



BOOKS

A Flawed Hero

Chasing the Flame: Sergio Vieira de Mello and the Fight to Save the World

Samantha Power, Penguin Press,
2008, \$32.95, hardcover, 640 pages.

REVIEWED BY PETER F. SPALDING

Samantha Power, a former adviser to Sen. Barack Obama's presidential campaign, was nicknamed "the genocide chick" by some of her Harvard students after she won the Pulitzer Prize for her last book, *The Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide* (Basic Books, 2002). Her new work profiles the late Sergio Vieira de Mello, the dashing director of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, whose Baghdad headquarters was bombed in August 2003.

Killed at 55, he was found beneath the rubble, sprawled on the flag of the organization he had served his whole adult life. As Power explains, Vieira de Mello saw his temporary duty in Iraq as an opportunity to "listen to the voices" there. Toward that end, he made himself and his offices open to visitors. The much safer Green Zone was not a place he wanted to be.

The Brazilian-born diplomat was aptly described as a "a cross between James Bond and Bobby Kennedy" by a journalist on the eve of Power's first meeting with him in Zagreb in 1994, where she was a novice reporter covering the breakup of the former

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Yugoslavia. He had a taste for Johnnie Walker Black Label and the ladies, but was also a serious student of moral philosophy who wrote a 600-page Ph.D. thesis for the Sorbonne promoting a theory of universalism rooted in reciprocal respect.

Married and the father of two sons, Vieira de Mello repeatedly left his family behind to seek the most dangerous, unaccompanied assignments — postings one could also describe as "the real Foreign Service": East Pakistan/Bangladesh (1971-1972); Sudan (1973-1974); Cyprus (1974-1975); Mozambique (1975-1977); Lebanon (1981-1983); Cambodia (1991-1993); Kosovo (1993-1994); East Timor (1999-2002); and Iraq (2002-2003).

Sergio, as his staff fondly called him, declared that he was not assigned to manage politics, but to "deliver the groceries" to refugees displaced by war. He once told a UNHCR colleague: "We are the lowly humanitarians. We're the guys who pass out food and fix the roads. They look down on us elsewhere in the U.N. They don't see us as capable of handling high pol-

itics." Nevertheless, many in the United Nations hierarchy saw him as a future secretary general.

Though she clearly admires her subject, Power acknowledges that he was obsequious to war criminals like Radovan Karadzic and Slobodan Milosevic in hopes of gaining their cooperation. (Such unsuccessful fawning caused some U.N. colleagues to nickname him "Serbio.") He behaved with equal subservience toward the Khmer Rouge leadership, sharing fine French wine with Ieng Sary, the regime's "brother number two," with nary a mention of the genocide he had helped perpetrate.

A friend once told Vieira de Mello that if he ever wrote an autobiography, he should call it *My Friends the War Criminals*. Power is less damning, contenting herself with the observation that "his highly practical mantra of 'talking to everyone' caused him lapses of judgment." That is putting it mildly, to say the least. As Power titles one chapter in the book, "Fear Is a Bad Adviser." So is ego.

The massacre in Srebrenica and the Rwandan genocide would temper his willingness to make nice with mass murderers. But one suspects that the ambitious Vieira de Mello remained motivated by the desire to get results at any cost, thereby increasing his stature in the eyes of his superiors.

Reading between the lines of this beautifully written and well-researched biography, one comes to understand why a pragmatic idealist seeking the presidency might reach out to the author — who, like the hero of her



book, is fascinated by the role of moral authority in the conduct of foreign affairs.

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What's Your Brand?

**Competitive Identity:
The New Brand Management
for Nations, Cities and Regions**
*Simon Anholt, Palgrave MacMillan,
2007, \$35, hardcover, 160 pages.*

REVIEWED BY FRANK BAXTER

What is a brand? Broadly speaking, brands are the images that come to mind when people see, hear or think about products and services. Every company, organization and person has one. Successful corporations advertise heavily to reinforce a positive image in as many minds as possible, because people are wired to quickly judge what we perceive. We can't debate facts and our feelings each time we encounter something, so we "brand" it until conflicting information forces us to alter our perception.

Simon Anholt, the author of *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*, believes governments and countries also have brands, which need to be defended, improved and managed. A consultant to a dozen governments and organizations, Anholt calls himself the inventor of the term "nation-branding." Yet though he might have coined the term, governments have marketed their brands for ages. As a U.S. am-

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bassador who is committed to promoting the image of his country in Uruguay, I believe we can learn a lot from what Anholt has to say.

For instance, he writes: "All responsible governments, on behalf of their people, institutions and companies, need to discover what the world's perception of their country is" and develop a brand management strategy. He's right. Uruguay, where I currently serve, brands itself as safe and friendly, with the Punta del Este resort area embellishing its image.

Anholt states that "the reputation of a country has a direct and measurable impact on just about every aspect of its engagement with other countries, and plays a critical role in its economic, social, political and cultural progress."

I agree — but not completely. Consider Israel. The Jewish state has many detractors, yet enjoys a strong, export-driven economy. Israelis are technology innovators with a global reputation for excellence. Their goods turn up not only in hostile countries, but even in states whose governments are their sworn enemies. And despite being in a state of war with two neighbors, Israel's standard of living resembles Spain's. To use another buzzword, Israel has been able to segment its brand, with

different perceptions by different audiences.

Anholt is at his best when he discusses the tools a country or city can use to improve its brand. I like his chapter on competitiveness, where he urges countries to improve their images by analyzing "precise, relevant data" and avoiding "associations that are out of date." Likewise, a country cannot market its "benefits and offerings" unless they are relevant. Anholt illustrates these points using examples of countries and their images.

The legendary U.S. journalist Edward R. Murrow, who stated that "truth is the best propaganda and lies are the worst," is a voice Anholt says we cannot ignore. He urges readers to reflect on whether their nations deserve a negative reputation. Anholt's truth-based branding concepts appear in one form or another throughout his book. As a former businessman who believes a person's word is his or her bond, I agree with him.

The United States and Europe figure prominently in Anholt's case studies and charts. This is, of course, understandable. Londoners and New Yorkers have more money to pay for image consulting than their counterparts in Kigali or Managua. Unfortunately, I found nothing specific on Latin America in Anholt's book. I think a section on the successful regional marketing of Punta del Este would have been a good case study.

Anholt's *Competitive Identity* is an important and welcome edition to the small corpus of books on public diplomacy. It's an interesting read for anyone who wants ideas about how their country is perceived — and what can and should be done to improve its image. ■

Frank E. Baxter has been the U.S. ambassador to Uruguay since 2006.