



Exploring place branding in the Global South: the case of Johannesburg, South Africa

Zenzile Mbinza¹

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Abstract

This paper presents two points of discussion. Firstly, the paper contends that through the efforts made by the city of Johannesburg (CoJ, the council) in branding, there is scope to explore cities in the Global South from other perspectives other than the popular obsessions of poverty, informality and violence that currently litter literature on exploring urban issues in these settings especially amongst scholars in the developed world. Secondly, it argues that the CoJ, through its consecutive place brands, has complicated its relationship with different stakeholders including residents and businesses. This is because in comparison to other cities in South Africa and in Africa more generally, the city of Johannesburg has managed to develop strong, recognisable place brands over time. While this is lauded, it leaves room to ruminate about the necessity of place branding in a city that is encumbered by huge socio-economic divides.

Keywords Place branding · Johannesburg · Urban poor · Global North/South · Global city · Aspirational

Introduction

Whether on purpose or by fluke, places have always found ways to popularise their offerings as well as highlight their achievements (Linstedt 2015). These efforts have culminated in the formation of the distinct discipline of place branding, which has grown in leaps and bounds in recent years. Kotler et al. (2004) see place branding as a consequence of the conditioning effects of globalization and advances in technology in the Global North that have undergone significant industrialisation.

The rate at which place branding has grown and been applied across the world differs significantly between the Global North and Global South. The discipline is in its maturity in theoretical inquiry and practical application in the Global North where, amongst others, it encompasses the use of place branding for purposes of public diplomacy, investigating its role in advancing democratic ideals and to a lesser extent, its links to strategic spatial planning (Anholt 2008; Eshuis and Edward 2013; Oliveira 2015). On the contrary, place branding is in its infancy in the Global South and

has emerged with the primary focus of attracting tourism and foreign direct investment (FDI) (Mihailovich 2006).

This is not to say that Global South cities do not have stories to share with the world. However, to date, the prevalent academic inquiry into the Global South and its cities has predominantly focussed on presenting these sites as problematic and counter to normative forms of urbanisation (Sanyal 2015). As such, urbanisation in Global South cities has been seen as bizarre, unstable and has essentially been bastardised and otherised. Given this, it is not surprising that whole volumes have been dedicated to the diagnosis of the urban condition of Global South cities without necessarily giving any remedial interventions. A case in point is Mike Davis's book, *Planet of Slums* (2006), which estimated that there would be approximately 550 urban slum settlements by the year 2015 across the Global South. In this regard, Davis was correct in his estimation as this estimation has since been surpassed. Davis's cataloguing of the root causes of these slums in Global South cities include colonialism and the pursuit of neoliberal policies that these countries adopted long after their emancipation from colonial rule.

The point of Davis's book is not lost but it does present a point of debate on how cities are explored, particularly those of the Global South. Recently, there have been growing calls for scholars to re-evaluate methods and/or frameworks when exploring Global South urbanism (Potts 2012).

✉ Zenzile Mbinza
zmbinza@uj.ac.za

¹ Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa



Moving towards nuanced understandings of the intricacies of urbanisation in the Global South, Randolph and Storper (2023, p. 30) contend that “The fact that theories developed by studying Northern urban transactions cannot explain all dimensions of urbanization in the South does not betray any specific limitation of “Northern theory”, rather, it reflects the limitations of theory in general, regardless of its origin or where it is applied”. This assertion illuminates the prevailing approach through which cities in the Global South have been explored and calls for context-based analytical frameworks that explain urbanisation in these settings (Myers 2020).

The abject conditions that exist in slum settlements of cities in the Global South dominate literature on the study of urbanisation (Watson 2009). This has skewed the narrative of cities in these settings in painting alternate and differentiated depictions of their jurisdictions. Cities in the Global South also display modernist versions of development (Schindler 2017). Johannesburg is one such city wherein dual understandings of development exist (Murray 2008). Johannesburg is home to a large urban poor population exuded through its inner-city and urban peripheral developments in the form of townships including Soweto, Diepsloot, Alexandra and others. However, Johannesburg is also home to affluent, secluded suburbs such as Rosebank, Sandton, Park town, Bryanston and Fourways just to name a few. Thus, in efforts of “keeping up with Joneses”, the CoJ has continuously embarked on an agenda to set itself up amongst the leading world cities through place branding. In this pursuit, the city has had different iterations of its place brands, which have resulted in uneasy and messy readings of the socio-economic conditions in Johannesburg.

Aim and methodological approach

Place branding has received a lot of academic inquiry in the Global North (Hospers 2004). The texts emerging from these settings are layered and cover a wide range of issues related to place branding. However, inquiry into place branding in the context of Global South settings is relatively thin and the source material related thereto is sparse and sporadic. For the most part, inquiry on place branding in the Global South has concentrated on the attraction of tourism and FDI (Szondi 2007). This paper aims at casting a reflective lens on the nuances of place branding from a city located in the Global South. This is important because it provides respite from the popular lines of exploring cities in the Global South as being informal, problematic and counter to established modes of thinking about urbanisation.

This paper focusses on Johannesburg as the case study. Johannesburg was chosen because of its continuous efforts in place branding. Other major cities in South Africa and Africa, at large, are rather mute with respect to their efforts

in branding as compared to Johannesburg. The single case study approach allows for in-depth exploration and reflection on issues related to the point of inquiry (Hetz 2016). Admittedly, the generalizability of findings from a single case study is limited (Thompson and Perry 2004; Evers and Wu 2006). However, an increasing number of cities from the Global South are incrementally experimenting with place branding processes to deliver narratives that engage the world beyond the realms of attracting tourism and FDI. Thus, the overall aim of this paper is to contribute to a growing body of literature that speaks about place branding in the Global South and remove the belief that it is the purview of only cities in the Global North.

The paper presents the place brands that the CoJ employed from the early 1990s to around 2019. This temporal scale is significant in that it represents critical milestones in as far as the governance of Johannesburg is concerned. Beginning in the 1990s, the paper outlines the circumstances persisting in South Africa, and more narrowly in Johannesburg towards the end of apartheid and transitioning into democracy. The African National Congress (ANC) oversaw the governance of the city from 1995 until 2016 when the Democratic Alliance (DA) took over. Based on political ideology, these two parties differ significantly with the ANC having a more social outlook, while the DA is more liberal in its disposition (Peet 2002; Mottiar 2015). During the time when the ANC governed Johannesburg, there was a common vision projecting the city as a leading city in the world. However, this changed dramatically when the DA took over in 2016 and halted place branding efforts in the city in the name of financial prudence.

The paper explores a few place brands coined in Johannesburg using primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources of data are made up of archival research through the perusal of council meeting agendas and minutes as well as quotations derived from State of city addresses. Literature from journal articles and books form the secondary sources employed in this paper.

Johannesburg at a glance

Affectionately referred to as *eGoli* (place of gold) or simply *Joburg*, Johannesburg is South Africa’s premier city (Kracker Selzer and Heller 2010; Jonker 2015). Despite being the smallest city by area in South Africa, Johannesburg has the largest population of all other cities in the country (Rogerson and Rogerson 2019). A cosmopolitan city, Johannesburg’s population is made up of local immigration from other areas of South Africa and a large contingent of African migrants and other regions in the world (Thompson and Grant 2015).



The huge population in Johannesburg is due largely to its economic performance in South Africa. Gauteng, the province within which Johannesburg lies, is the biggest contributor to South Africa's gross domestic product with an estimated 40% (Seseni and Mbohwa 2018). With Johannesburg spearheading much of this share, Siampani (2023) notes that it is the best performing city, economically speaking, in Africa. In addition to this, more than 70% of South African businesses headquarter their operations in Johannesburg. In tandem, these factors make Johannesburg an important site through which to investigate the socio-economic dynamics of a city in the Global South.

This realisation has not been lost on the CoJ. Throughout its various administrations, including those during apartheid, the CoJ has continuously pushed the envelope in positioning Johannesburg as South Africa's premier city (Sihlongonyane 2015). The CoJ has coined different place brands throughout its history. These have had varying degrees of success, while also suffering some failures along the way. The following section presents these place brands.

Johannesburg's place brands over time

Throughout its existence, Johannesburg has projected an image of modernity emerging from an unexpected place (Sihlongonyane 2015). By "unexpected" is meant that the praxis of place branding has predominantly taken place in the Global North. Such has been the prolific experimentation with place branding in the Global North that place brands such as *I ♥ NY* (New York), *City of Love* (Paris) and *Sin City* (Las Vegas) are known to people the world over without them ever even having visited these cities (Hildreth 2010). Largely thought to be the purview of global cities such as New York, London, Paris and Tokyo, Johannesburg has punched above its own weight in forging a brand image that is not synonymous with a city situated in Africa.

Gateway into Southern Africa

In the early 1990s, South Africa was at a turning point in its history. Predicated by the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the disbandment of predominantly Black political parties by F.W De Klerk, the country was paving a way for a reconciliatory transition into democracy (Smith 2010). These events culminated in the negotiations that sought to end apartheid under the banner of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) (Mamdani 2015). CODESA was a multi-stakeholder bargaining platform that began its negotiations with the then ruling party, the National Party. Amongst its ranks, CODESA was made up of a diverse number of groups and the two prominent

black political parties, the ANC, and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) (Barnes and De Klerk 2002).

Negotiations began in May 1990 and ended in 1993, a year before South Africa took to the polls in the country's first democratic elections. During this time, several concessions were agreed to between the apartheid government and the ANC and IFP. Chief amongst these was the development of the interim Constitution of 1993, which would lend itself as a template for the Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) later developed in 1996, South Africa's supreme piece of legislation to date (Croucher 2002). Through CODESA, South Africa evaded a civil war that had brewing for years.

During this time, Johannesburg also experienced significant changes to its landscape. For example, Johannesburg's inner-city was hollowed out and was subject to huge levels of deterioration (Bremner 2000; Ntshona 2013). Winkler (2009) notes how on the back of the fear that businesses would be ransacked by an incoming Black population, White people and their businesses began to flee to the northern parts of Johannesburg such as Bryanston, Sandton, and Fourways through what is known as white flight (Winkler 2009; Simbanegavi et al. 2021).

As a response to this situation in the inner-city coupled with a stubborn, declining economy, the then city council developed the *Gateway into Southern Africa* place brand. This place brand sought to position Johannesburg as the launchpad into South Africa and the rest of the continent. Despite trade embargos that the rest of the world had imposed against South Africa as a means of protesting against apartheid, Johannesburg was still an important entry point into Africa owing to its considerably better infrastructure (compared to other countries in Africa) and the highly accessible Jan Smuts International Airport (now the OR Tambo International Airport) (Rogerson and Rogerson 2021).

The *Gateway into Southern Africa* place brand was also a ploy at reassuring the international community that Johannesburg and South Africa, more generally, were governable and open to business. During the negotiations held under CODESA, there had been a growing sense amongst mostly White people that the country would become a banana republic should it fall into hands of a Black majority. So, the place brand played the dual role of attracting investment into the city as well as telling a narrative of the safety and security of Johannesburg. These occupations of place branding are typical and widespread. As Line and Wang (2017) opine, place brands present different value propositions to different stakeholders concurrently. Thus, it is important for a place brand to lend itself to different interpretations over time. This is instilled by the constant and iterative articulation of a place brand to create uniformity and adherence to its message (Julier 2020).



Golden Heartbeat of Africa

Following the end of the CODESA negotiations in 1993, South Africa moved swiftly to optimise on the gains made there. In April 1994, the country held its first democratic elections. By the end of the elections, the ANC took over the responsibility of governing the country with Nelson Mandela at the helm. This was a watershed event in South Africa's history in that it not only signalled the end of apartheid, but it also represented the very first time that a Black South African became the head of state.

The ANC's assumption of governance cascaded to the local sphere as well. In 1995, residents in local jurisdictions elected their public officials in the local government elections. In Johannesburg, Isaac Mogase of the ANC was the victor replacing Dan Pretorius of the Democratic Party (Peterson 2021). Again, this was a significant milestone because for the first time in its history, Johannesburg was under the governance of a majority Black party and had its first Black mayor.

Around this time, the ANC was pulling ahead with the rolling out of its promises made in its election manifesto through the Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP). The RDP was a reformist, macro-economic strategy aimed at equalising the imbalances of the policies brought about by the apartheid (Gelb 2006). Amongst the key issues that the RDP sought to address was the redistribution of wealth and the creation of a more equal society (Moyo and Mamabolo 2014). However, in time, the RDP became merely seen as a massive scheme for rolling out social housing and, it was discontinued (Amoah and Kajimo-Shakantu, 2020).

Nelson Mandela did not take his presidency to its full term. In 1999, he stepped down as the president of the ANC as well as that of the country (Doeden 2014). While the discontinued RDP was seen as Mandela's brainchild, new President Thabo Mbeki spearheaded the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) (Vale and Barrett, 2009). GEAR had similar aspirations to the RDP but differed significantly in that it was mostly an austerity measure and it sought to use more neoliberal mechanisms for the realisation of its goals (Narsiah 2002).

In Johannesburg, the effects of opening to a larger population group as well as the international community were being felt. Johannesburg was attracting large swathes of people from other regions of the country and had to deal with an explosive growth of immigrants from the rest of the continent. With these challenges, the CoJ was buckling and struggling financially to the extent that it was on the verge of bankruptcy (Mothamaha and Govender 2014). The city needed to overhaul its finances as well as make revenue from the services that it was providing to its residents.

Mogase assembled a transformation team made up of the city's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Ketso Gordhan and Transformation Manager, Pascal Moloi (Tomlinson 1999). This team was tasked with turning around the prospects of the city and make it financially viable again. This was undertaken under *iGoli 2002*. *iGoli 2002* was the CoJ's actualisation of GEAR and to a degree, could be seen as the city's first attempt at crafting a Growth and Development Strategy (GDS) (Pieterse 2019). The team revamped the institutional make-up of the city by decentralising service departments (Galane 2019). This led to the formation of fourteen independent Municipal Owned Entities (MOEs) (Iroanya and Njingolo 2017). These included the Johannesburg Roads Agency (road infrastructure), Pikitup (waste disposal), City Power (electricity generation), City Water (water reticulation services) and Egoli Gas (gas generation for power) amongst others. The creation of these agencies resulted in the removal of duplications, and it streamlined the operations within the city leading to improved collections and revenue.

Coupled to these efforts and with a cognisance that the city was becoming more cosmopolitan, the CoJ coined the place brand, the *Golden Heartbeat of Africa* (Bremner 2000; Sihlongonyane 2015). This place brand specifically set out to position Johannesburg as the place to be in Africa. It projected Johannesburg as the pulse and pacesetter of everything good in development terms in Africa. At the same time, it was a rallying call for *Joburgers* to unite and appreciate their diversity. There had been mounting tensions amongst local South Africans and migrants (Chinomona and Maziriri 2015).

The *Golden Heartbeat of Africa* place brand was a tinge different from its predecessor, *Gateway into Southern Africa*. The latter suggested that Johannesburg was only a launchpad into Africa. To an extent, it divorced Johannesburg from the rest of the continent. This was to be expected considering that the place brand was established during apartheid. For a long time, South Africa was separated from the continent as well as the rest of the world, in diplomatic and economic terms (Crawford and Klotz 1999). In contrast, the *Golden Heartbeat of Africa* place brand strategically situated Johannesburg as being part of Africa. Not only that, but it also presented the city as a significant role player in the development of Africa.

A more salient aspect about *Golden Heartbeat of Africa* was its call for the unity of all people living in Johannesburg. The place brand lent itself favourably in Johannesburg as a way of relaying the message of Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu's *Rainbow Nation*. Tutu coined the term towards 1994 when South Africa was entering its democratic dispensation (Tshawane 2010). While the *Rainbow Nation* expression was used to garner South Africans of all colours to stand together as one, the *Golden Heartbeat of Africa* place brand called for the residents of Johannesburg, South



African and migrants to appreciate each other as brothers and sisters.

Both *Rainbow Nation* and *Golden Heartbeat of Africa* are underpinned by the notion of *ubuntu*. Briefly, *ubuntu* is the belief in the collective power of society, that one cannot be without others (Buqa 2015). It is critical for place brands to adhere and connect to deeper concepts of hope, selling the future, galvanising residents behind a common goal and democratising society (Ooi 2008). Place brands developed under these precepts tend to have longevity and are more easily recognisable than those that do not have these ideals at their heart.

A world-class African city

Two years into his mayoralty, then Mayor of Johannesburg Amos Masondo, and still with the assistance of CEO, Ketso Gordhan and Transformation Manager, Pascal Moloï, concluded the process of ratifying the institutional make-up of the city of Johannesburg in 2002 (Wafer 2012). The said process began under the mayoralty of Isaac Mogase in 1997 under the auspices of *iGoli 2002* (Tomlinson 2017). This process was predicated by the dwindling fiscus of the city, which had seen Johannesburg on the brink of bankruptcy (Ngobeni 2008). On the back of this, the city of Johannesburg had to find ways of generating revenue as well as increase its economic viability through the collection of service fees from the city's residents. Since the late 1980s, Johannesburg had been plagued with non-payment of services; a phenomenon which was mostly associated with the previously disadvantaged areas of the city such as Soweto. Non-payment of services amongst Black residents of the city was a form of protest and had begun during apartheid (Crankshaw and White 1995). The central argument in this protestation was that suburbs continued to receive premium services, but previously disadvantaged areas (townships in particular) received substandard services.

With *iGoli 2002* coming to the end of its shelf-life, the city of Johannesburg was also involved in a major repositioning campaign that sought to establish a global footprint for the city as well as set it apart from its competitors regionally. This process came in the form of place branding, which saw the city coining the tagline, *A world-class African city*. From the onset, this place brand was extremely aspirational as it aimed at navigating Johannesburg through new frontiers of development. The coining of taglines is a popular function of place branding (Kladou et al. 2017). However, it is insufficient to make regions or cities memorable. Concerted, strategic efforts are necessary to make place brands spring up in people's (residents and international community alike) minds. Since its adoption, the *A world-class African city*

place brand has become the city of Johannesburg's most recognisable.

The place brand first came into prominence when it was used to catapult Johannesburg as the host of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) (von Frantzius 2004). This world-renowned summit had never been held in Africa. The CoJ used the hosting of this event to highlight its infrastructure and ability to host important mega-events. The development of place brands with the hopes of hosting mega-events is a hallmark of the discipline (Herezniak and Florek 2018). Johannesburg successfully hosted the event with little negative outcomes, and this launched the city as a capable host of mega-events.

The CoJ continued in the vein of hosting mega-events. In 2003, the Wanderers Cricket Ground in Johannesburg played host to the final of the International Cricket Council World Cup Final (Hemmonsbey and Tichaawa 2019). Again, this event was successful. In hosting these types of events, the CoJ intended to compete with other leading cities in the world by highlighting the modernity of its infrastructure and other assets. Cities bid to get the rights to host mega-events and the awarding thereof usually comes after years of consideration.

The shine and splendour of the *A world-class African city* place brand came under threat in 2008 when there were sporadic xenophobic in Johannesburg (Everatt 2011). Tensions grew to a boiling point between South Africans and migrants, which saw the latter being attacked on their person as well as their businesses (Greenburg 2010). In an earlier, 2004 State of the city address, Masondo had said

“...while migrancy contributes to the rich tapestry of the cosmopolitan city, it also places a severe strain on employment levels, housing and public services” (Lan-dau and Freemantle 2010, p. 378).

Masondo's utterances could be seen as having ignited these violent attacks on migrants. While the ANC rebuked Masondo over these comments, he continued to place blame on migrants for crime and other social ills in Johannesburg in subsequent engagements.

The *A world-class African city* place brand reached its crescendo when Johannesburg hosted the opening and final matches of the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup (Pavoni 2011). Both matches were held in Soweto at the iconic Soccer City (renamed from FNB Stadium for commercial reasons during the tournament), Africa's biggest stadium (Field 2010). Soccer or football has the largest following in the world amongst sporting codes (Dunmore 2011). So, the successful hosting of the most important matches of a World Cup tournament cemented the idea that Johannesburg was able to compete with other world cities and was above the cut in relation to its counterparts in Africa.



While the CoJ enjoyed great publicity from the deployment of the *A world-class African city* place brand, there were also dissenting voices against it. For example, in 2013, Steven Haywood, a Johannesburg resident filed a lawsuit against the city claiming that its radio adverts were misleading (Smith 2013). Haywood's central argument laid in the fact that many of the city's MOEs were not performing well financially, and this had severely impacted their ability to render services to residents. The Advertising Standards Authority agreed with Haywood and ordered the CoJ to refrain from using the tagline in its adverts. Later in the same year, however, the CoJ appealed the decision and was allowed to use the tagline in future advertising campaigns (Delmont 2013).

This place brand was used by the CoJ across three mayoral terms, two of Masondo's and one of Parks Tau. When Tau took over as mayor in 2011, he knuckled down on the efforts of his predecessor and made the place brand more visible. However, when the ANC and subsequently Tau did not win the 2016 local government elections, and this signalled the death knell to the use of the place brand as had previously been enjoyed. To an extent, Johannesburg lost its identity after this.

A Johannesburg that works is a South Africa that works

In August 2016, the ANC lost the local elections to the DA and other political parties who had assembled under a coalition arrangement (Booyesen 2016). The DA had selected Herman Mashaba as their candidate, and he became the fourth post-apartheid mayor of Johannesburg. Emerging from a business background and not a political one, Mashaba's ideas on governance differed from those of ANC's Mogase, Masondo and Tau who had become before him.

Mashaba wanted to run the city as a business and accused the ANC of having ransacked the public coffers during its time in office (Beaumont 2020). With reference to place branding, he saw it as unnecessary expenditure. In his inaugural State of the City Address, Mashaba bemoaned

It is a disgrace that our residents have had to endure your shameless self-promotion of a world-class African city while living with your less than world-class performance (CoJ 2006, p. 18).

This showed that Mashaba did not place significant value to place branding. However, this did not stop him and his administration from developing their own. The CoJ under Mashaba's leadership coined the *A Johannesburg that works, is a South Africa that works* place brand. The place brand saw Johannesburg as a critical component of South Africa's economic development. However, it completely divorced

Johannesburg from the African continent, contrary to the place brands that had come before.

Mashaba was a proponent of striking against immigrants, particularly those of African descent (Machinya 2022). On several occasions, Mashaba levelled blame against immigrants for the social ills that plagued the city (Chiumbu and Moyo, 2018). These included accusations of criminality, the hijacking of buildings in the inner-city and for the city being in disrepair in general. Mashaba was at pains at proving these accusations when confronted by journalists and human rights groups (de Villiers and Chabalala 2016).

The *A Johannesburg that works is a South Africa that works* place brand had the shortest shelf-life of all Johannesburg's place brands. It did not feature prominently in television and radio commercials and other media platforms. By 2017, and still under the mayoralty of Mashaba, the city discontinued the use of the tagline and reverted to using a *world-class African city* tagline. This has continued to date despite the numerous changes in the leadership of the city since 2019, which marked Mashaba's resignation as mayor (Kiewit and Harper 2019).

Discussion

Apart from *A Joburg that works is a South Africa that works* place brand, developed by Herman Mashaba in 2016, Johannesburg's place brands have always sought to project a modernist, international outlook. They have also been purposefully imbued with a local, indigenous outlook. This local outlook is largely presented through the continuous reference to Africa. Thus, the city's place brands exude a dual representation of the city: (a) of modernity and (b) rurality. In the case of modernity, Johannesburg avails itself as a site of development as mostly understood in the Global North. This is in line with place brands that seek to constantly anchor cities in global economic flows (Warren and Dinnie 2017). In the case of rurality, the place brands vowed allegiance to the African continent as well as chart a path for Johannesburg to showcase development from a place that is understood as lagging in conventional understandings of development elsewhere (the Global North). In addition, the "Africa" in most of Johannesburg's place brand is a play on the cosmopolitanism found in the city, a phenomenon Mbembe refers to as Afropolitanism (Mbembe 2007). Afropolitanism speaks to being of and from Africa; it presents a new way of how Africans perceive themselves in the world by underscoring their contribution/s to society in general (Gikandi 2011; Eze 2014). It diverges from the conceptions of viewing Africa as needing a hand or having to be led by developed nations.

Through colonisation and other forms of appropriation including apartheid, Africa became known as the "Dark



Continent” (Bassil 2011). This stigmatisation of Africa was synonymous with the continent’s people being unable to think for themselves, always needing foreign aid, etc. This was despite colonisers taking significant natural resources and the continent being home to progressive, ancient civilisations. Recently, there has been a turn in sentiments about Africa being backward as such countries as the Netherlands and France have increasingly and systematically opened their borders to an ever-growing African population. These countries have begun to appreciate the considerable intellectual contributions that Africans continue to make in the world. This is a significant point of departure from the past that saw Africans as only beneficial to have as surplus and cheap labour (Scully and Britwum 2019).

The chasm in the duality of Johannesburg’s place brands is poignant because it reinforces the politics of the right to the city as espoused by David Harvey. Succinctly, Harvey sees the right to the city as the ability of being able to change ourselves by being able to change the city (Harvey 2012). This notion transcends the idea of imagining how a city can be but starts to embrace ideas about how residents can actively participate in changing the city, both politically and economically. On the one hand, the place branding narratives of Johannesburg paint a picture of a city that is well functioning and offers a lot of socio-economic opportunities.

These relate to mostly opportunities of work and recreation but also the degree to which residents can participate in city governance processes. This set of narratives is conversant with more affluent and well-off individuals of the city as well as the international community. On the other hand, however, these narratives inadvertently close the city off to the urban poor. The agency of the urban poor is subverted through contemporary city governance strategies and/or tools. Increasingly, place branding is falling into that domain. Eshuis and Edwards (2013) go as far as pointing out that of late, place branding has been part of an expanding sleuth of tools in urban governance. Place branding poses an additional challenge to an already disenfranchised urban poor because its processes are not well articulated by city governments. Many place branding campaigns are initiated by top officials in government but are mostly brought to fruition by consultants (van Ham 2008).

For example, *Johannesburg’s a world-class African city* place brand was executed by *Interbrand Sampson*, an international marketing firm with offices in Johannesburg (Pashkush et al., 2015). The heavy reliance on consultants drastically reduces the opportunities available for residents, local businesses, and other affected parties to contribute meaningfully to place brands and/or their narratives. More critically, the CoJ has never conducted surveys on the perceptions or reception of its place brands from its residents and businesses. However, the city commissioned a review of its *a world-class African city* place brand in

2006, which was undertaken by Switch Brand Consultants (CoJ 2006). The employment of brand consultants in developing and reviewing place brand strategies is common (Vuignier 2016). Less so however is the collection of perceptions about a place brand from residents, businesses, and other stakeholders. This is the case in Johannesburg. It has left a vacuum in the way that residents, businesses and international community interact with the city, an opportunity missed really, because these actors play a critical role in the word-of-mouth marketing and ambassadorship of place brands (Chen and Dwyer 2018).

A popular trait of place branding, particularly in developing economies, is to employ or pay homage to a place’s geographical location (Pike 2011). This is popular because it brings familiarity between residents and the place brand. However, the use of this is limited and as such, place marketers rely on other mechanisms. One of the most popular mechanisms in this space is the rewriting of new, aspirational place brands (Cassinger 2018). To a large degree, these sort of place brands still retain an element of representing the local, but they also embellish aspects of narratives that are foreign to residents.

Extreme usage of this mechanism sweeps the lived and material experiences of the local under the carpet. Instead, they paint lofty images of cities with world-class infrastructure and capabilities while they ignore the gaping divides between the rich and poor. Seldom does one find a place brand that is celebratory of impoverished enclaves within cities. In Johannesburg, it is the glossy, tree-lined street suburbs of the north of the city that can lay claim to world-class status. Places such as Alexandra, Diepsloot and Orange Farm have not been reflected in the city’s place brands over time. The discord between aspiration and reality is problematic for city governments and residents alike. It provides a further avenue for the contestation of the right to the city in that antagonises these stakeholders against each other. As such, place branding under the guise of misrepresenting aspiration and reality widens the power disparity between city governments and residents.

The balance of power between city governments and residents is skewed in South Africa (Barry et al. 2007). Johannesburg is no exception to this reality. Politically, residents are only empowered to change city governance through local elections that occur once every five years (Everatt 2016). So, even when a local government is not performing, it is ousted internally by members of the executive council. The challenges of engaging with municipal leaders is also cumbersome. South Africa’s system of local governance requires residents to take matters up with their ward councillor (Kersting 2012). The efficacy of this arrangement depends largely on the ward councillor’s availability and responsiveness to the needs of their community. This is hugely subjective.



The balance in power between city governments and residents widens even further when factoring in place branding as another political and governance mechanism. Already, processes such as integrated development planning, the formulation of the city's GDS and the like are difficult to understand, let alone be a part of. The participation of residents in these processes is a matter of rubberstamping decisions taken in the echelons of city governments (Kavaratzis 2012).

Effective and successful place brands exhibit several traits. One of the most important is the uptake of a place brand by residents (Tøttenborg et al. 2021). This is imperative because it garners support for the place brand as well as cultivates a culture of ambassadorship amongst residents. In this way, a place brand is afforded a face and persona. A place brand created with this in mind is injected with a pulse as residents are naturally the rhythm of any place.

This idea of infusing place brands with personality has not been lost on the CoJ. Africa not only represents a continent in purely geographical terms but also has interpretations of a way of life of a society. These interpretations include but are not limited to humility, forgiveness and nurture. However, Africa also has many negative connotations such as having lazy people, exploitation, informality, violence and underdevelopment. So, to speak of striking a balance of these differing connotations with the view of creating effective place brands in Africa is an immensely challenging undertaking. In developing its place brands, Johannesburg always sought to straddle between two spaces, the international and local.

Using influential figures such as Nobel Peace prize winners such as former President Nelson Mandela and Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Johannesburg managed to imprint its image on the minds of the international community and residents through its place brands. Not only that, but it also paved the way for the integration of not-so-popular places in its brand image. Both Mandela and Tutu lived on Vilakazi Street in Soweto at a point in their lives (Dondolo 2018). In a way then, reference to Africa is a mechanism that attempts to equalise the socio-spatial differences in Johannesburg's places, at least metaphorically. The degree to which this gap has closed materially since democracy is questionable.

The figures referred to above, Mandela and Tutu, are renowned the world over and thus, drawing close association to them is not surprising. However, the faces and lives of the proverbial man on the street are not sufficiently captured through the city's place brands. The most recognisable facet in Johannesburg's place brand through the inclusion of Africa is the continent's informal space economy. Informality in Africa is synonymous with hustling and eking out livelihoods (Okyere and Kita 2015). It is a facet that has been erroneously romanticised in certain quarters (Ofosu-Kusi and Matsuda 2020). Unsurprisingly, Johannesburg's place

brands through the inclusion of Africa heralded a spirit of things that can be achieved despite considerable difficulties.

However, this is a limited view of Africa. As has been mentioned before, informality has been seen as a survival strategy. It has not sufficiently transcended this to the point where it is seen as a strategy for creating wealth. In the Global North, informality is conveniently touted as entrepreneurship. In South Africa, it is seen as a nuisance. For example, in Johannesburg, an operation entitled *Operation Clean Sweep* was launched in 2013 to remove the perceived blight of informality on the streets of Johannesburg (Benit-Gbaffou 2016). This was inevitable as urban planning processes are premised on normative principles of order and harmony. Anything counter to that is problematic. In a similar vein, place branding hardly celebrates elements that are contra to established understandings of development.

Another critical issue regarding the branding of Johannesburg and many other cities for that matter is the question of who owns a place brand. Given that places are home to many people, businesses, religious organisations, universities and others, this question is not easy to answer. Instead, Stubbs and Warnaby (2015, p. 3) argue that the question is unimportant, instead suggesting that it ought to be "who has a stake in the place brand". From this then also emerges the need for describing the levels of interaction between city governments as proponents and initiators of place branding campaigns and disparate stakeholders.

Johannesburg is home to a multitude of stakeholders including a diverse number of residents. On the point of residents, many are not from Johannesburg but have come to the city mostly for employment opportunities. This in presents a challenge in that the place attachment of these residents is not strong and so directly impacts on the way that the city's place brands have been received over time. Residents that are not from a city usually display ambivalent or nonchalant behaviours to place brands. Thus, it becomes even more important for city governments to capture as many stakeholders as possible in their place brand messages. This assertion however creates the misplaced conception that place branding messages are created unilaterally by city governments. Kavaratzis (2012) opines that effective and successful place brands are those that have been co-created by city governments in conjunction with a large cohort of stakeholders.

Unlike its counterparts in the Global North, cities such as New York, London, Paris and Tokyo, Johannesburg is a city that faces a myriad of challenges brought about broader socio-economic and political underpinnings. These range from a stagnant national economy, brushing off perceptions of crime and grime and the short-sightedness of urban governance policies such as the Integrated Development Plan. Captured by phrases such as *eGoli* (place of gold) and *Gauteng maboneng* (city of lights),



Johannesburg has become a premium site for the pursuit of a better life. This has resulted in Johannesburg having a large population of immigrants, both from within the country and outside of it. This increase in population exerts pressure on the city in several ways including infrastructure, employment creation and welfare.

In local government configuration in South Africa, Johannesburg is classified as Category A municipality, meaning that it is a metropolitan authority (Maseko 2018). Apart from being tasked with the provision of public services such as water, electricity, refuse removal and infrastructure, Johannesburg is also responsible for creating its own revenue as it relies less on intergovernmental transfers (Dlamini 2011). Given this reality, place branding appears to be an add-on, almost unnecessary endeavour. However, and rightly so, Florek and Conejo (2007) point out that place branding is important for emerging economies in defining and shaping their economic and political aspirations especially if cities or countries in these settings hope to attract FDI.

So, Johannesburg finds itself at a crossroads regarding whether it should concentrate on providing public services or vying for the attraction of FDI. The city must do both, appease the local and serenate the international community. This dual occupation of branding Johannesburg is necessary because on the one hand, it provides a platform for instilling pride and confidence in the city from the perspective of local stakeholders and inviting business and investment from the international community on the other hand. The latter is important because investment is not only thought of in financial terms but also from a desire to learn from other leading cities on how they contend with struggling economies. Striking this balance is no mean feat.

Other than the attraction of FDI, place branding is a tool for public diplomacy (van Ham 2008). It is an avenue through which cities, especially those embedded in emerging economies can strategically craft a reputation that can be leveraged to foster relationships regionally and internationally (Kiambi and Shafer 2018). Place branding is important in allaying external negative perceptions of a place. For example, in 2008 and 2011, South Africa was rocked by a wave of xenophobic attacks, and it tainted the image and reputation of the country (Hayem 2013). These attacks also occurred in Johannesburg. In both cases, the country and Johannesburg put out strong messages of reconciliation and tolerance to thwart negative connotations with the view of protecting already established and long-standing trade relations with countries in Africa and the world more generally. Thus, place branding presents a channel through which cities and countries can communicate their values and what is important to them (Avraham and Ketter 2016).

Conclusion

It is clear to see that place branding is still in its infancy in the Global South. A scan of the literature reveals that it has been employed mostly for the attraction of FDI and tourism (Metaxas 2010; Andéhn and Zenker 2015). Johannesburg has managed to cast a more developed form of place branding that effectively put the city in the arena of global cities, albeit with varying degrees of success. While the city managed to enter this arena, it simultaneously set itself up for confrontation on the local front.

The strides made by the CoJ in place branding important in as far as opening avenues for the exploration of Global South urbanisation from other perspectives. Global South cities are so much more than the texts on informality, violence and impoverishment would lead to believe. These spaces abound with untold stories and subliminal, underexplored meanings of urbanisation. Place branding, amongst other instruments, can play a significant role in unearthing these meanings.

This is not to say that explorations of urbanisation in Global South cities must ignore the poor material conditions that beset these spaces. Nor it is a call to romanticise these abject conditions. Rather, it is a call for urban scholars interested in these settings to layer their understanding and diagnoses with the view of fully surfacing the issues that continue to hinder development and find meaningful, lasting solutions. Only in this way, can the urban conditions of the Global South be brought to bear and attended to.

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Data availability The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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Zenzile Mbinza is a lecturer in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning. His research mainly focusses on place branding, township economies and integrated development planning.

