

SOUTH AFRICA'S SOFT POWER: A COMPARATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

There is an emergent literature on South Africa's soft power. In comparison with other African nations, South Africa possesses enormous soft power assets that it could wield to gain international benefits. However, paradoxically, there is little analysis of the nexus between soft power and South Africa's foreign policy, suggesting a lack of interest among local and international scholars. In light of this reality, this article provides a critique of the current soft power literature relating to South Africa from a comparative perspective. It explores scholars' different conceptions of soft power and the debates on South Africa's soft power. The article identifies three strands of Pretoria's soft power literature and notes that more needs to be done to grapple with the idea of soft power in order to deepen the country's use of its soft power competences. It concludes by pointing out the role of the intelligentsia and other non-state actors in assisting state agencies to grasp the utility of soft power as foreign policy leverage.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy, DIRCO, intelligentsia, soft power

HISTORICIZING SOUTH AFRICA'S FOREIGN POLICY LITERATURE

Twenty years into post-apartheid democracy, South Africa has transformed itself from a pariah state into one that has gained widespread international acceptance and recognition. As Van Wyk (2012: 274) remarks, "Post-apartheid South Africa's



Politeia
Volume 34 | Number 2 | 2015
pp. 40–58

Print ISSN 0256-8845

reintegration into the international community resulted in the reorientation and development of the country's foreign policy". This led to heightened interest in studying South African foreign policy since the dawning of democracy and robust and nuanced scholarly analysis on the country's foreign policy to date. Naidoo (2010) categorised post-apartheid foreign policy literature in three broad themes: the estimative/prescriptive;¹ the new dispensation² and ambiguity³. She adds that these three broad patterns in South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy discussions are reflected in four clusters of foreign policy analysis: regional foreign policy (integration, cooperation and development); regional issues pertaining to trade and investment; regional issues centred on collective security through peacekeeping/brokering and finally, South Africa's role in the post-apartheid period.

In another analysis, I added a fourth category of South African foreign policy literature focusing on its 'emerging and regional power status' vis-à-vis the four concentric circles of Pretoria's foreign policy: Southern Africa, the African continent, the Global South and the world in general (Ogunnubi 2014). This thread examines the country's regional influence, particularly in the Southern African sub-region and the African continent as a whole.⁴ Sidiropoulos (2007, 22) is of the view that South Africa's regional power status can be justified on the following basis: keenness to shoulder the responsibilities that go with being a power in its region; its commitment to partnering with key emerging powers such as India, Brazil and China to boost interdependence among these partners; not wanting to upset the apple cart in Africa and seeking to be admired and welcomed as part of the group; and finally, pride in its science and technology capacity, a developed private sector and a global rather than a parochial agenda.

A cursory survey of current trends in South African foreign policy literature suggests that a fifth band of literature is beginning to emerge, focusing on 'soft power' – one which many scholars and pundits are too careful to approach or have rarely explored sufficiently. Nevertheless, a handful of scholars have attempted to engage in an in-depth analysis of the idea of soft power in South Africa's foreign policy albeit with apparent ambivalence in their conceptualization of the concept.⁵ There is therefore a growing but limited literature on South Africa's soft power. It is clear that, in comparison with other African nations, South Africa possesses enormous soft power assets that it could wield to gain international benefits (Ogunnubi and Uzodike 2015; Sidiropoulos 2014). Paradoxically, however, there is a lack of substantial analysis of the connection between the idea of soft power and (South Africa's) foreign policy. This is perhaps indicative of local and international scholars' lack of interest in this subject. Unlike its BRICS (Russia, India, China and South Africa) counterparts, South Africa has yet to fully grasp the value of soft power as a leverage of foreign policy despite the fact that it has the richest reservoirs of soft power resources on the African continent (Sidiropoulos 2014).

It is for this reason that this article explores current perspectives on South Africa's soft power from a comparative and critical perspective. It reviews existing understanding and the application of the concept of soft power to South Africa and offers suggestions for future research. Within the analytical parameters of existing soft power literature on South Africa, the article identifies three broad strands in this literature and concludes that more needs to be done to de-Americanize the concept of soft power in order to deepen Pretoria's soft power competence. More importantly, it highlights that the role of the intelligentsia and other non-state actors in assisting state agencies to grasp the utility of soft power as foreign policy leverage is critical to the cultivation of South Africa's soft power resources. As Geldenhuys observed, the foreign policy framework articulated in Chapter 7 of the National Development Plan (NDP) not only has the capacity to enhance South Africa's soft power, but can in itself be better realised through the utilisation of South Africa's soft power capability (Personal communication 12 February 2015).

The author approaches this article from an interpretive meta theory of knowledge, and as such adopt a qualitative methodology and methods to unravel the major themes and mind-sets of the data interrogated. Based on an extensive literature survey, the primary data is drawn from a list of publications relating to South Africa's soft power or what scholars such as Flesher (2007; 2010) and Geldenhuys (2011, 2010) refer to as 'ideational' power (See Tables 1 and 2). I also draw insights from a range of official government documents or transcriptions of recorded verbal communication or rhetoric on soft power. The selection criteria included reference to the concept of soft power through text scripts that: (1) directly refer to the concept of soft power (2) refer to the idea⁶ of soft power (3) refer to terminology associated with soft power such as culture, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, economic diplomacy, etc., and (4) refer to the concept of ideational power.⁷ I further relied on a qualitative content analysis⁸ of these data in order to identify similarities and dissimilarities in analytical contexts.

Table 1: A Chronological list of South Africa's Soft Power literature⁹

S/n	Author/Year	Literature type	Title
1	Ogunnubi and Isike (2015)	Journal article	Regional hegemonic contention and the asymmetry of soft power: A comparative analysis of South Africa and Nigeria
2	Ogunnubi and Uzodike (2015)	Journal article	South Africa's foreign policy and the strategy of soft power
3	Sidiropoulos (2014)	Journal article	South Africa's emerging soft power
4	Van Wyk (2014)	Conference paper	South African soft power and its regional leadership: The use of special envoys

5	Tella and Ogunnubi (2014)	Journal article	Hegemony or survival: South Africa's soft power and the challenge of xenophobia
6	Grix and Lee (2013)	Journal article	Soft power, sports mega-events and emerging states: The lure of the politics of attraction
7	Smith (2012)	Book chapter	Soft power: The essence of South Africa's foreign policy
8	Chiroro (2012)	Policy brief	Optimising the currency of soft power in the international arena
9	Sidiropoulos (2012)	Book chapter	South Africa: Development, international cooperation and soft power
10	Dowse (2011)	Policy brief	Power play: International politics, Germany, South Africa and the FIFA World Cup
11	Smith (2011)	Book chapter	South Africa and India as regional leaders: Gaining acceptance and legitimacy through the use of soft power
12	Smith (2010)	Conference paper	Acceptance and legitimacy through soft power. Closing the gap between domestic and foreign policy
13	Yazini (2009)	Journal article	Assessing South Africa's strategic options of soft power application through civic interest groups
14	Bodomo (2009)	Journal article	Africa-China relations: Symmetry, soft power and South Africa
15	Van der Westhuizen (2006)	Conference paper	Looking from the South upwards: Towards a reconceptualisation of soft power

Source: Author's compilation

As the above table reflects, since 2006 when the first modest attempt was made to analyse South Africa's soft power, 15 pieces of literature were identified by the author based on manifest reference to the concept of 'soft power' in their title and text. This body of literature comprises of seven journal articles, two policy briefs, as well as three book chapters and conference papers, respectively. Currently, there is no single or edited academic book dedicated to South Africa's soft power, despite the enormous potential for understanding soft power in global, regional and multidisciplinary contexts. Of the 15 pieces of literature surveyed, 'soft power' was included in the title of all but one. It would thus seem that there is a preference for the nomenclature 'soft power' as opposed to 'idea-driven' or 'ideational' power.

As table 2 below shows, there are a number of other significant pieces of literature which do not directly refer to the concept of soft power, but are recognisable by their latent reference or undertone to the idea of soft power captured in the main argument of their analysis.

Table 2: Selected list of latent literature on South Africa's Soft Power

S/n	Author/Year	Literature type	Title
1	Smith and Van der Westhuizen (2015)	Book chapter	Promoting South Africa's foreign policy through public diplomacy and branding
2	NDP (2012)	Policy document	Chapter 7: Positioning South Africa in the World
3	Geldenhuys (2011)	Journal article	Dealing with 'deviants': Testing South Africa's good international citizenship
4	Geldenhuys (2010)	Book chapter	South Africa: The idea-driven foreign policy of a regional power
5	Van der Westhuizen (2008)	Journal article	Popular culture, discourse and divergent identities: reconstructing South Africa as an African state
	Graham (2008)	Journal article	Gold star or bottom class: Is South Africa a good international citizen?

Source: Author's compilation

NYE'S IDEA OF SOFT POWER AND THE 'CONCRETE FALLACY'¹⁰

The traditional notion of power – as the ability to influence others in order to obtain preferred outcomes – has always been conceived along the lines of precise, measurable and tangible resources of a state's power over others (Nye 2011, 90). This form of power is often based on a concrete assessment of a state's material capabilities, mainly in terms of military capability and economic strength (Gallarotti 2010b). However, scholars like Waltz (1986) and Gilpin (1981) acknowledge the general lack of consensus on the definition, form and nature of power (See Baldwin 2012). It is in this regard that Nye offers a different perspective on the idea of power.

Although the concept of soft power was first propounded by renowned American political scientist, Joseph Nye, it was initially mooted in the writings of authors such as Kline, Morgenthau and Knorr (Ogunnubi and Uzodike 2015). Since 1990 when his first analysis of soft power was published, Nye has offered a number of explanations and conceptualisations of this term.¹¹ While many sceptics are quick to dismiss the

concept as 'old wine in a new wine skin',¹² Nye and other proponents of soft power have continued to argue that, in the information age of the 21st century, typified by increasing intercommunication, globalisation, the proliferation of non-state actors, etc., trends in international interaction have changed considerably to the extent that states are beginning to find more subtle ways to influence the behaviour of their state counterparts than displaying their hard and material power competence. According to Nye (2011: 84), "soft power will become an increasingly important part of smart power strategies"¹³. Although hard power capabilities have traditionally been – and still are – regarded as the main tool to promote a state's national interests, "the idea of soft power as a foreign policy tool is increasingly gaining wide acknowledgement particularly as the curtain winds down on the 20th century" (Smith 2012).

Nye's explanation of the concept of soft power is briefly discussed¹⁴ in order to juxtapose it with other scholars' varied understanding of South Africa's soft power. In his most recent book, *The Future of Power*, Nye (2011: 81) explained that, as an academic concept, soft power has "migrated to the front pages of newspapers and been used by top leaders in China, Indonesia, Europe, and elsewhere". He pointed out that the extensive and sometimes bogus use of the term has exposed the idea to misrepresentation, as anything short of military force. Nye confirms that, although soft power may appear to be an alternative to raw, hard power, the term is largely descriptive and it can be wielded for both negative and positive purposes. Soft power should therefore be conceived not purely as a zero-sum game but also as a positive sum interaction (Nye 2011: 90). Arguing that soft power has often had 'real effects' in history, Nye explains that, for instance, in eighteenth-century Europe, France's dominance was advanced by the spread of French culture and language.

Nye clarifies that, as an ideology, soft power cannot be associated with either idealism or liberalism and, indeed, falls outside the remit of realism. Rather, it represents a form of power rooted in the competitive struggle over legitimacy (Nye 2011: 82). The point Nye seems to make is that states as well as non-state actors, from corporations, to institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), transnational terrorist networks and even celebrities that have soft power competences of their own have the capacity to use this power to promote their ideas in a way that legitimately advances their cause while also enhancing their credibility.

Nye's analysis of soft power rests essentially on three basic resources; *culture* (in places where it is attractive to others), *political values* (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and *foreign policies* (when others see them as legitimate and as having moral authority) (2004a, 11: 2011, 84). He explains that these conditions are critical to "determining whether potential soft power resources translate into the behaviour of attraction that can influence others towards favourable outcomes" (Nye 2011: 84). Apart from the soft power resources of culture, political values and foreign policies; hard power resources that are usually mobilised to achieve pragmatic behaviour can also be mobilised to achieve soft power outcomes of attraction.

Economic and military capabilities can sometimes contribute significantly to soft power gains that appear not to indoctrinate but to inspire free choices on the part of the targets (Smith 2012).

Nye has offered a number of conceptual definitions of soft power with the result that it has become difficult to make any serious measurement of the concept. However, Nye is quick to acknowledge the inherent difficulty of wielding soft power capability since its success largely depends on a number of factors such as a government's ability to effectively incorporate its soft power resources into specific foreign policy strategies. A further dilemma lies in the fact that soft power is not totally controlled by governments since "culture and values are embedded in civil societies" (Nye 2011: 83). Similarly, soft power gains often take long to realise, which causes politicians and stakeholders that seek immediate returns to be wary of investing in such power. Some analysts suggest that soft power is nothing more than cultural imperialism. While agreeing that, in itself, soft power does not offer a messianic solution to all foreign policy contexts and may sometimes provide very little leverage, Nye maintains that this insufficiency is true of all forms of power.

Despite the fact that Nye's idea of soft power was initially applied to the United States and continues to be vaguely defined as a rather amorphous concept, the idea has been adopted and broadly applied in a variety of countries across the world as a component of foreign policy strategy (Thussu 2013: 4). Since the early 1990s when Nye first posited the concept, there has been a plethora of essays and scholarly analysis of the term with most emanating from China and the United States. The term has also gained wide usage among state officials, the media, the corporate world and even music bands (Ogunnubi and Isike 2015; Thussu 2013). For example, Li (2010: 214) observed that hardly any international conference concludes without a reference to 'soft power'. Particularly among the BRICS countries, there has been substantial focus on the value and utility of soft power. However, within this group, South Africa's soft power literature is still very much in its infancy and almost non-existent. While countries like China and Brazil have officially recognised the role of soft power – particularly cultural and public diplomacy for their foreign policy – South Africa has yet to fully demonstrate a grasp of the value and utility of soft power. Having succinctly reviewed Nye's soft power prescriptions, this article turns to an assessment of scholars' application of the concept to the South African case.

South Africa's Soft Power literature in a comparative context

For the purpose of this article and based on previous studies, I developed three thematic categories in the current South African soft power literature: (*Prescriptive*, *Utilitarian*, and *Comparative*) extrapolated using the procedure of common classes which provide an overarching pattern of argument. In short, the prescriptive cluster of literature focuses on the possible role and value of soft power in strengthening South

Africa's foreign policy as a regional (hegemonic) and middle power. As expected, this type of literature assesses the prospects that soft power (resources) offer for South Africa in both the medium and long term. The second cluster is characterised by an assessment of the utility of soft power for South Africa's foreign policy and international profile. This category is distinguished by detailed analysis of the country's specific soft power engagement, especially in Africa and of how (arguably) the country's foreign policy post-1994 has been conditioned by an emphasis on soft power. It also attempts to locate South Africa's specific soft power resources and capabilities. The third cluster of literature is largely concerned with a comparative analysis of South Africa's soft power status vis-à-vis other regional actors or middle powers like Brazil, India, China and Nigeria. This strand of literature examines the fledgling development of South Africa's soft power in relation to its regional and middle power counterparts across the world. This theme thus reinforces the argument that the realm of soft power is not limited to developed states but is also within the ambit of developing countries such as South Africa.

(a) Prescriptive/Normative

As noted earlier, the prescriptive band of literature on South Africa's soft power is largely focused on propositions about the value of soft power in different contexts, for instance, in achieving South Africa's middle power status; and its hegemonic leadership as well as the factors that may impact on the successful utilization of its soft power (Chiroro 2012; Yazini 2009). This body of literature is therefore concerned with providing a normative outline of how South Africa can maximize its soft-power attributes in an increasingly shifting world order while also identifying the contradictions that need to be addressed in order to deepen the cultivation of soft power in South Africa.

For instance, research in this regard has emphasized the role of civil society groups as a tool to build South Africa's soft power capability (Yazini 2009; Chiroro 2012). It is argued that non-state actors such as civil society interest groups are becoming increasingly critical in the country's foreign policy ambitions. Pretoria's foreign policy goals are given credence when these interest groups are involved and are effectively integrated into the policy cycle, thereby improving its soft power. Chiroro (2012, 1) shares similar sentiments with Yazini (2009) on the prospect of South Africa's soft power and argues that effective communication between state agencies and the South African people is critical in maximizing the country's soft power attributes. He adds that "A conscious and consistent adherence to the currency of soft power could enable South Africa to push through a national, African and a more human global agenda of immense magnitude in the overall international arena".

The context and extent of South Africa's soft power status is determined by a number of factors including its historical legacy, multilateral diplomacy, and

engagement with civil society as well as the media. Other factors include its trade relations and domestic politics (Chiroro 2012) and recurring incidences of xenophobia (Tella and Ogunnubi 2014). Hence, there is an urgent need to gain the support of this diverse group of non-state actors and institutions as well as citizens in order to advance South Africa's soft power prospects. Among the contradictions that need to be addressed in shoring up South Africa's soft power are pervasive inequality; widespread poverty; xenophobia, and inconsistent state policies, etc., due to their potential to prevent the country from accruing the benefits of soft power capacity. Tella and Ogunnubi' (2014) work on the impact of xenophobia on South Africa's soft power prospects is instructive in this regard. The authors point to a correlation between the country's pervasive culture of xenophobia and its dwindling soft power status, especially in Africa. They note that Pretoria's capacity to deepen its soft power mainly depends on its ability to address the culture of xenophobia often exhibited through the looting of foreign owned shops, violence and indiscriminate actions against immigrants. To a large extent, the legitimacy and acceptance of South Africa's regional hegemonic status will be a function of its willingness to address these outbursts among its people.

Consequently, authors in this spectrum of the literature present a narrative that emphasizes the need for public participation in the foreign policy making process, coupled with clear communication of the government's foreign policy intentions to the public through organized civil society and NGOs. It is clear that more space must be provided for public participation in the policy process as well as effective communication through different channels if South Africa's soft power is to be enhanced at both regional and global levels.

While many of the arguments of these scholars appear plausible, there is very little attempt to capture South Africa's specific soft power attributes. Some of the fundamental questions that this cluster of the literature neglects are: What are the sources and instruments of South Africa's soft power? To what extent does South Africa's soft power suppress or advance its regional hegemonic profile? Does the use of soft power create ambivalence between international recognition and regional acceptance? The literature in this regard thus assumes that South Africa does indeed have a substantial base of assorted soft power without offering credible evidence to support this claim. In this sense, much attention has been devoted to establishing how South Africa could improve its soft power status and mitigate the contradictions that may arise from its use of such power. However, drawing on Nye, it stops short of providing significant detail on the 'sources', 'currencies' and 'ingredients' of South Africa's soft power. As Nye (2004) suggests, awareness of soft power attributes is one of the first steps in utilizing this power. Dowse (2011, 6) confirms that awareness of soft power resources is a fundamental requirement to mobilize the instruments of soft power expansion.

Furthermore, differences between civil society groups threaten to derail South Africa's successful cultivation of soft power. While scholars such as Chiroro (2012) and Yazini (2009) acknowledge this difficulty, they offer little analysis of how such impasses could be resolved. However, this cluster of the literature brings to fore the need to explore the connections between the *agents* (state and non-state), *instruments* (sources) and *objects* (recipients) of South Africa's soft power capacity in a way that does not create contradictions but a unified expression of the country's soft power assets.

(b) Utilitarian

As noted earlier, the second thread in the literature on South Africa's soft power is constructed within the discursive theme of a utilitarian orientation. These studies focus on the utility of soft power for South Africa's foreign policy and attempt to fill the gaps in the prescriptive band. While these studies may appear similar to those discussed in the previous section, they are distinct in their ability to move the debate beyond mere prescriptions on the value of soft power to demonstrating the relevance (utility) and often successful implementation of South Africa's foreign policy through its soft power arsenal and appeal. Therefore, this cluster of the literature is utilitarian in the sense that it not only describes the value of soft power in the context of foreign policy, but more importantly, the benefits of its mobilization by South Africa in the past two decades.

The main argument advanced by these scholars is that soft power has been the fulcrum of South Africa's foreign policy engagement (Ogunnubi and Uzodike 2015; Sidiropoulos 2014; Smith 2012). It is argued that, based on South Africa's historical legacy, particularly its military activities, soft power capability has become the most practical alternative to realize its foreign policy objectives.

Scholars such as Sidiropoulos (2014) and Smith (2012) therefore make a case for the location of soft power in Africa, especially South Africa, despite Nye's failure to sufficiently apply his analysis to developing countries. These scholars have been vocal in asserting that on the African continent, South Africa perhaps has the best claim to the repertoire and exercise of soft power – extended through its culture, political values and the legitimacy of its foreign policy (Sidiropoulos 2014). Ogunnubi and Isike (2015) join this debate by pointing out that South Africa's superior soft power base vis-à-vis other regional contenders such as Nigeria probably give the former a legitimate claim to be referred to as Africa's regional hegemon. In the post-apartheid era, South Africa's foreign policy has shifted remarkably as a result of its focus on its soft power attributes. Unlike its apartheid predecessor, the democratic government's foreign policy has largely been characterized by a "desire to use the legitimacy and credibility developed through its peaceful transformation into a democratic state as

a means of influencing others and the shape of the international order” (Sidiropoulos 2014, 198).

Scholars also agree that much of South Africa's exercise of soft power has been a product of the actions of its citizens resulting from a robust civil society and NGOs as well as a thriving private sector. Sidiropoulos (2014, 199) highlights that “many civil society actors, building on their experience in the transition to democracy, have taken part in diplomatic initiatives in Africa” and have been critical in raising awareness of human right abuses in countries such as Swaziland. Furthermore, the country's cultural attraction, the nature of its political settlement and its subsequent constitutional order confer unrivalled moral authority on South Africa (Sidiropoulos 2014). Much of its post-apartheid political recipe has been brought to bear in conflict resolution engagement as well as post-conflict initiatives in countries such as Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lesotho and South Sudan (Ogunnubi and Uzodike 2015). The efforts of its Special Envoys as a diplomatic instrument for peace diplomacy have been quite remarkable (Van Wyk 2014). Van Wyk argues that the Special Envoys appointed by the Presidency have become a critical component of South Africa's soft power. Other sources of soft power include the efforts of its human rights-based foreign policy as well as the moral authority embodied in its iconic characters, particularly its first democratically elected president, Nelson Mandela. Some scholars have argued that Mandela represents the most important embodiment of South Africa's soft power assets (Sidiropoulos 2014).

Scholars in this cluster of the literature emphasize that South Africa enjoys significant international/regional recognition, legitimacy and acceptance as a result of the moral authority that accrues from the extension of its soft power (Smith 2012). South Africa has thus become a regional hegemonic power and middle power due in part to its international reputation and the continental leadership role it offers by virtue of its strong democratic character. This is reflected in and endorsed by many of the core values promoted by the West (Sidiropoulos 2014). South Africa thus enjoys credible international influence and status as a regional power and middle power on the basis of its substantial soft power capacity. A clear demonstration of this credibility is Pretoria's representation as Africa's only member in the Group of 20 and BRICS, as well as the IBSA Dialogue Forum (India, Brazil and South Africa).

Although, this cluster of the literature on soft power perhaps offers the most extensive analysis of the sources and instruments of South Africa's soft power, these analyses would have been more robust had they included an exploration of the regional and global dynamics of this soft power. The analysis of the nexus between soft power and South Africa's foreign policy would have benefited immensely from a rich comparative context. Also, these scholars' arguments have often revolved around the successful extension of South Africa's soft power without examining instances when this has yielded very little results (if any). Some of the critical questions that remain unanswered are: What are the contradictions and limitations of South Africa's soft

power? How do the actions of the state/government help to scramble or advance the communication of South Africa's soft power? Who are the direct recipients of South Africa's soft power? What perceptions do the foreign public hold of South Africa and how do these perceptions ultimately affect the reception of its soft power? One must not also overlook the question of whether soft power can indeed be regarded as a competent foreign policy instrument. Based on the experiences of well-established soft power states (great, regional and middle powers), this is an issue that needs to be tested with verifiable evidence, especially for developing states such as South Africa. This leads us to the next stream of the literature which pays some attention to the comparative context of South Africa's soft power.

(c) Comparative

Although the nexus between soft power and the foreign policy of developing countries, particularly in Africa, has been neglected, soft power analysis has been applied to a considerable degree to South Africa's foreign policy. Besides the two streams of literature discussed above, specific attention has been paid to a comparative analysis of South Africa's soft power with countries such as Brazil and Germany (Grix and Lee 2013; Dowse 2011); China (Bodomo 2009); India (Smith 2011); and Nigeria (Ogunnubi and Isike 2015). It is in this context of comparative analysis that efforts to de-Americanize the idea of soft power could emerge. For instance, Grix and Lee (2013) and Dowse (2011) extensively explored the idea of developed and emerging states using Mega Sport Events (MSEs) as soft power leverage. They pointed out that these global sporting events have become an important tool for the extension of foreign policy ambitions. Current trends show that emerging states such as Brazil, China and South Africa are increasingly using the currency of MSEs to assert themselves not just as regional actors but as global actors in international politics. The comparative perspective also offers "an opportunity for an empirically based analysis of the concept of soft power and of diplomatic practice by states, drawing from a more expansive set of actors used by scholars to date" (Grix and Lee 2013, 524). By hosting MSEs, developing and emerging countries such as South Africa are able to use this public diplomatic tool to attract the foreign public who are usually the direct recipients of soft power.

Among other high profile international sporting competitions, South Africa's hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup underscored Pretoria's developmental and state-building strides since the end of apartheid (Grix and Lee 2013; Dowse 2011; Cornelissen, Bob and Swart 2011). The country's successful bid to host the World Cup was similar to China's experience with the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, signaling the international credibility of a once-pariah state and subsequently providing South Africa with a platform to demonstrate its power of attraction. Furthermore, the manner in which South Africa framed its bid, claiming that it was

an 'African bid', extended the rhetoric of its soft power as Africa's continental power. Like China, South Africa attracted significant soft power benefits by becoming the first African state to successfully host a global sports mega-event of the magnitude of the World Cup. Scholars have sought to locate the ontological roots of soft power beyond the realm of traditional developed states by showing that developing and emerging states are beginning to make use of their soft power assets to transform their image and enhance their international positioning through hosting MSEs. Winning the bidding process and successfully hosting the Olympics or World Cup sends out "positive signals of inclusion and acceptance in the international system" (Grix and Lee 2013, 535).

In the same vein, Ogunnubi and Isike's (2015) comparative study of the soft power competences of Nigeria and South Africa concludes that, based on South Africa's stronger awareness and willingness to mobilize its soft power features; it is able to stand head and shoulders above Nigeria in terms of regional hegemonic status. Aside from traditional hard power competences, the tendency to refer to South Africa as Africa's regional hegemonic power is premised on the asymmetry of soft power capability which appears to be manifestly skewed in favour of South Africa. Smith (2011) offers a similar argument in relation to two members of the BRICS group (South Africa and India). In her view, both India and South Africa are making clear inroads into the epicenter of global influence armed by the trajectories of their soft power resources. The regional power status conferred on South Africa as a result of its extensive use of soft power has led to increasing degrees of acceptance and legitimacy. In other words, soft power is becoming an important prerequisite for the recognition and acceptance of regional powers (Ogunnubi 2014; Smith 2011).

Bodomo (2009) alerted readers to the skewed soft power relationship between South Africa and China and argued that the pattern of Africa-China relations is asymmetrically skewed in China's favor. On the other hand, effective engagement by prominent African states such as South Africa to play a counter-balancing role through its soft power enables it to change this ambivalent relationship.

In the context of Afro-Sino relations, compared to other regional actors in Africa such as Nigeria and Egypt, South Africa currently appears to be playing a greater role in stymieing this asymmetric relationship through its soft power after barely 15 years of diplomatic relations with China, with positive economic results (Bodomo 2009). Bodomo argues that, while South Africa has made the biggest contribution to counter-balancing China's dominance, it could do more in terms of replicating China's soft power, particularly through the establishment of the Mandela Institute. This would provide a cultural diplomatic platform to project South Africa's ideational materials at the global level.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S SOFT POWER

This article is the product of an extensive literature review on South Africa's soft power in Africa particularly dwelling on its implication for Pretoria's foreign policy. There can be no doubt that, the twenty-first century has been marked by steady growth in the visibility, volume, and value of cultural products from countries such as India, China and South Africa (See Thussu 2013:3). In the case of South Africa, despite the vast opportunities inherent in its soft power resources, state officials as well as foreign policy analysts have yet to engage sufficiently with the idea of soft power. Indeed, in the current information age, there is an increasing correlation between culture, media and international relations and Pretoria would do well to recognize this reality if it seeks to continue to play a leading role in regional and global affairs. There is therefore a need for more in-depth research on the role of both state and non-state agents of South Africa's soft power in finding the space to blend the country's sources of international attraction as useful instruments to advance its global influence. More importantly, the paucity of literature in this regard perhaps illustrates a lack of awareness among policy actors and analysts on this subject. Compared to its BRICS counterparts, where there is a substantial literature on soft power, South Africa has yet to fully develop a useful body of literature that can assist government in considering the utility of the components of its soft power resources.

It is on this basis that I argue that the academic community, NGOs and civil society groups have a significant role to play in helping to capacitate traditional South African foreign policy makers to grapple with the demands and expectations of a soft power strategy. This article has highlighted the fact that the current literature on South African soft power falls within three broad themes which sometimes overlap but are distinct in their analysis of soft power. It also noted that the successful utilization and cultivation of South Africa's soft power would be a function of Pretoria's ability to sufficiently understand its ideational value. The academic community has a pivotal role to play in this regard. If South Africa is to progress beyond the mere possession of soft power resources, a strategic vision is required on the part of both state and non-state actors to build a solid strategy to project its power of attraction. As Nye (2004, 14) pointed out, the successful wielding of soft power largely depends on a state's ability to develop "deeper understanding of the nature of power and the role of soft power, and achieving a better balance of hard and soft power" in the foreign policy process. In other words, it is crucial that a wide spectrum of actors, including policy makers, politicians, civil society interest groups and academics understand how these subtle instruments of power impact on South Africa's global political-economic influence. The current literature has not sufficiently tackled this very important area.

Soft power assets need to be calibrated effectively with hard power competences to influence state behavior and require appropriate and concerted efforts by all stakeholders. South Africa therefore needs to go beyond China's example where soft power is fundamentally coordinated and directed by the state by promoting a symbiotic relationship through public-private partnerships of state and non-state actors. This would enable the country to communicate its soft power in an effective manner.

In conclusion, it is interesting to note that soft power is beginning to appear in official government rhetoric, such as the recent NDP (2012). This suggests that considerable efforts are being made to understand the utility of soft power. The NDP makes reference to the value of soft power and highlights cases where the soft power resources of public diplomacy, culture, and higher education could be mobilized to achieve strategic foreign policy mandates. Consequently, more research needs to be conducted on issues such as: the role of soft power in achieving South Africa's foreign policy goals prescribed in Chapter 7 of the NDP 2030; the evolution and (projected) influence of South Africa's soft power, especially in Africa; and the agents, sources and communicative instruments for disseminating soft power. Other areas of study include an examination of the utility, contradictions and limitations of soft power; the soft power value of South Africa's intellectual infrastructure, higher education, and cultural and public diplomatic instruments; and the implications of Pretoria's soft power for its regional hegemonic status. I end with Le Pere's (2014) assertion that the collective endeavour of South Africa's foreign policy community to sustain its standing as a middle power and shape African and global agendas should be fundamentally premised on Pretoria's capacity to grasp the utility of its soft power assets.

NOTES

1. The literature relating to this period includes: Mills and Baynham (*Changing the Guard: South African Foreign Policy Into the 1990s*: 1990), Vale (*Starting Over: Some Early Questions on a Post-Apartheid Foreign Policy*: 1990), Points of Re-entry: Prospects for a Post-Apartheid Foreign Policy: 1992), Evans (*Continuity and Change in South Africa's Present; Future Foreign Policy; Myths and Realities in South Africa's Future Foreign Policy*: 1991), Geldenhuys (*Towards a New South Africa: The Foreign Policy Dimension*: 1991), Davies (*Integration or Cooperation in a Post-Apartheid Southern Africa: Some Reflections on an Emerging Debate*: 1992), Du Pisani (*Post-Settlement South Africa and the Future of Southern Africa*: 1993); McGowan (*The 'New' South Africa: Ascent or Descent in the World System?*: 1993), Koos van Wyk (*Foreign policy options for a new South Africa*: 1993), and Colin Legum (*South Africa's potential role in the organisation of African unity*: 1993).
2. See Du Pisani (*South Africa and the Region*: 1994), Mills (*From Pariah to Participant*:

- South Africa's Evolving Foreign Relations, 1990-1994: 1994), Bischoff (Democratic South Africa One Year After: Towards a New Foreign Policy: 1995), Davies (South African Foreign Policy Options in a Changing Global Context: 1995), Carlsnaes and Muller (Change and South African External Relations: 1997), Landsberg (Selling South Africa: New Foreign Policy and Strategic Ambiguity or Ambitious Strategy?, Foreign Policy Since the 1994 Election: 1995), Le Pere and van Nieuwkerk (Mission Imperfect: Redirecting South Africa's Foreign Policy: 1995), Shubin (Flinging the Doors Open: Foreign Policy of the New South Africa: 1995), Vale (Continuity Rather Than Change: South Africa's 'New' Foreign Policy: 1995), Evans (South Africa in Remission: The Foreign Policy of an Altered State: 1996) and Spence (The Debate over South Africa's Foreign Policy: 1996), and Van der Westhuizen (Can the giant be Gentle? Peacemaking as South African foreign policy: 1995).
3. Mills (Leaning All Over the Place? The Not-So-New South African Foreign Policy: 1997); Ryall (Caught Between Two Worlds: Understanding South Africa's Foreign Policy Options: 1997); Solomon (In Search of a South African Foreign Policy: 1997); Henwood (South Africa's Foreign Policy: Principles and Problems: 1997); Le Pere, Lambrechts and Van Nieuwkerk (The Burden of the Future: South Africa's Foreign Policy Challenges in the New Millennium: 1999).
 4. Vale and Taylor (South Africa's Post-Apartheid Foreign Policy Five Years on – From Pariah State to 'Just Another Country?': 1999); Taylor (Stuck in Middle Gear: South Africa's Post-Apartheid Foreign Relations: 2001); Sidiropoulos (Ed) (Apartheid Past, Renaissance Future: South Africa's Foreign Policy, 1994-2004; 2004); and Adebajo et al (Eds) (South Africa in Africa: The Post-Apartheid Era; 2007).
 5. Solomon (South African Foreign Policy, Middle Power Leadership and Preventive Diplomacy); Bischoff (Foreign policy by changing balances of power? South Africa as a middle power at the United Nations: 2009); and Flemes (Regional power South Africa: Co-operative hegemony constrained by historical legacy: 2009).
 6. See Ogunnubi and Uzodike (2015); Tella and Ogunnubi (2014); Ogunnubi and Isike (2015); Ogunnubi (2014); Sidiropoulos (2014); Smith (2012, 2011); Geldenhuys (2011, 2010); and Chiroro (2012).
 7. I deliberately separate 'idea' from 'concept' with the understanding that a reference to soft power may be made without necessarily quoting 'soft power' in the work.
 8. As noted earlier, ideational power is often used as a replacement for soft power.
 9. Content analysis is a technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages (Hosti 1968:608).
 10. This list is compiled based on the literature that specifically addresses the issue of soft (ideational) power as a major theme.
 11. The idea of the 'concrete fallacy' has its roots in the work of Lukes Steven, Power: A Radical View, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
 12. Over the years, Nye has continued to refine his conceptualization of soft power which

has ranged from “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (2004, p. x); to the “ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence” (2004:9); the “ability to affect the behavior of others by influencing their preferences” (2004:5); the “ability to affect the behavior of others by influencing their preferences” (2004:5); and later as the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes (2011, p.20-21).

13. Nye himself agreed that “Though the concept of soft power is recent, the behavior it denotes is as old as human history” (2011:81).
14. Smart power is the term Nye used to refer to strategies aimed at successfully combining the use of both the hard and soft power capacities of a state.
15. Nye’s idea of soft power is fully expounded in four of his books: *The Paradox of American Power* (2002); *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004a); *Power in Global Information Age* (2004b); and more recently, *The Future of Power* (2011).

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