

## NYAMARIRA THAT I LOVED: COMMODITIZATION, CONSUMPTION AND THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF SOAP IN ZIMBABWE

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"A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties." (Karl Marx)

The following is a description of work in progress. This research examines changes in the political economy and social history of consumption in a twentieth century southern African society, namely that of Zimbabwe. More specifically, this research focuses on the detailed social history of one group of commodities, soap products, and the ideologies of cleanliness, hygiene and body image associated with these products. I hope to write the "biography" of soap in Zimbabwe, to use Igor Kopytoff's phrase, and thus describe what I believe to be an important aspect of the lives of Africans there during this century. I will be paying particular attention to advertising, both because it is a crucial form of evidence for this work and because advertising is a central aspect of consumption in modern capitalism.

I must stress strongly at the outset that this essay is very much a description of ongoing research, and, as such, both omits some of the material presently in my possession in favour of giving a summary of my work and, at the same time, reflects a research programme not even half finished. I will discuss the current state of my work by first briefly reviewing some important theoretical work on commodities and consumption, and then by proceeding to the specifics of my research.

Discussion of commodities, consumption and advertising has taken place on a murky academic terrain. These topics are claimed at various moments by history, anthropology, communications, political economy, critical theory, sociology, economics, psychology, business studies, and a host of other disciplines. Though I am by training a historian, this work will necessarily engage many of these perspectives without being produced directly under the sign of any of them.

However, this work takes as an essential theoretical starting point Marx's observations about commodities and consumption, especially his definitions of use value, exchange value and commodity fetishism. Commodity fetishism is of particular importance. As discussed in Volume 1 of *Capital*, there are three essential elements to commodity fetishism: one, that commodities can take on characteristics and meaning having nothing to do with their "physical properties" and therefore assume a life of their own; two, that these "fetishisms" have their origin in the historically specific mode of production which created the commodities; and three, the independent life of commodities can mask the relations of production from which they arise.

Commodity fetishism as it appears in classical marxism is a bare beginning and no more. Marx himself recognized that his description of fetishism was both the least developed and the most convoluted section of *Capital*. More importantly, a successful analysis of the nature of consumption depends more crucially on more recent debates in Marxist and progressive circles.

For one, analysing consumption and advertising successfully requires some recognition that twentieth-century capitalism possesses features unlike the nineteenth-century form known to Marx and his contemporaries. Definitions of this twentieth-century form, variously called "late", "mature", "monopoly", "modern", or "post-industrial", tend to vary widely and to be the subject of much argument, but virtually all definitions recognize that consumption, commodity fetishism and advertising have assumed new roles of central importance.

Furthermore, acknowledging the importance of these phenomena necessarily leads to a weak point in classical Marxism - the analysis of culture and ideology. If we recognize commodity fetishism, consumption and advertising as important, we must be able to analyse them - we must be able to discover what character any given commodity has assumed, how it has done so, how its fetishisms have been interpreted and reconstructed by consumers, and what kind of cultural environment the commodity is circulating in.

To expand successfully on Marx's outline requires casting a wide net. There is a good range of attractive and insightful work from the last several decades on relevant topics: reconsiderations of economic anthropology, philosophical inquiries into the nature of things, sociological studies of consumption, a sub-disciplinary branch of "consumer history", and much more. [1]

There are several works which I would like to focus on in order to extract, somewhat sketchily, some particularly useful concepts and ideas. The first of these is Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*, one of the best and most uncompromising examples of what Edmond Preteceille and Jean-Pierre Terrail call the "differentialist" approach to consumption. Such analyses argue that consumption is a crucial symbol and enforcer of social stratification, which Bourdieu sees primarily as class relations. *Distinction* analyses the cultural and artistic preferences of French consumers and concludes that what is defended as the difference between taste and vulgarity, high art and popular culture, is little more than a positional tactic in class struggle. He writes:

The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile--in a word, natural--enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous pleasures forever closed to the profane. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social difference. [2]

Bourdieu describes a virtual "relations of consumption" which corresponds with fundamental relations of production in French society; artistic consumption thus both symbolizes and organizes class relations and class struggle.

Jean Baudrillard's work also takes the classical Marxist terminology for production and applies it to consumption, but Baudrillard's purposes are quite different from those of Bourdieu. Baudrillard begins by elevating consumption to the centre stage of any analysis of the contemporary West. He argues that modern capitalism has become totally reliant on consumerism and its meanings. He therefore infers that there now exists a new form of value, which he calls sign value, writing that the

extension of the critique of the political economy to the sign and to systems of signs is required in order to show how the logic, free play and circulations of signifiers is organized like the logic of the exchange value system; and how the logic of signifieds is subordinated to it tactically as that of use value is subordinated to that of exchange value. [3]

Sign value is a useful concept. Modern capitalism is distinguished at least in part from classical industrial capitalism by its involvement with, and dependence upon, a complex "culture industry", and part of this development has been an increasing mastery of and reliance upon the manipulation of the meaning of commodities. Commodity fetishism has itself become a source of surplus.

This being the case, it becomes necessary to re-work the term commodity fetishism itself to allow it to carry added cultural, ideological and semiotic weight. One attractive attempt to work towards this goal is Wolfgang Fritz Haug's *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*. Haug works within the terms provided by *Capital*, but expands and improves upon them with the concept of "commodity aesthetics", which "designates a complex which springs from the commodity form of the products and which is functionally determined by exchange value - a complex of material phenomena and of the sensual subject-object relations conditioned by these phenomena." [4] "Commodity aesthetics" as developed by Haug improves upon commodity fetishism by adding greater complexity, by an appreciation of the nature of modern capitalism and its reliance on the meaning of goods, and, especially relevant to the subject of this paper, by a full appreciation of the sensual, physical aspects of consumption in modern capitalism.

Naturally, if the question of the meaning of commodities is moved to a central position in any analysis of modern capitalism, then the question arises: How does modern capitalism produce commodity aesthetics which contribute to the accumulation of surplus? In a general sense, thinking on the "culture industry", rooted in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, helps to suggest some answers. But, more specifically, it is clear that advertising is one of the key institutions at the heart of capitalism's production of commodity aesthetics. The literature available on advertising is vast, but much of it, both liberal and Marxist, is problematic, vague or simplistic. [5] One work which I find particularly useful, however, is Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertisements*. Williamson avoids many of the worst clichés of advertising research, to argue that advertising achieves its effects only through a fragmented and shifting process, relying on the interplay of cultural hegemony, interpretation, and struggle. She argues that the subject of advertising is neither a free agent freely interpreting information conveyed by advertising nor the subject of an omnipotent psycho-social conspiracy; instead, the viewer of advertisements constructs the meaning of advertisements and in turn commodity aesthetics based on the broader interplay of hegemony and counter-hegemony in society:

... the subject drawn into the work of advertising is one who knows. To fill in gaps we must know what to fill in, to decipher and solve problems we must know the rules of the game. Advertisements clearly produce knowledge...but this knowledge is always produced from something already known, that acts as a guarantee, in its anteriority, for the 'truth' in the ad itself. [6]

She adds: "Advertisements are selling us something else besides consumer goods: in providing us with a structure in which we, and those goods, are interchangeable, they are selling us ourselves. And we need those selves." [7] Williamson's work contains a good deal more of interest: in particular, her analytic methodology is a useful model for any examination of individual advertisements - it is a blend of Marxist understanding of political economy and the analytic techniques of semiotics and critical theory.

There is another school of thought on advertising which I find quite useful, but lack the space to discuss fully. It is characterized in particular by the work of Dallas Smythe, William Leiss and Sut Jhally. Most centrally, these authors are united in arguing that advertising is not merely or even primarily a form of capitalist ideology or social control, but is instead an industry like any other, which produces a commodity: the mass media audience. Without delving too deeply into this complex and controversial argument, let

me simply state that for the work at hand, the most useful emphasis of this school is to stress the connections between the historical creation of an audience for mass communications and the elaboration of advertising's importance to capitalism generally. [8]

It is important to regard all these ideas with a certain amount of caution. It is customary for authors to argue that "consumer culture" is seductive and alluring, illusory and miasmatic; so, too, is the temptation unreservedly to accept consumption, commodity aesthetics and advertising as not merely important aspects of modern capitalism but the only aspects worthy of note. As Bill Livant points out, "If we think about consumer culture, and isolate commodities from capital, we will mistakenly attribute to the commodity magical powers in itself, by itself alone to constitute a culture of consumption ... It is just possible that such an account of commodity fetishism ... is itself a theory which is a fetish of the commodity." [9] The result of surrendering to the analytic temptation of consumerism is amply demonstrated by the later works of Jean Baudrillard - having elevated consumption to the centre stage, Baudrillard ultimately loses the ability to distinguish signs from the real, symbolic exchange from material production, and exchange value from use value, and so he loses any basis for a meaningful critique of the present order of things. The work which I find most useful as a constant reminder of the dangers of excess on these topics is Edmond Preteceille and Jean-Pierre Terrail's *Capitalism, Consumption and Needs*. Preteceille and Terrail accept that traditional Marxist examinations of consumption and needs have been reductionist or overly cursory:

A proper insistence on the determining character of social relations of production has overshadowed not only the necessary analysis of the specific structure of modes of consumption, but also an analysis of the relations between the two spheres, which has been reduced to a single mechanistic determination. Today, the crisis and the social movements that have developed within it emphasise these deficiencies, and demand a new theoretical effort to go beyond such oversimplifications. [10]

However, the authors simultaneously ground this new perception in a fundamental understanding of the importance of the whole political economy of capitalism. They write:

This whole way of life, this complex of needs and related practices of consumption is continually modified by the development of capitalist production. One cannot object too strongly to the assumption implicit in non-Marxist analyses which, from Condillac to Baudrillard, have postulated the possibility of dealing directly with consumption practices without analysing class situation and relations with the sphere of production. The true difficulty of a scientific approach is that of considering the specificity of the modes of consumption in their dependence on the concrete modes of production, as so many specific moments in the whole process of social production. [11]

Without this caution, any analysis of consumption and commodity aesthetics will inevitably degenerate into disconnected observations on autonomous "consumers" who pursue their consumption activities independently of their other social and economic activities. This is the quintessence of capitalist ideology about consumption: that the meanings and use of commodities have nothing to do with the conditions under which they are produced, and that the consumer who buys an automobile has no relationship

with the worker who makes one, even when the same individual is involved. This is the terrain on which Baudrillard and others make their fatal errors in their study of "consumerism". Once the importance of grounding such a study is forgotten or dismissed, endless submission to capital's ideology of consumption inevitably follows, and the basis for a meaningful critique becomes impossible.

The question naturally arises: Of what use is this material in a southern African setting? Virtually all of the scholarship on these questions which is presently available restricts itself very visibly to the metropolitan West. Almost no one has asked whether consumption in modern capitalism means much in the larger context of the world economy. [12] The world described by Baudrillard, "where consumption has grasped the whole of life ... the general climatization of life, of goods, objects, services, behaviors, and social relations represents the perfected, 'consummated' stage of evolution which through articulated networks of objects, ascends from pure and simple abundance to a complete conditioning of action and time" [13], does not sound much like southern African at any point in the present or past. Nevertheless, with significant adaptations, much of this work can provide an illuminating perspective on some aspects of southern African social history.

The key, perhaps, to beginning an inquiry into commoditization in southern Africa is to consider that just as many authors have argued that pre-capitalist and industrial capitalist modes of production "articulate" with each other in the region, so too do indigenous, mercantile, industrial and modern patterns of exchange "articulate" through the twentieth century in southern Africa.

At its most basic, commoditization is the process by which goods produced in a pre-capitalist society are transformed into commodities - the nature of their exchange, their usage, and their aesthetics are transformed as a result, while at the same time, virtually all acts and practices in society begin to take on the character of commodities. In southern Africa, capitalism has resembled in a very basic way, in its origins and social effects, nineteenth-century industrial capitalism; but it has simultaneously been governed by metropolitan institutions and companies rooted in modern forms of capitalism. Lying behind this mixture are still further complications: the prior influence of mercantile capital and the continuing survival and struggle of pre-capitalist types of production and cultures. The spread of capitalism has been uneven and has been resisted in ways particular to the region. Furthermore, as a consequence of the particular histories and experiences specific to southern African societies prior to and during colonialism, capitalism in southern Africa has had, and continues to have, many features unique in the world political economy. The articulation of all these factors has meant that commoditization, as a facet of the overall movement of capitalism, has possessed specific local dimensions and has engendered particular contradictions and struggles in southern African social history. For example, the ideology of consumerism, with its central illusion of total abundance, which is so closely attached to the process of commoditization in the West, can hardly support itself in the frankly brutal form of racial capitalism found in the region. Similarly, the resistance of southern Africans to racial capitalism and colonialism has been sustained and shaped by an ability to refer to or reconstruct a social and historical world which is "non-Western", and this has inevitably made the transformation of commodity aesthetics in everyday life a wholly different enterprise to what it was in nineteenth- and twentieth- century metropolitan societies.

None of this general speculation becomes truly meaningful, however, until it is situated in specific local circumstances - in this case, soap products in Zimbabwe. [14] Soap and cleanliness in Zimbabwe are a social stew, a point of intersection. Ideologies and formations of gender, the body, health, hygiene, odour, the family, labour, race, class, childhood and education all met and continue to meet in soap and related products, while the separate but overlapping interests of the colonial and neo-colonial state, local and

multinational capital and the missions all affected and continue to affect the use and significance of soap and cosmetic commodities. Not everything which affected the production and exchange of soap was intended to be part of the process of commoditization - but the process ultimately drew upon every available input.

Soap and cleanliness have virtually no historiography, African or otherwise, with the exception of a few industry studies. To a significant extent, this is because soap and its associated aesthetics lie within subjects which have been considered to lack a history: sexuality, gender, the body. Thus, the historical investigation of soap, cleanliness, hygiene and odour is just now beginning. [15] This lack of a secondary literature sometimes complicates matters for my research.

Much of the picture that I can presently offer is hazy and very provisional. What I know at present suggests that the history of soap and cleanliness in Zimbabwe is best discussed in three basic parts: first, the interaction between pre-colonial African practices and developing European ideologies concerned with the body and race; second, the institutionalization of these ideologies about African bodies primarily through mission and state schools for Africans; and, finally, the development and solidification of the commodity aesthetic of soap and the expanded role of multinational capital. In a rough sense, these developments sketch out a chronology stretching from the 1890s to the contemporary period, but they also coexist throughout twentieth-century Zimbabwean history.

A necessary part of this entire work, important to its central interests, is a review of pre-colonial Ndebele and Shona practices relating to the presentation and cleansing of the body. I am still far from being able to make definitive statements about such practices, but a number of nascent facts are clear.

First, southern African societies did not, for the most part, use soap prior to the mid- or late nineteenth century. This contrasts with much of western and equatorial Africa, where soap made from palm oil and ash had been locally produced and consumed for centuries. Soap in southern Africa was not totally unknown, especially in areas where contact with the Portuguese was frequent, and along the coasts, it may have been produced locally by African peoples. But its use was certainly not widespread.

Instead, there were a number of practices found throughout the region relating to the preparation and cleaning of the body. A variety of plants and other natural substances were used for various purposes: saps for washing the hair, barks and soils for cosmetics, and shrubs known as "soap bushes" were used for cleansing. Bathing in water tended to vary, depending upon local access to water, but was usually regular as well as "routinized and communal". Finally, throughout the area, people creamed or glossed the body with a mixture of animal fat or castor oil and several different types of clays, most commonly coloured red or sometimes yellow. [16]

Certain practices did vary widely. The composition of bathing groups varied in size and in gender make-up from place to place. Hair shaping and glossing, body decoration and bodily adornments and shapings also tended to range significantly throughout southern Africa. There were also specific kinds of washing practices that were maintained quite differently from place to place. For example, the washing of infants, post-coital washing and washing (or not washing) after the death of a family member tended to be practices with a great deal of highly localized meaning and specificity.

There were less tangible but equally important facets of pre-colonial practices relating to the preparation and cleansing of the body, such as local and regional ideologies and pre-conceptions about cleanliness and dirtiness, purity and impurity, lightness and darkness, beauty and ugliness. Ideologies built around these concepts, or their local analogues, were rich, complex and subtle, encompassing gender, class and ethnicity.

Additionally, there were practices and goods which were connected to cleanliness and hygiene. For one, the care and presentation of clothing, so crucial to the modern Western practice of cleanliness, may have been important to southern Africans, but in significantly different ways. Odour is another subtle but crucial element. It appears that at least some of the smells and physical sensations widely regarded as unpleasant by Westerners at various times were not seen as such by southern Africans, and equally frequently, the reverse was true. Emily Moffat, an early LMS missionary in Zimbabwe, commented in her diary in 1859, after a meeting with a local Shona family, that "They laughed at the idea of using Eau de Cologne for headache or for removing a bad smell, saying 'Why, that is a bad smell!'" [17] On the opposite side of matters, another early missionary, Thomas Morgan Thomas, recorded that he found a local mixture used for purification extremely unpleasant in odour and appearance. [18]

This point calls attention to questions about general European attitudes toward southern African bodies and appearance. Even as African ideas and practices varied widely throughout the region on a number of points, and, more importantly, certainly changed over time and were the subject of struggle and revision within local communities, so, too, did European attitudes and actions toward African bodily appearance and practices change over time. A familiar aspect of contemporary racism in the region, in which African bodies are envisioned as "dirty", "impure", "smelly" or "unclean" by whites, has evolved in nature and intensity over time. The institutional expression of these attitudes and a commodity aesthetics which incorporates such visions have also developed in tandem over a considerable span of time with "body racism."

Initially, European travellers in the interior of southern Africa made relatively few comments about the cleanliness or bodily habits of their hosts, though such comments were not completely absent, nor were such early travellers completely innocent of ethnocentric and racist attitudes. Far from it. For example, Robert Moffat, the LMS missionary who made contact with Mzilikazi and helped establish small stations among the Ndebele, was rarely at a loss for racially charged commentary on his hosts. But he rarely commented on cleanliness, bodily habits or odour.

Moffat's immediate successors had more comments to make on the bodies of the people they encountered. John Moffat mentions that Shona peoples seemed "excessively dirty", while Thomas provides the opposite side of the coin by noting that "the Iindebele is not wanting in good taste in respect to beauty, cleanliness and dress. Washing himself thoroughly and daily, he is generally clean, and ... knows how to dress and ornament his body to the best advantage." [19]

By the 1890s, with the mass arrival of Westerners, there was a noticeable increase in "body racism", both in terms of sheer volume and in terms of the evidently expansive hegemonic "common sense" which supported such racism. One typical account rages "They were all, as Mashonas generally are, repulsively filthy. It is not their custom to wash their bodies more frequently than once a month, and many, I am confident, do not perform this irksome duty oftener than once a year. They simply allow the dirt to wear off." [20] The first Anglican bishop of Mashonaland writes that "the Mashona are a very dirty race ... their kraals are a model of picturesque dirtiness." [21] Another author argues that Africans "pick up dirt by instinct" and complains of "the omnipresent odour which streams from these people." [22] A soldier with the settler column writes that Ndebele women "were not handsome with their heads shaved except for a ring of hair in front, black bodies smeared with grease, the centre of a thousand flies, thick-lipped, gross ... Stupid, greasy, bestial." [23] One missionary at turn-of-the-century Bulawayo comments on her Ndebele pupils that "cleanliness was a rare virtue" and relates the following story about one of her charges who took the injunction to wash to heart: "Mapita's little daughter ... with shining black face, which showed that she had been heeding the command, looked up brightly and said 'Yes, but you are white and we are

black.' She evidently had thought that, if she washed every morning, she too would become white." [24] As the settler state and capital consolidated their hold on the area, these ideas became a fixed part of the repertoire of racism. The *Native Affairs Department Annual* in the 1920s describes five "basic complaints about the natives", with one being "They are so dirty; so smelly." [25] One farmer's account gives basic voice to this "complaint": "For it's oh! ye odorous Rhodesian natives ... Mr. Rhodes spoke of you as 'Africa's greatest asset', but so far as houseboys were concerned, you were Africa's greatest and smelliest ass." [26] By the time that these attitudes had become a codified part of racial ideology among the Rhodesian elites, some of the earlier focus on "tribal" bodies had often been eroded in favour of a belief that Africans were "generically" unclean. At the same time, one does sometimes encounter accounts from the 1920s onward, written by European travellers not residing in Zimbabwe, which reversed this entire formation by elaborating a typical "noble savage" image, bemoaning the "loss" of a "pure" African body.

The influences on the evolution of these ideas were diverse. Changes in metropolitan attitudes and practices certainly played a major role. Robert Moffat may well not have seen his hosts as dirty because he himself did not place a high priority on bodily cleanliness. The historiography surrounding social purity and hygiene movements in England and the United States is spotty, but the material currently available tends to suggest that the social purity movements of the early nineteenth century focused more on general conceptions of the impurity of the urban working class and on working class sexuality. Personal cleanliness, of bodies and clothing, was not a significant part of these movements until later in the century, and regular washing with soap as the universally practiced epitome of personal cleanliness seems to have developed even later. From the 1870s to the 1890s, "domestic training visitors" were hired in many English municipalities to keep watch on and "reform" the practices of working class women in the home, and the stress given in this work (often sponsored by or connected to religious societies) to personal cleanliness and regular washing with soap grew as the century wound to a close.

Therefore, European travellers in nineteenth-century central-southern Africa probably did not bring with them an unambiguous or resolved set of practices and convictions on the subject of cleanliness and washing. Their attitudes probably changed as those in the metropole did, but they were also subject to other factors: for one, the evolution of scientific discourses of race and the spread of a self-consciously "scientific" form of ethnography which mimicked the conventions of natural history in its descriptions of African peoples and constructed "tribes" with reified physical and cultural characteristics. Part of this "creation of tribalism", as a recent anthology describes it, was a set of pseudo-scientific assertions about the physique of a particular tribal "type". Embedded within such assertions, one can often find material about cleanliness, appearance and hygiene. Particularly notable in this context is the sentiment prevalent from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the peoples being defined as Ndebele were "cleanly" as opposed to those peoples being defined as Shona; this fits in with a larger valorization of Nguni peoples generally as "superior" physical types. [27]

Though metropolitan factors like these were certainly a major influence on the evolution of Western attitudes towards African bodies in colonial Zimbabwe, of equal importance was the simple fact that the settler project after the 1890s was very different from the activities of pre-colonial travellers and missionaries. People like Selous and Moffat travelled under the sufferance of local African elites, and lacked the power to act upon any ethnocentric ideas they might have had. The settler state, on the other hand, was from the beginning engaged in the subjugation of Africans and the conscription of labour - and a key part of that general subjugation was the subjugation of African bodies, a conquest that was both material and ideological. In its ideological dimension, it consisted at least partially of the production of an African body which was depraved, dirty, degenerate, foul.

In this light, it is worth moving on to the second stage of this process: the institutionalization of this evolving "body racism", primarily in the education of Africans by the missions and later the state. Mission schools stressed from their establishment in Zimbabwe training in cleanliness, hygiene and body presentation, including the wearing of certain types of clothing. The 1903 Education Ordinance expressed this early emphasis by including among its legally mandated requirements for schools instructing Africans that pupils be "taught habits of discipline and cleanliness". [28]

As the schools elaborated this emphasis, it became closely linked to a number of other hegemonic projects. In particular, ideas and teachings about gender, the family and domesticity came into play. Some cleanliness training was directed at both boys and girls without particular attention to gender. One example of a genre of textbooks which circulated in mission schools for Africans throughout the continent instructed pupils to learn "some ... laws for the body which God has given you. You are to live in your body all the years of your life ... It is the tool with which you will do your work ... So it is for you to look after your own body ... This is your duty, for your body can easily be spoiled and become useless for its work." [29] This latter point is particularly interesting and highlights the close interconnections between an interest in health (in this case, cleanliness) and an interest in Africans as workers, a point I will return to. The textbook goes on to tell children about their "body-house" and how to keep it proper, concluding that pupils have now discovered "that the great enemy of your body is dirt; dirty villages, dirty houses, dirty food and dirty insects ... No real Christian will allow his body to become dirty ... all dirty things will make his body weak." [30]

Girls and adult women were particular targets of hygiene training, and such training was melded with a complex formation of attitudes toward gender, domesticity and sexuality. Early girls' schools like the one established at Hope Fountain in 1917 stressed hygienic instruction. In 1928, the newly established Department of Native Education had an important sub-department for domestic education. The reports of the "Organising Instructress of Domestic Science" were frequently dominated by comments on the cleanliness (or more usually, the perceived lack of it) of African pupils, especially girls. These reports also argued that the only cure for the intrinsic dirtiness of the African population was the intensive training of girls and their teachers in "proper" domestic practices. The Department's overall director in this period, Harold Jowitt, gave voice to these sentiments when he wrote

Without exception ... the greatest need in which this Department is called to assist - the direction of dynamic activities which shall enrich the life of Native womanhood by reducing human wastage, replacing ignorance and fear by knowledge and self-respect, cleansing the home and through it the race. [31]

The Department also trained a group of "Jeanes Teachers", an internationally sponsored programme designed to make schools "relevant" to African and African-American communities "by stimulating community awareness of local deficiencies ... practical work in gardening, hygiene, sanitation, diet, recreation, arts and crafts and school and home improvement." [32] ] The programme expanded to include a group of female instructors, "itinerant Home Demonstrators", who travelled to rural areas to teach African women the supposedly proper care of the home, the family and their own bodies. Additionally, "Jeanes women lived in and ran their own model village ... erected during 1928 ... Meetings were held in kraals where dirt was systematically cleared up." [33]

Both the general and gender-specific sorts of hygiene instruction continued throughout the lifetime of the Rhodesian state, migrating from mission to state schools with a minimum of adaptation. Indeed, in this migration, the state developed an interest in cleanliness which went beyond the borders of the schools. As part of an overall attempt to

introduce Africans, especially women, into "modern living", which included Western hygienic practices, methods of laundry, dressing and body presentation, the Southern Rhodesia Information Service and other state agencies circulated a number of pamphlets, publications and announcements from the 1950s onward. In one column entitled, "The Home Teacher", published in various African newspapers by the Native Affairs Department, the daily routine of an idealized housewife named "Mrs Chanunorwa" is described:

In no time she had a fire burning brightly and had the mealie meal cooking. The two children appeared in the kitchen. A basin of warm water, soap and towel stood ready. Ellen had cut up an old worn towel into four small pieces so that each member of the family had a wash cloth. Kudzai, her little son, rubbed the soap onto his cloth and began to wash his face and neck with vigour, until it shone with cleanliness. Next he took a small brush and cleaned his nails. His mother reminded him that he must rinse his mouth with clean water after he had eaten and then clean his teeth with his toothbrush. She told him that he must work the brush up and down to get all the food out of the crevices then rub his gums and keep them healthy. She told him that failure to observe this rule every day would result in his getting toothache as his teeth would decay. [34]

Some of the forces which gave these campaigns their drive and structure are fairly straightforward. For example, one stated goal, particularly after the 1940s, of educating location girls in domestic skills was to help build a female workforce capable of domestic work and laundry. In a broader and more complex sense, much of hygienic training also had to do with ensuring the reproduction of an African working class through particular forms of domesticity and the nuclear family. Tied closely to this was anxiety about the physical conditions of the locations and reserves: in both cases, access to water and space which had been crucial to pre-colonial hygienic and sanitary practices had often been curtailed or removed completely, and disease became a regular feature of African life as a result. This simultaneously endangered the labour supply and provided a soft spot for metropolitan critics of colonialism to expose; but overly rapid population growth or urbanization was regarded with equal suspicion. Hence, education in cleanliness shifted responsibility ideologically and morally for miserable conditions in townships and reserves on to the "inherently dirty" African, while providing the basis for limited protective measures against disease. On a still broader level, hygiene campaigns engaged much more ambiguous ideas about "purity", "impurity", sexuality, gender and identity. This is one of the most consistently frustrating aspects of this material. At one moment, the word hygiene can shift from unambiguously referring to personal bodily cleanliness, but, within the space of several sentences, it can shift to refer to general personal habits, including dress and demeanour, or it can refer to the condition of the home and village, or it can refer in a coded but unmistakable manner to sexuality - sometimes pregnancy, menstruation, female genital cleanliness or venereal disease, while, at other times, a vaguer sort of sexual "impurity" is at stake, as in the case of one textbook circulating in the region during the 1930s called *African Youth and Sexual Hygiene*. [35]

This suggests what may have been at stake in these campaigns at their broadest level: the control of the African body itself. I agree in this light with many recent scholars, of whom Michel Foucault is the most prominent example, who argue that power over the body is one of the most fundamental forms of social power and a primary location of oppression. The ideological production of Africans as "dirty" and "smelly" carried with it the authorization to institutionalize programmes and practices for "cleansing" and "purifying" them. The ownership or stewardship of the African body - which counted among its most important results the enlistment of that body for labour - was extended and reproduced by the racist assertion of the inherent filthiness and degeneracy of

## African bodies.

All of this was also part of and fuel for the process of commoditization as it appeared in soap and cosmetic products. Clearly, cleanliness campaigns were not a deliberate conspiracy to sell more soap. Instead, what the schools and related institutions were doing was bringing the "dirty" African into what Jean and John Comaroff call the Western "natural". In modern, metropolitan capitalism, all aspects of this natural have their expression in various commodity aesthetics: an inherent part of any aspect of hegemonic "common sense" is that there exists a product which expresses that common sense. This is a process with a particular history of its own in the West. The rhetoric of cleanliness acquired power in England before soap became the commoditized embodiment of this rhetoric. As the new, "modern" soap companies overtook the first wave of industrial soap producers, they used advertising and promotion to create sign value, to make soap the commodity which contained and expressed social purity, sexual and social propriety, true femininity, successful adherence to new ideals of domesticity, health, attractiveness, and other virtues. For soap in Zimbabwe to gain the same symbolic power, all of these sorts of ideologies had first themselves to acquire currency. But once they had become part of established hegemonic themes promoted by settlers, soap and other Western products for cleaning and adorning the body and its environment increasingly became a powerful expression of these themes: an expression summed up compactly in a short celebration of Unilever's operations in South Africa with the phrase "Soap is Civilization". [36]

It is important before launching into an account of soap consumption and multinational interest in an African consumer to establish a general picture of the transformation of consumption in southern Africa under the sway of capital. Capital's interest in an African consumer did not appear suddenly in Zimbabwe in 1945. As early as 1902, the British South Africa Company had queried the newly established Rhodesian associations for businesses, mines and farmers about methods for "encouraging and increasing" the "desire of the natives to possess themselves of articles of European manufacture". [37] This was in some sense a very old question in the region, which had been asked by generations of Portuguese and other European mercantile traders. But, in 1902, it was being asked not by mercantile traders but by new formations of colonial capital, who were not merely interested in discovering and meeting African tastes, but in creating a new kind of consumer - "encouraging", "increasing", and indeed creating African needs for Western products. In the debate over this initiative among Rhodesian elites, most offered pessimistic assessments, saying that the time was not yet ripe for a such an initiative. Some participants offered interesting proposals: one member of the Salisbury Chamber of Commerce proposed bringing Africans into the colonial towns to be shown around museums, and thus "their desire for articles they did not possess might also be increased". [38] Even the pessimists recognized that drawing Africans into a cash economy was crucial to the successful solution of what was foremost on their minds, the "labour problem", and that accomplishing this goal would at least in part have to rest on Africans developing new needs for goods produced by Western capital.

Nevertheless, all parties in this early discussion recognized that the commoditization of African life was necessarily limited until a later date. For one, Africans in Zimbabwe did not co-operate with the plans of the settlers, either in joining a labour force or in cultural terms, ceding their own historical and social terms of reference and meaning. This persistence of what merchants and manufacturers referred to as "traditional" tastes, needs and culture, was condemned, but initially somewhat impotently. Furthermore, the obvious dilemma of relying on consumption as a method for the recruitment and social control of labour is that consumers require at least some sort of wages to purchase goods, and that the more reliant capital becomes on consumption, the more important it becomes that purchasing power or credit purchases at least be seen to be more available. In the brutal wage politics of racial capitalism, especially prior to World War II, this was clearly not only seen as impossible but utterly undesirable. Consumption was also, just as in

Bourdieu's *Distinction*, a crucial marker and enforcer of class and racial boundaries. The continuous loathing expressed by settlers for the "educated" or "arrogant" African and his/her violation of relations of consumption in tastes and preferences was an important check to hasty or incautious commoditization: it was incumbent at all times to mark off or signify goods available for Africans as "lesser" or "vulgar" and to inhibit intrusions into the realm of European tastes and needs. Of course, this was a particularly contradictory exercise, because various hegemonic projects also encouraged Africans to abandon practices and ideas recognized as especially "African" or "traditional" in nature.

Prior to World War II, local and multinational capital did develop significant markets and accompanying secondary industry which found markets among African consumers. Indeed, in many cases, such markets had extremely deep roots in centuries of mercantile exchange. This was reflected in the nature and patterns of commodity distribution among the African population. Even after such commodities were produced by capital, they were distributed through essentially mercantile networks, referred to as "Kaffir truck"; this made any possibility of manipulating commodity aesthetics distant or non-existent. There were changes in the meanings and uses of commodities, of course, especially in the locations, but these occurred largely without the direct input of capital, and were a product of more indirect struggles over hegemony and culture.

After 1945, the situation changed to some extent. There was an explosion of interest in "the African market" throughout the continent, but especially in southern Africa. There were many reasons for this: the development of a neo-colonial world economy, the minimal but noticeable increase of wages for southern Africans following political pressure from the now sizeable African working classes, the evolution of a small but important urban African middle class, increasing urbanization, changes in consumer distribution which gradually shifted the mainstream "Kaffir truck" trade into informal sector "hawking", and, of particular importance, the evolution of a communications and advertising industry capable of reaching African populations. Nevertheless, even with this new interest, many of the problems and contradictions engendered by commoditizing African life continued to plague capital.

Many business publications and discussions during the 1950s and 1960s in southern Africa reveal the extent to which capital was both engaged in and perplexed by trying to create an "African market" with "African consumers". Conventions of the South African Society of Advertisers during these decades, regional in scope and participation, gave significant attention to such issues. There was agreement that "the attitude of the advertiser to the African market has changed. No longer is the African regarded as the depository of 'kaffir truck' nor as an appendage of the European market ... ". There was exultation that "The Bantu is aspiring to what he believes to be our standard of living and undoubtedly advertising has been a vital influence in this." [39]

At the same time, this euphoria concealed a sense of frustration and a recognition that commoditization was largely incomplete and contested. One speaker argued that "traditional taboos ... no longer play as important a role as is sometimes assumed", but then admitted that an "African" sense of commodity aesthetics continues to subvert the efforts of industry:

It is true that in Rhodesia Africans would not buy green-coloured radios ... I doubt that you could get Africans to eat lobster, crayfish, eels or shrimp under any circumstances ... The African is not yet completely integrated ... differences emerge most strikingly in the various traditional taboos that still operate, however weakly, against certain products and in the African's inability at present to assimilate the 'higher' art forms of Western society ... [40]

This kind of acknowledgment led one speaker at a later convention emphatically to declare "An African Market does not exist per se. This term is not a reality but only a misleading and dangerous fiction." This speaker, J E Maroun, subsequently declared

The only African markets that do exist are those that have been created ... A fallacy applicable to all marketing, but of particular importance in considering the African market, is the belief that marketing exists solely to satisfy the needs of consumers ... Marketing creates needs, it sells solutions to problems, it makes people desire what you have to sell.

Maroun thus makes a call for what is self-consciously defined as a new type of missionary enterprise, in an astoundingly revelatory passage:

The challenge ... lies not in discovering African needs and wants ... it lies in the creation among Africans of needs or markets for the particular product or products which we desire to sell to them ... we must realise that almost all our efforts in the African market should be designed to change culture - the traditional way of doing things--and in some instances even to introduce ideas which are foreign to and contradict tradition and, therefore, will meet with resistance ... We are offering the African new solutions to his problems and in many cases even new problems. What we should be concerned with primarily is his acceptance of the solution rather than the detail. [41]

Other voices of advertisers and executives from this period often expound on related themes, sometimes targeting particular "resistances" - the survival of informal trading networks, the need to encourage literacy in English, an aggressive campaign to pressure the state into expanding radio programming and allowing commercials to air on it, a concern with "improper" or "traditional" uses of modern products and practices. There were also many attempts to codify "rules" or "hints" for advertisers to avoid encouraging "product resistance", such as "Avoid idiom strange to the African ... play on words should be avoided" and "Advertisements of the 'strip cartoon' variety should illustrate situations familiar to Africans". [42] Many advertisers and manufacturers also worried about a Catch-22 of "relations of consumption": Africans would reject a product marketed exclusively for them, but, if a product became widely used among Africans, many white consumers would then shun it. [43]

Soap fits extremely well into this general outline of commoditization; it is in fact the epitome of the process. It was introduced early to Africans in the region by multinationals, but its use only increased slowly, outside the control of those multinationals, and it was distributed primarily through informal and mercantile networks. But by the 1950s, sales of soap to Africans had risen considerably, and Western views of cleanliness, washing, clothing and the body had acquired power of some sort. Soap companies began aggressively to advertise their wares, seeking to control the commodity aesthetic of soap and to expand their product lines, creating an expanding pyramid of different types of cleanliness, attractiveness, hygiene, and bodily presentation, each with its own "natural" commodity expression. But, as with the general picture presented above, the course of these efforts did not always run smoothly.

Soap was industrialized early in the Industrial Revolution, being an extremely easy commodity to manufacture, though it is also easy to produce in a household setting. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, a new breed of soap companies dominated the market: companies like Lever Brothers, Gossages, Crossfields, Knight and Pears, Procter and Gamble. These new companies were distinguished largely by features common to modern

monopoly capitalism, among them a heavy reliance on advertisement and innovations in the form of their commodity: brand names, packaging, diversified types of soap and cleansing products. Indeed, so noticeable was the association of these companies with advertising and new forms of marketing that we now recognize in the English language with numerous aphorisms and phrases an intimate association between advertising, marketing and soap.

Most of these companies were at the very least aggressive exporters, and some, most notably Lever Brothers, established major sites for extraction of raw materials and local production abroad. By the early 1900s, there were a number of large-scale and small-scale soap- and detergent-making facilities scattered throughout South Africa, as well as a few elsewhere in the region, including several in Mozambique. It is hard to say with any precision when southern Africans began to use soap in significant amounts, but some guesses are possible. As noted earlier, African communities in the interior were probably not totally unfamiliar with soap. Traders do sometimes record that they were asked for soap, especially by Africans from or familiar with either coastal Mozambique or South Africa. Even once settlers moved northwards, soap was still fairly hard to come by, as many early Rhodesians complained in accounts about frontier hardships, but exports of soap entering through South African ports destined for the new colony clearly increased by the early 1900s.

Brand name soaps were probably not used by Africans until significantly later. Soap manufacturers used leftovers and low-grade raw materials to make a type of cheap soap known as "filled soap" or "blue mottled" which seems to have been circulating through "kaffir truck" trading to Africans in some amounts by the 1910s. Blue mottled was, as William Lever put it, the "missionary" of soaps, "always the pioneer in starting the soap habit." [44] Such soaps were "bar soaps" as opposed to the "tablet soaps" more familiar to contemporary Western consumers. Bar soaps are large rectangular units of soap from which small pieces can be chipped as needed. While tablet soaps were frequently targeted toward a specific sort of cleansing need, as in the case of toilet soaps, bar soaps, both "blue mottled" and brand name bar soaps like Sunlight Soap, were used both for bodies and for clothing. By the turn of the century, the soap companies were working to encourage preferences for the more profitable and more easily diversified tablet soaps among metropolitan consumers, but did not attempt to do the same in other markets until much later. It was taken as a given that, for reasons of price and taste, Africans would not initially purchase brand-name bar soaps or tablet soaps. The Lever Brothers' leadership felt "the African might be educated to buy more expensive, but also more economical, bar soap of the type made in Europe, but that would take time." [45] However, this was viewed as an inevitable development, especially by William Lever, who was an aggressive believer in developing a market for soap products among Africans. His early operations in western and equatorial Africa, set up primarily for the procurement of palm oil, were urged by Lever himself to develop local consumption of soap as well. Lever, on his second trip to the Congo in 1924-25, was attentive to both with the state of the Huileries de Congo Belge, his plantation operation, and with SAVCO, his local soap-making subsidiary. He agreed with a SAVCO manager that "the manufacture of Sunlight, Salvator and other specialities for natives in the Congo would serve no useful purpose". [46] But Lever encouraged plans to develop a diversified SAVCO line with locally "relevant" names like "Elephant" which would mimic, at a lower grade of production, the product line of the parent company. A local executive reported to Lever that "Blue Mottled soap is more or less an institution among the Congo natives" and that new lines of "yellow household" and "toilet" soap could probably be introduced successfully. The manager added "We are strongly in favour to add a Carbolic soap. The native loves the smell of it." [47]

By the 1920s-1930s, British South Africa Company subsidiaries in the Rhodesias were producing soap for the local market. These subsidiaries were bought out by Unilever (Lever Brothers following its merger with Dutch margarine firms) during the late 1940s. This development coincided with and was important to the expansion of a communications and advertising industry in the Rhodesias, and the subsequent acceleration of the process of the commoditization of African life.

It was broadly accepted by this time that the basic need for soap had been established among some African populations, particularly the urbanized middle and working classes: "The African's increasing earning power ... has resulted in a demand for Western goods which hardly existed a few years ago, including canned foods, soaps, clothing and furniture," [48] and "A very important matter ... is the sale of soap which amounts to over 5% of the yearly turnover experienced by Bantu traders." [49]

Nevertheless, manufacturers also were developing a number of projects and concerns built around soap and related commodities for cleansing and presenting the body. Soap is to some extent a "keystone" commodity. Once it is established as the commodity expression of the need for cleanliness and hygiene, it can become the core of an entire universe of needs. Maroun declared "We are not selling toothpaste or soap or laxatives but new ways of cleaning teeth, washing and blood purifying. We are selling new ways of doing old things ..." [50]

Advertising was the primary channel for suggesting "new ways", new needs, new commodity aesthetics - not only in African newspapers and radio, but also through direct market surveys, demonstrations, contests and promotions, and roving cinema vans which showed short training films before and after main features. Advertisements portrayed soap and cosmetic products, targeted at specific sorts of "new needs", as the quintessence of "modern living" and successful urban identity. Some campaigns played on totemic themes of the conflation of "whiteness" and the whitening power of detergents and face creams with success and ambition, a symbolic message with a considerable history, given that Victorian soap ads in England often also played on the theme of soap's powers to "make black white."

Another type of campaign connected anxieties over labour with soap, and promised that the use of toilet soaps could guarantee success in the perilous world of work. Lifebuoy, for example, was promoted in one campaign which declared that "The Successful Man Uses Lifebuoy" and portrayed a variety of "typical" African male workers: a miner, a bricklayer, or a clerk. [51]

Other kinds of success which soap and related products were portrayed as essential to involved the family, domesticity and sexuality, targeted mostly at women. Anxieties about work also remained in this kind of ad - the success of the family is often shown in such ads as verifying or securing one's successful integration into working-class or middle-class life. Sunlight Soap ads, in a cartoon strip format, played on these themes with particular intensity. In one such ad, a wife whose husband's work life is imperilled by his poorly laundered shirts is given advice to shift from "harsh, cheap" soaps to Sunlight, which makes "everything go right", because "I wash my husband's shirts in Sunlight!" Another campaign for Lifebuoy simply promised that "The successful man and his family use Lifebuoy Soap ... The big red soap that keeps the whole family healthy!" For those still seeking to form a family, soap and cosmetic products promised assistance: one woman laments that she could "never find a husband. My clothes look so old and dirty", discovers Sunlight, and is advised "Men like a girl's clothes to look fresh and clean - and smell nice, too". The result: "Sunlight Soap has changed my life - and soon I'll be a happy wife." With many such advertisements, the commodity aesthetics of clothing and of cosmetics and perfumes were closely tied to the development of the need for different kinds of soap.

One's health was often seen as being at stake as well, and here the commodity aesthetics of Western medicine played an important role in developing this kind of need for hygienic products. Some soaps were explicitly portrayed as helping one remain healthy, especially Lifebuoy. There were also a host of health-connected hygienic products intended for inclusion into daily cleansing practices, like Dettol Antiseptic and Colgate Toothpaste. One Dettol ad campaign, for example, featured an African nurse adding Dettol into her daily bath to help secure her health.

These campaigns sought to promote not merely cleanliness, or the connections between cleanliness, soap and various kinds of successful modern living, but they also encouraged the idea that different parts of the body and different social identities required specific commodities to achieve the state of cleanliness. There were detergents for machine washing, flakes, powders and liquids; separate detergents and soaps for hand washing; health soaps; toilet soaps; household soaps; face creams; anti-perspirants; toothpastes; shampoos; straightening and facial creams, etc. If this expansion of needs could be accomplished, it would verify for capital that African tastes had achieved true "sophistication". One advertiser crowed in 1959 that there was now a demand for "sophisticated grooming", and claimed that in the ideal African woman's handbag, one would find

Pond's Talc, Pond's Cold Cream, Pond's Dry Skin Cream,  
Pond's Lipstick, Max Factor Creme Puff, Butone No.3,  
Vaseline White Petroleum Jelly, Glostora, Cutex Nail Polish,  
Go deodorant, Ingram's Camphor Ice, Glycerine, Olive Oil,  
Dettol Antiseptic, Vinolia Bath Soap, Lux Toilet Soap,  
Maybelline, Goya perfume, Wisdom and Colgate toothbrushes,  
Colgate toothpaste, nylon hair brushes and Gloria liquid shoe  
polish...

African women, declared this advertiser, would be the "vanguard" of commoditization, "for the African man, like his European counterpart, tends to be conservative ... Never underestimate the size of a woman's thumb ... there may be man under it." [52]

"Conservative" resistance to the new commodity aesthetics remained a persistent target for advertisers, though the nature of such resistance was defined differently at various moments. The general apprehension that Africans were using soaps and cosmetics generally in the "wrong", i.e., "African" manner, was always present. One manufacturer commented nervously "We could be completely ignorant about the African market ... manufacturers in Britain were amazed at the sales of their carbolic tooth powder [in Ghana] where toothbrushes were unknown. They discovered that this most potent-tasting tooth powder was consumed internally to drive out bad spirits." [53] Another speaker noted "The African idea of shaving is something completely different to ours. He uses a razor blade in his own way, he does not use shaving cream ... The task therefore is to compose and hammer home an image to that African shaver on the correct way of shaving ..." [54] Along with men and rural Africans, "the old people" were held particularly responsible for inhibiting the spread of new commodity aesthetics: "Sunlight soap for toilet purposes .. is used in African homes mainly by the older people, while the younger people tend to use toilet soaps. The reason for this is that the older people find scented toiletries offensive ..." [55]

Fears also clustered around the inadequacies of advertising itself. Many capitalists complained that there was inadequate access to and support of radio by the state, while others fretted that the lack of English instruction would force advertisers to concede to the use of African "vernacular". One marketer commented "African languages ... are as yet incapable of subsuming the concepts of a technological culture ... there is a lot to be said for advertising in English, partly because the African attitude to his languages is negative and also because he is not thoroughly conversant with them." [56] Some businessmen warned of the dangers of improper or badly designed soap advertising. The case of Palmolive and Lux was one example:

Palmolive and Lux are the leading brands of toilet soap in both the European and African market. Lux is relatively strong in the African market and Palmolive in the European market ... Palmolive offers a school girl complexion which European women desire above most things, but which has no appeal for African women because their school-girls do not have the rose bloom in their cheeks. On the other hand, Lux appeals to African

women because it promises to make them look like the film stars who are said to be using it. And this is not as preposterous as it sounds if it is remembered that there are now African beauty queens. [57]

The existence of these anxieties raises what I consider to be the most important aspect of this study but also the aspect which I am least able to comment on at this point, as my research in Zimbabwe itself is still to come. If I have discovered a hegemonic project or projects of some scope and duration, then what kinds of responses and struggles did this project engender among its targets? I believe absolutely that the history of Zimbabwe was made by Africans - never, as the phrase goes, "in circumstances of their own choosing" - but it is crucial to see Africans as not merely reacting to the making of history by others but playing a generative, creative role in their own lives. Only in my research still to come, through the submission of my interests to the lives and testimonies of those who have actually experienced this history, can the full potential of this project be reached.

Without engaging in too much speculation, I can say that certain hazy outlines are already evident. For one, whatever the responses to the varying efforts of state, mission and capital, they are certain to have been plural in nature, engaging divisions and different contingent and fixed identities in contention within local African communities as well as the larger struggles between colonizer and colonized. The fact that the identity of African women was so wrapped up in the commoditization of soap certainly suggests that African men may have played a cooperative or suggestive role in the process. Equally, cleavages between old and young, urban and rural, working-class and middle-class identities must have been at stake as well. At the same time, there must have been contradictions which divided those encouraging commoditization apart at various moments and made new responses and strategies possible as a result. The entire production of an African consumer was the subject of much unease among Rhodesian elites. The developments which were hailed by advertisers as making a modern mode of consumption among Africans possible were also a threat to the continued power of the white minority: increasing wages, increasing urbanization, increasing education, increasing familiarity with Western culture. One farmer fretted in the 1940s, "In Rhodesia, fashion is going to be the race of the white man to get away from the black man." [58] The same commentator acts out a standard, and to her comforting, drama of racism by reprimanding and beating her houseboy for having dirty hands, "foul with ... maybe tobacco, or snuff, or maybe nose pickings or beer, or ... card playing", but also declares apprehensively that if the remedy is washing with "scented soap", then "that I do not like". [59] Advertisers and marketers were operating where capitalism defined class as race, and developing a "modern" mode of consumption was an ever-present danger to those supposedly impervious boundaries of race and class.

There is no question that, by the 1940s, the demand for soap among African populations in Zimbabwe was real, but it is equally certain that this demand had a history - it was an artifact closely linked to a seething mass of ideological and material developments. Soap has a use-value, and there is no doubt some sort of real need for personal cleanliness, but it is impossible and indeed undesirable to detach the use-value of soap totally from its exchange-value, real needs from created ones. It is important to know that such distinctions exist in order to ground a study of commoditization in the real and material conditions of everyday life, but if we are to study the past as it was experienced, we cannot cavalierly untangle the knot that time weaves.

A more useful exercise is to ask about how the subjects of cleanliness campaigns and commoditization countered with their own visions and practices. In Zimbabwe, where struggle over racial capitalism was always a powerful sub-text of daily life, the development of the commodity aesthetic of soap and cosmetic products, and indeed of the body itself, must have been contradictory and fragmented, but it also must have been at times rocked by implicit or even active resistance.

There are practical problems in uncovering this history: direct questions about soap would almost certainly fail to produce meaningful answers. Answers about commodities designed for the body will have to emerge in the context of much fuller testimony about daily life, though some groups, like hawkers, could provide particularly interesting specifics about what kinds of commodity aesthetics have legitimacy among Africans, and in what ways they have gained such legitimacy.

There are also some interesting hints and statements in published secondary material which help to light the way. David Lan, for example, records that *mhondoros* involved in the nationalist struggle avoided the use of "strong smelling soaps", and Michael Gelfand notes that the education of Shona children includes a strong emphasis on culturally specific ideas about *kushambidzika*, personal body cleanliness. In her autobiography, *Zimbabwean Woman*, Sekai Nzenza tackles commoditization of the bodies of African women quite directly:

...it would be so nice to be free in body and spirit. The multinational companies have started dressing us up in weird knickers and bras; they have started putting us in bubbly baths advertising Lux or some other soap. Besides putting our black bodies on the market, they have started telling us how we can change our black skin to nearer white ... They will go on to make anything to make us feel beautiful and make money out of us. [60]

One Zimbabwean work which I found particularly telling in its reference to cleanliness and bodily practices is Tsitsi Dangaremba's recent novel *Nervous Conditions*. In telling the story of a young rural girl's struggles with Western education and class mobility, Dangaremba frequently uses images of odour and hygiene to convey the central conflicts of the novel. The narrator, Tambu, moves to her aspirant uncle's household, where she "expected to find another self, a clean, well-groomed genteel self who could not have been bred, could not have survived on the homestead." [61] She comes to feel that in her old rural life, "living was dirty." [62] But Tambu also understands that she has lost a great deal in this move, and the symbol of this loss becomes Nyamarira, the water in which she washed as a young girl. She muses sadly that in her new life there would be no "trips to Nyamarira, Nyamarira which I loved to bathe in and watch cascade through the narrow outlet of the fall ...". [63] For me, the images of Dangaremba's novel resonate with the historical weight of cleanliness campaigns, of commoditization and the hegemony of "modern living", and with all the ambiguities and struggle that history produced. Nyamarira stands for wistful nostalgia, for a different model of daily life for the body, and a haunting presence in the life of a new "modern" African girl. Tambu celebrates that she "was to take another step upwards ... away from the flies, the smells, the fields and the rags; from stomachs which were seldom full, from dirt and disease", but there is always the bittersweet knowledge that this step is "Also from Nyamarira that I loved". [64]

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## Notes

- 1 The works I have found useful in this context are too numerous to mention fully; among them are Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods*, the anthology *The Social Life of Things*, especially the essays in it by Igor Kopytoff, William Reddy and Arjun Appadurai; Grant McCracken's *Culture and Consumption*, Neil McKendrick's *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, Chandra Mukerji's *From Graven Images*, and Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power*.
- 2 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (Cambridge, Mass, 1984), pp 6-7.
- 3 Jean Baudrillard, "For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign", in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster (Stanford, 1988), p 63.
- 4 Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality and Advertising in Capitalist Society* (Minneapolis, 1986), pp 6-7.
- 5 Once again, this is too broad a literature to review comprehensively in this paper. Many of the most prominent Marxist critiques of advertising share some of the defects of liberal and neo-classical critiques, particularly the tendency to characterize advertising simplistically as an omnipotent and conspiratorial form of psycho-social manipulation. The best conventional Marxist analyses of advertising include the work of Stuart Ewen, especially *Captains of Consciousness*, and Raymond Williams's essay "Advertising: the Magic System", printed in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. Perhaps the best example of liberal critiques of advertising is Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders*.. An extremely good recent work which duplicates many of the insights of Judith Williamson's research is William Leiss, Stephen Kline and Sut Jhally's *Social Communication in Advertising*.
- 6 Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London, 1978), p 99.
- 7 Williamson, *Decoding*, p 13.
- 8 The "audience commodity" school has attracted much controversy and discussion. Dallas Smythe's essay "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism", in the Fall 1977 issue of the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, and the responses which followed, give a good overview of the controversy. Sut Jhally's recent *The Codes of Advertising* is a superbly argued defence of the "audience commodity" thesis, as well as an excellent analysis of commodity fetishism and consumerism generally.
- 9 Bill Livant, "The Imperial Cannibal", in *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America* (New York, 1989), pp 33-34.
- 10 Edmond Preteceille and Jean-Pierre Terrail, *Capitalism, Consumption and Needs*, (Oxford, 1985), p 4.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p.65.
- 12 A notable exception is Michael Taussig's *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*.

- 13 Baudrillard, "Consumer Society", in Mark Poster (ed), *Jean Baudrillard*, p.33.
- 14 I initially set out to compare two commodities: soap and alcoholic beverages. This has proved to be far too much material for one project, but I would continue to argue that commoditization is a very useful process to keep in mind for approaching more than soap. In the case of alcohol, for example, emphasizing alcohol as a commodity gives a new slant to many recent social histories of alcohol and beerhalls in southern Africa. Other commodities ripe for this treatment would certainly include clothing, medicine, tobacco and foodstuffs. In the case of clothing, medicine and foodstuffs, the "biographies" of these respective commodities remain closely connected to soap and cosmetic products
- 15 Among published works, I have found Alain Corbin's social history of odour in France, *The Foul and the Fragrant*, a very influential and suggestive study. I have learned recently that there is an increasing number of works-in-progress on the history of cleanliness and soap in the United States and England. Of these, I am most eagerly awaiting what is certain to be a landmark study of these topics in US social history by Joanne Brown of Johns Hopkins University. There are also some histories of the soap industry of use, such as Charles Wilson, *The History of Unilever*, D K Fieldhouse, *Unilever Overseas: The Anatomy of a Multinational*, and a history of Procter & Gamble entitled *Eyes on Tomorrow*.
- 16 I am indebted to Carolyn Hamilton for getting me started on this topic with her description of Zulu practices.
- 17 J P R Wallis (ed), *The Matabele Mission: A Selection from the Correspondence of John and Emily Moffat, David Livingstone, and Others 1858-1878*, (London, 1945), p 66.
- 18 Thomas Morgan Thomas, *Eleven Years in Central South Africa*, (London, 1872).
- 19 John Moffat, in Wallis (ed), *The Matabele Mission*, p 206, and Thomas, *op. cit.*, p 171.
- 20 William Harvey Brown, *On the South African Frontier: The Adventures and Observations of an American in Mashonaland and Matabeleland* (New York, 1899), p 194.
- 21 G W H Knight-Bruce, *Memories of Mashonaland* (London, 1895), p 28.
- 22 Dudley Kidd, *The Essential Kafir*, (London, 1904), p 34.
- 23 Sam Kemp, *Black Frontiers: Pioneer Adventures With Cecil Rhodes' Mounted Police* (London, 1932), p 64.
- 24 Francis A Davidson, *South and South Central Africa: A Record of Fifteen Years' Missionary Labours Among Primitive Peoples* (Elgin, Ill, 1915), p 68.
- 25 *Native Affairs Department Annual (NADA)*, 1, 1923, p 82
- 26 Jeannie M. Boggie, *First Steps in Civilizing Rhodesia* (Rhodesia, Fourth Edition, 1966), p 81.
- 27 Take for example this quotation from A T Bryant on the Zulu: "They were innately a cleanly and tidy people, and disorder and unsavouriness were distasteful to them. And yet, in actual fact .. they often failed to meet their own lowly standard ... They were unable to improve upon their condition and rid themselves of the dirt and

untidiness amidst which they lived, owing to a complete absence among them of all those commodities and conveniences with which we have been able to supply ourselves ... Absence of soap and other sanitary needs was sorely felt by them; though they never said so, being entirely ignorant of anything better than what they had, had ever existed." Quoted in Eric Rosenthal, *As Pioneers Still* (Cape Town, 1961).

- 28 Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Native Education Inquiry Commission*, 1951, p 4.
- 29 G E P Borderick, *Personal Hygiene for Elementary Schools in Africa*, (London, 1939), pp 17-19.
- 30 *Ibid.*, pp 55-56.
- 31 Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Director of Native Education*, 1929, p 57.
- 32 David Flood, "The Jeanes Movement: an Early Experiment", *NADA*, 10, 3, 1971, p 15.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p 17.
- 34 *Bantu Mirror*, 10, 25 September 1960, p 4.
- 35 Ray E Phillips, *African Youth and Sexual Hygiene*, (Durban, 1935).
- 36 Eric Rosenthal, *As Pioneers Still: An Appreciation of Lever Brothers' Contribution to South Africa* (Cape Town, 1961).
- 37 *Rhodesia Herald*, February 8 1902, p 3.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Report on the Second Advertising Convention in South Africa* (Durban, 1959), p 9.
- 40 Nimrod Mkele, "Advertising to the Bantu", *Report on the Second Advertising Convention in South Africa*, pp 130, 132.
- 41 J E Maroun, in *Third Advertising Convention in South Africa: The Challenge of the Decade* (Johannesburg, 1960), pp 122-23.
- 42 British Board of Trade, *The African Native Market in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (London, HMSO, 1954).
- 43 See the *Third Advertising Convention*, p 130, for a representative discussion of this issue.
- 44 Quoted in D K Fieldhouse, *Unilever Overseas*, p 380.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p 343.
- 46 Lord Leverhulme to R Lintermans, November 21 1924.
- 47 R Lintermans to Lord Leverhulme, November 29, 1924. Carbolic soaps had disinfectant added to them, giving them a distinctive and memorable odour. Some "filled soaps" had carbolic added to them, and later, brand name carbolic soaps like Lifebuoy sometimes became particularly associated in southern Africa with

African, especially African male, consumers. It is not hard to infer that for some marketers, encouraging carbolic soap use among certain populations and groups was a symbolic gesture that these groups were more in need of cleansing and disinfecting than others - a politics of odour is implicated in the case of carbolic soaps.

- 48 *Advertising and Marketing Facts on South Africa: Africa's Richest Market*, (Johannesburg, 1962).
- 49 Werner Willi Max Eiselen, "The Elasticity of the Bantu Consumer", *Second Advertising Convention*, p 102.
- 50 Maroun, *Third Advertising Convention*, p 125.
- 51 This campaign and the others mentioned subsequently can be found in many issues of *The Bantu Mirror* and related African newspapers such as *The African Parade*, *The African Eagle*, and others published by African Newspapers Ltd in British southern Africa during the 1950s and 1960s.
- 52 Mkele, "Advertising", *op. cit.*, p 127.
- 53 *Third Advertising Convention*, p 130.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p.133.
- 55 Mkele, "Advertising", *op. cit.*, p.132.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p 131.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p 132.
- 58 Boggie, *First Steps*, p 132.
- 59 Jeannie M Boggie, *A Husband and a Farm in Rhodesia* (Rhodesia, 1959), p 106.
- 60 Sekai Nzenza, *Zimbabwean Woman: My Own Story* (London, 1988), p 135.
- 61 Tsitsi Dangarema, *Nervous Conditions* (London, 1988), pp 58-59.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p 70.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p.59.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p 143.