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"Our Mosquitoes Are Not So Big": Images And Modernity In Zimbabwe

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Chapter 1

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In 1990, I asked Roger Dillon, a long-time Zimbabwean advertiser who was the owner of a small marketing firm, whether he had ever seen an example of African audiences misinterpreting or misunderstanding an advertisement of some kind. Dillon, who specialized in mobile cinema vans and billboards, thought about it for a minute and then told me two stories. The first concerned the experiences of an acquaintance who had worked for the Rhodesian government as a health officer. On one occasion, Dillon said, the man had gone to the Zambezi Valley to talk to remote villages about malaria prevention. Equipped with several large drawings, a demonstration mosquito net, and a two-foot-long papier-mâché mosquito, he explained the transmission of the disease and suggested some possible strategies for its prevention. At the conclusion of his talk, the villagers thanked him but gently suggested that his ideas did not apply in their area, because their mosquitoes were so much smaller. In her book *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness*, Megan Vaughan cites an almost identical story told by a staff member of the Colonial Film Unit.

Dillon's second tale involved his experiences showing films to African audiences at mining compounds and in rural areas. At one such screening of a documentary on World War II, Dillon said, the audience arose screaming in fright when footage of planes strafing the ground was shown, and many of them fled the room. Again, this echoes many of the anecdotes discussed by Vaughan in her discussion of colonial films about hygiene. As Vaughan notes, these kinds of tales "abounded on the colonial circuit and were clearly told with great glee."[1] Why were they a genre, a common colonial story?

Some of the repetition here may simply be the literal truth: George Pearson, the man who tells the story about the mosquito in Vaughan's book, may actually have been Dillon's unnamed acquaintance, or at the least, may have been connected to him. Nevertheless, the currency and popularity of such stories clearly

stretched beyond any one group of colonial individuals. The temptation is to treat these tales straightforwardly as a form of imperial apocrypha, tall tales whose popularity was due largely to their racist lampooning of the deficient interpretative skills of Africans, parallel to stories about African incompetence with machinery or middle-class African faux pas with European manners. This was certainly part of their appeal to white storytellers.

Another possibility is that these stories were elaborated versions of real events, that Africans in fact did interpret modern visual genres of representation as terrifyingly mimetic, that Africans did not understand the visual grammar of such materials and reacted in ways that Europeans saw as humorous or inappropriate. I think this too is absolutely on target. Africanist scholars are accustomed to discussing the complicated historical transactions and misrecognitions between Europeans and Africans regarding literacy and writing.[2] The historical evolution of various styles and technologies of visual representation within modern Western societies have been intrinsically just as complex, and their introduction to colonial Africa no less so. Of course, African audiences had surprising, sometimes violent, sometimes whimsical, reactions to visual media and imagery circulating during the era of colonial rule: how could it have been otherwise?

I want to review both of these interpretations in relation to visual materials and mass communication in twentieth-century Zimbabwe, with particular attention to early experiments in colonial cinema for African audiences and to the later development of advertisements directed at Africans. In so doing, I also want to explore a third way of thinking about such stories. White settlers and administrators were not merely amused by African reactions to films, posters, and the like. Whites were just as likely to express anxiety, uncertainty, and even fear about such reactions. For every whimsical story of Africans running in terror from a movie screen, there was an advertiser nervously commissioning a scientific study on the supposedly different physiological basis of African color vision. For every humorous anecdote about giant mosquitoes, there was a surveillance report by a policeman about the behavior of African audiences in urban movie houses. Whether fearful or bemused, white onlookers were never certain what Africans saw or how they saw it.

Part of their confusion was produced by the familiar ideological and cultural defense mechanisms among colonizers, which actively maintained the alterity of their African subjects. I argue that, to an equal extent, uncertainty about African audiences and their reception of visual materials was caused by uncertainty among whites about their own interpretative skills. New styles and technologies of visual representation unnerved Europeans to the same extent that they puzzled or alarmed Africans. Though whites often claimed mastery of the visual, their stories about Africans were sometimes a technique for laundering fears and anxieties about the impact that new styles of visual representation were having on their own lives. At the end of the day, these stories were ultimately part of a larger, albeit somewhat fractured, discussion between Africans and Europeans about the dangers and benefits of modern visual technologies. These stories were the tip of an

iceberg, a deeply embedded and shared reaction to modern visual genres and forms.

THE UNEASY VISUAL

If we were to catalogue the core narratives to emerge out of Western colonial expansion since the sixteenth century, stories about Western modes of visual representation and their effect on non-Western peoples would surely figure prominently. "The native who fears that the camera will capture his soul" and "The native who fails to recognize himself in the mirror" are iconic tales that recur again and again in the Western imaginary. Some Africanists have discussed the actual colonial encounters that animated such narratives. For instance, Paul Landau has described the use of a magic lantern, an early form of image projector, in the early 1920s in colonial Botswana by Ernest Dugmore, a London Missionary Society preacher; and Christraud Geary has chronicled the role played by photography in the German colonial administration of Cameroon.[3]

The introduction of cinema to African audiences in British territories provides a valuable and relatively fresh opportunity to examine a similar colonial experience with visual representation.[4] It came only a few decades after film's appearance in metropolitan societies. From the moment of its invention, film has provoked intense anxieties in every society exposed to it, and we should not suppose that white colonizers were any less anxious about the general power of cinema merely because they were colonizers. Cinema combined, in the minds of many onlookers, the presumed mimetic powers of photography with the imaginative plasticity of literature and painting. It could bring the fantastic to life, make the unreal or impossible into truth, grant images a power they had never had before. Such a prospect was unnerving and exciting enough in itself, but of peculiar concern in a colonial situation. If whites themselves were not certain what to make of film, then what would Africans do? If cinema could make Frankenstein come to life, powerfully reproduce the Russian Revolution, or convince an audience that the image of a train was actually going to hit them, then could it not depict something that to African audiences might suggest (and thus help create) a remade social order?

The introduction of cinema to Africans in British territories was therefore handled with extreme care, and subjected to a good deal of semi-official scrutiny and surveillance. For example, the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment, sponsored by the International Missionary Council, showed a variety of films to African audiences in East Africa between 1935 and 1937, mostly instructional films of different kinds. The "Experiment" recorded Africans' reactions to several versions of the same films, in order to elicit responses to variations of particular images and sequences. The supervisors of the project assumed, for the most part, that African reactions to the visual language of film would be fundamentally different than those of white audiences.

Figure 1.1. "Urban bioscope," Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), ca. 1907. Photo no. 6319b, National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ). Courtesy NAZ.

In some cases, they felt satisfied that they had accurately understood and anticipated African interpretations of films and were able to edit various movies until they conveyed the appropriate instructional message (though the project also struggled with considerable technical difficulties that interfered with this process of correction). For example, one film that tried to be a "slap-stick comedy" in which a young boy played pranks on his elders, produced both laughter and consternation. Upon investigating, the unit found that the concern was emanating from older members of the audience who thought that it was disturbing to show such disrespectful behavior, "even though the boy had a beating at the end."[5]

In other cases, however, the film unit was relatively baffled by audience reaction or deeply concerned about persistent misreadings. In one instance, a film about a progressive chief who tries to bring education to his district showed one scene in which the chief falls ill and is brought to a hospital, where he faints. Later, the chief arrives back home, cured in the nick of time, to save a schoolteacher from having to undergo a poison ordeal at the hands of a witch doctor. Audiences persistently assumed that the chief had died in the hospital and that the man who showed up later in the story, dressed in new clothes, was another, different, chief. The film unit resorted to reading an explanation through a microphone during the airing of the film, but it remained, in their judgment, a failure due to the audience's persistent refusal to recognize the chief as the same character. Another film experimented with dramatizing a local folktale called "The Hare and the Leopard" and made use of African actors dressed as anthropomorphic animals. The film was not a success with audiences. One viewer summed up a prevalent complaint by saying, "[T]he animals were merely human beings."[6]

The unit producers sometimes explained such misunderstandings by arguing that Africans had defective or reduced interpretative skills that were especially evident in dealing with visual material, capacities that would need to be investigated and specially catered to before instructional films for African audiences could be successful. At the same time, they often acknowledged the validity of African readings and misreadings of the films shown by the unit, attributing them in some cases to visual or conceptual errors on the part of the film producers but also to the legitimate exercise of interpretation by the audiences. After the showing of one film about a theft, debates often broke out among audience members about the fate of the thief and about the appropriateness of colonial law. In the first version of the story, the thief was killed by falling from a tree; in the second version, he was taken off by an African policeman, while his victim deposited his recovered money right away in the Post Office Savings Bank.[7] Audiences debated whether the thief should die—many assumed that his fall from the tree was deliberately caused by his pursuer, not by an accident—and argued about which court system should have jurisdiction in the case; many felt that the thief should be punished by a chief, not the European courts. Although the film producers described the assumptions about the thief's death as a "misunderstanding," it is also clear that they understood audience reactions as being legitimately predicated upon the film's content, and more

Figure 1.2. A scene from *Philemon the Footballer,* 1952. Central African Film Unit, photo no. 22390, NAZ. Courtesy NAZ.

important, on the content of African experience in colonial society. When Africans reacted with shock, surprise, or confusion to the capacity of moving images to conflate the imaginary and the real, the producers often conceded the legitimacy of these reactions without necessarily engaging in racist condescension.

When they made such concessions, they did so in part because their cinema experiment aroused concern among white and Indian audiences as well, often premised on the same apprehension about the ability of the cinema to transform reality through its uniquely powerful representational technology. In the case of the film about the thief, some Europeans who saw the movie told the unit that no film portraying crime or violence should be shown to Africans for fear that such a film would create the behavior it sought to censure.[8] Europeans and Africans watching a film on agricultural planning had a split reaction when a buffoonish African character realizes late in the film that he forgot to plant seeds in his well-tilled and watered garden: whites laughed, Africans did not. In the same film, Indians objected strenuously to a scene showing an Indian merchant overcharging an African customer, while Europeans objected to a scene showing a European farmer who mistreated his laborers and to the use of an African actor's voice to represent the voice of another European planter later in the film.[9] What is striking about the reaction to this and many of the other films shown by the unit is that African interpretations of the language and meaning of film were often closely mirrored or echoed by the

reactions of other colonial audiences. All social groups were often unnerved or startled by the mimetic capacities of the cinema, concerned about the power of visual representation not only to reflect but to transform social relations in colonial society. Indeed, in many cases, Africans, Europeans, and others were critical precisely because the camera translated social reality into cinematic images, transforming unspoken understandings about everyday life into a discomforting mirror that demanded some response.

The same pattern marked similar experiments with cinema in colonial Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) from the late 1910s to the early 1940s. African audiences were watched, both openly and in secret, for their reactions to films. At the same time, the reactions of whites to movies, especially during World War II, were sometimes of equal concern to government officials and various civic groups and were watched closely as well.

Local efforts by the Rhodesian state and by civic groups like the Boy Scouts to supervise cinema for Africans were particularly provoked by the recommendation of a metropolitan commission in the 1930s that no distinction between African and European audiences be made in the case of films. However, surveillance and official concern about Africans and the cinema had been prevalent in Rhodesia since the end of World War I. As one Rhodesian official typically concluded, "for the Native, there is a wealth of opportunity for misunderstanding even our simple domestic melodramas. Incident is everything to the Native, and unless the subject deals quite definitely with an artistic development based on his own psychology, a wrong impression is bound to be created."[10]

Between 1917 and 1940, Rhodesian police officials reported a number of incidents they found distressing while surveilling African audiences. During one newsreel that showed a white beauty queen, "thrills of delight" were heard, and an unspecified but apparently disturbing "noise" was heard whenever kissing appeared on the screen.[11] Another movie showed an African stealing roller skates from his former employer, a skating rink, after he is sacked for disturbing a white woman skater. The skates are brought back to his rural homestead, where he explains that these are "the things that amuse the white man." A police sergeant charged with investigating this film immediately requested it be taken out of circulation, as it was "very much appreciated by the natives, as was evident from the laughter."[12] In another instance, a Roman Catholic missionary who showed films in townships assured police that "should anything of an objectionable nature be shown . . . I immediately shut the film off and continue further on."[13]

Censorship of this sort aimed at Africans was hardly exceptional: the British South Africa Company's local authorities and later administrators were perpetually wary about African access to a wide range of materials, from Garveyist tracts to flyers for patent medicines and fancy clothing. However, visual materials, especially film, aroused particular anxiety. That concern was primarily explained, just as in other instances, as a concern for the deficient interpretative powers of Africans or about their alien cultural sensibilities. But just as in other instances, the extent

to which official fears about African audiences were echoed by concerns about white audiences was often remarkable. One official file leapt from the need to exercise selective censorship of films for African audiences to a long harangue about the appeal of movies to Europeans of "limited mentality," arguing that regular patrons of movies favored "spectacularity, sensationalism and maudlin sentimentality," and that they were unable to appreciate films either in terms of messages or in terms of art.[14] Having delivered these remarks, the author of the report immediately segued back to the inability of Africans to properly understand cinema.

In another instance, a 1942 report about the exhibition of war newsreels to white farmers near Chinhoyi, northwest of the capital, the supervisor of the film unit complained to the minister of internal affairs that white audiences were indifferent to or actively scornful of the movies.[15] White audiences in southern Africa also demanded that images of the Rhodesian African Rifles (an all-black unit) bearing arms be deleted from wartime films.[16] At the end of a lengthy correspondence between government officials and filmmakers about the making of a film on Cecil Rhodes entitled *There Lies Your Hinterland*, Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins scrawled at the bottom: "History should be presented factually down to the last detail. In other words, fiction and fact should not be mixed. I also realize if this were done it would probably ruin the movie business."[17]

These sentiments have a certain bitter hilarity coming from the pen of a prime minister of Southern Rhodesia. Dominant elites expressed concern that films mixed "fiction and fact" in a uniquely powerful manner, not only for African audiences, however, but also for whites of "low mentality," children, and other people in England. Members of these audiences expressed the same concern. Africans probably did at times run from images of strafing planes or make appreciatively naughty noises at white beauty queens, just as white audiences sought and feared cinematic spectacle or nervously examined cinematic representations of their own vigorously sanitized history of colonial conquest.

The historical development of visual advertising directed at Africans provides further insight into these issues, while also illuminating the historical specificity of different visual media. Print advertisements, billboards, and similar promotions directed at white Rhodesians appeared almost immediately after the founding of the colony in 1890. Similar advertisements explicitly directed at African consumers emerged in the 1920s, and their propagation was marked by profound uncertainties from that point on. Some of these problems had relatively little to do with questions about visual representation and more to do with an imagined relationship between consumption and citizenship, more to do with local struggles between factions of capital interested in suppressing African wages and manufacturing capital's interest in African purchasing power. Advertising to Africans acknowledged their considerable and constantly growing centrality to the colonial economy as consumers, a fact most white Rhodesians were unprepared to accept.

But many of the furtive debates among marketers and between marketers and groups of concerned whites about African advertising were animated by concerns

specifically related to the relationship between visual representation and colonial hegemony. At the same time that the cinema was a growing concern, in the 1920s, civic groups publicly requested that the Rhodesian government regulate images seen on posters in stores and other public locations in colonial Salisbury, because Africans might be intercepting messages intended for white consumers and might act inappropriately as a result.[18] Many businesses responded positively to these requests, and the government also passed a law in 1929 that heavily restricted visual advertisements of any kind in rural reserve areas.[19] As in the case of cinema, the primary fear expressed by whites was that to reproduce a particular image was, in some fashion, to make what it showed into reality. For example, one Anglican cleric complained early in the colonization process that pictures showing mission Africans in fancy European clothing—a common genre—were not based on reality, but acknowledged that the pictures were helping to create such fashions where they had not existed.[20]

Print advertising directed specifically at Africans began to appear in colonial Zimbabwe in the 1930s. Once it became relatively common, many whites warily examined such ads both for images that showed Africans things they should not be allowed to see, such as white women portrayed as objects of desire, and for images that represented a social world dramatically out of line with colonial reality. The former appeared only rarely, as advertisers were acutely conscious of white sensibilities in this regard, but the advertisers I interviewed told me that they often had to fend off complaints in the latter category. Of course, this underscores that it was not just Africans who were surreptitious spectators of images meant for whites, but the other way around as well. Printed images displayed in public and semi-public forums, unlike cinema or written materials, do not necessarily betray their audiences, which is part of what makes them unnerving in situations where cultural hegemony rests on fragile underpinnings.

Print advertisements used throughout southern Africa often portrayed Africans achieving some high social and economic standing through the wise use of some commodity, particularly from the 1950s to the 1970s. One campaign for Castle Lager, for example, showed Africans fly-fishing in the mountains and picnicking next to their car, transposing black men and women directly into images that had initially featured white subjects. Campaigns for Ambi, a skin lightener, featured a wealthy African couple relaxing at Victoria Falls and a light-skinned African doctor reviewing charts, contrasted with his dark-skinned janitor. Other campaigns were careful to show African achievements as more suited to the standards of colonial society: a regular series of print ads for Lifebuoy soap showed African men in a variety of "appropriate" work settings, including mining, bricklaying, clerking, and teaching.

Moreover, even in those cases where advertisements made implicit promises of social advancement to Africans that were clearly unrealistic, standard visual tropes that predated the advent of print advertisements in Africa were still extensively adapted for use in colonial society. For example, ads for toiletries aimed at Africans
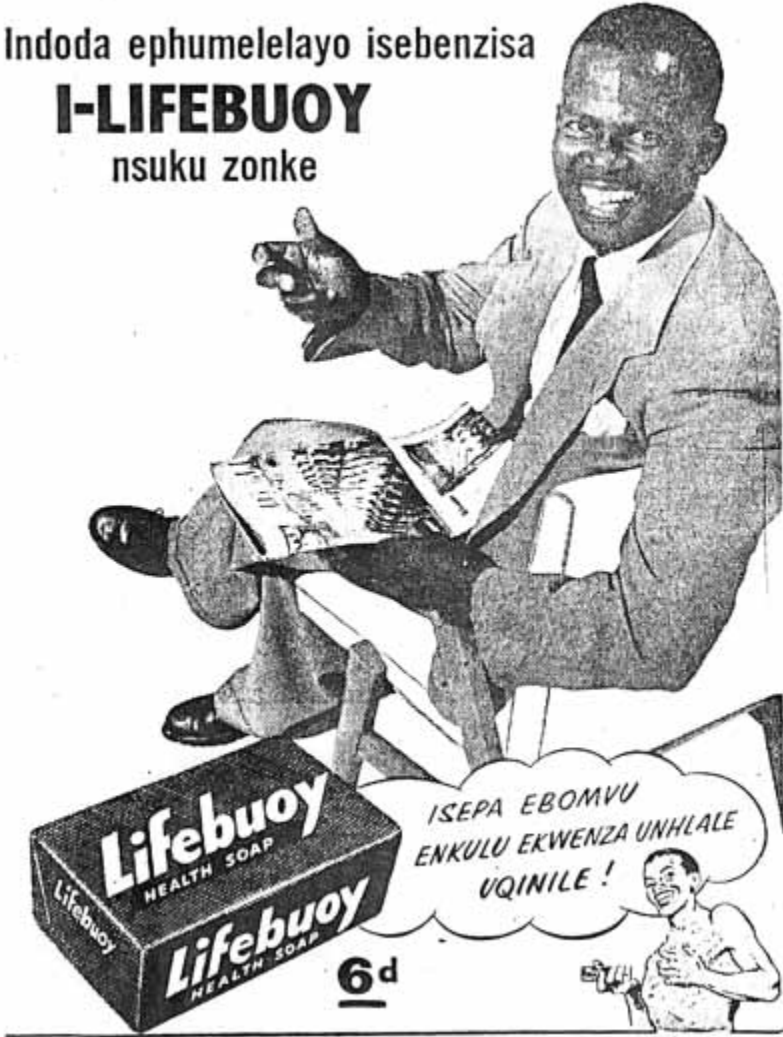
Figure 1.3. Advertisement for Lifebuoy soap, *Bantu Mirror,* September 10, 1960.

frequently tapped into one of the oldest themes in modern advertising, a theme with deep roots in Victorian England and the United States, namely, the fantasized power of a good soap to turn blacks into whites. These were not subtle ads: one version, promoting Gossage's Soap, showed a caricatured African whose face was half white and half black, with the caption "Soap Makes Black White."[21] But these were also images that could never appear in this form in colonial Africa itself. They would have been massively transgressive. As a shorthand description of the cleansing power of a soap, making use of Africans as a symbol while appealing to white metropolitan consumers, they were fine. As a promise to Africans that they might literally become white, they were impossible to accept. The basic trope—toiletries can lighten you and fulfill some social aspirations—thus remained the same, but the content of the image often changed, to show Africans becoming lighter, but not "white."

MISINTERPRETATIONS

Advertisers worried a great deal about images and their interpretation by Africans. Elsewhere, I have recounted in detail the general concern of advertisers about communicating with African audiences.[22] Virtually every individual aspect of advertising intended for African audiences was scrutinized for the possibility that it might contain a fatal miscommunication or error of some kind. The sensibilities of African consumers and of wary white onlookers alike figured into the calculus of marketing teams as they designed print campaigns. But nothing made these professionals more anxious than the visual component of print advertisements. As professional conventions governing transnational or cross-cultural advertising grew in importance around the world during the 1950s, they had an immense impact on the outlook and practice of advertising professionals in southern Africa. At the outset, such conventions argued that pictures had an immediacy and inherent transcultural currency that made them the ideal medium for conveying advertising messages in a wide variety of cultural settings. Pictures, in contrast to words, were believed to have universal power. Most advertising apocrypha about cross-cultural blunders and disasters turned on poor translations or the dual meaning of words, like the selling of the Chevrolet Nova in Latin America ("Nova" being turned into *no va*, or "doesn't go") or the translation of "Coke adds life" into Chinese, allegedly becoming "Coke brings your dead ancestors back to life" in the process. Many First World professionals argued that the ability of a picture to make real some proposition about the power of a commodity was not usually subject to such textual miscommunications. (They no longer so argue, and the general consensus today is that visual communication across cultures should be approached with as much caution as any other form of communication, or perhaps more.)[23]

Professionals in southern Africa never accepted the then-conventional wisdom. Even in the 1950s, their most time-honored anecdote about the dangers of cross-cultural advertising concerned an image rather than words. An ad for Raleigh bi-

cycles that showed a young African boy fleeing a lion on his bicycle had led to a precipitous drop in Raleigh sales among Africans in some parts of the region, it was said. The explanation was that Africans had interpreted the advertisement to mean that lions would chase you if you bought a Raleigh bicycle. From the outset, advertisers wondered what Africans saw and how they saw it, what kinds of perceptions Africans brought to pictures and especially colors.

As in the case of the cinema experiments, advertisers sometimes had a racist understanding of African perceptions, seeing them in terms of a lack, an absence, or an incapacity. Color was a particular concern among advertisers working with the "African market": many were concerned that particular colors were seen as "taboo" by African viewers.[24] Some of this obsession was laundered through scientific racism: advertisers commissioned studies that allegedly "proved" that Africans lacked the same range of color vision that whites had. Later on, similar studies understood the difference in cultural, rather than biological terms, but the core proposition remained in place.[25] I encountered the continuing power of this idea myself while interviewing a South African advertiser who had worked in Zimbabwe for many years. Africans, he argued, reacted very differently than whites to pictures, particularly to brightly colored ones, which tended to overwhelm and frighten them. Leaning over with a conspiratorial air, he informed me that he had a theory about this reaction, based on his long experience. Africans spent most of their lives in the dark, he explained—their rural huts were dark, townships were dark, mines were dark—so bright images "excited" them.

This advertiser was perhaps unusual in the racist absurdity of his views and in the persistence of those views (most professionals in southern Africa have dropped the more overtly racist underpinnings of their practice with alacrity in recent years). However, the foundation of such a view lies fairly deep within professional practice in the region. What made the whole matter even more difficult for advertisers was an equally fundamental assumption that pictorial display was the most powerful technique for reaching and transforming African consumers. This is precisely what made images so dangerous: they were understood as far more powerful than words in dealing with a population assumed to be essentially nonliterate and mostly without access to radio. The potential consequences from a misunderstanding were grave, but so too were the potential benefits from a successful campaign. J. E. Maroun, an advertiser active in the 1950s and 1960s, a man who was unusually blunt in his admission that his profession's goal was to transform the innermost self of Africans, held that the single most powerful and effective way to do this was simply to picture an African using a new product in a new manner.[26]

Just as in the case of cinema, stories also abound about African misrecognitions of the language of print advertising and of commodity packaging. One example involves the image of a baby on the wrapper for Stork Margarine, which apparently was taken by some Africans to signify that the margarine was made from rendered baby fat. During interviews in Harare, several individuals recounted stories about small changes in the packaging of cigarettes that they took to signal a se-

cret reduction in the quality of the tobacco. Local Colgate-Palmolive executives told me that changing the image of a brand is approached with great reluctance in southern Africa for exactly this reason. Campaigns announcing that a product is "new" and "improved" are very rare in comparison with the Euro-American context. I assume that these stories, like stories of Africans running from cinema screens, have some empirical truth to them, even though they are also told and retold as humorous apocrypha by those who have never come into personal contact with these incidents.

Such reactions suggest once more that Africans themselves have sometimes been uneasy about the power of modern technologies of visual representation to transform everyday life. In numerous conversations, particularly with older individuals, I was told how underwear advertisements in newspapers have created immorality and licentiousness among young people. Many also blamed the Zimbabwean government's promotional campaigns against AIDS for creating loose sexual behavior. By picturing sexuality, these images are held to create the behavior they envision. However, advertising images also have had immense appeal and fascination for many African viewers for much the same reason, as a set of novel and powerful propositions about how life looks elsewhere and how life could look at home.

And once again, whites' uncertainties about the meaning of pictures to African onlookers, whites' fears that the potentially surreptitious gaze of Africans might intercept images in public space, have not only reflected whites' desire to maintain social control over Africans. Such discomfort has also been rooted in whites' concerns about the power of advertising to transform their own desires and their own sense of self through new technologies of visual representation. In this regard, advertising is a fundamentally different than film. Anxieties about the cinema have centered on its technologically driven capacity to make the imaginary come to life; anxieties about advertising, especially about the visual dimension of advertising, center on its capacity for subverting the free will of its targets. Indeed, one of the best known and most widespread genres of opposition to advertising centers on its visual components: the paranoiac writings of Wilson Bryan Key and his fellow travelers about "subliminal images" in advertising.[27] Familiarity with the idea of subliminal images in advertisements, even among those highly skeptical about the idea, is nearly universal around the world: I even had several interviewees in the townships of Harare loosely describe an approximation of this phenomenon.[28] The wide currency of the concept has something to do with its correspondence to the lived experience of viewing advertisements: many people feel as if they have been compelled to purchase a commodity or pursue an action by representational mechanisms that they cannot quite perceive or identify. This sense was, I think, as common among white audiences in colonial Zimbabwe as it was in the United States or Europe. Concern over African responses to posters, billboards, and print advertisements was a way to defer or displace these deeper anxieties. Modern visual advertising proposed a new kind of disconnection between the surface of things and a hidden truth underneath; it required that viewers routinely accept and be

motivated by a representation that they know to be a lie. When Africans "failed" to see that the picture of a baby on the surface of a margarine wrapper had no relationship with the substance inside, that the baby's image was arguably a lie and, at the least, a major slippage between representation and reality, they called into question the whole of advertising practice and indeed, the whole of modern modalities of viewing and understanding visual material. If whites laughed at African responses, it was a rather nervous sort of laughter.

The fact that fears about the power of new technologies of representation could be deferred at all is what makes this a study of a specifically colonial situation. Colonial southern Africa was (and southern Africa still remains) a deeply censorious place, a place where police sat in darkened movie theaters taking notes on the noises that Africans made in response to the action, where concerned individuals furtively scanned African newspapers looking for images that portrayed inappropriate social ambitions, where self-conscious state censors specified with great precision that magazine pictures of semi-nude women must have their nipples erased, and so on. In colonial southern Africa, the racialized distribution of power and the nature of the colonial public sphere allowed for the deferral of the impulse for censorship substantially onto a subaltern group, with the usual consequences in terms of social control and regulation, burdened by the usual quotient of racist thought and practice. But underneath it all, pictures—whether they were on a screen or in a newspaper—both excited and repelled the whole of colonial Zimbabwean society, Africans and Europeans alike. Such sensations were unevenly represented and reported in public discourse, to be sure, but the advent of new kinds of visual media also underscored the complicated and convoluted manner in which modernity was a mutually forged artifact in colonial southern Africa.

NOTES

1. Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991).

2. The most recent and interesting treatment of this subject is Paul Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1995).

3. Paul Landau, "The Illumination of Christ in the Kalahari Desert," *Representations* 45, Winter (1994): 25–39; Christraud Geary, *Images from Bamun: German Colonial Photography at the Court of King Njoya, Cameroon, West Africa, 1902–1925* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988).

4. A forthcoming work by James Burns should vastly expand our understanding of the history of colonial cinema in southern Africa.

5. L. A. Notcutt and G. C. Latham, *The African and the Cinema: An Account of the Work of the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment during the Period March 1935 to May 1937* (London: Edinburgh House Press for the International Missionary Council, 1937), 39.

6. Ibid., 48.

7. Ibid., 33.

8. Ibid., 34.

9. Ibid., 46–47.

10. National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), S 2784/3/A-2, Cinema Censorship, "Cinema Report."

11. NAZ S 2784/3/A-2, Cinema Censorship, Sgt. A. G. Horn, British South Africa Police to chief superintendent, June 1927.

12. NAZ S 2784/3/A-2, Cinema Censorship, detective sergeant to superintendent, July 1917.

13. NAZ S 2784/3/A-2, Cinema Censorship, Tilman Esser, St. Patrick's Church, to British South Africa Police, 1927.

14. NAZ S 2784/3/A-2, Cinema Censorship, "Cinema Report."

15. NAZ S 482/240/39.

16. NAZ S 482/240/39, information officer to minister of information, November 1941.

17. NAZ S 482/240/39.

18. NAZ SA 5/1/5, Salisbury Chamber of Commerce Minute Books, 1921–31.

19. See NAZ S 2390/751/39, Department of Native Affairs, Correspondence re: Regulation of Advertisements, 1927–32.

20. G. W. H. Knight-Bruce, *Memories of Mashonaland* (London: Edward Arnold, 1895), 149.

21. For more on this subgenre of advertisement, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), ch. 5; Jan Nederven-Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992); and Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), ch. 3.

22. Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), ch. 7.

23. Paul Messaris, *Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1997), 91–125.

24. One black professional, Nimrod Mkele, found himself having to reassure white colleagues that there were no colors that carried negative connotations for Africans with the exception of the color black, whose negative meaning, he noted, was "universal." See Nimrod Mkele, *Advertising to the Bantu: Second Advertising Convention in South Africa* (Durban: Society of Advertisers, 1959), 134.

25. See A. P. van der Reis, *The Response of Urban Blacks to Colours* (Pretoria: Bureau of Market Research, 1980), for one more recent example.

26. J. E. Maroun, "Second Address, 'Bantu Market' Session," in *Third Advertising Convention in South Africa: The Challenge of a Decade* (Johannesburg: Statistic Holdings, 1960), 133.

27. See Wilson Bryan Key, *The Clam-Plate Orgy, and Other Subliminal Techniques for Manipulating Your Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980), and other works by the same author.

28. Tapera household, Kambuzuma Township, Harare, May 18, 1991.