "vote no borders" together with Malcolm Offord, a business investor and fund manager. But, more interestingly perhaps, is the fact that Malcom Offord is a generous donor to the United Kingdom conservative party and advisory board member of the centre-right Centre for Social Justice think tank (The Guardian, 1/5/2014). A few mouse clicks further shows that some people doubt the honesty of this campaign and accuse it of "astroturfing" (i.e. using fake grassroots efforts that primarily focus on influencing public opinion and typically are funded by corporations and governmental entities to form opinions; Cho, Martens, Kim & Rodrigue, 2011; Bella Caledonia, 2014; Craig Murray, 2014).

In sum, considering the controversial use by the Rwandan government of dubious public relations agencies in the past - as outlined by Corporate Europe Observatory's report - there is valid reason to believe that the country's latest nation branding effort is just more of the same.

8.1.2 Rwanda's £30 million sleeve

In line with Corporate Europe Observatory's report, several academics have also come out and publicly proclaimed that Rwanda's latest nation branding efforts entail to the same dubious public relations scheme as outlined in the report.

As such, on 28 May 2018, 5 days after Arsenal's sponsorship deal was made public, Filip Reyntjens - an emeritus professor of Law and Politics at the University of Antwerp, who is considered a specialist on Rwanda - published an article entitled "When the poor sponsor the

rich: Rwanda and Arsenal FC” on The Conversation¹⁰ news website. In his article, Reyntjens claims that Arsenal might have (unwillingly) overlooked the risks that are involved when dealing with Rwanda, considering the signal that the football club is giving in light of Kagame’s human rights and democracy records (The Conversation, 28/5/2018).

Reyntjens thereby refers to the existence of widespread analysis and commentary (i.a. by investigative journalist Judi Rever and Human Rights Watch), claiming that the Rwandan Patriotic Front regime has engaged in human rights abuses - including the massacre of thousands of innocent civilians - and de-facto eroded the state of democracy in Rwanda. Furthermore, he underlines that in October 2017, the United Nations subcommittee on Prevention of Torture suspended its visit to Rwanda because of “a series of obstructions imposed by the authorities” (The Conversation, 28/5/2018).

Consequently, Reyntjens highlights that the Rwandan Patriotic Front - due to realising that battles have to be fought in the media, as much, if not more than on the ground - has developed a formidable information and communication strategy stretching back to the civil war it launched in October 1990. He explicitly refers to a quote by Kagame, from an interview with Nick Gowing, published in Gowing’s report “Dispatches from Disaster Zones: Ominous Lessons Learnt from the Great Lakes and Eastern Zaire in Late 1996 and early 1997” on challenges and problems for information management in complex emergencies:

"We used communication and information warfare better than anyone. We have found a new way of doing things" (Gowing, 1998: 4).

Taking this into account, Reyntjens concludes that the information and communication strategy of the Rwandan government has involved, and still involves, paying those who can help promote the right image of the country. For a long time, this only implied public relations firms. But, as highlighted by the sponsorship deals, this now includes football clubs as well (The Conversation, 28/5/2018).

Likewise, Susan Thomson - an associate professor of peace and conflict studies at Colgate University, who was program officer for the United Nations Development Programme and

¹⁰ The Conversation (<https://theconversation.com/uk>) is an independent news website that only publishes articles written by academics and researchers (The Conversation, 2020).

present in Rwanda during the crisis - published a blogpost on the “Africa is a Country”¹¹ blog titled “Rwanda’s £30 million sleeve” (Africa Is a Country, 2019b).

In her blogpost, Thompson claims that the Rwandan government’s public relations strategy - whether told in foreign settings or on social media - aims to craft a particular image of Rwanda as a country on the move, fully restored from the violence of the genocide (Africa Is a Country, 2019b).

She highlights that the Rwandan Patriotic Front leadership, as part of its priorities upon taking power in August 1994, strategically and with considerable success, dispatched both the military intelligence services and public relations machinery to craft a singular victor’s narrative of Tutsi victims and Hutu killers (Africa Is a Country, 2019b).

Thompson moreover notes that the Rwandan Patriotic Front media handlers were able to quickly craft a singular Rwandan Patriotic Front-produced narrative that framed itself as the hero who saved Rwanda from chauvinist Hutu elites with ethnic hatred in their hearts; by means of working with expatriate journalists, aid workers and diplomats, all of whom were rightfully shocked at the human suffering the country experienced (Africa Is a Country, 2019b).

As this narrative is widely accepted in the West, Thompson claims that it has provided the current Rwandan Patriotic Front government with the moral authority to remake Rwanda in its vision of benevolent leaders governing the largely uneducated and rural masses. Hence, they promote an official public relations line proclaiming that, thanks to government-led initiatives to promote national unity, Rwandans now live in harmony. Ethnic labels - of being Hutu, Tutsi or Twa - are a thing of the past, a relic of previous regimes who manipulated ethnicity for their own selfish political goals; and with ethnic unity comes economic development for the country (Africa Is a Country, 2019b).

Thompson furthermore highlights how the subtext of the government’s message is also plain: Rwanda is a good place to do business, and welcomes foreign tourists and investment as part of the backbone of government plans to grow the economy. The Arsenal deal is the most recent iteration of this policy goal, offering a tidy convergence of President Kagame’s love of the

¹¹ Africa Is a Country (<https://africasacountry.com/>) is a site of opinion, analysis, and new writing founded by Sean Jacobs, an associate professor of international affairs at The New School, in 2009. The name - Africa Is a Country - is ironic and is a reaction to old and tired images of “Africa”. Hence, the authors aim to deliberately challenge and destabilize received wisdom about the African continent and its people in Western media - including “old (nationally oriented) media,” new social media as well as “global news media” (Africa Is a Country, 2019a; DevelopmentEducation.ie, 2015).

beautiful game and the desire to transform his Rwanda, whatever the costs to the average citizen (Africa Is a Country, 2019b).

Considering the above, she concludes that the “Visit Rwanda” nation branding campaign is yet another example of President Kagame’s grandiose vision for Rwanda, seductively disseminated as good economic stewardship. Moreover, according to her, the sponsorship deal is better seen as another example of a dictator who is out-of-touch with local realities, bent on pursuing vanity projects rather than actual development; and without any avenue for recourse for the Rwandese citizens, given the Rwandan Patriotic Front’s tight political grip on the country (Africa Is a Country, 2019b).

In sum, both Reyntjens and Thompson provide valid reasons to believe that Rwanda’s latest nation branding efforts account to a similar well-primed (dubious) public relations scheme, as was outlined by Corporate Europe Observatory’s report.

8.2 A genuine attempt at improving the country’s image abroad?

Whilst the last chapter certainly provides a multitude of reasons to believe that Rwanda’s current nation branding campaign is (yet another) attempt at whitewashing the authoritarian government’s policies, it would be unfair to reflect only one side of the argument and leave no room for other interpretations. As such, certain elements can be derived from Rwanda’s nation branding approach that reasonably provide a rationale to believe that it is considered part of the country’s diplomatic “toolbox”. Accordingly, several aspects can then be outlined that substantiate the government’s policy.

But, before going into these aspects, reference should be made to an important concept in this regard: the concept of “soft power”. This is a term coined by Nye (1990) to describe co-optive power in contrast to hard power such as military actions. It refers to a country’s ability to influence other countries’ behaviour or “the ability to shape what others want”, without using hard or coercive power - which is “the ability to change what others do” (Nye, 2004: 5-11). Nation branding, as done by Rwanda, can be an important tool in the development of a nation’s soft power. A successful nation branding campaign will, after all, help create a more favourable image among the international audience thus further enhancing a country’s soft power (Fan, 2008).

8.2.1 Commercial diplomacy to help spur tourists and foreign investors

As outlined above, Rwanda has an ambitious project related to international tourism, in which The Arsenal and Paris Saint Germain sponsorship deals appear to play an important role in achieving the goals of the government's strategy for economic development. Accordingly, the way the government has positioned the country in relation to the international community has changed over the last few years.

Whereas Rwandan diplomacy, after 1994, used to be more focused on traditional and (human) security diplomacy - for example, by contributing to United Nations and African Union peacekeeping troops, thereby altering the country's image as a peace kept nation state into that of a proactive peacekeeper (Holmes & Buscaglia, 2019: 104) - the government appears to have changed this focus over the last decade, into preferring more economic and commercial diplomacy; with the Rwanda Development Board in the foreground, as the central diplomatic actor.

A clear example of this can be seen with the appointment of the current High Commissioner for the Republic of Rwanda to the United Kingdom, Yamina Karitanyi. Prior to her posting in London, Karitanyi was the director of the Tourism and Conservation portfolios at the Rwanda Development Board (Rwandan High Commission United Kingdom, 2018). Hence, her appointment shows the importance given by the Rwandan government, to the role of the Rwandan Development Board (as main diplomatic actor in this regard) for the development of the country.

Furthermore, several efforts undertaken by the government show how attempts have been made to reposition the country as a more tourist and business friendly country. For example, there is the government acquisition of an airline company, the Rwandan subsidiary of the Ugandan-based SA Alliance Air. This airline was re-branded to RwandAir, and began to operate as the new national carrier (with passenger air transportation as its core activity) for Rwanda, on 1 December 2002 (The New Times, 25/8/2014). Whilst the government had hoped to privatise the airline once it became profitable, the process was abandoned in 2008 after it emerged that nobody at the time was willing to offer the amount expected from the sale. It has since been held, despite being lossmaking (Himbara, 2018b), as part of the government's long term plan to connect Rwanda to the rest of the world (RwandAir, 2019).

Another example is the construction in Kigali of a very large conference centre - the Kigali Convention Centre. This building was unveiled in July 2016, having cost reportedly \$300 million, thereby making it the most expensive building in Africa (Himbara, 2018a; Architectural Digest, 2019). With its construction, the Rwanda Development Board believes the country can position itself as the leading destination for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions in East Africa; thereby making it part of the country's tourism sector, as they look at events as one way to diversify and develop the economy. Yamina Karitanyi, who was the chief tourism officer at Rwanda Development Board at the time, was quoted as saying:

"meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions are not only a very powerful marketing tool for the country but also a big revenue generator" (The East African, 18/7/2015).

More recently, of course, are the sponsorship deals with Arsenal and Paris Saint Germain. As stated earlier, the rationale behind these partnerships is that they will improve the overall perception of Rwanda. This will then allow the country to earn more foreign currency from tourism, which can then be invested to the benefit of the Rwandan people (CNN, 13/8/2018; Sport/Voetbalmagazine, 11/12/19). Similarly, given its pivotal role as central diplomatic actor, it was once again the Rwanda Development Board (and not the foreign ministry) who announced both sponsorship deals.

In sum, these efforts give an idea of the rationale embedded in the commercial diplomacy strategy, adopted by the Rwandese government in order to develop the economy and reduce the reliance of the country on foreign aid.

8.2.2 Sports diplomacy by means of strategic sponsorships

Sports is widely recognised as a universal language that can break down cultural barriers. As such, sports diplomacy has increasingly become an important aspect of diplomatic practice. It can be defined as the "use of sports people and sporting events to engage, inform and create a favourable image among foreign publics and organizations, to shape their perceptions in a way that is (more) conducive to the sending government's foreign policy goals" (Murray and Pigman, 2014: 1101-1102).

Following the above made assumption that Rwanda's nation branding approach is part of its diplomatic toolbox, another argument that could be made is that the strategic sponsorships with

Arsenal and Paris Saint Germain, are part of a larger sports diplomacy play for Rwanda as the country looks to rebrand itself on the world stage. Indeed, by aligning itself with two of the most well-known football clubs in both the English and Francophone worlds, one could say that Rwanda has positioned itself as an actor in the “global sports scene” (John Wall Street, 12/12/2019).

It could furthermore be argued that the strategy applied by the Rwandese government in converting their image-building efforts to diplomatic outcomes, is the strategy of Vast Media Coverage. This strategy emphasizes that the conversion of sports diplomacy into favourable outcomes will be more effective when the endeavours are communicated globally. According to Cull (2009), a core approach to do this is through international media, radio, television, and internet. Raney & Bryant (2006) furthermore point out that, through vast media coverage, sports stars have become household names like Hollywood celebrities and the excitement of sports has been brought to virtually everyone. Hence, this strategy seems to have great potential for image-building efforts by nations (Abdi et.al., 2018: 369).

Given also that Paris Saint Germain’s president and chief executive officer, Nasser bin Ghanim Al-Khelaifi, has served as chairman of Qatar Sports Investments since 2011 (the same year Qatar Sports Investments obtained ownership of Paris Saint-Germain; The New York Times, 26/10/2012) and is well known for holding various leadership roles in Qatar (for example, in November 2013, he was made Minister without Portfolio in the Qatari government by Sheikh Tamim, the emir of Qatar; Le Parisien, 2/12/2013), the sponsorship deal with Paris Saint Germain could be seen as including traditional sports diplomacy (i.e. international sport consciously being employed as an instrument of diplomacy) by the Rwandan government, aiming to form a strategic alliance with Qatar.

Noteworthy in this regard is that Qatar Airways, a Qatar-state owned airlines, purchased a 60% stake in Rwanda's Bugesera International Airport on 9 December 2019 (5 days after the Visit Rwanda sponsorship deal was officially announced; English Twitter account of Paris Saint-Germain, 2019) and two months thereafter obtained a 49% stake in RwandAir (Al Jazeera, 5/2/2020; The Africa Report, 10/2/2020). As such, it is not inconceivable to believe that there is an element of reciprocity present in these deals.

Similarly, given the history between Rwanda (especially president Kagame) and France, the partnership between the Paris Saint Germain - a French football club - and Rwanda could also be seen as including an element of traditional sports diplomacy by the Rwandan government

(John Wall Street, 12/12/2019). It could thereby be argued that President Macron's willingness, on the 5th of April 2019, to open the history archives to a commission of historians and researchers investigating France's role in the Rwandan genocide 25 years ago was seen as a catalyst by the Rwandan government for a warming of the relationship between two long-time adversaries (The Guardian, 5/4/2019). Nevertheless, as long as accusations of complicity in the deaths of an estimated 800,000 people have not officially been acknowledged by the French, diplomatic relations between Kigali and Paris remain clouded. For example, to this day, France does not have a full-time ambassador based in Kigali (La France au Rwanda, 2020). As a result, this rationale seems less likely.

8.2.3 Celebrities as ambassador for “brand Rwanda”

In 2018, the Australian-American actress Portia de Rossi gave her wife, Ellen DeGeneres, an on-camera 60th birthday gift: a trip to Africa culminating in a visit to a new campus named for Ms. DeGeneres to be built at The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund in Kinigi, Rwanda. The fund continues the work of Fossey, the naturalist who made Rwanda's gorillas her cause and who was murdered in 1985 (The New York Times, 23/11/2019).

Since that gift was given, on live television, Ms. de Rossi has been to Kinigi to break ground for the campus (and shared videos and photos of the trip), and Ms. DeGeneres has visited Rwanda (and shared videos and photos from the trip). The couple has a combined 80 million followers on Instagram (The New York Times, 23/11/2019).

Whilst in Rwanda, the couple met President Paul Kagame in Kigali and also took pictures with the chief executive officer of the Rwanda Development Board Clare Akamanzi, holding the “Visit Rwanda” campaign placard (The East African, 2/6/2018).



Figure 7: Portia de Rossi and Ellen DeGeneres in Rwanda¹²

For Rwanda, associating with a global “brand” as big as DeGeneres, who has 78 million followers on Twitter, is likely to give the country more visibility in its marketing efforts as a high-end tourism destination, as well as towards its gorilla conservation agenda (The East African, 2/6/2018).

Ellen DeGeneres is, however, not the only celebrity to make a highly publicized visit to Rwanda. On 10 October 2019, Brazilian footballer David Luiz visited Rwanda as part of the “Visit Rwanda” partnership between the Government of Rwanda and Arsenal football club (The New Times, 9/10/2019a).



Figure 8: David Luiz visiting Rwanda together with his mother and fiancée¹³

¹² The East African, 2/6/2018.

¹³ Visit Rwanda, 2019.

David, accompanied by his mother and fiancée (and a media team, of course) began his trip by visiting the Kigali Genocide Memorial, where he paid respects to the victims of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. He then went on to meet president Kagame, before heading to Singita Kwitonda Lodge in the Northern Province. There, he planted an indigenous tree as part of efforts to reforest areas surrounding the stunning Volcanoes National Park, which is home to the endangered mountain gorillas (Arsenal Football Club, 14/10/2019).

On his second day, David and his family trekked through the volcanoes to see Rwanda's mountain gorillas and then attended a national league football match at Kigali Regional Stadium where he met players, young Rwandans from the Irebero Goalkeeper Training Centre and enthusiastic fans. David concluded his trip by meeting hundreds of Arsenal fans at the Kigali Convention Centre where he answered questions on his experience in Rwanda and his life and football career (Arsenal Football Club, 14/10/2019).

When considering the notion of nation branding as an aspect of diplomacy, even simple praise broadcast to millions of followers can easily be considered a diplomatic act (Jones, 2017: 326). Inevitably, the visits of high-profile celebrities such as Ellen DeGeneres and David Luiz function as an integral part of building "brand Rwanda". With the rise of market hegemony and less state-centric governance, celebrities as commodified, branded personalities become not simply part of a political culture (Daley, 2013) or "unorthodox diplomatic community" (Louis, 2012), but totemic in attaching value to the events, places, or people they endorse - however tacitly. As such, visits as those by Ellen DeGeneres and David Luiz; and statements such as:

"I came to Rwanda with the curiosity to learn about the country, considering what it went through 25 years ago. I have to say I was inspired by how fast it has bounced back" (The New Times, 13/10/2019b).

can be considered a triumph for a government attempting to change the perception of the country to the outside world.

9 Conclusion

Based on what was discussed above, it can perhaps best be said that Rwanda's latest nation branding effort is ambiguous.

On the one hand, the Rwandan government's history of using public relations firms to work on deflecting the (western) media's attention and criticism from the "actual" situation in the country, has been well documented. Hence, it is not unreasonable to expect that we are once again dealing with more of the same; which was also highlighted by academics specialized in Rwanda, such as Filip Reyntjens and Susan Thomson, who have publicly expressed their concerns with regard to the Arsenal "Visit Rwanda" sponsorship deal.

On the other hand, nation branding could also be seen as a logical outcome of globalization and neoliberal policies, which have made it easier for people, capital and goods to flow across borders. In response, nation-states, such as Rwanda, are expected to make themselves more attractive to foreigners and foreign capital; and nation branding is one of the tools available that states seem to deem handy to serve this goal.

All things considered, by focusing on nation branding, Rwanda's foreign policy has - in my opinion - (unwillingly) limited itself to the laws of the marketing world, in the hope that these can manufacture a good image and as such attain objectives - such as attracting a lot of foreign visitors and investors to the country - which are perhaps too good to be true.

There seem to be two reasons for this.

Firstly, there is the poorly developed Rwandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is led by Vincent Biruta - who is a career politician and bureaucrat, but technically a medical doctor - and has an inadequately trained diplomatic corps that is unable to wield the country's soft power to its fullest extent. As a consequence, when it comes to foreign policy in Rwanda, there is a decentralization noticeable, in the sense that specific areas in foreign affairs are being delegated to the ministries - such as the Rwandan Development Board - that deal with the subject.

Secondly, there is the fact that the identity of Rwanda is personified by its President Paul Kagame, who is globally seen as the ambassador of (brand) Rwanda. His dubious reputation reflects on the image that exists of the country abroad. Furthermore, due to his enduring hold on power, the impression is given that without Kagame, Rwanda has no future. But then, that

very argument implies that what he has achieved is not sustainable because if it were sustainable, it should endure without him. In addition, the (authoritarian) leadership model that is currently in place in Rwanda has as its downside that it failed the African continent terribly. Only a few authoritarian leaders are seen as good leaders, who focused on developing their nation's economies, and placed their nations' interests above their own, whilst the vast majority failed in doing this. This perception, even if it is true for Kagame or not, reflects on Rwanda's image unwillingly or not.

As a result, Rwanda's approach to foreign affairs resembles more a business plan with a set of actions (such as nation branding) and resources devoted to them, used to score economically; rather than an all-inclusive top-down and bottom up streamlined national strategy. This has, as shown above, certainly provided the country with a lot of visibility and perhaps even diplomatic clout, but there still seems to be an overall lack of sustainability.

Hence, moving forward, Rwanda should no longer place its faith solely in nation branding campaigns, by public relations firms who aim to create an identity for the country and its "ambassadorial" leader, but rather see it as an add on (e.g. when announcing projects, initiatives and events happening in the country) to an active foreign policy strategy. The only way this seems possible, in my opinion, is through the development of its foreign ministry and its diplomatic institutions.

10 Limitations and suggestions for future research

Whilst my study has covered part of the groundwork on Rwanda's approach to nation branding, the limited scope in which it was written – a master's thesis – means that there is still some leeway for more in-depth research. This research could be a follow-up to this thesis, with new information that might emerge given the limited time that has elapsed since the announcement of the sponsorship deals; or could be focused on various aspects that have been dealt with in this thesis. For example, research could focus more in depth on the functioning and the role of the Rwandan Development Board as the main diplomatic actor in Rwanda's foreign policy. This research could perhaps even be in comparative scope with the Singapore Economic Development Board, on which it was based. Another example of follow-up research could be to scrutinize Kagame's role in managing the image of Rwanda and how his persona reflects on the country. Inspiration could furthermore be drawn from the interviews that were conducted for this master's thesis. Indeed, the answers provided by my respondents deal with, amongst others, several topics that were only partially covered or not covered in this thesis. For example, the aspect of foreign aid utilisation by the Rwandan government and the role of budget support by foreign governments herein. Lastly, since my master's thesis was written within the scope of my international relations and diplomacy study, there still remains room for research from other disciplines. In this regard, the most evident fields would be marketing, communication science, African studies and development studies.

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Annex

Appendix A: Sample email sent to potential interviewees

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Thomas Voets and I am an international relations and diplomacy student at the University of Antwerp, currently doing research on Rwanda's approach to nation branding. This research is supervised by Prof. Dr. Jan Melissen, who is an international recognized expert in international relations and public diplomacy (his publications can be consulted on <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/staff/jan-melissen/>).

If possible, and at your convenience, I would like to have a short interview, so you can elaborate on your point of view, which will allow me to get a better understanding of and more insight on Rwanda's approach to nation branding. Your participation would provide me with an invaluable added value to the successful completion of my research. Hence, your help would be very much appreciated.

If you have any question, you can contact me by phone (+32 487 93 29 22) or e-mail (thomas.voets@student.uantwerpen.be).

Kind regards,

Thomas Voets

Student Master of International Relations and Diplomacy Studies

Appendix B: Interviews

B.1 Interview with Dr. Robert Govers (Whatsapp call 17/03/2020)

Dr. Robert Govers is an independent international adviser, scholar, speaker and author on the reputation of cities, regions and countries; and is chairman of the International Place Branding Association. He typically advises in areas such as place identity, image, reputation, economic competitiveness, tourism policy and strategy, educational policy, tourism and investment promotion; and major international events. He approaches this from a strategic reputation management perspective, which is based on the premise that places build reputation by what they do and not by what they say. As he has held positions in South Africa, the Netherlands, Belgium and has been involved in many consultancy projects and advisory boards for reputable organisations (i.a. the International Air Transport Association and the European Commission), he was able to provide an insider's view on various aspects in the field of nation branding.

Q1: What is your opinion of the concept of nation branding?

Govers: The whole idea of the nation as brand, I think most people would agree that it's a valid concept. After all, a brand is nothing more or less than a way of trying to influence the reputation, the awareness and the perception surrounding the brand. I think you cannot deny that cities, regions and countries have that. The name of a city or a country has a certain name recognition and evokes certain associations. Thus, the fact that countries can be considered "brands" is beyond any doubt. What does that mean? If you translate it into the active verb of "branding", then you have views, both in literature and in practice, that argue that it is a perspective on policy. In other words, actively thinking about how to adapt policies in such a way that they benefit the country's image. Then, of course, there are those who talk about communication campaigns and advertisements right away. In fact, that is also what is most visible in practice. Obviously then, what people see the most are the advertising campaigns. But, there are a lot of academics who say that the whole idea of advertisements is ridiculous. I am one of them by the way. I tell my clients "do not give ridiculous amounts of money to advertisement campaigns because that does not work". But, this does not mean that the whole concept of "branding" can be discarded. So, both in literature and in practice, you see a lot of confusion about what the concept exactly means. I think the critics are right to criticise the propaganda and advertising campaigns, but then there are many (and I am one of them) who say that, the fact that things often go wrong in practice, is not an argument for saying that the whole concept does not make sense; because there are also examples of countries that are not using advertising campaigns, but do have an active nation branding program and are successful with it. For example Bhutan, with its gross national happiness index, the happiness institute;

or Estonia, the e-state with e-residency and data embassies. These have an active program of policy aimed at improving the policy on the one hand, of course, but also at contributing to the country's image.

Q2: The image of Rwanda, with its history of genocide, is to a certain extent negative. Do you think a nation branding campaign, could change the perception of the country to the outside world?

Govers: You are talking about a campaign and that implies that you are going to communicate something. In other words, that you are going to do something with advertisements and advertising campaigns. This is a tactic that public relations agencies, advertising agencies and brand agencies use. In fact, this is often the wrong starting point, because it is not proven at all that advertising is the best way to improve a country's image. I certainly think that when it comes to countries that are struggling with a negative image based on a problematic past, one can argue whether that is actually the right way to go about changing it. It can even be counterproductive. There are examples of regions, Dutch Limburg for example, or Groningen, which are regions that have to deal with shrinkage and very often get negative press coverage because of the shrinkage problem. They then start advertising campaigns using slogans such as: "nothing beats Groningen" or "please come to Limburg, it's so beautiful here" and you can observe that those campaigns actually achieve the opposite effect, because people start to think that, if they start with advertising, it has to be really bad. Thus, you have to be careful with it. But, this does not imply that the idea of "nation branding" is wrong.

Q3: Would you consider nation branding to be part of a government's diplomatic activities

Govers: I notice that many of my colleagues in public diplomacy are critical of nation branding because they think it is about logos, slogans and advertising campaigns, but that is not true, it is only a small part of it. I always tell them that nation branding is nothing more than an extension of the idea of public diplomacy, in which public diplomacy is about how to interact and how to communicate about your policy as a government with consumers abroad. Nation branding goes beyond that because it tries to show not only the public actors, not only the central government but also regional governments, the cities in a country and the private actors (large exporters, companies with activities abroad) and even civil society (for example, sports and culture), in order to try and show consistently to the outside world what a country stands for. Thus, it is more about a perspective on policy and how to use those things that are already happening in a country in such a way that it will be reinforcing the country's brand. In other words, it is often about strategy. I think any country can do that, especially countries that have a negative image. But, of course, the challenge is bigger because you have to fight against certain clichés and stereotypes that people have. That is very difficult because clichés and stereotypes are very persistent and difficult to get out of people's minds. That is why it is all the more important to not see nation branding as a campaign, but as a strategy in which you try to get all actors and sectors in a country moving in the same direction. A kind of national purpose or national strategy, in which one develops a national idea of how the country wants to position itself internationally. Then, through incentives (this

can be through subsidies, but also simply by actively cooperating with actors), try to get everyone to do the things they are doing in such a way that it clearly strengthens the brand. Hence, the examples of Bhutan and Estonia, where you see that these programmes become part of the tourism sector, but also of the commercial sector and in export companies. They are more or less doing it automatically, because they are proud of the direction in which the country is moving. This then creates a visual effect that can be much stronger than what you can achieve with a campaign.

Q4: Would you say then that nation branding aims to emphasise and bring out “national pride”?

Govers: Certainly, it is very connected with that. It is about defining a national purpose, a national goal, of what we represent, who we are, It is always about identity. What is our past, how has it changed and based on that, where do we want to go? What does our future look like and how do we want to communicate that by positioning ourselves towards the outside world? Thus, you try to achieve two things at the same time: on the one hand, reputation building to the outside world, and on the other hand, certainly national pride. These things go hand in hand, because without that national pride it is impossible to achieve your goals. Once again, it is all about how you implement things. How your projects, investments, export products,... the things that are already happening, how you are going to streamline them in a certain direction. You have to do this jointly therefore, as a government cannot do this alone. That is why, when advising clients, both on a municipal and a national level, we hold various consultative meetings with the government as well as the business community. For example, last year we helped the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs for an assignment, in which the National Olympic Committee, representatives of the cultural sectors, the business community, large exporters (Heineken and Philips for example) were all involved. That is essential because these are all non-state actors that help create a very strong image to the outside world.

Q5: Would it be correct to assume that these companies then become affiliated to the country as representatives of the country?

Govers: That is pretty important. And it is essential that they are willing to show their pride. For example, there is this issue with Philips in the Netherlands, since Philips does not want to profile itself as a Dutch company. Americans think Phillips is American and Japanese think Philips is Japanese, and Philips want to keep it that way. Companies like them are, for example, less prepared to do so. Back when I was teaching at the KULeuven, I had a student who examined for his thesis whether the Flemish business community was willing to promote the brand Flanders instead of Belgium. The answer was usually negative. Because, if you look at the big exporters, you are of course talking about the beers. They say that if they sell Belgian beer in America, they can ask for premium, because Belgian beer seems to be very popular. As such, they indicate that they would be crazy to try and make a Flemish beer out of it, because then no one would understand anything about it anymore. Thus, they just keep it

that way, it stays Belgian beer and chocolate. Of course, companies do not always have a connection with a certain level. But, if they do, it can work to your advantage.

Q6: How do you see the role of foreigners who visit a country and report positively about it (e.g. on social media), as part of a nation branding strategy ?

Govers: Social media is, of course, important in this respect. Absolutely, it is essential. But, having said that, when you talk about countries in comparison to commercial brands (where you talk about the brand policy of companies), you see that with countries and cities, the big challenge is that they are constantly in news reporting and on mass media; whereas commercial brands or companies almost never get discussed on these platforms, unless there are major calamities. Countries are constantly in the news and influencing that is the big challenge. Thus, social media is very important, but in the end only a drop in the ocean; because it is still the case that, including on social media, this is mainly driven by the news media (i.e. what journalists write). That is the difference with commercial branding. Commercial brands invest a lot in social media because they know they can dominate it, since they have much more power compared to the traditional news media. For countries this is very different. Hence, why the challenge around nation branding is so much bigger than with commercial brands. Why is that so? Because advertising is much less effective and because it is almost impossible to fight against the news media. Thus, if you then bring positive narratives into the world... I refer once again to Estonia. Not much is written about Estonia in the news media, but you can see that the news reporting is quite positively dominated by the initiatives they do, such as e-residence. Quite a lot has appeared in the international media about this. This is because of the policy they pursue. By large investment projects and initiatives. But, of course, that makes social media and reviews of people who have visited the country not unimportant. That remains very important, especially for countries that have a very large tourism sector or welcome many international visitors.

Q6: Would you say sustainability is a key aspect of reaping the maximum benefits from nation branding ?

Govers: It should really be a long-term initiative, where there is a kind of investment program with initiatives that succeed each other. What is very important in nation branding and what you also see in various studies is that presence is very important. The more you export internationally, the bigger your economy, the greater the interaction with foreign countries, the easier it becomes, of course, to bring that out into the open. That is of course a problem for a country like Rwanda. I would assume that they do not have that many big exporters, so not that big of an international presence, which does not make it easy.

Q7: How do you see the role of public relations firms in nation branding, particularly for low income countries who do not have the capacity to invest large sums of money in their own economy?

Govers: I am not a big fan. We always say that, if you have a good story and interesting initiatives that is more than enough. Take Bhutan with its gross national happiness, for example, which is just something that the king came up with: “wellbeing is more important to us than pure income and pure economic growth, so we are going to do something with it”. They then started developing various initiatives around that gross national happiness. No public relations firm has ever worked on that, it is just a good story. As such, the only thing you need is, to know a few journalists, call a few journalists and ask them to write about it. If you have a good story, they will. So actually, to be honest, the moment you have to spend a lot of money on public relations firms and advertising you have already lost. You need to have a strong story and then the media will pick it up. But, of course, that makes it very difficult, because it is about togetherness, bringing people together and creating consensus in a country. Therefore, if you do it right, it may not even have to be that expensive. But, it is very difficult. While, of course, public relations firms and branding agencies sell the idea that it is not difficult at all, but that you just have to throw a lot of money at it. That is actually just the opposite

Q8: Would you then say that nation branding is in essence a natural top-down and bottom-up process that gets highlighted in the media, in particular the foreign media ?

Govers: Yes, you have to do it based on projects, investments, initiatives and events. Events can do a lot. If you do it in a way that appeals to people's imagination, in an inventive way, in a creative way, it may well be that you get media attention for it. A very good example of something that has received a lot of free publicity: in Eindhoven they work on technology, design and knowledge, but they really wanted to organize a marathon. Those responsible for brand Eindhoven then said “why a marathon, that doesn't fit our brand, everyone does a marathon, so who cares”. They then started thinking and decided to organise an “unofficial” marathon, where the criterion was that people had to run on their feet but could use everything else in the field of innovation and technology to try and go faster. This turned it into an alternative story and something like this is picked up very quickly by the media, these kind of initiatives.

B.2 Interview with Dr. Jonathan R. Beloff (Skype call 19/03/2020)

Dr. Jonathan R. Beloff is a teaching Fellow at the department of Politics and International Studies, in the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London. He recently completed his PhD dissertation on Rwanda's foreign policy entitled "The Evolution of Rwandan Foreign Policy from

Genocide to Globalisation”, which is going to be published in a book titled "Foreign Policy in Post-Genocide Rwanda: Elite Perceptions of Global Engagement". His academic focus is on economic development and international relations in the African Great Lakes Region; and he has previously worked for the National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide (Kigali, Rwanda), the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and Vad Vashem. As his research deals, amongst others, with Rwanda’s foreign policy and as he has conducted field work in Rwanda, he was able to provide me with insider knowledge and an expert’s view on aspects dealt with in my thesis.

Q1 : Are you familiar with Rwanda's sponsorship deals with football clubs Arsenal and Paris Saint Germain, and if so, what is your opinion of these sponsorship deals?

Beloff: Right of the bat, you cannot underestimate the importance of the Rwandan Development Board in all of this. Whilst, Serge Kamuhinda, the former Chief Operations Officer of the Rwandan Development Board, would always call President Kagame the true commercial ambassador of the country, it really fundamentally is, the Rwandan Development Board. Rwandan diplomacy is changing. Away from security diplomacy, away from traditional diplomacy, to economic and commercial diplomacy. Rwanda is really focusing on its engagement with the international community, with the Rwandan Development Board right in the foreground. It was not the foreign ministry who announced the Arsenal deal or the Paris Saint Germain deal. The foreign ministry had very little to do with Ellen DeGeneres visiting together with her wife. It was all the Rwandan Development Board. They are key. The current High Commissioner for the Republic of Rwanda to the United Kingdom, Yamina Karitanyi, was the director of tourism at the Rwandan Development Board. This is how important their role is in the development of the country, which is rooted in the genocide and trying to prevent another genocide by having economic diplomacy

Q2: Would you then consider the use of these sponsorship deals as an aspect of Rwanda's diplomatic toolbox?

Beloff: It is. It fundamentally is. Sponsorships are part of Rwanda’s foreign policy. They are using them with the aim of separating the identity of Rwanda in the international community. When hotel Rwanda came out, it was the first movie that really discussed the genocide. I have written a book chapter about the promise of the movie, in which I refer to a conversation with Jeanette Kagame, where we asked: “how can you and your husband watch this?” She responded: “well, at least people now know that Rwanda exists and can learn about it”. So, for the longest time, the identity of Rwanda in the international community was genocide. Whether the genocide guilt card or just the misery of genocide. Through the Rwandan Development Board’s engagement with these sponsorship deals, this identity is radically changing away from the genocide. If you look at the Rwandan Development Board’s strategy, they only mention the genocide in a few words. Everything else is about the nature, the culture, etc. That is what these sponsorships are about. They aim to get people to look at the different designs of the

Visit Rwanda logo on the sleeves, billboards,... and for people to look up what it is about. And it is weird, because I lived by Arsenal stadium, and a lot of the die-hard fans who go to the matches are English working class people, who were now going on vacation to Africa. In essence, because the English premier league gets like a billion views, this is just seen as a massive billboard for the Rwandan Development Board; which they use to portray the changing identity of Rwanda. Not just for tourism, but also for investment. You have to keep in mind, of course, that it is anecdotal that this is working. As such, they claim that Google searches on Rwanda have radically changed, but have never been able to fundamentally illustrate that. However, I would not be surprised at all if that would be the case.

Q3: From your own perspective, do you believe these sponsorships are part of a long-term strategy or rather of a short-term effort to gain visibility on the progress made in the country?

Beloff: Fundamentally, there has been mass debate about the usefulness of advertising, which I think sometimes goes more into development and international aid, rather than if the advertising works or not. But, fundamentally, it is part of a long-term strategy, to help diversify foreign income in Rwanda and to dramatically change dependency. Not just dependency from coffee and tea, which were the primary sources of foreign capital income, but also minerals. Furthermore, it is also to diversify the economy and to supplement a growing economy aiming to reduce reliance on foreign aid. Whilst some of it is definite - for example, Vision 2020 - it is part of this long term strategy to try and boost development through the tourist industry. Then, by increasing government revenues, being able to decrease reliability on foreign aid. And, when I did my field work in 2014-2015, 40% of the national budget income was dependent on foreign aid. Now, it is around 30 or 32%. The government says one thing on the New Times of Rwanda, but when you read the budget, then you realise something different. There is a source of mine in the national bank, who says that the “unofficial” goal is for foreign aid to account for only 15% of government income. The only way to do that is through development, and tourism is the big thing they want to grow and develop. Two years prior to the Arsenal deal, there was the desire with Rwandan officials to sponsor a football club. An international known club was already been discussed, because they saw it as a massive billboard that million people would see. Moreover, Arsenal was the number 1 team in Rwanda, followed by Manchester United then Chelsea.

Q4: Do you then believe the choice for Arsenal was made with the idea of getting a lot of Rwandese people involved?

Beloff: I would say that there is this weird dynamic. For example, there is a goalie for Kigali sports I know, who discussed the impact of satellite TV on the Rwandan premier league. Before 1994, they were heavily fascinated with the domestic league, but that dramatically changed because of the media. As such, I would say there is certainly some national pride, no doubt, even with Rwandese Manchester United fans. I spoke to many and even the leader of Rwandan football between 94-96, who was responsible for trying to rebuild the league. He is a Manchester United Fan. “Look”, he said, “we have

something on the international stage.” That is the thing, dealing with social dynamics. This government is trying to forge social unity as a response to genocide. But, once again, focusing on the tourist industry in Rwanda. There are thousands of hotel beds in Kigali. The competition is so large that there are so many hotels where hardly any beds are booked. This campaign is a strategy to help boost tourism and get people into these beds. That alongside the promise of the conferences, exhibitions and all that, to try to help these hotels. Actually, one hotel owner in Kigali that I know has 20-30 rooms and only gets 2-3 rooms filled a night. He is very supportive of the Visit Rwanda campaign, because they try to get more people to visit the country. Thus, compensating him as well as the Rwandan government. So, all in all, I would say there is this weird dynamic.

Q5: Would you say then that these sponsorships are part of a multi-stakeholder agreement decided on by the government and then implemented by the Rwandan Development Board?

Beloff: The Arsenal and Paris Saint Germain deal are fundamentally part of this grand strategy for tourism development. Because, in 2013, they really developed the national park. They developed the infrastructure there, which was needed as it was poorly managed after the genocide. There was a lot of work that needed to be done. I did not realise it at that time, but when I lived in Rwanda, 2012-2013-2014, it was the big focus. Let us develop the infrastructure for tourism domestically, before we try to attract foreigners in.

Q6: Do you believe that the Rwandan government first wants to focus on tourism and then use it as a leverage to develop in other fields to try and gain more influence and a better image?

Beloff: The image management is a loose connection to the tourism. Especially after the M23. There is, and I know what I said earlier, more like a looking past at how the Visit Rwanda has changed the identity of what most people think of Rwanda from genocide to now. At the time that the deals were being announced and the discussions were happening, my informants in the Rwandan Development Board and in other government administrations, always considered this a secondary thing in the grand strategy of development. Because, fundamentally, the country’s identity will depend on Kagame. He has done a very good job of trying to be reliable. He has replaced Yoweri Museveni as the go to African internationally, which is one of the reasons for the current tensions between Rwanda and Uganda. If you look at the G7 and all these international meetings. When leaders deal with the global south, it is now Kagame; and Kagame knows the language of the international community and he knows the norms that, especially liberal, world leaders like: women, ICT, health. They love this stuff, and he knows how to play in that very well. I just submitted a paper about women empowerment in Rwanda; and there is a lot of political rationale for this. History customs and norms. Kagame knows this. You know, 10 years ago he and Jeffrey Sachs were very close with each other. When Sachs was the de facto development specialist that everyone wanted to talk to, Kagame and him had a good relationship. So, by leading the African Union, the image of Rwanda in the international relations and global leadership realm has

changed, with tourism being a big part. But, in essence, Kagame takes this role of de facto African leader everyone can go to. His country is stable. His country is doing well and it is developing well.

Q7: Would you say that Rwanda's tries to portray this image of being an example of how development can steer a country in a different way?

Beloff: In a sense, it is one of their dirty little secrets. They like being this case study of foreign aid utilisation. There are three government agencies that are directly monitoring corruption. I talked to a lot of people in the national bank. Specifically to Renato Decussi, who is the one who gets the checks from these foreign governments for direct budget support. He goes through many examinations to ensure that money is not wasted. A good amount of that deals with historical reasoning. Namely, the corruption of Habyarimana and how the Rwandan Patriotic Front does not want to repeat that. Some of it deals with the country's needs of money. So, they do not want to waste it. They use this as a leverage against the international community. "If you want to criticise us - especially after the M23 - then use us as a case study to show other African states about the proper use of foreign aid." And, western states know that. Someone in the British high commission in Kigali told me that it is a weird balancing act they have to do because Rwanda is one of the only countries where foreign aid is working. The Rwandan government knows that. They also mention it in conversations. Even the foreign minister has said it as well.

Q8: It seems as if the identity of Rwanda is focused on Kagame and on how he portrays himself. Is the diplomatic corps then perhaps not being underused?

Beloff: I would call Kagame the number one ambassador. However, there is a decentralization when it comes to foreign policy in the country. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a mess, with the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Richard Sezibera, being sick and being replaced by Vincent Biruta, who is a career politician and a career bureaucrat; but technically a medical doctor. However, there has always been a decentralization in the sense that specific areas in foreign affairs are being delegated to the ministries that deal with the subject. For instance, when it comes to the economic and commercial diplomacy and when it comes to foreign aid, the foreign ministry has very little to do with any of that. It is the ministry of finance, economic planning and the Rwandan Development Board. Especially, the national bank, played a major role in foreign aid negotiations during the M23 allegations. They were one of the primary factors for why Germany did not cut their foreign aid. Because, John Rwangombwa, the Governor of the national bank, had personal relationships with many in Germany. He was negotiating and talking with them. It was not the foreign ministry. When it comes to peacekeeping, the foreign ministry will always say go to the Rwandan Patriotic Front. The Rwandan Patriotic Front has fundamental control over the formal relations with the UN or the African Union, that deal with peacekeeping. Not the foreign ministry. So, in essence, whilst Kagame is the "big guy"; fundamentally, a lot of topics are given to the ministries that deal with them. But, the reason why Richard Sezibera was appointed to be the foreign minister, was to professionalise the foreign ministry. However, he got very

sick and the government responded horrific, claiming he was not sick. Just a horrific response. But, not a very unusual one. Now, Vincent Biruta. He is not a Rwandan Patriotic Front person, but is still considered a very important person in the government. This shows how the Rwandan government organises itself. It is a conciliatory democratic state, if you want to call it that. It does not want opposition parties, but everybody speaks together. Vincent Biruta is a big face to that. I have known him since 2012 and he has always had that role. Unfortunately, if you really want to know where the foreign ministry is now. It is massively underutilised. They just developed a diplomacy school like a year or two ago.

Q9: Would you then say the nation branding could be seen as an alternative to the lack of development of the foreign ministry?

Beloff: Yes, it is a very diverse foreign affairs. With commercial diplomacy, the Arsenal deal and all that dealing with Rwandan Development Board rather than the foreign ministry. Commercial diplomacy and economic diplomacy is the direction the country is going to for now.

B.3 Interview with Dr. Filip Reyntjens (Skype call 24/03/2020)

Filip Reyntjens is a Belgian constitutionalist and emeritus Professor of Law and Politics at the University of Antwerp. He is a specialist in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Rwanda, the first country he worked on and to which he still devotes a large part of his publications. His research focuses on constitutional law, development policy and the history of Great Lakes Africa.

Q1: Can you tell me something about the foreign policy of Rwanda?

Reyntjens: Well, I would say that there is a combination of factors. If you look at Visit Rwanda, the sponsorship deals with Arsenal and Paris Saint Germain; and also the fact that Kagame last year was the president of the African Union, and the East African community, that is all good of course. But, it does not say much in the sense that the presidency is a rotating role. It is not because it was Rwanda's turn in the East African community. But, because Rwanda had not been the president of the African Union since some time. So, that is how it goes actually. It is not necessarily a big recognition of what Rwanda is doing. But, in the end, it gets promoted in Rwanda as a major acknowledgement of what they have been doing, of course. Here we have a combination of two factors. One, if you think of those shirt sponsorships of Visit Rwanda. Rwanda has an ambitious project related to international tourism, in the broad sense. So, tourism last year was about \$450 million. That's quite a bit for a small economy like Rwanda. And you have to see that in relation to Belgium. So, there is the shirt advertising; but there

is also the construction in Kigali of a very large and very expensive conference centre - the Kigali international conference center. That cost them about 400 million dollars. They also invested a lot in the national airline, RwandAir. That costs the state 15 million dollars a year to operate, because that company is loss-making. Not to mention the other investments. Because they're buying airplanes and it all costs an awful lot of money. So there is a package there. There's tourism: kigambe, the gorillas the kivu lake and very chic resorts where one pays about \$12000 a night. So there is a coherent - if it will turn out to be realistic is something else, since it required a lot of investment and put a very heavy pressure on the exchequer - rational ambition to develop tourism as one of the monetary sources that the country has. After all, the country doesn't have that much else.

Then there is also the fact that Rwanda is actually quite widely and generally criticised for its lack of democracy, lack of respect for human rights, inequality, poverty, etc. and this is then attempted through expressions of good bureaucratic governance. In areas of health care, education and in general a very modern way of doing things. This is Kigali. The gap between Kigali and the rest of the country is phenomenal. If you look every day in the New Times, the newspaper of the regime. It is almost like a newspaper as we have here. I mean, it' s about things we're doing. But for an average Rwandan, who doesn't read the paper to begin with, that' s very far from his bed. There is quite a bit of criticism about the way the country is run, and the only way the regime can - and does - counter that criticism is to make a good impression.

Q2: It seems like the focus of the government is on promoting a positive image of Kigali to the outside world, is this policy shared by its citizens?

Reyntjens: No, certainly not. The citizens of Kigali are not involved in policymaking. It is a hard dictatorship. But, it is good for the better class of Kigali. For example, in the last few weeks houses of poor people have been demolished in a very aggressive way in order to make room for better houses for richer people. This is officially done in the name of fighting flood danger in case of heavy rainfall. So, in Kigali there are a lot of people who see how beautiful and clean it all is. Because for a foreigner who only goes to Kigali, it is of course very spectacular. A nice city, very well built. The roads are perfect. It is all cleaned with a toothbrush, so to speak. Anyway, it is absolutely phenomenal. So the impression is very good. But of course, those foreigners who work there, they do not come out of town. They only leave to go to the national park or to Lake Kivu. But, I mean, they do not end up on those hills, where more than 80% of the Rwandans live.

Q3: How are Rwanda's relations with other states?

Reyntjens: Relations with neighbouring countries are bad to very bad. There is nearly war with Uganda. There is nearly war with Burundi. The Rwandan army has repeatedly invaded Congo. There have also been very conflicting relations with the fourth neighbouring country, Tanzania. So, it is all not going very well. Elsewhere in Africa, I do hear that - including in South Africa - people are often irritated by

the arrogance of the Rwandans. They all know it better. Everyone should listen to them and what they do, they do well; what the others do is not good. That irritates quite a few people. There is a very strong feeling in the regime – I am not talking about the ordinary Rwandans of course - of being special. And special means special good. A bit like a chosen people kind of mentality. That irritates some, of course.

B.4 Interview with Mr. Peter Verlinden (Skype call 30/03/2020)

Peter Verlinden is an independent journalist, specialized in foreign countries and especially in Central Africa. He also writes, moderates debates, guides tours in Africa, the Arab world and Quebec; and lectures at the University of Leuven and several graduate schools. As he is married to a Rwandan and has furthermore written several articles on the sponsorship deals of Rwanda with Arsenal and Paris Saint Germain, he was able to provide me with an expert's view on the various aspects that encompass these deals.

Q1: What is your opinion of Rwanda's sponsorship deals with Arsenal and Paris Saint Germain?

Verlinden: I have been working with Rwanda for more than 30 years now, and I dare say as a journalist, who is now also a researcher - because I retired from the VRT in the summer, but had an assignment at the university in Leuven for 10 years - I try to substantiate what I do on this subject as academically as possible. So, I am not talking purely as a journalist, but I also try to go a step further. When it comes the whole tourism policy, including the sponsorship deals and all that. I have indeed written a small piece which was published in de Standaard. But I also have a longer piece, from when the Arsenal contract was signed, on vrtnieuws.be; and a piece that was published by Sport Voetbal Magazine, which is largely based on my research work. Now, what is it all about in essence? I have been trying to figure out what such a sponsorship contract – both the Paris Saint Germain as the arsenal one - entails. In both cases it is about 10 million euros per year. So together, that is about 20 million euros per year (probably, because those amounts are not officially released). This - coincidentally, or not - roughly corresponds (apart from a few million) to the Belgian amount for development cooperation per year. This is a somewhat bizarre coincidence, but it is true. Rwanda, of course, can say that the official line in this is: “we want to promote our tourism, and by promoting our tourism we will get more income and the economy will grow”. In fact, this is the official line. Of course there is nothing wrong with that as such. Even a poverty-stricken country has the right to have its own economic policy, and thus to look for ways to gain income. This doesn't have to be sanctioned by, for example, less development money. That's not the point. The point is, is this a good way? Can this do anything for the country? Namely, the fact of targeting foreign tourism - because domestic tourism in Rwanda does not bring in anything, it is

all about getting foreign currency - and investing heavily in it. Because it is not only about the sponsorship contract, it is also about investing in the Kigali Convention centre, also the great Kigali Sports Arena. The Kigali Convention centre, to give you an idea, is the most expensive building ever built in Africa. Officially it cost about 500 million dollars, but probably a lot more since they do not release those amounts. It is also, for example, about investing in RwandAir, the airline company, which was actually an existing airline but was completely expanded by the regime from 2000-2001. This airline has only been operating on a loss till now. No profit was ever made with RwandAir. Of course, by pursuing a policy in which you concentrate all your investments in one area, that makes you particularly vulnerable. If we make an abstraction of this and just look at the principle. Then the question is: how many people do you actually attract with that type of tourism? With that type of investment? And what do those people bring to the economy? This is very difficult to find out, because the Rwandan government is shielding these numbers. And to my surprise - but actually not such a surprise because after all these years I'm not that surprised by Belgian politics - Alexander de Croo (the Belgian minister for development cooperation) referred to the fact that the Rwandan government says: "yes, our number of foreign visitors is growing and we are attracting more foreign visitors. We now have 1.7 million foreign visitors per year, which are people that are going to spend money and are attracted to tourism." That number is absolutely wrong. Absolutely fake. It does not make any sense. How do I know that? For starters, just common sense. If you have been working on this for 30 years, you know there is never going to be 1.7 million tourists in Rwanda. That is impossible. But apart from that, you just have to look at the numbers. The most recent figures published by the Rwandans themselves are figures from 2014. I want to assume that these have risen a bit in the meantime, but not spectacular. The total number of visitors at that time was about 1.4 million; and I can assume that that has risen to 1.7 million in 6 years. But who are those 1.4 and 1.7 million? For starters, they are Africans from neighbouring countries. I am going to give an example: on the border of Congo with Rwanda - I have been there a few years ago, specifically to see it with my own eyes - tens of thousands (the estimate is 40 to 50 thousands) Rwandans cross the border every day to trade in Congo; because in Rwanda, people are not allowed to sell small things on the streets. So, what do these poor Rwandans do with their merchandise - they cross the border to Congo and sell it in Congo. These people are all registered. Not by name, but they have to show their ID and are counted. These are foreign visitors. Rwandans are foreign visitors, but so are Congolese in the opposite direction. Because you also have Congolese who go to Rwanda with other stuff. So, the vast majority of foreign visitors are foreigners from Africa. If you know the situation in the region, then you know that people come by land and not from further away than from neighbouring countries. That is just impossible, because the roads are too bad. Nobody is crazy enough to go from Mombasa to Kigali, nobody does that. Then you have a categorization as to why these people are coming. In transit? For business? To visit family? For tourism? And so on. If you then look at more interesting figures. For example, the number of permits to go and see gorillas. A gorilla family is only allowed to have one visit per day for a period of an hour with a maximum of 4 to sometimes 6/7 people.

More is not allowed because that is bad for the gorillas. If you calculate all that you know that there is a limit to that. You cannot have more gorilla visitors than that. And people who go to the gorilla park, go to see gorillas. They do not go to see landscape. What is the use then of other attractions: the Akagera National Park and the Nyungwe park, which have some chimpanzees. The visitor numbers of all these parks together are on an annual basis, about 60000. That includes, in the first place, Rwandans who visit it. This does not bring in anything, because they do not stay in a hotel and they pay almost no entrance fee. Foreigners who visit the gorillas and the parks, they pay a lot of money. Visiting a gorilla costs 1500 euros per person, which is the most expensive of the whole region. In other words, if you are going to calculate all that, I have come to the conclusion that the total number of people that on an annual basis can, at best, be categorised as foreign visitors who bring in foreign exchange as a result of this kind of investment, is probably around 20 to 30 thousand. That is a lot less than the 1.7 million they claim. So, now there is an additional problem. You could say, "those 20 to 30 thousand people, that's a lot for Rwanda, isn't it?" Well, in about the entire world people grin with the number of 20 to 30 thousand visitors. It is hardly worth it. But, I want to assume that you say: "in a country like Rwanda, it might pay off." Now, the problem is the following: those people who are being lured into visiting Rwanda is what we call high-end tourism; which is very, very expensive tourism. For example, a new lodge has opened in Rwanda, owned by a Qatari group. The stay is between 6 and 10 thousand dollars for one night, which is actually common for Rwanda. A lot of lodges like that are about a thousand dollars, that sort of thing. This kind of top tourism, to start with, is mainly in the hands of foreign owners or people from the regime. It is not in the hands of ordinary small entrepreneurs, who operate on their own. Additional problem, if they receive such a relatively small number of tourists, then the people who can work there - the cooks, the servants, etc. - are of course a relatively small number of people. So, the principle that the regime claims - i.e. that tourism promotes the economy and that that benefits the common people - is simply not correct. If it benefits those that run the business - who are almost always foreigners - it does not make sense, since it does not benefit the Rwandans themselves. That is what makes me say about the whole story: "it is not just about that sponsorship budget for Paris Saint Germain and arsenal, but in its entirety, a country that aims for high-end tourism, and a country like Rwanda - an overpopulated country - has no future, because it is impossible to let the whole country benefit from that." In addition, the country is not able to train its own people to do things like that, and certainly not to invest there itself. This is a very risky policy, because when you invest so much in things like that and it fails, all is lost.

Q2: Could you tell me something about the foreign policy of Rwanda?

Velinden: Of course. Following on what I said before, we now come to the aspect of international politics, diplomacy and so on. It is amazing - and this is a delicate point at the moment, but I say it anyway as I have experienced it in the 30 years I have been working on it, and I am appalled to see it among Belgian and other diplomats - how short-sighted foreigners are who go to the country. How little

they use their eyes and ears. Years ago, when I first talked to Alexander de Croo about it, I told him: “yes, Kigali is a city that glitters nowadays and where there are beautiful roads and flowerbeds everywhere; but the gap between Kigali (and by extension that high-end tourism, the beautiful asphalt road up to the park with the chic hotel and good food) and the common people is immense. And that is a gap that was much less before 1990.” The figures also prove it. The gap between rich and poor, the so-called Gini index, is much bigger nowadays. I see that on twitter too - that Swedes and Americans keep on doing that. For example, you have the Tour of Rwanda, the cycling race. Of course, that is one big public relations operation of the beer brand sponsoring it. All those people standing there cheering on the streets. But, you have to see what is happening behind those people, that is bitter poverty. The people are so poor, more than half of the population lives below the poverty line. That is the official figure, but it is probably even more. That is what they're cheating with. I think that - and I am gradually starting to find this out - foreign diplomacy, can be incredibly caught up in outward appearances of the city of Kigali and in international tourism; and I always wonder why, because I read the reports of researchers who are going to work deep in the hills and have contacts with people living deep in the hills. They say that, according to them, things have only gotten worse for ordinary people in recent years. So, this international politics is indeed a great politics of public relations. That is right. Kagame is trying to pose as a world leader, but I think that is fake. Not to mention Kagame's conscience - since this is just about current politics - because I do not hesitate to say - and there is all the scientific research all the reports and so on - that it is a fact that the current rulers in Rwanda, Kagame and his entourage, are responsible for at least 2 million deaths in Rwanda in the last 25 years. But if you look at the consequences of the wars they started in Congo, there are researchers who dare say 6 million, or 7 million or more. So, you would have to dismiss that, of course, not take it into account. But, I cannot do that with my conscience.

Q3: Do you know the Rwanda Development Board and their activities? What is your opinion on their work?

Verlinden: Yes, the Rwanda Development Board is, of course, an instrument that is purely a part of the regime. The problem with understanding what they do, is that you find very little about them; and their actual capital strength. Of course, there are some countries - the Netherlands, Great Britain, United States - that are giving budget support to Rwanda. In other words, they just give money and the Rwandan government does with it what it wants. Some of that money might go there. There is also a certain moment in 2012, when development money was withheld for a very short time as a result of Rwanda's support to M23 in Congo. At that time, a fund was established, which was managed by the Rwanda Development Board, and to which people were obliged to contribute their money - i.e. a compulsory tax - in order to do self-development, so that they would not need the development money anymore. Kagame has been saying for years, more than 5 years now: "soon we will not need the development money anymore and we will do it on our own". That is false of course, we have no idea

what resources the Rwanda development board has at its disposal. The most likely estimation is that it is not that much. I think they actually have very little capital at their disposal. The fact that RwandAir is now sold to Qatar Airways, and that the airport, they are now building, is also for 49% sold out to Qatar Airways - that alone indicates that Rwanda has a huge capital problem; because otherwise I would not understand why they do that. It is very hard to know - of course you can just visit the website of Rwanda Development Board, but that is public relations and propaganda to a large extent – then what it means in practice. So, more important is to look at foreign investment, because the intention of the Rwanda Development Board is to attract foreign investment. Well, one of the best informed people who publishes about this is David Himbara, who worked for Kagame until 2010, when he became more and more critical, especially with regard to economic policy. He is an econometrician who teaches at a university in Toronto, so a serious man. Of course, he is very much against the regime, but everything he publishes is supported by sources. David has researched this very thoroughly, based on data from amongst others the World Bank and he concluded that Foreign Investment is at a very low level; and therefore hardly means anything at all. So, you have to pay attention to the figures that the regime gives. They indicate, for example, that they have so much foreign investment in a year. But, what they do, is that they add the investments in Bugesera international airport, which have not happened yet. That is not really Foreign Investment, because those are loans. Even before Qatar Airways took 49%. Those are loans that Rwanda is taking out to build the airport. But, loans - even abroad - are not Foreign Investment. So, of course, the work of Rwanda Development Board sounds very noble - attracting foreign investment and the development of the country and so on. But, whenever you look at it - in spite of all those hurra messages and so on - and then look at the Human Development index and its components, which are based on the data of the country itself - from which we now know that a lot of that data is probably incorrect - Rwanda appears to be one of the poorest countries in the world. And that is hardly surprising. If the regime is willing to admit this, that would be a very nice step. But if, of course, they base their so-called development on the idea - in fact, they had first said by 2020 - that Rwanda will become a middle-income country, then they failed. The whole Rwanda Vision 2020 has actually failed. They did not achieve any of these goals. They are trying to hide that now, but it is not right. They have a new plan: Rwanda Vision 2040. I have read scientific analyses on that, which say that, if the final goal is to become a middle-income country by 2040, then you have to have a real growth of 8% per year. But, you have to pay close attention to economic growth, because you have to subtract 2 elements from economic growth to get real growth. You have to subtract your population growth - which in Rwanda is between 3 and 3.5% - and you have to deduct your inflation; because if you do not deduct it, you are working with fake numbers. So, it is possible to let an economy grow whilst the money becomes worth less. Then you are supposedly working on a growing economy, which of course is not true at all. So, I do not see what the great merits of the Rwanda Development Board are. But, to be honest, in practice, what they say is not realistic. You cannot have a country that is overpopulated, that does not have its own resources, that has an underdeveloped population with an education system

- despite what they say because that is not true of course – that is at a very low level. That way, you cannot develop a country in a sustainable way at all. You can develop small pieces, like Kigali city and tourism, but only for a very few people. For the total development of the country, that is far too little.