

Advertising and Race

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Advertising & Race

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Abstract

The essay explores advertising as a cultural form that is intrinsically tied to capitalism in its imperialist phase. It considers the ways in which racialised regimes of representation offer a way to investigate how advertising represents the economic and political interests of companies. It traces the representation of such interests in advertisements from the 1880s onwards. The chapter explores the parasitic ability of advertising to accommodate changing political and social values, reducing them to the interests of the market place. It argues that in advertising, while the real and full meaning of production may be often hidden behind ‘the empty appearance in exchange’ (Jhally 1991:50), ideological interests including racialised labour and economic relations are not so much hidden as naturalised through racialised regimes of representation to legitimate the violence of contemporary global relations

Key words: racism, advertising, imperialism, stereotyping, multiculturalism, ideology

This essay will explore advertising as a cultural form, one that is intrinsically tied to capitalism in its imperialist phase, and is driven by the search for raw materials and the need to create new markets. ‘Modern advertising’, as Raymond Williams asserted:

‘belongs to the system of market-control which, at its full development, includes the growth of tariffs and privileged areas, cartel-quotas, trade campaigns, price-fixing by manufacturers, and that form of economic imperialism which assured certain markets overseas by political control of their territories’ (Williams 1980:178).

The political control of territories to which Williams refers was consolidated by racist thought and practice which can be traced in advertising’s cultural representations. A Marxist critique of advertising must therefore consider the racialised regime of representations that are presented in this cultural form. I focus here on Anglo-American advertising in English...

The historical and contemporary relationship between race and capital can be traced through racialised slavery during which the black body was literally marked as a commodity. This process continued during European colonialism by which the wealth of former colonised nations was extracted through taxation, exploitation and unequal trade, processes of forced de-industrialisation and the forcible integration of nations into global markets on unequal terms. It enabled the development of European industrial capital to create the structures and conditions in the global South that exist today (Blackburn 1998; Dawson 2016; Ntobi 2016; Tharoor 2017; Williams 1945). These structures of exploitation developed alongside the emergence of Enlightenment ideas of individual freedom and universal humanism which were centred around a series of binaries that structured who and what was considered civilised and uncivilised – reason v emotion, culture v nature, science v superstition. Through these principles, Enlightenment thought legitimated multiple exclusions by which only white, property-

owning men were recognised as fully 'rational' and 'human' and therefore entitled to a full range of rights. These ideas we shall see were easily incorporated in advertising practices from the eighteenth century onwards to legitimate slavery, colonial rule and a racial division between the consumer and producer of goods.

In investigating the link between advertising and imperialism, the essay will consider the various methodological strategies that have been used by scholars to develop a critical understanding of the impact of advertising and promotional culture in our contemporary world to highlight the ideological role advertising has played in promoting racialized ideologies that support imperialisms' pasts and presents. It will look at the ways in which the representation of Africans and Asians in advertising have frequently been employed to represent the economic and political interests of companies and to consolidate the wider interests of colonialism and imperialism. This focus on political and material contexts, challenges the liberal critique of advertising as simply duping the consumer as well as the liberal critique of racism as one that can be challenged through the eradication of negative stereotypes. It will explore both historical and contemporary advertising to interpret the ideological meanings within promotional strategies which place the commodity at the centre of an imperialist and racialised world. While advertising is no longer discrete in the twenty-first century and film and popular culture are used to communicate commercial messages as well as consolidate ideas around 'race' and commodity culture, I will focus here on advertisements as a distinct cultural form to frame the scope of the chapter.

Critical advertising scholarship and 'race'

The first social histories of advertising were written by American scholars and explored the rise of advertising in the early twentieth century as a conscious craft to shift the perception of citizens from thinking of themselves as solely workers to identifying also as consumers. The planned nature of this process has been highlighted by both Roland Marchand and Stuart Ewen who viewed the rising influence of the advertising industry as part and parcel of the development of industrial capitalist production:

'An economy organised for efficient production through economies of scale... also needed a 'high velocity of flow' in the purchase of goods by consumers'(Marchand 1985:2). In this climate as Ewen outlined: 'It became imperative to invest the laborer with a financial power and a psychic desire to consume' (Ewen 1976:25).

Ewen outlines how advertising as a social construction was consciously and systematically used to promote the idea of the worker *as* consumer. He highlights the way in which exponents of Taylorism in the domestic sphere, such as the home economist Mrs Christine Frederick, proclaimed consumption as a gift to the world, see her 'Selling Mrs Consumer':

'Consumptionism is the name given to the new doctrine; and it is admitted today to be the greatest idea that America has to give to the world; the idea that workmen and masses be looked upon not simply as

workers and producers, but as consumers. . . . Pay them more, sell them more, prosper more is the equation.' (Frederick, 1929 quoted in Ewen)

For Mrs Christine Frederick this 'consumptionism' was an expression of modernity and a marker of American superiority. And as Marchand and Ewen identify, advertisers embraced this image of consumerism and exploited it to create anxieties and demands for products such as *Listerine* that people would never have previously bought. Yet neither scholar effectively considers the racialisation of the worker/consumer in these advertisements. While white American workers were sold products that they did not need as part of a world of fantasy in which goods were represented as offering emotional satisfaction and status, a wider symbolic value of this consumption in the 1920s was to distinguish white American workers from both African American workers and those living and working in European controlled colonies. Through advertising the archetypal white American worker was represented as modern and as such as 'civilised' in contrast to others, despite the fact that the consumerism promoted in these products could only be supported through the exploitation of black and colonial labour upon which the development of this new group of workers/consumers rested. 'The benedictions of consumerism in the imperial centre came along with underdevelopment at the colonial periphery' (Hund 2013: 32). The whiteness with which the image of consumption was constructed in the 1920s and 30s even led to maids in American advertisements in the 1920s to always be represented as white 'French Maids', despite the fact that African Americans made up 39% of the domestic servant workforce (Marchand 1985:202).

While these social historians focus on the advertising industry, its social impact and its psychological strategies, a rising number of cultural critics in the 1970s set out to explore not just the psychological dimension of advertising's persuasion, but to evaluate its wider ideological power. For Roland Barthes, Judith Williamson and later Robert Goldman, semiotics offered a way to dissect and decode the messages embedded that were not simply about selling, but about constructing the idea of a consumer society as natural and eternal (Barthes 1972& 1977; Williamson 1979; Goldman 1992). Barthes suggested advertising as a form of myth, Williamson outlined the ways in which the viewer was implicated in the production of these myths, offering examples of how ideas about history, labour and culture were mythologised and depoliticised through advertising imagery. Goldman later outlined the way in which commodity culture permeated the way we see ourselves. None of them however fully explore the racialised regime of representation within advertising. Discussions of race and racism in advertising have tended to focus on the reproduction of wider stereotypes in cultural representations (Pieterse 1992).

Even Raymond Williams who recognised the imperialist context in which advertising is produced never elaborates on the impact of this context for advertising's ideological power. Even Leiss Klein and Jhally's *Social Communication in Advertising*, (1986), offers no reference to racialised divisions of labour and its impact on advertising. Building on the work of semioticians and cultural historians, Sut Jhally has sought to employ a Marxist understanding of labour to argue that television viewers are not only involved in actively creating symbolic meaning, but also generating profit for the media through the 'labour' of watching advertising (Jhally 1991). Jhally, although acutely aware of the contradiction between what is presented in advertising and

the context of production does not interrogate the way in which the actual material interests of specific companies impacts on the representations they produce. His contextual and discursive approach highlights the way in which commodities have become increasingly personified and human emotions commodified, deeply influencing the way in which we think about ourselves. Dazzling, Happiness and Beautiful are now the names of perfumes calling out to consumers to acquire such qualities through consumption (Ramamurthy 2015; 248). By the end of the twentieth century citizens were no longer conceived as both workers and consumers as envisaged by Ms Christine Frederick but *entirely* constructed through the world of consumption.

There is no question that advertising and the wider promotional culture by which we are surrounded in the Global North has changed how we perceive of commodities. The analysis of advertising by the above scholars have increased our understanding of the ways in which the commodification of human emotions is central to promotional campaigns by major corporates such as Coca Cola and Nike. Coke, for example, suggests we can literally ‘open happiness’ through drinking Coca Cola. While these kind of practices suggest that advertising does indeed hide ‘the real and full meaning of production’ behind ‘the empty appearance in exchange’ (Jhally 1991:50), such semiotic and discursive analyses should not preclude an analysis of advertisements which address the wider political and economic interests of the advertising industry. As early as 1979 Don Slater argued that the analysis of ideology should not be separate from the analysis of the economic, but rather the task is ‘to analyse how the economic, institutional, ideological and political forces, strategies and dynamics have constructed the social relations within which material cultural practices are carried out’ (Slater 1983: 305).

If we understand the exploitation of ‘race’ as an ideology central to the development and consolidation of European and American capital, this intersection must be centrally considered in understanding the ideological power of advertising that is employed to sell the goods made through this exploitation. In the remainder of this essay I will consider how an analysis of the representation of people of colour in advertising is integral to a Marxist critique of advertising. I will highlight the ways in which through the representation of people of colour, the requirements of capital can be seen to be referenced within ‘the empty appearance of exchange’. This position challenges the Derridean idea of a free play of signifiers with an ‘indefinite referral of signifier to signified’ (Derrida 1978:25). As Hall has argued, the meanings in messages are not endless, but restricted by the encoding process, which includes the institutional structures, patterns and interests at play (Hall 1980). How are the ideological interests of specific companies manifested in the racialised images they produce? How are the requirements of contemporary capitalism reinforced and consolidated in the texts that we see?

In developing a methodology to explore advertising and its racialized representations, it is essential to adopt a methodological heterogeneity to fully explore the exploitation of the black presence within promotional culture, its link to company and corporate interests and the frequent naturalisation of the consumer as white, although there are shifts within this binary. A racialised presence can be seen to invariably point to the contemporary needs of capital and the ways in which ideologies of race and capital intersect.

Advertising spectacles and the naturalisation of capitalist relations

It is significant that Marx began his critique of Capital by analysing the nature of the commodity, the forms of value in it and the two-fold character of labour embedded there. Marx wrote this critique of commodity relations during a period when the commodity became increasingly ‘the centrepiece of everyday life, the focal point of all representation, the dead centre of the modern world’ (Richards 1990:1). The first part of Capital was written while living in London, observing the spectacle produced by the Great Exhibition of 1851 which was not simply a homage to the commodity, but a homage to Empire and the new commodities exhibited acted as symbols of imperial greatness and modernity. ‘It transformed wide sections of the population into supporters of imperialism and allowed commodity holders and exhibition organisers “to sell imperialism to the domestic public”’ (Hund 2013: 27).

Thus when late nineteenth century advertisers began to develop their brands it is not surprising that many made every effort to associate their products with the ideologies of Empire. The rise of commodity culture in this sense was integrally related to the exploitation and annexation of former colonial territories. If the site of the Exhibition, the Crystal Palace radiated the light of an incipient consumer culture’ it was because ‘it was a cultural imperialism made manifest’ (Hund 2013:29). The colonial expansion of European powers not only sought control over raw materials essential for the commodities being produced in the factories of Europe, but by the late nineteenth century companies also employed the commodity as a signifier of their own superiority and a method to civilise in their promotional culture (Richards 1990).

From the earliest developments of branding, racial hierarchies were not only reinforced and naturalised, but were used to represent colonial ideologies with vigour. Developing during the colonial era, the image of Africa and Asia in advertising was employed at strategic moments in Victorian advertising to not only consolidate a generalised racial supremacy, but also to promote specific company interests as well as endorse government policy and specific forms of colonial administration (Ramamurthy 2003). To consume was to be civilised and prove one’s superiority. Being a British consumer was to perform imperialist dispositions. Ordinary customers embraced and participated in this construction. One British soldier who saw the words ‘Pears Soap is Best’ inscribed on a rock in Khartoum even wrote to the company to suggest an advertisement which the company subsequently produced with the slogan ‘The formula for British conquest’, eliding the spread of commodity relations with Imperial expansion (Ramamurthy 2003:39-40).

Selling Imperial rule

Pears Soap became infamous in imperial promotion in the 1880s and 1890s. The image of the black child being washed white in one advertisement was reproduced in countless publications and was circulated so widely that it can be found repeatedly in major collections of ephemera. This image was first published during the Berlin conference of 1884-5, when the European powers sat to agree, with no African present, the way they would divide Africa and its resources between themselves. The production of such an image at the moment of the Berlin Conference suggests Lever Brothers’ symbolic support for a government policy of formal intervention in

Africa. Interpreted in Pears advertising through an image of playful instruction it affirmed the ideas of 'the white man's burden' (Ramamurthy 2003: 26-28). The innocence of the image, the picture of camaraderie between the white and black child denied the brutality of colonisation and suggests African complicity with the annexation of vast tracts of land to European control. The instruction which the white child offers justifies the new political system as one of support for Africa's development, a development that is visualised as being attained through literally being washed white, although it is a whiteness that is constructed as always incomplete, since as McClintock (1995) has argued, the head 'for Victorians the seat of rational individuality and self-consciousness – remains stubbornly black' (p.214), legitimising the need for European intervention.

Apart from this overt celebration of the European carving up of Africa that the image offers, soap advertising's repeated use of the image of a black child over the following decade also reflected the interests that Lever Brothers and other soap manufacturers had in the extraction of resources from West Africa, where palm oil and palm kernel oil were identified as being in abundance. The repeated use of the image of the black child, did not simply reflect an interest in West Africa, but also saw the company engage in political debates about forms of colonial rule. While policies of native land tenure eventually developed to support small scale peasant farming in West Africa, Lever was in favour of plantation production which would enable him to have more secure control over the raw materials he required for his soap empire. By constantly representing Africans as not just childlike but as irresponsible infants unable to govern themselves, Lever Brothers were engaging in debates over the form of colonial rule that should be adopted in the region, which during the 1890s was still being contested. In Lord Lever's opinion, 'a native cannot organise. He cannot even run a wooding post on the river satisfactorily. You only have to compare one run by a native with one run by a European to prove that' (Leverhulme 1927:312). The desire for direct control over production meant that soap advertising repeatedly represented Africans as completely incompetent and irresponsible children who needed to be instructed (Ramamurthy 2003: 24-60).

In contrast to the soap firms, cocoa manufacturers who began to make use of cocoa produced in West Africa in the 1900s favoured a form of colonial policy that would eventually be adopted in West Africa: indirect rule. The commitment to a differing form of colonial policy was promoted in cocoa advertisements from 1906 onwards, which employed the image of the African boy happily sharing cocoa with the countries of Europe. These new ads appeared after a scandal over slave grown cocoa from the islands of San Tome and Principe from which Cadbury's and other cocoa firms wished to distance themselves. For the cocoa firms, colonial rule was envisioned as a form of exchange (however unequal) rather than simply a process of direct control and instruction. Within this 'partnership', Africans as producers of raw material were envisioned as 'free' to share their produce with European consumers. Cadbury's position represented the ideas of a group known as 'The Third Party' which argued for a benevolent relationship between coloniser and colonised in which 'native rulers' should be delegated 'such responsibility as they are fit to exercise'. These attitudes can be seen as promoted through Cadbury's advertising where a black child in one image even sits on the same mat as a white girl to whom he offers a cup of cocoa. While represented as sharing the same mat (which we can read as a metaphor for the world) the African boy looks over to the girl to seek her approval. It is she who decides what is

appropriate for him and the resources of the world (symbolised by the cup of cocoa) remain for her consumption.

While symbolically represented as the producer and owner of raw materials, the African child in Fry's advertisements, while embodying the product as his own, literally pours what is frequently represented as abundant (trivialising his labour) into the cups of Europe in assent to this colonial 'partnership' (Ramamurthy 2003:70-77). The cocoa advertisements never acknowledge the actual labour undertaken by African peasants in producing the cocoa beans. This was less because of the denial of labour that is usual in advertising through its focus on visualising consumption, but more as a result of the dismissal of African industry so pervasive in racialised colonial attitudes. As one governor of the Gold Coast suggested: 'cocoa is notoriously one of the least exacting forms of permanent cultivation known to mankind.' 'The natives' according to Clifford, would never have undertaken it otherwise, 'or any task of the sort that made a more severe demand on their physical energies' (Lugard 1965: 399-400). The representation of the black boy, as infantilised or as the happy-go-lucky 'sambo' caricature can therefore be seen to have been used strategically during the colonial period at particular moments to reveal not just the political and ideological interests of companies but also their approach to global governance.



figure 1 Cadbury's cocoa advertisement c 1900, courtesy of Cadbury's and MDLZ

While huge changes took place in advertising as a practice during the mid and late twentieth centuries, with work often franchised to agencies outside of corporations, it is easy to assume that the purpose for which people of colour were represented in advertising shifted positively in the era of national liberations and civil rights struggles. Anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles undoubtedly forced corporations to change the kinds of representations that they had circulated during the colonial period and the image of the colonised increasingly began to disappear on consumer goods in the UK during the 1950s. However, corporate firms with economic interests in the former colonies continued to construct racialised representations that were used to bolster the

economic and political interests of capital. In the 1960s for example, corporations created images of themselves as benevolent organisations industrialising the Global South with images of dams and railway lines circulated to suggest firms such as English Electric or Associated Electric Industries were 'bringing a better life'. In these corporate images, the black man is no longer the worker serving the interests of Europe, but is rather framed as an individual reaping the benefit of western science and development; or is figured as a simple, leisured individual dependent on western productivity for his/her needs. In all the advertisements the corporate firm was framed as a benefactor aiding processes of development. Such images did not employ explicitly degrading stereotypes of black people but maintained the colonial ideology of the white man's burden as well as the belief in capitalism as developing an 'underdeveloped' world, legitimating these emerging multinationals' economic influence in former colonised nations. In one 1958 advertisement the Cold War conflict is made explicit with a text that asserts: 'Rival ideologies are competing for the future of the world, the one that wins will be that which offers more people a better life' juxtaposed with the image of an African man looking contemplatively at an English Electric engine powering the Johannesburg Mail, projecting the improved conditions of life as belonging to Western capitalist development. The colonial and racialised ideologies of 'the white man's burden' and of Africans as lacking intellect and industry were not challenged in these images that continued to maintain hegemonic structures which suited the new imperialist phase of neo-colonialism (Ramamurthy 2003: 173-213; Nkrumah 1965).

Selling neo-liberal multiculturalism

The parasitic ability to transform representations in the wake of dissent can be seen as advertising's 'ability to shore up hegemony and sustain imperialism through successive phases of Cold War decolonisation and neo-liberal globalisation' (Ramamurthy & Wilson 2013: 73). The resistance to racism from both anti-imperialist struggles as well as the civil rights and anti-racist movements in the US and Europe in the 1960s had a significant impact on representation and advertisers were forced to address some of the core concerns of dehumanisation and humiliation that previous advertisements had consolidated.

In the US, during the Cold War, Melamed has argued that the development of a liberal race paradigm 'recognised racial inequality as a problem' and 'secured a liberal symbolic framework for race reform centred in abstract equality, market individualism and inclusive civic nationalism' one that recognised race equality as a nationally recognised social value in the US (Melamed 2006:2). For African Americans, the Black is Beautiful campaign was a powerful force in challenging potential internalised racism and self-hate felt by the Black community as a consequence of the brutality of slavery. Malcolm X asked 'Who taught you to hate yourself?' (Malcolm X 1962) to encourage a critique of the origins of internalised racism, in the struggle to be represented as human and not rendered invisible. Civil rights discourses in the US during the 1960s often treated the question of media representations as separate from those of political and economic rights. 'What Negro consumers want now is recognition of their humanity and an industry wide respect for the Negro image' argued the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) (quoted in Chambers 2008:120). In 1963 they even appealed directly to the Coca Cola company, for example, to include blacks in their advertisements, suggesting a boycott may be a possibility if no change was made. Coca Cola in fear of a boycott responded (Pendergrast 1993: 286). The civil

rights movement's campaign for a wider range of imagery established a black presence within the American dream but the racialised political economy of the production of goods remained unchallenged. While CORE persuaded Coca Cola to create images with black people drinking the product in the 1960s, the labour conditions for agricultural workers on its Minute Maid orange farms in Florida remained deplorable, with living spaces being described as 'slave quarters' in the NBC documentary 'Migrant' screened in 1970 (Gottlieb & Joshi 2010 14-15).

The ability of corporations 'to shore up hegemony and sustain imperialism' can be seen in Coke's production of one of the most iconic multicultural advertisements of the 1970s. Coca Cola's 1971 'I'd like to buy the world a Coke' ad, which was screened worldwide, has been described as one of the most successful global advertising campaigns. While the adoption of multicultural imagery can be seen as part of a general shift in cultural representations, the company's embracing of images of diversity also suited its economic development interests. By 1970 Coke's export sales exceeded domestic sales of the product and the overseas opportunities appeared 'limitless' according to one researcher (Prendergast 296, 308). In this context, we can read Coke's 'I'd like to buy the world a coke' as a visualisation of the company's vision for global expansion rather than an innocent image of potential global harmony. The link between representation and commercial interests is also marked by the absence of Arabs in the ad, since the Arab Boycott of Coca Cola, as a result of its investments in Israel in 1966, had made the market in the Middle East impossible to develop. The peace loving, hippy feel of the ad therefore, not only hid the many conflicts Coke was having in various parts of the globe, from its brutal refusal to recognise unions in its Italian bottling plants to conflicts with the Federal Trade Commission in the US, but acted to serve a global expansionist vision.

The use of multicultural imagery to represent a corporation's interest in hegemonic globalisation was employed successfully again in Benetton's United Colours campaign that flooded magazines and billboards during the late 1980s. Deliberately adopting the idea of a 'united nations', with photographs of smiling young people from all over the world wearing colourful Benetton jumpers, Benetton's pervasive 1980s advertising circulated during the period when the firm shifted from being a predominantly Italian firm to one with increasing global sales. In 1983 Benetton's export sales exceeded its domestic market and in 1984 the firm employed Olivero Toscani to transform its image (Ramamurthy 2015: 283). The result was the United Colours of Benetton campaign which presented the firm as supposedly forward-looking through an image of multiculturalism.

Benetton's advertising from this period has been accused of essentialising ethnic and racial difference, with African models deliberately chosen as very dark skinned and European models as invariably blond, constructing such differences as tropes for consumption. (Back & Quaade 1993) Celia Lury (2000) has argued, that 'the production of difference has become a means by which global companies such as Benetton can lay a proprietary claim to goodness itself'.(p147) She highlights the adoption of difference, whether it be colour, culture, geography or national identity in Benetton images as embraced to represent the diverse splendour of the globe but one in which all these categories are reduced to a 'choice', in the market place. Taking the logic of multiculturalism in the context of global capitalism and its history of colonialism to its conclusion, Zizek argues 'Multiculturalism is a racism which empties its own position of all positive content (the multiculturalist is not a

direct racist, he doesn't oppose to the Other the *particular* values of his own culture), but nonetheless retains this position as the privileged *empty point of universality* from which one is able to appreciate (and depreciate) properly other particular cultures—the multiculturalist respect for the Other's specificity is the very form of asserting one's own superiority' (Zizek 1997).

Benetton's images of 'racial harmony', I would argue, can be seen as structured to maintain white supremacy, not only through the performance of difference, but by ignoring the dynamics of power within which the images operate and re-inscribing colonial and racist tropes such as that of the white man's burden or the stereotype of black criminality. If we simply look at repeated images of white and black hands in Benetton marketing, we can witness the way in which the white hand is often framed as 'giver' or as 'adult' in contrast to the black hand that is frequently structured as 'receiver' of white benevolence and goods or as 'child' (Ramamurthy 2003:219).



Hands (Anandi Ramamurthy 2020)

When we consider Benetton's organisational structure we can also understand their advertising and marketing strategy as a clear communication of the company's organisational form and as a consolidation of a neo-liberal multiculturalism that rests on the exploitation of both labour in the Global South as well as migrant labour in European metropolises, which relies of the normalisation of racialised inequalities. Benetton's images should not be simply recognised as operating in a general context, but as working to directly preserve the interests of this newly launched global firm. In the 1980s, Benetton began to develop a system they described as 'flexibility

in manufacturing' which allowed the company to respond quickly to changing fashion trends and demands. The system encouraged a computerised technology that increased exploitative labour relations through systems of subcontracting creating precarity for textile workers in the Global South as well as for sweatshop workers living in the Global North, many of which are immigrant women (Mitter 1986; Kim and Chung 2005:72; Ramamurthy 2015:284). Benetton's images also constructed ideological hegemonies to applaud capitalism as an ideal. The images Lury (2000) notes as representing diverse nationalisms did not just simply reduce nations to commodifiable and essentialised tropes but held clear ideological significations. Produced during the period of Perestroika, some advertisements presented Capitalism (represented as America) as gentle and kind through gendered images of blonde, blue-eyed girls with soft curls, in contrast to the USSR that was figured as an angry and hard-nosed boy complete with paper aeroplane to suggest the USSR as the aggressor in the arms race (Ramamurthy 1996). In another instance of ideological signification a young Chinese boy dressed in blue is carefully positioned with Mao's little red book upside down (Channel 4 1988). As Giroux (1993) argues, these images should be read as containing a violence at their core.

'Post-racial' racisms

Let us consider some recent advertisements in the US which address issues of migration and multiculturalism to explore the continued potential for reflecting on the ways in which a company's employment of racialised representations may continue to intersect with their commercial and political interests. 2016 saw major political rifts emerge with the election of President Trump and a marked rise in national chauvinism and racisms in both the US and Europe. Trump's declared desire to build a wall between Mexico and the US was met with outrage by liberals but gained him support amongst conservatives eager to lay the blame for economic hardship on the most vulnerable.

In this context it is surprising that any company would engage with an issue so fraught with conflict in their advertising. Yet in the US, Budweiser and 48 Lumber issued Superbowl advertisements that referenced immigration in 2017. Budweiser reflected back on European immigration to America in the nineteenth century, linking such migration to the American dream's idea of success through perseverance. 48 Lumber focused on the arduous migration journey of a Mexican mother and her child to America. The visualisation of Trump's wall at the end of the commercial which opens up for the two with the tag line 'The will to succeed is always welcome here', elides migration as a fundamental ingredient of the American Dream, reinforced by the child who collects rubbish on the journey to make a dream catcher, a metaphoric nod to the Democrats Dreamers program which gives children of undocumented migrants the chance to apply for residency status. 48 Lumber's narrative of Hispanic migration elides with the commercial requirements of the US construction industry in which Hispanics make up 30% of blue collar workers on US construction sites, making the 'economic exploitation of undocumented workers ... a cornerstone of the non-union construction industry's low wage business strategy'. It has led to the high rate of deaths amongst migrant workers who carry out some of the most dangerous tasks while being paid the lowest wages (Center for Construction Research and Training 2010:4). While the commercials by Budweiser and 48 Lumber caused controversy and racist responses online, the

companies' assertion of the essential need for migration and the free movement of goods highlights a wider structural requirement for the accumulation of capital in the era of globalisation. Such companies while espousing a commitment to freedom of movement rely precisely on migrant worker's undocumented status which allows for their intensified exploitation. It is significant that the 48 Lumber advertisement does not contest the Republican political policy of building a wall, but rather visualises an open door for the 'worthy' immigrant, maintaining the liberal race paradigm's division of 'good black'/'bad black and 'good immigrant'/'bad immigrant' (Pieterse 1992:203-4).

The failure to challenge the racism of gross exploitation in the production of goods means that within consumption discourses the focus is framed around avoiding offence. Witness H&M's unequivocal apology for the offence they caused through online marketing that placed a black child in a sweatshirt that read 'coolest monkey in the jungle' and a white child in one that said 'survival expert'. It led to the ransacking of H&M stores in South Africa with the 'gaff' covered in media world-wide. Some have suggested that such productions are deliberate strategies by companies to employ black outrage to profile their brands (White 2019). H&M's response to outrage was to take part in the conference 'Pathways to anti-racism' where they were pitched as intending to 'share insights about the interventions that they have employed following their racist hoodie advert. The neo-liberal construction of racism as a psychological programme of recovery for each individual ignores the racialised and structural inequalities upon which neo-liberal capitalism flourishes.

Anti-racism itself has been appropriated within 'diversity marketing' commodity discourses. Without interpreting advertising imagery with reference to the production context of commodities, it is impossible to fully appreciate the absurdity of designs such as Nike's Equality range in 2017. Using sound visualisations of Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech, Nike produced graphics for shoes sold during black history month. Six months previously however Nike ceased to allow the independent NGO, Workers Rights Consortium, access to factories to check on labour standards in factories globally. (Gearhart 2017) Their footwear continues to be produced in factories where labour rights are undermined, wages are desperately low and health and safety conditions are disregarded. The absurdity of consuming one's way out of racism must be understood through the failure to challenge the exploitation of the Global South (whose populations are primarily people of colour) by the Global North, whose populations are largely white. Neo-liberal discourses around race have been further consolidated since 2008 as right-wing 'post-racial society' narratives have gained ground, cutting off discussion about structural inequalities, political and social inequity and imperialist wars in favour of personal responsibilities (Squires 2014).

Representing Black labour

I have focussed so far on the use of people of colour in advertising by corporations representing ideological support for imperialism's political policies and practices. In this final section I will return to focus on a core issue for advertising as a whole – the mystification of labour relations to consider the ways in which the image of the non-white body contradicts simplistic arguments about ads as simply hiding labour relations. The non-

white body framed as a labouring body through literature and the arts, during both slavery and colonialism, permitted the representation of labour in advertising without acknowledgement of exploitation. The naturalisation of this image enabled the repeated and uncontested use of the image of the black slave and of colonised labour on tropical products throughout the colonial era and beyond and enabled these workers to appear as exotic icons rather than as the visibility of exploitation.

Tea advertising both during the colonial period and beyond provides a particularly strong example of the image of the colonial subject as born to labour enabling the representation of labour without shattering the fetishized world of the commodity (Ramamurthy 2003). In tea advertising we can also see the way in which the female labouring subject was often elided with romantic images of the plantation defined as ‘garden’, a space that has both been idealised and represented as a space of transgression in western culture. The visualization of the worker as feminized enabled the reconstruction of the ‘tea garden’ as a domestic space in Lipton’s advertising, from the 1920s onwards. The frequent reorganization of the space of the plantation into a visual manifestation of a heterotopian space of ‘garden’/exotic landscape, along with the traditional invisibilisation of women’s domestic work (Daniels 1987), which enabled a conflation of the worker/planter with the consumer through images of the exotic ‘belle, diminished the visibility of exploitation on the plantation (Ramamurthy 2012). By evoking an image of domesticity and traditional femininity these images turn the experience of plantation labour into a ghost-like one at the very moment that it is visualized. Although tea advertising retained the image of the female tea picker into the 1980s, the majority of images of plantation labour in the Global South disappeared in commodity advertising during the 1960s when anti-colonial struggles gained ground.

The association of workers in the Global South as natural labourers however re-emerged on Fair trade advertising when their image could act as an affirmation of the ethical consciousness of the consumer in the Global North. It has been argued that the appearance of workers on fair trade advertising during the 1990s was an act of de-fetishization, since fair trade aims to change market relations, to advertise the conditions of production explicitly, in order to ‘make transparent the relations under which commodities are exchanged (Hudson & Hudson 2003). Yet, I would argue these images do not de-fetishise commodities, but act instead to fetishise the form of labour, ‘to transform the unveiled concrete labour itself into a commodity’ (Varul 2008).

Kalpana Wilson has highlighted the way in which the visualization of Third World workers in charity advertising has also affirmed the racialized and gendered hierarchies in neo-liberal attitudes to development where women are represented as positive and asserting agency despite the limitations of their lot. Wilson has noted how ‘the use of the concept of ‘agency’ in these texts frequently has the effect of reassuring us that women do in fact exercise choice in situations where structural constraints mean that women are simply ‘choosing’ survival.’ (Wilson 2011:317). Wilson has commented on the way in which images in Oxfam Unwrapped and fair trade chocolate advertising represent the smiling subjects, usually women, as empowered by their own labour – as ‘“participating . . . hardworking, industrious and self-determined”’ subject(s)’ undermining our understanding of their exploitation (Wilson 2011:324).



Figure 3 The smiling worker

In much fair trade advertising and packaging the smiling worker assents to our consumption. Affect is crucial in our reception of these images. Workers' smiles enable an affective bond between producer and consumer (Ramamurthy 2012). Their smiles affirm their contentment with their conditions. Our pleasure, even hedonism in consumption can be excused by a feeling that we are morally 'good' in our fair trade choice (Littler 2009: 30). The fair trade foundations' campaigning images in 2011-12 for example, depicted producers and consumers smiling together. Inequality is here reframed as difference. Both smile as broadly as each other, suggesting through juxtaposition their mutual contentment. Smiling, which has been discussed in literature on race, gender and oppression, is often an important affective action as Marilyn Frye has highlighted: 'it is often a requirement upon oppressed people that we smile and be cheerful. If we comply, we signal our docility and our acquiescence in our situation. We need not, then, be taken note of. We acquiesce in being made invisible, in our occupying no space. We participate in our own erasure'(Frye 1983). Fair trade advertising and publicity promoting trade on the basis of fairness requires workers to perform their contentment for our consumption, just as the colonial worker did. This performance of emotional labour, as Rothschild notes, 'requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others. This kind of labour calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality' (quoted in Chong 2009). The necessary performance of this emotional labour asks us to consider: 'at what price can subjects speak the truth about themselves?' (Foucault 1983).

The drive to represent corporations as benevolent has become increasingly sophisticated with companies suggesting themselves as partners in the moves for social inclusion and social justice, through both ‘fair trade’ being adopted as a purchasing choice by all major corporations, as well as through corporate social responsibility programmes in which corporations carry out acts of charity. Adopting the same smiling faces of workers from the Global South as those found in the images of the fair trade foundation, corporate fair trade has sometimes rearticulated racist tropes in the bid to hide the exploitation of agricultural labour. Cadbury’s fair trade Zingolo advertisement for example, depicts a cocoa farm in which the beans mysteriously pick themselves while the local population sing and dance in reverence of the produce and, by inference, the Cadbury’s corporation. In corporate social responsibility PR, labour is again mystified, while both absent and present.¹ Coke’s Happiness is Home project presents the company as fulfilling individual dreams of seeing family by harnessing personal stories of separation caused by the impact of neo-liberal globalisation that are resolved through the company’s gestures of goodwill. While representing migrant workers, across the world, with some even depicted at work, the exploitation of workers in Coke factories is pushed aside by the company’s benevolent act of buying a plane ticket for 5 Filipino workers to visit their families, white washing the exploitation faced by migrant workers through the employment and business practices of the very corporations that fail to enable regular family reunification.² These viral videos present an example of the way in which promotional culture today does not always erase the meaning of production but modifies and frames it in ways to suggest corporate benevolence.

The fetishization and mystification of factory labour

The racialised nature of the above representations can only be fully appreciated when we compare it to the representation of labour (or lack of) more widely in advertising. While colonial advertising depicted African and Asian labour as a natural part of the imperial family and fair trade advertisements promote the image of the worker - always from the Global South – assenting to their own exploitation, the labour depicted in these images is always agricultural labour, frequently framed in idyllic natural environments. The imperial division of labour with the colonies perceived as the natural producers of raw material with European metropolises as the centre of industrial production has meant that industrial labour has been rarely represented or when it has it is fetishized, sometimes even through the visualisation of peasant/agricultural scenes. In her essay ‘Great history that photographs mislaid’, Williamson notes this fetishization. She analyses a Lancia advertisement in which the car is placed in an Italian vineyard surrounded by happy peasants. Williamson asks: ‘Who made this car? Has it just emerged new and gleaming from the soil, How can a car even exist in the feudal relations?’ (Williamson 1979).

In contemporary advertising, factories and highly mechanised labour environments, in particular, are rarely represented. When they are, they are usually places of fantasy, such as in McCain Oven Chips ‘Chip Perfection’ TV commercial from 2011 or the Coke ‘Happiness factory’ commercial from 2006. These narratives frequently push the worker into the background, fetishizing the technological and digital environment and in the process denying the exploitation and alienation experienced by the factory workers. One such recent advertisement is Amazon’s 2017 Christmas advertisement ‘Give 60’, in which a young, busy, white female consumer buys a gift

for a young girl from the Amazon website, while travelling on a bus.³ The alienation of contemporary western life that leaves us purchasing gifts online and sending gifts to loved ones that we neither touch nor wrap is transformed as an emotional exchange in this advertisement through a video that personifies and in this process fetishizes the Amazon box, as it travels through one of the company's automated warehouses (renamed by Amazon as 'fulfilment centres'). Here, workers in the Global North (including many migrant workers), operate in the background of the warehouse, out of focus or in the shadows, their presence diminished in order to effectively transfer humanity and feeling from people to commodities. The harsh working conditions of the Amazon worker are erased by the smooth running machines. The automated nature of this factory situates it as representative of work in the Global North. In earlier advertisements a racialised division of labour in Empire Marketing Board images of the 1920s represented white workers as the operators of machines to distinguish them from colonised labourers: the producers of raw material in the British Empire (Ramamurthy 2003). Here racialisation is implicit through the only individualised Amazon worker, the driver at the end of the narrative, being white. The exploitation of factory labour in the Amazon image is mystified and denied in two ways. Firstly the labour of workers who have produced the goods and the conditions of their work are erased through the perfect and neat packages that travel with ease on the digitised conveyor belts. Secondly the workers in the warehouse itself are diminished through the animation of the inanimate boxes to suggest humanity and love as transferred through the purchase of goods between consumers. The exploitation of Amazon workers, many of whom are migrant workers, their exhaustion and experience of physical pain due to the relatively harsh working conditions are erased in the video (Osbourne 2016). The boxes' Amazon smiles literally sing to us and to each other 'give a little bit' 'of your love to me'. Human emotions and experience are thus transferred from people to goods, centring the commodity and the corporation as both benevolent and the pivot of contemporary human life.

Conclusion

It is clear that advertising not only acts to structure commodities as the centre of our social worlds, but also reproduces supportive ideologies of both race, gender and class to service the accumulation of capital. From the late nineteenth century when the first consumer societies developed we have seen the ways in which advertising harnessed racialised ideologies to consolidate corporate interests. These representations not only reflected wider ideas that circulated in society, but can be seen to have acted to consolidate racialised ideas that supported the specific interest of major firms.

It is crucial for a critical analysis of advertising's ideological impact to investigate the material context within which advertising images operate so as to understand the economic and political interests that these images serve. Here, I have identified not only the entanglement between racist ideologies and capitalist development during the period of Empire, but also their continued entanglement in the post-independence and in the neoliberal era. I have also identified the way in which the gendered divisions of labour intersect with racialized ideologies to naturalise racial hierarchies and represent the Global South as born to labour, an image that is further consolidated through the frequent representation of women's domestic labour, which has been historically naturalised as outside of the realm of exploitation.

While advertisements fetishize commodities to make them appear 'mist-enveloped' and to carry properties that an inanimate object can never have, the analysis above makes clear that the real is not simply 'hidden by the imaginary' (Jhally 1991) but that advertising naturalises forms of exploitation to often represent exploitative social and economic relations as benign. As such the real is not so much entirely hidden as re-framed as 'natural', normalised and legitimated, to deflect from the violence of contemporary global relations that maintain the exploitation of the Global South by the Global North. This is made possible and acceptable through racism. Neo-liberal multiculturalism has created imagery that suggests the possibility of equality at the point of consumption, yet such advertising often essentialises difference and only works through erasing knowledge of the persistent structural inequalities that make such a possibility farcical. In fair trade advertising the workers of the Global South are even employed to authentically assent and be happy in their exploitation and their position outside of conspicuous consumption.

It is not useful to suggest a reform to advertising, as advertising as a cultural form is tied to the system that we wish to see destroyed. The value of looking critically at advertising images is that they permit us to see the ways in which material interests directly impact on representation. The social, cultural and political meanings advocated in advertisements can never contradict an advertiser's economic interests. In the main, these social and cultural meanings naturalise capitalism as benign. We can see the ways in which commodities are fetishized and take on human characteristics, changing the way we view ourselves and others. We can also trace the way in which racialised practices are central to exploitation under capitalism and these practices impact on regimes of representation. Such racialised regimes of representation intersect with gendered hierarchies. It is also clear that capitalism in its imperialist phase remains adaptable and parasitic, able to absorb and deflect dissent through shifting our focus from structural inequalities to questions of personal difference and transformation. Through the enactment of racialised and gendered hierarchies advertising even naturalises inequality as 'difference', enabling corporations to be framed as benevolent and benign.

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¹ Cadburys Zingolo commercial featuring Tinny: https://youtu.be/WkOE_bYhF10

² Coca-Cola Where Will Happiness Strike Next- The OFW Project: <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xmpllu>

³ Amazon 2017 Christmas commercial : <https://www.thesun.co.uk/video/tvandshowbiz/parcels-sing-roger-hodgsons-give-a-little-bit-in-the-2017-amazon-christmas-advert-give/>