



REVIEW OF M.A. THESIS

'Nation Branding in the Aftermath of a Military Conflict:

The Case of Chechnya"

by Giovanni Pigni

The topic chosen for this thesis is undoubtedly pertinent and politically hot; it also goes without saying that the author invested lots of his time and efforts in studying the subject. However the way the research was implemented raises a bunch of important questions related to the methodology and interpretation of data.

First, the usage of the concept of nation branding is not unproblematic. The author rightly started with the market-oriented connotations of this concept, but it remained unanswered how Kadyrov's (or perhaps his advisors') comments in social networks can have a market value, or alter investment climate, etc. The author reduces the Hexacon model, in fact, to tweeting and a media show, thus avoiding serious analysis of cultural factors, issues of governance, etc. To me it is highly questionable whether Anholt himself would include Kadyrov's "enlightened leadership" (with the legitimization of polygamy and underage children's fights, repression against gay people and relatives of those accused in terrorism, the personal guard etc.) in his vision of governance, given the implicitly liberal roots of this concept hardly compatible with neo-feudal practices ubiquitous in today's Chechnya. Besides, neither of the author's examples of "nation branding" extends beyond Russia, and thus has no international effect whatsoever, which reduces their meaning and only demonstrates the detachment of Chechnya from global brand markets.

Second, all examples of successful nation branding campaigns that the author gives in the literature review section are grounded in experiences of independent countries / nation states. The projection of this concept onto Chechnya should not be automatic, since in this case we deal with a region that is a constitutive part of the Russian Federation. Perhaps, it would be more appropriate to compare Chechnya with Catalonia, for example, yet even in this case parallels could be hard to draw since Chechnya is not claiming its independence.

Third, based on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, the author deduces the need for (re)branding Chechnya from century-old victimization by Russia. This outlook leaves in the shadow multiple



Russian narratives claiming that it is Chechnya under Kadyrov that de-facto colonized Russia. Regardless of author's personal attitudes and sympathies, discarding this important aspect of the complex situation would be inappropriate.

Fourth, the author didn't show any critical distance to the object of his study and in fact simply followed the propagandistic narratives he studied. The thesis leaves a strong impression of an apology of the authoritarian and personalistic regime in Grozny, especially when it comes to "gender roles" and religion. Again, for an academic research this looks superficial and lacking in a deep analysis of the subject under consideration.

Based on my assessment, I propose to the examination board the minimal grade, and only in the case of receiving author's satisfactory answers to the raised questions.

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