

The motif of billboard texts of adverts in four cities: Apropos of Bantu and African languages

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Advertising, which is but one link in the value chain of marketing, is the hallmark of the postmodern world, ubiquitous and dominant in all public spaces and spheres of life. A random count of billboards, posters, and electronic and digital advertisements can attest to this without recourse to systematic empirical evidence. However, there is a need to interrogate the basis of this status quo, its 'superstructure' and 'base', and address the impact of advertising on African peoples and their values; how they are influenced and directed in public sphere in African localities, where their values should be predominant. The impetus that inspired the thematic exploration of this article is that in public spaces where indigenous languages and values should logically be dominant, they are marginalised and patronised, in ways that are cynical and are an instrument of capitalist motives and agenda. This article seeks to explore manifestations of this marginalisation and undermining of values of speakers of Bantu and other African languages in advertisements, a genre that is so ubiquitous that it imposes a subliminal crisis among indigenous languages speakers, who are demographically in the majority on the African continent. The impact of this genre pervades spaces in languages, in style, diction, and undertones that have an ideological impact in environments and settings where African languages and values are expected to be predominant, or at least should indigenously and logically be strongly anchored. This premise is the base of my inquiry.

Contribution: This dominance is achieved by means of visual and textual images of advertisements that have sought to 'sustain alienation' and establish subordination of the consumer.

Keywords: advertisements; African languages; values; coloniality; false; imaginary needs.

Introduction

Aim and methodology

The aim of this discussion is to undertake a close reading and explication of the content of selected advertisements, in order to deconstruct embedded paradoxes and ironies, which manifest contradictions of an inclusive-exclusive narrative. To this effect, the overarching question that I am pursuing is the private or public discourse junction and disjunction of habitat and values in pursuit of the questions of, (1) how Bantu and other African languages and values feature in public spaces in selected geographical spaces as manifested in visual and textual images of advertisements, (2) to what degree is their prominence or obscurity and integrity or obfuscation in these spaces manifest, and, (3) how the impact of advertising in Bantu and other African languages and African values, within the theoretical framework of advertising creates fabricated, fictitious and fantastic worlds at the junction of private or public discourse.

I set out to situate my aim and methodology within the notion of decoloniality as an overarching purview. As decoloniality has many facets and definitions, and is not a theory per se, my working definition is that it is an exercise, enterprise, and project of eschewing, elimination, and obliteration of oppressive aspects of the colonial enterprise, but with specific reference to the vexing and recalcitrant presence of imperial languages and their attendant values in the public spaces, in the genre of advertisements. I bear in my peripheral vision Maldonado Torres's ten thesis (2016), and will conclude this discussion with their précis.

My methodology will be a close reading and explication of advertising texts selected from four cities. Two of the cities are located in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region, Accra in Ghana and Bamako, which are each the capital city of the country. In the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, I selected Gaborone and Johannesburg.

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The latter is the only city in my selection which is not the national capital city but the economic hub. Economic Community of West African States and SADC are two economic demarcations of the African continent recognised by the African Union (AU). Other regions are the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), East African Community (EAC), and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), overseen by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) of the AU. I was in Bamako attending the celebration of the World Day of African and Afro-Descendant Culture, which took place on 23–24 January 2018, in Accra attending a conference of the first AU PAWA (African Union Pan African Writers Association), which took place on 07–09 March 2018. I visit Gaborone frequently but most of the photos were taken during a visit in April 2018. Johannesburg is my domicilium.

The sampling of advertising texts in these centres was convenient, random, and purposive. It was convenient in the sense that my presence at the selected cities was for purposes other than studying the content and form of advertisements; random in that I haphazardly took photographs of advertisements as a matter of leisurely pastime, as I was perambulating over a radius of about 3 km and driving radius roughly estimated at 35 km of the cities. It was purposive in the sense that I deliberately selected physical billboards and excluded digital billboards, as the genre of adverts over other possible genres, that is, newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets, brochures, journals, murals, theatre, cinema, rites, graffiti, rituals festivals, and other forms of digital media. I collected more than 500 advertisements, about 100 in each of the cities, but for the unit of analysis in this article I will consider 25 from each. Recently, investment in digital advertising has been on the increase:

Notably there is increased investment in the digital sector ... Globally, digital has grown 2.9 percentage points or +7.6% in the last three years. China and Brazil are the markets with the highest digital budget (50.1% and 45.1%, respectively), and the IAB South African Digital Ad Spend Report for 2020 reveals that despite the state of the economy, the digital industry experienced an 18% year-on-year growth. (Bizcommunity 2022:1)

This trend does not necessarily portend obliteration of static billboards in the foreseeable future, which are as recalcitrant as hard copy version of books, which are far from being antiquated despite advent of the eBook (Maake 2018).

Theoretical framework and theories of advertising

I find it necessary, if not imperative, to pursue a two-fold or double-tiered approach in this discussion. Firstly, to anchor the close reading and explication of my corpus of selected texts on theories and theoretical concepts which will be outlined a few paragraphs later. Secondly, to adopt a Trojan-horse approach, which deploys theoretical concepts derived

from theories of marketing, a tool which propagates indiscriminate sale and buying of perishable and non-perishable goods, which does not consider the difference between wants and needs among the target populations. This is reminiscent of Kahlil Gibran's poem, 'On buying and Selling':

And a merchant said, Speak to us of Buying and Selling.

And he answered and said:

To you the earth yields her fruit, and you shall not want if you but know how to fill your hands.

It is in exchanging the gifts of the earth that you shall find abundance and be satisfied.

Yet unless the exchange be in love and kindly justice, it will but lead some to greed and others to hunger. (Gibran 1925:43)

A complicating factor is that there are several theories of marketing, which are a tenor for advertising, but that they are not theories per se, but mainly principles or models or matrices or processes, which tend to be inductive rather than deductive. There are 17 of these so-called theories listed which are predominant in the world of marketing, namely, Ansoff Matrix, Balanced Scorecard, Marketing Mix, Communication Mix, SWOT analysis, Stakeholder Mapping, Mendelow's Matrix, consumer decision making process, Porters Five Forces, GE Matrix, Marketing Environment, Segmenting consumer markets, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Boston Consulting group Matrix, PESTEL Analysis, RABOSTIC planning model, and PESO model (Professional Academy n.d.) This perspective and interpretation is thus propitious for the rationale for selection of Maslow's hierarchy needs (Wikipedia n.d.), for it is the only one in the list which is a theory qua theory. I will, however, engage it only as a supplement to an eclectic set of theories of advertising outlined by Bhasin, and scaffold it with Marcuse's theory of 'false needs', which is almost synonymous to Marx's concept of 'unnatural and imaginary appetites'. In short, I will be engaging four theoretical frameworks, with Bhasin's as the primary, to explicate my *paradigm* of antitheses or binary oppositions that I discern in advertisement texts.

Bhasin (2023) asserts that there are five advertising theories, namely, (1) the mediation of reality, (2) shifting loyalties, (3) the magic of meaning, (4) the hidden message, and (5) imitative desire. In order for me to situate my discussion within the context of these theories, I would like to highlight their saliency and potential impact on African languages and values (Maake 2018). The fundamental aim of advertising is to persuade, using fair and foul strategies and tactics. Let us study the thematic layers of these strategies and tactics by employing Bhasin's theories, and linking them with Marcuse's (1970) and Maslow's theories of needs.

The first theory of advertising explains how advertisements utilise the media to elicit world of fictions and that of actions together and not necessarily the content. A relevant question to ask in this regard is who the portrayed protagonist(s) of the actions depicted are, what values they seem to hold or

propagate, and what language they are presumed to speak, dramatically and fictionally but portrayed as real. As action is often depicted in a combination of words and images, medium and values become paramount in this question, and whether there is congruity between the language of actants and the audience to which the text is directed. The second theory explains how advertisements play upon and replicate clashed loyalties that keep on changing. The third theory explains:

[H]ow advertisements influence the values and other fundamental beliefs of the consumers ... and services and are increasingly becoming involved with the *shaping of individual and social values* ... and affecting social goals and public attitudes. (Bhasin 2023:1, [authors own emphasis])

The fourth theory explains how advertisements use persuasion with messages which are 'emotionally-loaded'. What happens is that as the message is coded, there is a tendency of viewers' critical resistance to be deluded, reduced, or mitigated. The final theory explains how advertisements adopt a manner of playing upon consumer's tendency to want what other people also wish by building this castle in the air that keeps the desire alive – tantalising by illusion.

These explicatory theories converge into what Marcuse calls 'false needs' and 'superimposed needs', which are (Maake 2018):

[S]uperimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice ... Most of the prevailing *needs to relax, have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs.* (Marcuse 1970:21–22 [authors own emphasis])

Marcuse questions the idea of freedom of choice in a world where needs are artificially created:

Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear – that is, if they sustain alienation. (Marcuse 1970:23)

In the case of advertisements, the alienation is paradoxical, in the sense that at the surface structure it suggests incorporation of the audience yet at the deep structure it excludes the working classes to whom it is mainly directed, portraying illusion of inclusion. Marcuse's thesis is in line with his historical materialism predecessor, Marx, that:

The increase in the quantity of objects is accompanied by an extension of the realm of the alien powers to which man is subject, and every new product represent a new *potency* of mutual swindling and mutual plundering ... The need for money is therefore the true need produced by the modern economic system ... *Excess and intemperance* comes to be its true norm. Subjectively, this is even partly manifested in that the extension of products and needs falls into contriving and *ever-calculating* subservience to inhuman, refined, unnatural and imaginary appetites. (Marcuse 1970:61–2)

Excess and intemperance are crucial to note, in that the working class(es), comprising the majority of speakers of Bantu and other African languages, are enticed and coaxed while their means are limited, but fall into the trap of imitating the trappings of the middle class(es). I propose that there are several instruments of illusion and alienation, and the most fundamental aspects of culture that they set out to undermine are language and values, as I shall subsequently aver in this discussion, through exposing elevation of needs in the idiom of words and images that create false needs illusionary euphoria and false status.

Antithetical intersection between advertising, and African languages and values

Advertisement is the lifeblood of capitalism, and peoples of the Third World, or in economic terms the Developing World and underdeveloped World are mainly consumers rather than producers and sellers of commodities. The relationship between capitalism and the African world, which is constituted mainly of African languages and values, can be presented as an axis of a vertical superstructure and base on the one hand, and horizontal citizen-to-citizen continuum (Figure 1). The horizontal line of axis comprises impersonal owners of 'means of production' (multinational companies and corporations), while the vertical comprises of consumers, that is, the urban 'classes', 'middle classes', and rural 'classes'.

With regard to the antitheses or binary oppositions of Africa and Europe, Old World and New World and Third World, Developed and Und[er]veloped, North and South, and Capital and Labour economies, in most cases but not necessarily all cases the contradiction tends to coincide with race, even though in non-conventional instances of capitalism, as I averred earlier, 'whiteness' creates an illusion of inclusion; 'non-racialism' by co-opting 'blackness' and dresses it in 'borrowed robes', that is, trappings of the capitalist class. For purposes of this discussion 'humanistic values' refers to values underpinned by Ubuntu, *motho ke motho ka batho / umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – a person is fulfilled through others but not through secondary material objects (Maake 2018), and humility expressed in the Sesotho proverb, *motsamai o ja noha* – when you are in foreign territory or a

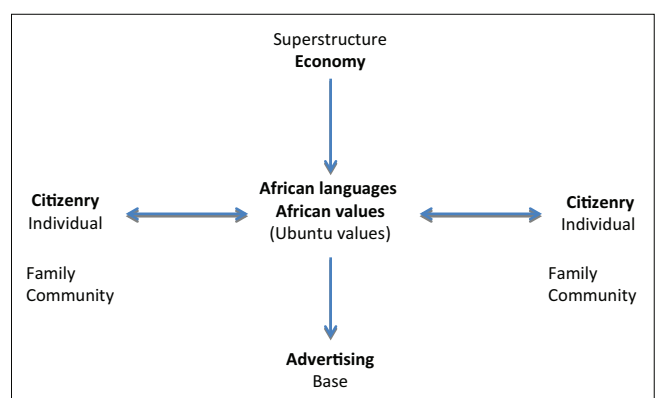


FIGURE 1: Axis of communication.

guest, you consume what is offered to you. Advertisements create foreignness in one's own homestead.

Marketing, advertisements and decoloniality

It might be judicious to suggest that this discussion should consider and contextualise itself in discourses of decolonising advertising or marketing. Notwithstanding, I find it plausible to state that the unit of analysis of this discussion and its aim is a close reading and explication of devices and techniques of advertising in order to expose and subvert the underlying nature of their formulation and clandestine motif within the discourse of decolonising, which it might miss if vigilance is dulled. Decolonising is only used here as a guiding notion or principle. I have to start by mentioning that there are discourses which are *prima facie* relevant or not relevant to this discussion, though not necessarily so *de facto*. Instances of this are Nederstigt and Hilberink-Schulpen (2018), Eckhardt et al. (2022), Yeboah-Banin's (2023), Fazli-Salehi et al. (2023), Editors of Encyclopaedia (2023), and Masoga and Shokane (2023), which I will address *en passant*, simply to test my scepticism or acquiescence of their relevance.

These studies were undertaken in Asia, Europe, and US, and none of them refer to Africa or the Southern Hemisphere, let alone case studies of advertisements in the languages of Africa, except for Masoga and Shokane, which are relevant to this study. The perspective of the others regarding decoloniality, if at all, excludes the African perspective. Research conducted by Nederstigt and Hilberink-Schulpen on foreign languages in advertising stresses the role of the match between product and language. Ads with a match are regarded as more effective. However, their effectiveness has not been compared to that of advertisements in the consumers' native language, which are not restricted to products with a match, but are used for a range of products. Their experiment tested whether native ads were more effective than those in the medium of foreign languages. They state that they took consumers' foreign language proficiency into account. Results suggest that the foreign language is not the only key to success in advertising and effectiveness but effectiveness might also depend on the particular foreign language used.

The research conducted by Fazli-Salehi et al. (2023) is obliquely relevant in that it explored what it calls 'ethnic disidentification' or 'anti-group trait'. Their findings point to the conclusion that among participants of their study, which was undertaken in south western US, cosmopolitanism was effective where advertisements featured 'multi-ethnic models'. In my study the relevance of the so-called multi-ethnicism use class co-option as a guise for inclusion, thereby creating an upward mobility illusion while excluding African values, thus obliterating them by omission and substitution with upper class and Western values. In other words, the authors of this article operate within Western paradigms,

without exhibiting consciousness of other worlds, especially the Global South, where coloniality wears the guise of 'multi-ethnicism'.

While Eckhardt et al. (2022) are interesting, they are not pertinent to this discussion. Their article is derived from a seminar that was organised jointly by the Bayes Business School Royal Holloway University of London under the theme of 'Decolonizing the business school' (Eckhardt et al. 2022:176). They make useful suggestions about the essence of decolonising and how it should be executed in the business school curriculum. Their propositions, quoting Burton (2009) and Bonsu (2009) are apparently apposite and radical, especially the quoted premise, that 'contemporary advertisements suggest inferior African "otherness"' and 'how the brutality of colonialism in Africa is perpetuated in contemporary ads' (2022:177). Nonetheless, they seem to elide over the fact that colonialism, coloniality, and neo-coloniality have advanced beyond merely othering Africans. But that they have evolved into creating false and camouflaged inclusivity by using nefarious strategies of illusion of inclusion, as in the adverts that this discussion analysed.

The question of 'whiteness' Eckhardt et al. (2022) invoke tends to ignore manipulation of the illusion of inclusion which 'whiteness' has adopted. 'Whiteness' no longer poses or manifest crudely as exclusion of 'Blackness,' as they imply, but it has managed, through devious manipulation, to co-opt some black people into racial capitalism as agents, and portraying them as beneficiaries of capitalism equal to dividend gained by 'whiteness'. In this way, capitalism, manifested in its major hallmark, advertising, adorns a mitigating and deceptive motif of non-racialism and equity by concealing contradictions that are exhibited in advertisements. 'Decolonizing marketing' was a project spearheaded by business schools. The authors' use of the concept 'North America' while excluding Mexico is a symptom of the malady of colonialism and imperialism.

A major part of the article comprises interviews of major participants in the conference. The question which the article revolves around, 'What is decolonizing within the market to you?' is symptomatic of the paradox of business schools attempting to subvert coloniality. The second-person pronoun in the question is obviously aimed at soliciting subjective views that evoke inductive and anecdotal responses. About 78% of the article comprises a conversation recorded over Zoom in February 2021. While the conversation is teleologically substantive, it does not seem to have a theoretical or empirical base. If the interview was held among African scholars, it would be regarded just a palaver. A question that arises is how decolonising is possible within business schools – within the marketing discipline, that is, in institutions whose flagship degree is the MBA (Master of Business Administration). The MBA can be reasonably conceived as one of the major instruments of the colonising project of capitalism, which operates through creating a culture of consumerism.

The MBA is a guarantee of the *raison d'être* of business schools, without which they would be impoverished. Mintzberg, who has undertaken comprehensive comparative studies of MBA degrees, opened his book by proposing that 'it is time to recognize conventional MBA programs for what they are – or else close them down' (2005:5). Later on, he makes a cogently developed argument that 'the consequences of MBA education are far more influential and disturbing than most people realize ... The overall effect of [*the MBA*] have been profoundly more negative than positive' (2005:69–70). The epithets *disturbing* and *influential* are concomitant of all advertising methods. This is testimony to the contradiction and fallacy that decolonisation can occur within business schools.

Yeboah-Banin's study comes close to a degree of relevance to my studies. It is based in West Africa, which overlaps with two cities of my study, Mali and Ghana, albeit limited to the latter. If there are other studies on advertising that I might have missed, I promise to accept censure for this grievous fault, and plead for clemency and absolution. Yeboah-Banin's study is extensive, in that it sampled 1000 multilingual participants in five cosmopolitan cities in Ghana using Petty's and Cacioppo et al.'s (1986) ELM (Elaboration Likelihood Model). I regard it as empathetic, that is, it seeks to explain how people react to stimuli and process them in a manner that persuades or changes their attitude and behaviour, while my approach is conceptual-analytical. Yeboah-Banin's concept of 'getting the message' with regard to the perspective of the audience and 'belief in advertisements' does not explore reading or interpreting connotations of the message by the audience as underpinned by coloniality as one of 'competing motives', let alone a major variable. Thus, it cannot stretch itself to considering the question of coloniality and decoloniality.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica's article (The Editors of Encyclopaedia 2023) is a historical survey of the development of advertising methods and media from the primordial stage in the Middle Ages by word of mouth, through to the invention of the printing press, and the industrial revolution to the present. It is useful in so far as it gives a broad historical background, and explains the proliferation of advertising media and technique over centuries.

Masoga and Shokane offer a perspective that is cognate to my reading of the adverts selected and the notion of decoloniality and Afrocentricity, unlike Fazli-Salehi et al.'s (2023) 'ethnic disidentification' or 'anti-group trait', Eckhardt et al.'s (2022) 'othering of Africans' or Yeboah-Banin's (2023:5) 'getting the message' or Fazli-Salehi's 'multi-ethnic models'. Masoga's and Shokane's critique: 'whiteness vs blackness vs thoughtfulness vs. dullness'. The concept of 'thoughtfulness' is pertinent to adverts that are discussed here, in that they stereotype the African as myopic to comprehend coloniality, regarding their minds to be limited to understanding of only the first level of meaning ('dullness' of denotative reading and only 'getting the message' on face value), and inability to read the second level of meaning

('dullness' to read connotative meaning). Furthermore, their approach, using Asante's theory of Afrocentricity, is acutely sensitive to the project of decoloniality. Acquiescing to their assertion that: 'Evidence points to the fact that the question of casting radical doubt on the thinking ability, [*i.e.* 'thoughtfulness'] of others, [*especially Africans*] is more of a historical development than a natural phenomenon' (2023:9), I would like to add that this development has evolved and taken guises over time, so as to camouflage its subtle yet devastating persistence. It perpetuates the trauma from which recovery requires radical and militant decoloniality. Advertising is one of the most potent opiates which render the African susceptible to 'epistemic dislocation, to make the colonised actively participate in their own colonisation' (Masoga & Shokane 2023:10).

Quantitative and qualitative profile of advertising

This section will describe advertisements based on the following aspects: region, country, languages (Bantu-African or English-French), city, erstwhile colonial powers (Britain and France), and personae or identity; persons portrayed in adverts; dress code, background, product or commodity, and mythical needs. These are succinctly illustrated in Tables 1–7 discussed further in the text.

Food, clothing, shelter, and health are in the first instance physiological, or 'lower' needs in Maslow's theory of needs (1970). However, they can be elevated to 'higher' needs through machination of creation of false and artificial needs, dictated by the packaging and the manner of consumption through advertisements, a major instrument of deculturation.

TABLE 1: Official and non-fictional languages in economic community of west African states and southern African development community.

Region	State	Official languages	Other languages
ECOWAS	Mali	French	Arabic, Bambara, Bomu, Bozo, Dogon, Fulfude, Hassaniya, Mamara, Maninkan, Soninke, Songhay, Syenara, Tamasheq Wolof, Mandingo etc.
	Ghana	English and French	Akuapen, Asante, Ewe, Dagaare, Dagbani, Dangme, Ga, Gonja, Kasern. Mfantse, and Nzema and Twi.
SADC	Botswana	English	Setswana (national language), Kalanga.
	South Africa	English, Afrikaans, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, Setswana, Sesotho sa Leboa and Siswati.	Gujarati, Tamil, Sign Language, Hebrew, Italian, Portuguese

ECOWAS, economic community of west African states; SADC, southern African development community.

TABLE 2: Colonial Languages in economic community of west African states and southern African development community.

Region	City	State	Coloniser	Language	Number	Other
ECOWAS	Bamako	Mali	France	French	25	0
	Accra	Ghana	France	English	25	0
SADC	Gaborone	Botswana	France	English	18	7
	Johannesburg	South Africa	France	English	21	4

ECOWAS, economic community of west African states; SADC, southern African development community.

TABLE 3: Profile.

Personae	Identity	Dress code	Background 1	Number	Background 2	Number
Male or female	African or Western	African or Cosmopolitan	City	25	Rural	0

TABLE 4: Major advertised commodities or products 1: Accra.

Product	Need	Number
Food	Primary	0
Clothing	Primary	10
Housing	Primary	0
Health	Primary	0
Education	Secondary	0
Telephony	Secondary	11
Electricity	Secondary	4
Banking	Secondary	3
Insurance	Secondary	1
Tourism	Secondary	0

TABLE 5: Major advertised commodities or products 3: Bamako.

Product	Need	Number
Food	Primary	2
Clothing	Primary	5
Housing	Primary	0
Health	Primary	0
Education	Secondary	0
Telephony	Secondary	3
Electricity	Secondary	1
Banking	Secondary	5
Insurance	Secondary	9
Tourism	Secondary	0

For instance, food is a primary need, but its packaging and consumption using utensils and eating in a particular manner add an adjunct dimension that is 'false' and 'superimposed', in Marcuse's terms, and in Marx's terms 'refined, unnatural and imaginary'. Food is a product that is most susceptible to Macdonalisation of society; how fast food has become dominant in the consumer world (Ritzer 2000). This is in line with Maslow's theory that after higher needs are gratified, affection and belongingness emerge. Arguably, advertisements are a stimulus which elevates its appeal to a false sense of 'belongingness', a threshold above primary needs.

The falsehood and superimposing often take the form of displacing the language and values of the targeted audience, 'liguicide' and 'liguifam', as referred to by Masoga and Shokane (2023), and deculturation. It substitutes it with a 'fictional' language and milieu which evoke a sense of refinement and sophistication, and thereby lofty and preternatural aspirations of grand illusion, complete with a panoply of mortgaged material objects. Advertising thus creates a 'world of fictions', 'play[s] upon and replicate[s] clashed loyalties', resulting from constant manipulations, 'use[s] persuasion' in a manner that is 'emotionally-loaded', and thereby 'play[s] upon consumer's tendency to want what other people also wish ...', so that they should 'love and hate what others love and hate', to revert to Marcuse's phrases (Maake 2018). There is also an element of racial and class 'double consciousness' (Du Bois 1903:1–2). By aspiring to the goods or commodities that are advertised, the consumer

TABLE 6: Major advertised commodities or products 2: Gaborone.

Product	Need	Number
Food	Primary	9
Clothing	Primary	2
Housing	Primary	0
Health	Primary	0
Education	Secondary	2
Telephony	Secondary	5
Electricity	Secondary	3
Banking	Secondary	3
Insurance	Secondary	1
Tourism	Secondary	0

TABLE 7: Major advertised commodities or products 3: Johannesburg.

Product	Need	Number
Food	Primary	4
Clothing	Primary	7
Housing	Primary	0
Health	Primary	2
Education	Secondary	1
Telephony	Secondary	4
Electricity	Secondary	1
Banking	Secondary	3
Insurance	Secondary	2
Tourism	Secondary	1

or target audience succumbs to the fallacy of 'equalization of class distinctions' (Marcuse 1970:25). English and French are generally regarded as languages of the upper classes that dominate the political economy and are often abused as instruments of creating fictitious potency of economic upward mobility.

It is thus an efficient instrument to instigate a false consciousness among those who are placed on the periphery. The periphery is elucidated eloquently: 'There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born' (Fanon 2008:41). This hell, by its domination and control of the capitalist system, even among agrarian societies, simultaneously creates a series of illusions of reality through tantalising advertisements. Yet its devices and techniques are rendered transparent by a close reading and explication.

The fictional personae portrayed in the advertisements are accompanied by texts that are not in the languages of working-class consumers. They are set in environments that are fictional, ideal, epicurean, refined, and alien to them. In order to dislodge their alienation, one has to be conscious that they are perpetually fixed in a paradox which maintains the dramatis personae's fictionality and audience's marginality, with the mirage of upward material mobility. This mobility is elusive and plants them in a state of perpetual aspiration, like Tantalus, a character in Greek mythology, who was punished by being put in a lake with a tree with

fruits hanging low and water beneath him. When he tried to reach up to the fruit it went higher than his reach, and when he tried to drink the water, it receded (Graves 1993). This is a perfect analogy of alienation embedded in advertisements.

Advertising and decoloniality

The base of the agenda of the colonial enterprise was to annex and occupy space, in order to exploit material resources for production of commodities and enslave people in order to exploit their labour and create a consumerist culture, as per the agenda of the notorious Congress of Berlin of 1884. When African colonies gained independence, colonialism retreated geographically to the European metropolitan centres. However, it left neo-colonial functional markers and coloniality; neo-colonialism. These institutions control the political economy of the formerly colonised world, as depicted and argued in the works of a myriad anti-colonial writers of fiction and non-fiction. The spectacular colonial marker is language, an indelible footprint re-inked and emblazoned by advertisements.

Neo-colonialism and coloniality will ever remain sites of contest. Said expounded that: 'The slow and often bitterly disputed recovery of geographical territory which is at the heart of decolonization is preceded – as empire had been – by the charting of *cultural territory*' (Said 1994:253, [*authors own emphasis*]). Concerning the stages of decolonisation, Said continued to propose that after the period of *primary resistance*, literally fighting against outside intrusion, there comes a period of secondary, that is, ideological resistance, when efforts are made to reconstitute a 'shattered community, to save or restore the sense and fact of community against all the pressures of the colonial system' (Said 1994:252–253). It is this ideological resistance that should be the heartbeat of decoloniality, against a geographically remote but ideologically contiguous warfare to re-entrench continuity of colonialism through coloniality. If the quest of decoloniality is to destabilise and disestablish the colonial or neo-colonial system, it has to:

[R]each and then to occupy the place in imperial cultural forms reserved for subordination, to occupy it self-consciously, fighting for it on the very same territory once ruled by a consciousness that assumed the subordination of a designated inferior Other. (Said 1994:253)

Following on Said, it is plausible to explain commercialisation and consumerism as a central and centripetal force of the remnants of colonial capitalism, that are manifest in its major instrument and economic biblical genre – advertising. It has to be observed that colonialism, at its inception and through its reign of terror, fought literally, but after its recession, it mutated into a figurative war using some Africans as its mercenaries.

The seminal manifestations of the cultural territory of the colonial-capitalist-cum-racist enterprise are textual images that displace the essence of the target audience by tantalising it with fictitious worlds to which it is enticed and seduced to

aspire. The displacement takes the form of New (World) Languages and New (World) Values, pitched against the No-World or 'zone of non-being'. That the culture of commercialisation and consumerism and its instruments of perpetuation – advertisements – should be so confident as to presume that it can capture its target audience without even attempting to speak its language or adjust to its values is not only (Maake 2018) evidence of assumption of supremacy and arrogance, but its complacency in the knowledge that anchored and entrenched coloniality will do the rest as a superstructure and base. This is evident in the language of advertisements and images in this brief case studies of Accra, Bamako, Gaborone, and Johannesburg, metropolitan centres that are inhabited by the majority whose first languages are not English or French, and whose indigenous cultures are not European (Maake 2018). In Gaborone and Johannesburg, there is a semblance and modicum of symbolic attempt to revert to the national languages, but given the predominance of English, it is plausible to argue that this semblance tends to be only symbolic or poetic or paternalistic gesture, which seduces deceptively.

The tragedy of the advertising enterprise is that commodity industries are fully aware and conscious of the need to address their target audience in the languages that they speak:

To communicate effectively with African consumers, companies need to deliver their marketing messages in a plethora of languages. South Africa has 11 official languages. Nigeria has only one – English – but Nigerians speak more than 500 local languages. Further complicating consumer communications is the continent's low literacy rate of 62 percent. In some countries, including Burkina Faso and Niger, the literacy rate is below 30 percent. (Agvenim-Boateng, Benson & Russon 2015)

What prevents companies from doing so is open to conjecture, but in the interregnum of seeking authoritative and comprehensive answers, I will seek comfort in the lackadaisical explanation that it is the overt and subliminal dictates of the values of the imperial metropolitan centre that dictate prescripts of commerce and business. Perhaps another walk in other metropolitan cities of the continent and a more in-depth discussion on Africa might shed more light on this preliminary exercise that I have taken by serendipity (Maake 2018).

Conclusion

In peril of stating the obvious and common-sensical, I venture to proclaim that there is absolutely no doubt that imperial languages have dominated and continue to assert domination over Bantu and other African languages and values during and after the colonial period, and the consumer market has found no reason not to substitute this audacity. The claim of this discussion is not originality but a case study seeking to address a particular dimension of this dominance – advertisement, *inter alia* (Maake 2018). The questions that I sought to address and stated at the beginning of this article led me to propositions that seem rational, namely that the dominance or subordination and prominence or obscurity antitheses in private or public

discourses in four selected African cities suggest continuing dominance by imperial languages and competitive values, and more so their chameleonic and iridescent guise (Maake 2018).

These disguised values are perpetuated through mediation of reality, manipulation in an environment of fabricated and shifting loyalties, creations of 'magic of meaning,' 'hidden message,' and 'Imitative desire' at the expense of humanistic values. In short, they constitute 'a language of [false] association' and 'language of [false] assimilation' (Masoga & Shokane 2023:10) by subliminal conscription, reinforced by the illusion of inclusion in both cases.

Their dominance is achieved by means of visual and textual images of advertisements that have sought to 'sustain alienation' and establish subordination of the consumer. They can be summed in Marcuse's thesis of creation of 'false needs' and 'superimposed needs'. Maslow's theory of needs was helpful in that it helped to unravel and explain how the capitalist project subtly exploits secondary needs and elevate them to create fantastic needs, while disguising the contradiction of the illusion of inclusion. Gibran's poetic lines quoted earlier, also concretise the purpose and consequences of strategies of advertisements. Besides being deceptive, they but lead some to greed and others to hunger. It is credible to conclude by postulating that the validity and reliability of these case studies can be affirmed if they were to be extended to Mozambique (predominantly Portuguese and almost zero adverts in the local languages), Eswatini (Siswati vis-à-vis English), and Lesotho (Siswati vis-à-vis English), countries that the author is familiar with and visit frequently, but has not included them in the study, because it arose by serendipity, as stated in the opening of this discussion.

The next and final question is what this discourse, as much as neo-colonial political propaganda, betokens in the context of the discourse of decoloniality. Part of the decoloniality project should be questioning of the failure of manifestation of private discourse in African languages and practices or desired values among the citizenry of African cities and other spaces about colonial strategies. It must seek strategic and tactical means to destabilise the superstructure and base of coloniality, and its machinery, commercialism, and capitalism; to 'rechart and occupy the space'. This is not to oversimplify things by implying, let alone advocating, that everything Western should be eschewed, but must be interrogated and subverted where necessary. And necessity seems to be ubiquitous. Which modus operandi should be used? I do not have an overarching answer. Thus, I hand over authority and epilogue of my argument to Maldonado-Torres, before concluding by reiterating that this discussion has not provided a modus operandi, for that was not, ab initio, its aim and intention. Maldonado-Torres (2016:30) postulates that:

Decoloniality is never pure nor perfect, and it does not count with a full picture of what a decolonized institution, society, or world can be. Asking for purity or for perfection, for a complete plan of

action, or for a complete design of the new decolonized reality are forms of decadence and bad faith. They do not tend to be real questions but rather attempts to delegitimize decolonization movements.

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N.M. declares that they are the sole author of this research article.

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