Being Cosmopolitan: Marketing Development Studies in the Neoliberal University

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Abstract: This article unpacks how 'development' is represented and sold in postgraduate development studies courses at two UK universities, based on a close reading of the course's marketing materials and interviews with professional marketing staff within the university, academic leads on development studies courses and current development studies students. It explores the effects of development representations on students and their imaginations of the discipline and the university brand. I find representations of development engender a cosmopolitan desire mainly among international students and project a cosmopolitan virtue of the university through its development activities and associations. Contrary to seeing the cosmopolitan as a progressive political concept in a time of globalisation, I contend these cosmopolitan identities are imbued with the racialised legacies of colonial power.

Key words: Branding, cosmopolitanism, development studies education, representations, marketing

I. Introduction: Being Cosmopolitan

The marketing of development studies courses is typically regarded as a necessary practice of universities, drawing in often reluctant academics. The marketing of these courses is decidedly not seen as an opportunity for (re)conceptualising 'development' as a field of study nor for problematising imaginations of the discipline and how it attracts people to the field. In this article, I argue that the ways in which development studies courses are packaged and sold to fee-paying students perpetuate racist assumptions and problematic stereotypes in service to attracting student customers. This is revealing of the values that are appealed to and edified in the call to study development. Drawing together two fields of inquiry—critical higher education studies and critical development studies—I find that the logic of development studies course marketing produces representations that engender a type of cosmopolitan desire among students and project a cosmopolitan virtue of the university and its development activities.

Coming from the Greek *cosmos*, meaning the world, and *polis*, meaning city or citizen, to be marked cosmopolitan is to be marked as a worldly citizen. Cosmopolitanism concerns the vision of 'a beautiful idea' of a borderless human condition (Beck and Cronin, 2014: 1), where being cosmopolitan invokes a global identity. The concept of cosmopolitism comes from an expansive field of scholarship. My engagement with it is necessarily narrow and confined to identifying where and how cosmopolitan values and desires are coded in the marketing of development studies in both the aspirational brand of UK universities and its aspirational appeal to mainly international students in a competitive higher education marketplace.

In higher education scholarship, cosmopolitanism is often interpreted through an internationalisation agenda typified by international student mobility and global citizenship education (Carunna, 2014). The geographies of cosmopolitanism in this literature are marked by northern and southern differences and flow. Students from the Global South flow to the north (Maringe and Carter, 2007), and northern education courses fund southern studies and explorations (Patel, 2015). Where cosmopolitanism is critiqued, it is accused of being 'banal' and, in education, of supporting unrealized promises (Matthews and Sidhu, 2005). Yet, the concept itself reflects an intrinsic epistemic and moral position inseparable from colonial and imperial structures of power. As Andreotti (2011) notes, global citizenship education in northern institutions is reflective and constitutive of the geopolitics of knowledge production, racialised epistemologies and privileged Euro-American ways of knowing the world.

In UK schools, global citizenship education focuses on traditional ideas of citizenship as individual rights and responsibilities but roots them in a globalised world. This is often connected to development by linking an individual sense of responsibility with global engagement and a moral purpose to 'help to make [the world] a more just and sustainable place' (Oxfam, 2017). Martin and Griffiths (2012: 912) argue that the curriculum content of global citizenship education in schools is designed to have teachers 'prepare their pupils' to play an active role as citizens '… based on the liberal concept of care', imbuing them with a sense of self-belief to bring about change in societies to which they may or may not belong. This means,

> The notion of aid, responsibility and poverty alleviation retain the Other as an object of benevolence. The global citizen is some-how naturally endowed with the ability and inclination to 'help' the Other. To be addressed as a global citizen is to be marked as benevolent. (Jefferess, 2008, in Martin and Griffiths, 2012)

The realisation of cosmopolitan values through global citizenship education is a reading of compassionate liberal individualism tied to familiar tropes of saving and taking responsibility for Othered development-subjects. In parallel, the production of a global citizenry aware of global issues is tied to a liberal internationalist agenda to create 'competitive cosmopolitan subjects' equipped to engage with a global knowledge economy (Biccum, 2011: 1334).

Preparing workers for the global knowledge economy is central to the internationalisation agenda of UK universities and an instructive tool to recruit lucrative international students (Altbach and Knight, 2007). This cosmopolitan projection is invocative of colonial imaginaries of the desirability of the UK as a destination for study and constructs studying in the UK as a proxy for 'global' education in ways that capitalise on British colonial legacy, the global economic demand for degrees awarded in English and the presence of an English-speaking international mobile elite.

Reflecting on these entanglements of colonial legacy and cosmopolitan values, critics have offered an alternative framing of cosmopolitanism. Mendieta (2009: 241) offers a dialogical cosmopolitanism that is 'grounded, enlightened and reflexive'. Mignolo (2010: 124) offers a 'de-colonial cosmopolitanism' that privileges knowledge from the margins. Some abandon the term altogether, favouring instead progressive alternatives, such as Gayatri Spivak's planetarity—a call to imagine ourselves and reach out to one another as temporary subjects of the planet (Spivak, 2015). These points of redemption can serve as signals of 'good' cosmopolitanism and stand in contrast to ideas of 'northern' cosmopolitanism closely linked to enlightenment values and European global expansion, where Europe and its people look out to elsewhere, universalise their gaze and mark themselves as worldly.

The project of international development has long been critiqued along these lines when conceptualised as a northern technical pursuit

that restricts any other vision of 'development' and, through a 'development industry' of its own creation, fixes unequal global power relations to foster European superiority and privilege European sensibilities (Escobar, 1985). This critique, and the underpinning conceptualisation of development, is pronounced within the sub-field of development communication; particularly, studies on representations of development, where the communication of northern differences by northern development actors to northern audiences via infantilising representations of southern want and need is instrumental for the sustenance of a paternalistic development industry (Kim and Wilkins, 2021).

Development communication encompasses two elements—communication *for* development and the communication *of* development, often framed as 'doing good' and 'looking good'. These two elements can be coterminous (Enghel and Noske-Turner, 2018: 8), though when teased apart reveal differing political and economic purposes. Yet, a joining undercurrent of northern cosmopolitan values and desires is coded into and across these communications.

Communication *for* development is evident in the advocacy work of NGOs, where its purpose is to further developmental aims, such as raising awareness of global debt. It is overtly political and can be educative for the northern public. The 'Make Poverty History' campaign exemplifies this and is illustrative of how 'development'—when crafted as a cosmopolitan virtue—allows Britain to rebrand and the British public to reimagine their colonial past by creating a contemporary British image of global generosity, vision and outreach. Harrison (2010) describes how the 'Make Poverty History' campaign adopted a process of 'Africanisation' to ground lobbying for global fair trade, international debt relief and better aid with 'the hollowness of poverty imagery [to] mobilize people to engage with campaigns on behalf of distant others' (Harrison, 2010: 397). The visual representations of development in the campaign were observably black Africans and Africa-esque 'barren' landscapes as synonyms for poverty. They were accompanied by textual representations of Africa as a place in need of trade and governance for self-improvement that Biccum (2007: 1123) argues is akin to 'apologetic literature around empire'. The corollary of Africanised poverty is the rise of the British public as global citizens with empathic moral concern and obligation for far-off Africans. These representations of Africa and Africans in need of British assistance have an imperial antecedent and echo British moral obligation and legitimacy in missions to civilise Africa.

The communication *of* development as a subject and a field of practice is a rich body of work; particularly, in respect to 'selling development' in marketing campaigns of northern NGOs, ethical businesses and bilateral donors (Cameron and Haanstra, 2008; Chouliaraki, 2016; Dogra, 2012; Kim and Wilkins, 2021; Ponte and Richey, 2014). Within a neoliberal modality that governs the contemporary development industry (Power, 2000), acts of marketing, branding and selling (products or expertise) are necessary activities for development actors to retain their relevance, market share and relative positions of power (Patel and Mun, 2017).

Pivotal to the effective communication of development is centring the emotional capacity of northern audiences who serve as spectators of development as fundraisers, supporters and consumers of development apparel. Within these parameters, the communication of development has undergone a notable shift away from negative images of black and brown development-subjects typified by NGO fundraising campaigns for famine relief in Ethiopia in the 1980s, where white the northern audiences were triggered to act by emotional responses, such as pity, guilt and shame. Following sector-wide reflections on 'what are acceptable images of development?' there has been a turn to positive images that

keep intact people's dignity and 'aimed to show self-reliant and active people of the [south]' (Dogra, 2012: 7). Such images are likely to include happier-looking black and brown people to trigger different emotional responses from the same audience, trading pity, guilt and shame for feeling good about supporting a noble cause.

Chouliaraki (2016: 361) argues the new aesthetics of communication brings into being a 'specific kind of public actor—the ironic spectator of vulnerable others', where irony means 'a disposition of detached knowingness'. This speaks to a hyper-individual notion of solidarity 'where the encounter between Western spectators and vulnerable others [...] is reduced to an often narcissistic self-reflection that involves people like "us"' (Chouliaraki, 2016: 362) and reaffirms the centring of the northern self. To Cameron and Haanstra (2008: 1476), the northern self is made 'sophisticated, affluent, cosmopolitan and sexy' through their generosity as individual donors, supporters and consumers of a worthy cause. Such actions do not recognise development crises in global structures of inequity or historise them in European practices of colonialism and slavery, and thus, retain development as a positive association for northern individuals and reaffirm ideas of white saviourism.

The aesthetic shift in NGO fundraising and communication is not simply driven by inward reflection on acceptable images of development but is located by Chouliaraki (2016) within two parallel processes: technology, particularly, social media as direct unfiltered public communication of the self and the mass industrialisation of development work engendering the adoption of corporate principles of branding over traditional dissemination. Placing this in a wider context, she writes,

> the financial regime of the aid and develop-ment field ultimately legitimises a neoliberal logic of governance that turns the cosmo-politan aspirations of humanitarianism into

the corporate aspirations of the West. (Chouliaraki, 2016: 364)

Framing the development industry and its finances within a corporate landscape denotes a move away from cosmopolitan values as planetary concerns to corporatised northern cosmopolitan desires. This is illustrated by Ponte and Richey's (2014) work on 'Brand Aid' and the phenomenon of branding development problems and the people they affect in consumable products sold to northern audiences, such as wristbands, ribbons, t-shirts and red noses. 'Development' is conceptualised as a tradeable object or idea with the unique selling point of a worthy cause. Within this cause-related marketing logic, what is being sold is a moral good, where the product is incidental. For consumers, the purchase of development apparel and its associations as an ethical purchase marks the buyer's virtue.

Cosmopolitan values and desires bridge communication *for* development and the communication *of* development. While some of the logic and purpose of marketing, branding and selling development may differ between them, they are grounded in the same visual and textual representations of development as a field of difference. Drawing on the Orientalist arguments of Edward Said and the use of imaginative geographies, Dogra (2012) argues, distance is used to capture spatial and geographic elements of difference, connoted in the language (such as the use of 'developing' and 'Global South' as shorthand geographies) and visibly different-looking marketplaces, cities and villages that invoke a spatial and material distance to northern audiences. The clearest example is of *terra nullius* evoked by Africa-esque landscapes empty of people but full of 'underutilised' natural resources (Harrison, 2010). This is juxtaposed in urban contexts with overcrowded, busy, and aesthetically displeasing places and the near-total absence of images of southern modernist city centers, colonial administrative buildings in European style and overhead streetscapes of wide

boulevards and grids, built by colonialists and recognisable to northern audiences.

The difference, Dogra (2012: 93) argues, is 'nested in a dehistoricised oneness of universal humanism'. Such sentimental and untethered ideas of global humanity, or cosmopolitanism, serve as a rationale for northern engagement. A latent thread running through this discourse is race in both differences connoted by racialised bodies, and how racialised bodies are instructive in development communication. From interviews with fundraisers, Dogra notes, 'Effective fundraising requires that [southern] people do not outwardly look like "us"… Skin tone is the easiest signifier of "difference" that is apparently "demanded" by British audiences' (Dogra, 2012: 148). They note the easiest way for INGOs to circumvent the problematic aesthetics of a race in fundraising, is to adopt a 'humanist' approach where there is a racial mix of bodies alongside 'happy' imagery. This taps into a much longer history of processes of racialisation, which mark the deserving and undeserving poor in British imaginations (Shilliam, 2018), and the inverse Otherness that makes black bodies deserving only when they are located elsewhere and the object of benevolent paternalism.

In critical higher education studies and studies of development communication, being cosmopolitan is located within the internationalisation agenda of UK universities and the branding of Britain as 'global', within global citizenship education that marks British learners as worldly and within development communication that sells an idea of development as a positive association and worthy good for northern consumers by triggering 'feeling good' and operationalising racialised differences. The next section grounds this in the neoliberal university.

II. Marketing Development Studies in the Neoliberal University

The vast literature on 'selling development' has not examined universities as specific actors and sites selling development studies education. The marketing of development studies education is topical in a political climate where the neoliberal university is a distinct site of three inter-linked processes: the increased marketisation, privatisation and financialisation of higher education since at least the 1990s in the UK. Patel and North (2022), in the Introduction to this special issue, draw on James Vernon to explain that, '[M]arketisation is linked to the emergence of an "audit culture" associated with the development of performance indicators and league tables, which aimed to "increase efficiency through competition and internal markets"'. This created a new 'ethos and subject' (Vernon, 2018: 274), introducing the notion of students as consumers, and paving the way for processes of privatisation, with the introduction of tuition fees [in the UK] in the late 1990s. This, Vernon suggests, led to the development of new 'technologies of financialisation—and an explosion of student debt', as the burden of funding universities shifted from the public (via the state) to private individuals, that is, students.

In this environment of commercial sensibility, wherein 2018–2019, tuition fees generated 49% of all UK universities' income (17% of which is from international student fees, HESA, 2020), the importance of marketing and branding the university and its courses, particularly to international students who pay the highest tuition fees, is heightened (Altbach and Knight, 2007). This manifests in logics that presume and then monetise cosmopolitan desires to court international students via discourses that market the superiority of western knowledge (Robertson, 2010), which brand UK universities as leading providers of expert knowledge (Chapleo, 2010) and with the promise of endowing lucrative capitals that enhance their global employability (Lomer et al., 2018).

Discourses of marketing reveal something about the intention of universities and their development studies departments.

Scrutinising these discourses allows me to unpack the assumptions and claims made about development education, which expose real tensions between the functionality of marketing (to build brand recognition, capture prospects and generate revenue) and critical scholarly reflections of development that query its coloniality. Thus, marketing discourses and representations of 'development'—as the subject of marketing—are revealing of some of the neoliberal modalities within and around the university. I approach this task by unpacking marketing development studies education at three scales: nation-branding, university branding and course level marketing.

Three Scales of Marketing Development Studies Education

Nation-branding Britain
In a competitive and lucrative global higher education marketplace, UK universities—underwritten by the UK government—drive to package the UK's higher education as a desirable product and the 'British brand' as one associated with globally recognized quality. Critics have long argued this type of nation-branding performed by UK universities generates and plays on a discourse of the relative superiority of Western education and knowledge (Sidhu and Dall'Alba, 2012).

At this scale of nation-branding, international development is pivotal in branding post-colonial Britain. This is evident in two moments: the creation and the dismantling of the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Power (2000: 97) discussed how in the 1990s under Tony Blair's Labour government, a 'new' Britain was purposefully reimagined and remade, in which the idea of DFID encapsulated a global moral authority of a post-colonial Britain, a Britain 'reborn, free of an imperial past'. Following the announcement of DFID's merger with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 2020, there was a lamentation for a globally respected and morally upstanding British export (Stewart and Wintour, 2020).

The former Secretary of State for International Development, Andrew Mitchell (2020), went further and said in an ahistorical and decontextualised statement, 'Just as America was a military superpower, Britain was a development superpower with its tentacles and work spreading all around the world'.

Drawing these nation-branding discourses together marks the UK as a uniquely desirable destination for the study of development. This context is relevant in light of international student choice literature that repeatedly finds a hierarchy of prospective student decision-making that runs from selecting a desirable country, then a 'prestigious' institution and finally, an interesting degree course (Maringe and Carter, 2007). Nation-branding sets the context for the next two scales.

Branding the University
The university brand is a unique competitive identity, which captures the values a university wishes to externally project; for example, 'excellence' or 'being global'. Closely related to other university marketing strategies, branding (a verb) concerns building associations between the brand (a university) and the consumers of the brand, including prospective students, staff and research funders (Lomer et al., 2018). In a competitive marketplace, a successful brand identity defines a university's offer in relation to other institutions (Chapleo, 2010). The extent to which brand identity is aspirational or emerges from the institution's actual performance is subject to debate. Most usefully, we can regard the university brand as ideological and a means to convey a particular purpose (Naidoo et al., 2014).

This is exemplified by Faber and Holm's (2005) study of higher education institutions in the USA. Writing in a political context where higher education is decried as elitist and removed from popular concerns, they argue the purpose of a university's brand is to project the university as admirable and a worthy public good. Despite internal tensions in formulating an appropriate brand

for the university, 'the public image must elide the internal strife and contradictions and instead convey a grand harmony of diverse ends' (Faber and Holm, 2005, p. 119). This means communicating to external audiences. Virtuous slogans, such as 'Meeting the challenges of our world', or in the UK, 'meeting *grand challenges*', do not just speak to the merits of a particular university, but are a response to a desire for the university to be seen as global, impactful and a public good that serves us all. The university brand, thus, operates at two complementary levels: a competitive image that serves to attract prospective students, staff and funders and a collaborative image that projects the higher education sector as a public paragon, an admirable, worthy and virtuous endeavour. These cosmopolitan themes, which I discuss later, are heightened by the universities' activities in the field of international development.

Course Marketing

There is surprisingly little literature on course marketing as a field of practice compared to university marketing and branding, yet the two are linked. Where a university brand establishes a particular purpose, courses exemplify it. So, if a university brands itself as 'excellent', then course marketing demonstrates how. This is typically done with reference to named staff as experts, to subject rankings and the outcome of the latest Research Excellence Framework (REF)[1] emblazed on a departmental webpage. Additionally, course marketing serves to inform prospective students about the course content. Here, clarity and accessibility of information on course assessment, content and structure are particularly important alongside *exciting* prospective students (Moogan et al., 2001). It is within this objective to stir excitement and pique interest in a course that representations of development in development studies course marketing are pertinent and reminiscent of the type of representations employed by northern development NGOs.

In relevance to the marketing of development studies courses are ideas of cause-related marketing and the construction of development as a consumable ethical product (Ponte and Richey, 2014). The positive emotional response of northern audiences is triggered by the careful crafting of development as a positive association for them (Cameron and Haanstra, 2008). The packaging of development studies courses generates a type of global citizenship where 'global citizens' (domestic and highly mobile international students) are sold the capacity and self-belief to intervene to bring about change in societies, loosely based on an individual sense of responsibility for the Other (Martin and Griffin, 2012). Running through these are appeals to a sense of cosmopolitanism grounded in racialised representations of difference (Dogra, 2012).

III. Methodology

The questions that guide this study are: in development studies course marketing, what is sold? How? And, to what effect on student imaginations of the discipline? The study of development as a course in its own right in the UK market (and not a module or pathway within related disciplinary degrees) is typically at the postgraduate level, which is where this study focused. To address the research questions, I drew on textual and visual analyses of representations of development in publicly available course marketing materials of two UK universities to understand what is sold in marketing materials. 22 documents were analysed: two course brochures and twenty document-webpages. To identify the webpages, the home webpage of a specific development studies course was located and then, navigated away via hyperlinks on the page and navigated to from institutional or departmental homepages, a technique recommended by Pauwels (2011). This approach captures the structure

and navigational options of a website and reveals who is in control of the medium and to what end. For example, in a commercial webpage, this can mean being guided to a basket to buy a product or in higher education, submitting registration details for direct course marketing.

The study included interviews with five marketing professionals from within the internal communication and marketing teams in these universities and three academic leads of their development studies courses, to understand marketing processes and decision-making. Respondents were identified through purposive sampling, building on access via gatekeepers. The data mapped the organisational structure of marketing teams, revealed why particular discourses are given prominence in marketing material and the tensions that exist between actors involved in the production of that material.

Finally, two sets of group interviews were held with a total of 13 postgraduate development studies students in these universities to understand the effects of development studies marketing on their imaginations of the discipline. The groups were diverse with a wide range of development experience from none to over 10 years. The majority were international students. Group interviews were held at the start of the academic year, prior to deeper engagement with critical theories and ideas of development, in an effort to minimise the risk of evaluating the teaching of development.

The two universities—University A and University B—share characteristics that affect the apparatus of university marketing. Both are large, research-intensive universities with a high range of postgraduate offerings. They command high fees. Both universities are competitively and uniquely positioned in their field and so do not engage in the 'aggressive' marketing often ascribed to 'mass market' universities that need to capture a market share of students to maintain commercial viability (Ali-Choudhury et al., 2009).

Two analytical frameworks were developed to analyse the data produced. The analysis of course webpages and brochures was approached through a cultural studies lens. This meant identifying the social context and conventions within which visual and textual artefacts are read and employing a multimodal analysis of webpages to understand them as social and cultural cues (Lister and Wells, 2004; Pauwels, 2011). I developed a framework with three components suitable for analysing development studies marketing materials. These are (a) textual analysis identifying typologies of development subjects, narratives and counter-narratives of development. (b) Visual analysis identifying photographic conventions (composition, viewing position, use of foreground and background) and social conventions (use of visual metaphors and gaze) deployed in marketing imagery. (c) Webpage analysis identifying typographical signifiers, cross-modal interplay and the significance of page structure and navigation.

The second analytical framework was developed through a grounded approach to code conceptualisations of development among professional marketing staff and students and the influence of marketing materials on students. From student group interviews, examples of grounded codes include development as a *place*, an *application* and a scholarly *concept*, with these ideas informed by *life experience*, *professional experiences*, *scholarship* and *course marketing*. In individual interviews with marketing professionals, example codes include a parent code of 'course marketing rationales' and child codes *demonstrate value for money*, *targets* and *fulfil the brand promise*. The codes were arrived at through an iterative process of re-reading transcripts and continually identifying new codes until the data were saturated.

IV. Findings and Discussion
Branding the University Through 'Development'

Where nation-branding discourses construct the UK as a desirable destination for the study

of development, the university brand serves to build positive associations between the university and brand consumers, including prospective students (Lomer et al., 2018). The brands of the two large universities in this study are necessarily broad and transdisciplinary; here, I only regard the use of development or development studies as a way to signify particular aspects of the university brand. Namely, their global outreach and outlook, impact and public purpose.

The study did not set out to look at university branding and development. Rather in the course of navigating to and from departmental webpages, through interviews with university marketing professionals and student group interviews, it became apparent that the university brand was a major draw for all of the students and specific aspects of the brand they valued most was its global outlook and associations. One student explicitly picked up on the colonial ties that underlie the international reputation of UK higher education institutions, remarking,

> A UK degree particularly from [University A] mattered a lot to me because of where I want to work after I move back to Hong Kong, and [University A] is quite highly regarded in Hong Kong obviously, it is a former British colony. (Group interview, 2018)

Other international students added they chose the university because,

> It is very prestigious.
>
> I knew coming to [this city] would mean an international environment. (Group inter-view, 2018)

Consistent with international student choice literature (Maringe and Carter, 2007), for highly mobile English-speaking students, there was a keenness to build an association with universities with reputations for international prestige. The colonial imaginary at play projects a cosmopolitan coding of these UK universities as global and globally relevant. The British colonial legacy is clearly apparent

in the desirability of an English-speaking degree, the currency it carries for employment, particularly in a former British colony and the aspirations it represents for formerly colonised people. For these students, discussed in the next section, their desires for themselves are held in tandem with their pointed critique of racialised representations of development, thus adding a layer of tension and complexity to ideas of 'white saviourism'.

In general marketing materials, not the course-specific marketing examined in the next section, both universities signified their internationalism through engagements with development. The prospective audiences for these materials extend beyond prospective development students to all students. The purpose of general marketing is, to 'just give the vibe of the place. To generate, "Hey look at us, we're consistently highly ranked, we're in [a desirable location], and we're part of this vibrant community"' (University marketing professional 1, 2018).

Of the materials reviewed for this study, three elements of an international agenda and development were evident: global reach, global impact and public purpose. Alongside the offer of development studies courses, both universities illustrated the doing of development on their central webpages through named research projects and the offer of development consultancy work (navigated to via department webpages). These practical demonstrations of development ensure a global agenda is represented by the universities. This focus on the application of development profiled the reach of northern institutions into the south. The doing of development work by the university was presented without critique or reflection and without any reference to debates within development scholarship that might mark a particular project as noteworthy in this field. That is, representations of development in research and practice were decontextualised. The presentation of applied development

was framed within an overarching discourse of 'impact'. This discourse needs to be understood in the context of the REF and with particular meaning around the actions of hero-academics (Pain, 2014). The representation of these development endeavours also marks the institution as an admirable and virtuous global player.

The third element of public purpose draws together global reach and impact to build a compelling case for why the work of the university in spaces of development matters. At University B, 'International Development' was listed as part of the institution's strategic mission, alongside widening participation and access initiatives. Specific mention was made to development studies courses offered by the university and these were described as forming part of the university's longstanding 'commitment to social justice'. The intertwining of development education and university admissions into a common and holistic view of justice, crafts a central role for imaginations of development at the heart of a public university's public purpose and signifies higher education as a public paragon.

Representations and implicit imaginations of development create a sense of cosmopolitanism that serves the university brand. That is, the university is illustrated and made global, worldly and a concerned international actor through its development works and is thereby branded as admirable, worthy and virtuous. These are key selling points with which prospective students—international and domestic—desire an association.

Marketing Development Studies Courses

At this third scale of the development studies course, representations of development are much more explicit and intentional in guiding prospective students to enrol. Unpacking representations of development across course brochures and webpages reveal a common set of conceptualisations of development across the two universities.

The images presented in this article are not the images analysed in the study. The study images were typically taken by staff, are unique and identifiable on the webpages and course materials of specific universities. Their publication here would compromise the confidentiality of the interviewees. The images shared are typical of the images reviewed in the research and allow the reader to connect the analysis. They are shared via a creative commons licence. They represent four types of images in the study: portraits of children or women, scenes of a busy public space, urban infrastructure and rural landscapes devoid of people.

Source: M.M./Global Panorama, 2014, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

Source: Curt Carnemark/World Bank, 2008, licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Source: Angela Sevin, 2006, licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

Source: Malini Morzaria/EU/ECHO, 2013, licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

In imagery, both university departments mimic familiar tropes of development, specifically highly racialised tropes of desperate or lacking black and brown bodies, and either barren or chaotic landscapes that appear unfamiliar to the viewer. There is no discernible effort to capture happy faces, rendering the images reminiscent of the 'poverty porn' critique levelled at INGOs, and more recent critiques of infantilising representations of southern need (Kim and Wilkins, 2021).

All of the images viewed are entirely suggestive of the so-called Global South, without ever being specific as to geographic places, social context, nations or cultures. The absence of any captioning suggests it did not exactly matter what or where the image was taken. Nor whose gaze was reflected in the image; the nameless photographer appearing omnipresent. The otherness in the image is the central selling point and is entirely connoted in the occasional black or brown body, the type of architecture, such as a tin roof or the surrounds of scrubland.

It was also unclear if the scenes were one of sustainable development or its absence. The lack of any other context to the images leads the viewer to imagine this is a pre- or ongoing development and not the 'end product', largely because the Africa-esque landscape of barrenness and the South Asian landscape of crowded chaos are familiar tropes of places needing development that resonates with the viewer (Harrison, 2010). The constant depiction of pre-development or places in need of development thus consistently frames the scene as lacking input or intervention, presumably from the viewer/reader of the image—that is, the would-be doer of development, the potential student.

Multimodality matters for viewer comprehension and interpretation of images such as these. Yet, in both cases, all the images were abstract and decontextualised from the surrounding text. The link between a description of the course and its learning objectives to the images above has to be forcibly intuited or imagined by the viewer, which leads to issues of gaze and agency. Owing to the absence of explanatory text, particularly in images that connote a problem in need of solving, the gaze is clearly that of an outside viewer bringing particular judgments of where and what the problem is.

Issues of agency and gaze are amplified by the text in brochures and webpages, which always directly spoke to a prospective student audience. In the text, there was a strong emphasis on taking action, personal appeals to 'make a difference' and identification of development as a field of practice, with the course as a means to acquire practical skills in this area. For example, University A states, '[this course] provides analytical and

practical tools to reflexively engage… [with] challenges in the Global South'. This call to action is supported by the structure of both departmental webpages, which used pop-ups and sidebars to guide viewers to register their details for open days or brochures, moving a step closer to application and the acquisition of practical skills.

In interviews with university marketing professionals and the academic leads of development studies courses, we derive explanations of how these particular textual and visual representations are arrived at. It is interesting to note almost opposing priorities and motivations between academic leads and university marketing professionals, in a context where these development studies courses did not have to aggressively market themselves to attract students to the course because they are able to trade on the strong and established university brand.

For university marketing professionals, demonstrating value for money was a keyword in creating marketing content and attracting high numbers of quality applicants. This included details of student facilities on webpages and brochures alongside the quality of marketing paraphernalia. One marketing professional stated,

> If something doesn't look polished, it looks like you haven't put enough time and effort into it. Things like paper quality… in terms of student recruitment marketing. […] If I'm asking you to pay me £9,000, you're going to have to wow me at every point. (University marketing professional 2, 2018).

These two elements of demonstrative value for money create an association for the student customer, which clearly speaks to the university brand. Specific marketing materials represent a quality brand that builds and complements brand recognition among potential students.

The university brand is visually present in all course-level marketing in terms of logos, colour schemes, font and tone and structurally through webpage templates and specific host servers. A marketing professional elucidated,

> I have university guidelines in terms of things like the font we have to use, the colour we have to use, having university banner on top of our course brochures and we have to use it… our hands are tied to a certain extent. (University marketing professional 3, 2018)

The structural ways in which course marketing happens and is directed are not noted by the academic leads involved in course marketing. These two sets of professionals did not directly engage with one another and typically spoke past each other in their thinking on course marketing. Overall, the academic leads in this study did not have to think too much about growing student numbers and so were driven to regard brochure and webpage content as vehicles to convey their particular ideas about the course and their pedagogical approach. The images were either hastily supplied and the product of amateur efforts or sourced from a generic image bank rather than images commissioned by professional photographers with a carefully considered development brief. They intended only to capture (in a decontextualised way) ongoing work in the department and to literally fill a gap on the webpage, because the webpage structure demanded it. One academic reflected,

> Sometimes I feel a little bit guilty that we are not really taking this [marketing] at all seriously. The content page of my own page, I have not renewed it in years. Maybe I should refresh it? … It makes sense to, because actually [course content] are things that we really love and are passionate about… [But there is a] lack of time and lack of interest. Seriously, marketing is the least of my concerns and I think we are lucky that we […] are well-known and therefore we don't need to do marketing. (Academic lead 2, 2018)

Another, on reflection, lamented the distance between university marketing teams and academics, noting,

> I am not a marketing person. I have no expertise whatsoever. And the same goes for my

colleagues. We are not marketing people, I do believe there is a discipline [of marketing] and I am not trained in it. So I would certainly like a closer relationship. But we get dribs and drabs. But nothing that sort of formally ties the academic understanding to the marketing discipline. (Academic lead 3, 2018)

Despite the arms-length that academics felt they kept from course marketing, they were very much a part of the marketing machinery. They fit into a carefully curated slot of brand activities in everyday ways that articulate the university brand. This includes the branding of themselves as 'expert' and their work as 'expertise', which is heavily relied upon to underpin the promise of 'exciting' course content on practical skills and training in innovative approaches to development, which both pique potential student interest and fulfil value for money expectations.

Noting the tension that can exist between academics and the discourse of marketing, a marketing professional noted,

I get that people are uncomfortable with that title 'marketing', and 'brand' can cause issues too. Sometimes we might reframe things and use words like 'reputation', for example. (University marketing professional 1, 2018)

The sensitivity required by university marketing professionals of academic sensibilities, critiques and preferences, was not mirrored by academic leads, whose approach to engagement with course marketing was uncritical and unthoughtful (in the sense of not thinking about a topic).

The overarching effect is the creation of non-critical representations of development in imagery and text. The absence of meaningful engagement with the content of course marketing also subverts established student marketing logic. One university marketing professional commenting on the use of imagery in course marketing remarked,

You want them [students] to be able to see themselves here, studying at the university, and you do that by representing them in the images. So, it's a good idea to have images

with a good male/female mix, ethnic diversity, age as well. It's good to have a range of images. You just want someone to see it and be able to image themselves doing that course and studying [here]. (University marketing professional 1, 2018)

The importance of self-representation and the use of images with different racialised bodies echoes the tactics employed by INGOs to manage the problematic aesthetics of race and the instrumental use of black and brown bodies to sell development (Dogra, 2012). Yet, in these course marketing materials, there were no images of students, only development scenes, encouraging prospective students to only ever imagine themselves in relation to Othered development subjects.

In the artefacts analysed, the 'Global South' is shown and described as a real place and contrary to the academic debate on the 'Global South', not as an abstract methodological or theoretical provocation. In its denotations as a real place, it is shown as chaotic, disorganised, untidy, busy and aesthetically displeasing, and the viewer's gaze is meant to contrast with the world they inhabit. These are not images of people living in difficult circumstances for others leading similar lives but are images selected to appeal to prospective students and stoke their imagination. Not necessarily intentionally, the two development courses have built cognitive associations for prospective students to the values of development as a normative pursuit, geographically grounded in the Global South and predicated on helping others who are not like 'us'.

Current development students were overwhelmingly critical of the representations of development in course marketing materials. On the images in their course brochures and on department webpages, typical reflections included,

I don't know her name and I am looking at her, we are all looking at her. It felt like I was objectifying someone or something she was representing… I just think that when I saw

the woman and the fact that this woman was associated with this page that has big word 'development'. I did not love it.

I do take an issue with these images […] framed in a way of helplessness and it is kind of like I don't want… I don't feel comfortable with that.

It just felt dated. This is not what I signed up for.

It is like a caricature in a way. I am half-way offended that the university would portray this picture of their own course. (Group interview, 2018)

All of the image-based representations of development were disappointing to the students, provoking visceral reaction and a strong sense of discomfort. This was acute among white students from broadly, the Global North. One noted,

Obviously, I have to be very critical about developmental discourse being from the West and everything. It puts you in a very difficult position to work in that field as the constant self-questioning if you are allowed. (Group interview, 2018)

The images were also familiar, legible signifiers of development tropes that spoke to the students in a common register:

It felt stereotypical to me honestly. It was like, it sounds terrible, but that is the kind of image you would expect in aid agency or an international humanitarian agency. They push that kind of image in the industry… That is not bad necessarily it is just what you would expect.

I think it ties to images that you are so used to seeing, these images of development and I think to some degree you kind of get desensitized by it because you see it, you see it so much. (Group interview, 2018)

For students of development, the representations of development they encountered did not need to be explained; the lack of context to the images did not really matter to their sense-making or decision-making. Their prior expectations and knowledge of the discipline forged the context in which these stereotypical, deficit-loaded,

racialised tropes were implicitly recognized and their meaning understood. While students did not want to see these images, what they represented remained appealing alongside the intuited relationship between the imagery and the text. All the students said they focused on the skills and employability they can expect from the course and value for money. The language of practical skills executed in the Global South that is evident in course marketing materials, supplemented by their own further research, convinced these students to apply and enrol.

Interestingly, for many students further research included using social media to see different, more appealing images of development and development work. Instagram was mentioned several times as an important source of information to convey how fellow students saw their own course, especially overseas elements of it. One Instagram-viewing student shared that,

Then I even went like super nerd and like watched everyone's videos from last year and I was like… How cool! National Geographic! So, I thought it was really, really me. I started to envision a really exotic life for myself like becoming a filmmaker midway through the course [joke]. In seriousness, I really liked what I saw. (Group interview, 2018)

What is made exotic in this encounter is not development work, per se, but the representations of it in a fascinating, attractive and perhaps, enviable way. The explicit focus on the self is enabled by social media technologies (as discussed by Chouliaraki, 2016) that support direct peer communication and voyeuristic exploration.

Overall, among the students, there was a preference for images and text that are hopeful and representative of empowered development subjects. Reflecting on images from their course marketing materials, students noted,

I see negative images, even if I don't see any images of my country…I feel uncomfortable because there is always a good thing in all our countries and I think it should be

promoted. Why are we always using these horrible images?

These sorts of images resonate with a lot of things that I have seen in [my own country] and I agree with [student x], I don't think these images should portray like an idea of helplessness but it should follow that shift of development agencies, and maybe, perhaps use images that are more empowering. (Group interview, 2018)

Though an important caveat is from two students of colour from broadly, the Global South who said they felt the images were real and that it should be discomforting to see the reality of living a life in poverty. One remarked,

I do not feel bad for them [in the photos]… I see [structures of inequality] and I see people who are dealing with really difficult things […] and making the best [of it]. (Group interview, 2018)

The points of departure on problematic representations of development and the feelings they engender appear (or are starting to appear in this study) between, broadly, acceptance of discomfort among southern students of colour, and abject rejection among a group where the most vocal opponents are predominantly northern and white.

The desires engendered by representations of development are captured by the concept of cosmopolitanism, particularly northern cosmopolitanism (Cameron and Haanstra, 2008). A cosmopolitan desire is wanting to be seen as outward-looking, global and a compassionate agent of change and it remained present in all student reflections of course marking materials and was a driver in their decision to enrol. A northern cosmopolitanism in development marks the construction of a northern self that is made good and benevolent, free of the feelings of discomfort embedded in typical development scenes of the Other. The visceral reaction of many of these students to image-based representations of development and the strong desire for more hopeful imagery with the same levels of personal appeal as the action-orientated text is suggestive of a northern cosmopolitan

desire of wanting to engage with a socially valuable endeavour, without being made to feel uncomfortable about it.

V. Conclusion: Being Cosmopolitan

In the marketing of development studies education, cosmopolitan desire (wanting to be a certain kind of person or wanting to be seen as a certain kind of institution), is reflected in and engendered by marketing discourses at the scale of the course and the university. The branding of cosmopolitanism is sensitive to national political debates and the (notional) value of public institutions to the public. Within a national context that marks the UK as a desirable destination for the study of development, university branding draws upon representations of development to project global outreach, impact and public purpose through its development activities. At the course level, tired visual representations of development that draw upon racist tropes of development-needing people and places, are apparent in marketing content and may well persist through blurred lines of responsibility between university marketing teams and academic leads. Interestingly, these tropes are identified as such and rejected by students of development, who prefer more positive and hopeful representations notable by their global positioning.

The notion of cosmopolitanism engendered by representations of development in the marketing and branding activities of universities perpetuates cosmopolitan geographies of northern and southern differences and flow. This is not delinked from its Kantian origins in European global expansion. Cosmopolitanism as a concept, and its relationship to branding and development, remains rooted in Europe, and its institutions, looking out elsewhere and marking themselves as worldly. Its articulations are embedded in highly mobile international students courted to study development in the UK, at prestigious institutions with global impact, in specific courses that speak to their pre-existing

imagination of what development is, even if students themselves are highly critical and reject conceptualisations of 'development' as a northern technical pursuit and imagine themselves as (future) critical practitioners. The content of university marketing and branding, where these focus on development representations, are epistemic and moral positions that are inseparable from colonial structures of power and echo a wider context of post-colonial nation-branding of the UK and the study and practice of international development.

The findings of this study are limited to two UK institutions similar in size, market positions and global profile. The meaning of representations of development in marketing is likely to vary across universities both in (a) the context of a highly stratified UK higher education system with universities needing to operate to different market sensibilities and (b) internationally, as 'development' and its representation in university courses may only tangentially relate to the history of development studies education and practice in the UK. Despite these caveats, the study raises sufficient cause for deep and meaningful engagement with the role development academics play in the practices of course marketing and the production of critical and reflective representations of development that challenge and remake imaginations of the discipline. This element of rethinking development education has the potential to constructively rework the values that are appealed to and edified in the call to study development and thereby, draw the criticality of the classroom to the front page of the brochure.

Acknowledgments

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

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Note

1. A public quality audit of university research.

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