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*Brazil also has high crime rate, but it brands itself better than SA The Herald (South Africa) July 14, 2009 Tuesday*

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**SECTION:** OPINION & EDITORIAL**LENGTH:** 598 words**HEADLINE:** Brazil also has high crime rate, but it brands itself better than SA**BYLINE:** Tracie Mackie**BODY:**

THINK Brazil ... samba, Kaka, Ronaldo, beautiful women and Seleção (the name given to their national soccer team).

Crime and violence? Mmm, doesn't quite come into the scenario, does it?

Now, why does South Africa have such a bad reputation when it comes to crime and violence while a country like Brazil, with similar socio-economic challenges and high crime rates, is perceived so differently?

The question was asked by a South American journalist attending a 2010 Fifa World Cup South Africa-organised media communication workshop in Johannesburg about a year or so ago. I was there.

Somehow Brazil seems to have contextualised violence and crime better than we do here in SA.

So why is it then that Brazil walks in the world's limelight as a country of soccer and samba, and South Africa often limps behind as a one of poverty and crime.

Paulo Sotero, director of the Brazil Institute at the Washington-based Woodrow Wilson Centre, was quoted in a Cape Town newspaper recently: "Maybe it's because we (Brazil) had less to overcome than South Africa. We never had the trauma of the legal system of segregation to get to grips with, so maybe we were less divided as a nation when we started out."

Sotero also puts Brazil having a more positive reputation than South Africa down to steady progress doused with a realistic outlook on life and the feeling that while much has been achieved, much more needs to be done. He also says: "The democracy is still being built on a daily basis. That not only helps our reputation, but our own sense of self as a nation."

It appears Brazilians are rarely short on optimism and have defined their identity by a vision of what they are going to become as a nation. South Africans, on the other hand, continue to define themselves by their past.

Policy analyst Marian Tuny, at the Washington-based **Cato Institute**, suggested this. Academics all over the world have picked up on the debate.

Some argue the election of Jacob Zuma as president contributes to negative perceptions, given the criminal allegations that recently surrounded him. Others say that under former president Thabo Mbeki's watch, the country was dogged with controversy because of his handling of Aids in South Africa and the Zimbabwe issue.

While some academics also have reported that our negative reputation could be attributed to the government's inability to deliver when fighting poverty and crime.

Others have claimed there is a perceived tendency on the part of SA authorities to withhold crime data.

(Twelve months have apparently passed since the South African Police Service released its annual statistics and it is understood that this year's figures will not emerge until August or September.)

So, perhaps there is a bit of merit in all the academic debate.

And yes, like Brazil, crime is a challenge in SA.

But maybe Brazil will be able to turn the challenges around quicker because of its optimism that has contributed to building a brand that attracts people to its shores as tourists and investors.

So, we can leave the world to manage our brand or as branding specialist Thebe Ikafaleng has said: "Either, you take control of the perception, or, the perception will begin to define you. We've allowed the image that we are a land of criminals to fester".

So as we move towards 2010, let us as South Africans take control of our own brand, define its personality and deliver on its promise.

Think South Africa ... Nelson Mandela; safari; adventure; warm, friendly people; braaivleis and sunny skies; rich heritage and

culture. Think positive ... it's possible.

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