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THE CRISIS OF IMAGES: A READING OF FEED A CHILD'S CONTROVERSIAL 2014 ADVERTISEMENT

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THE CRISIS OF IMAGES: A READING OF FEED A CHILD'S
CONTROVERSIAL 2014 ADVERTISEMENT

By

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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

This work reads Feed A Child's 2014 South African fund raising campaign advertisement (<http://goo.gl/cRboV7>) through Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model of communication. Utilizing concepts from Stuart Hall's model this paper draws attention to racial questions raised by the commercial. Even though the commercial's stated purpose is to raise awareness of unequal social conditions in South Africa, its visual elements are racially offensive. The turmoil generated by the commercial is the consequence of the complex structure of its message, and the fact that its meaning is not determined solely by the organization's stated intentions. This work explores the way that the processes of encoding and decoding generate different meanings. Hence, in spite of its attempt to combat economic racism, Feed A Child's message has been decoded by part of its audience as the reproduction of historical stereotypes that confined blacks in South Africa in a ghetto of deficiency and laid the foundations of racism and apartheid in the country. In what is characterized as continuous struggle over meaning, this paper builds on Hall's work on representation and reaches the conclusion that there is actually no fixed meaning to Feed A Child's commercial message. Rather, its meaning resides in the articulatory process by which the two instances of meaning production negotiate for dominance.

1. Introduction

Located in Southern Africa, the Republic of South Africa has historically suffered more than one sad event. From slave trade in the early 1600, the country was subjected to the rule of colonialism in the nineteenth century. And most recently the regime of apartheid that ended in 1994. South Africa was colonized by the English and Dutch. English domination of the Dutch descendents (known as Boers or Afrikaners) resulted in the Dutch establishing the new colonies of Orange Free State and Transvaal. The discovery of diamonds in these lands around 1900 resulted in an English invasion which sparked the Boer War. Following independence from England, an uneasy power-sharing between the two groups held sway until the 1940's, when the Afrikaner National Party was able to gain a strong majority. Strategists in the National Party invented apartheid as a means to cement their control over the economic and social system. Initially, the aim of the apartheid was to maintain white domination while extending racial separation. Starting in the 60's, a plan of "grand Apartheid" was executed, emphasizing territorial separation and police repression¹.

It is in this country with this long and sad history that in 2014, Ogilvy and Mather South Africa² produced a television advertisement³ for the South African charity Feed A Child that sparked outrage and accusations of racism. The advertisement shows a black

¹ <http://www-cs-students.stanford.edu/~cale/cs201/apartheid.hist.html>

² Ogilvy & Mather South Africa is part of one of the largest marketing communications networks in the world, founded originally in 1948 by David Ogilvy. It is an international advertising, marketing, and public relations agency based in Manhattan. It won the prestigious Cannes and Lions Award in 2013.

³<http://goo.gl/cRboV7>.

child whose head rests on the lap of a white woman as she rubs him while popping titbits into his waiting mouth. The child is later rewarded with another snack when he brings the woman a newspaper in bed; he is then shown licking the woman's finger while she is cooking. The message of this advertisement is supposed to be as the tag line at the end of the video reads: "The average domestic dog eats better than millions of children." Help fed a starving child. By donating R20⁴ via SMS to 40014.

In its attempt to critique economic racism, Feed A Child opted for shock advertising which consists of triggering strong emotional reactions in order to attract its audience's attention. This builds on cultural taboo in order to draw attention on the living condition of poor South Africans. Even though Feed A Child claims it wanted to make a positive argument about social inequality in South Africa, many viewers consider the advertisement to be offensive. This has resulted in it being banned by the A.S.A (Standards Authority of South Africa). Both the rhetorical audience⁵ and the larger audience receive the message, but their responses to it vary depending on differences in ethnicity and social status. Hence, visual meaning, as George et al. posits, is dependent on both the message sent and the audience's reception of that message (201). Even though the commercial is accompanied by a written message that states the author's purpose, "Help fed a starving child. SMS "child" to 40014 to donate R20", the provocative force of its images is so strong that what the author's intended meaning becomes problematic.

⁴Twenty Rand. The Rand is the South African Currency.

⁵For LLyord Bitzer, "a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change. [...] the rhetorical audience must be capable of serving as mediator of the change which the discourse functions to produce"(8).

Feed A Child's advertisement, which was shown during breaks on South African news channels, has provoked a considerable amount of controversy. Outraged accusations of racism made to the South Africa's Advertising Standards Agency⁶ prompted the removal of the ad. These are some reactions from the South African audience⁷:

Fridays Morning Show @Powerxtramornin

Feed A Child: http://youtu.be/qkR_MXdwkqk Wow It's like they are trying to bring slavery back. What a stupid & ridiculous advert.

5:51 AM - 6 Jul 2014

rujeko hockley @rjkhckly

Just... NO/WHY. Tone deaf doesn't begin to cover it. History isn't over, people. Feed A Child like a dog: <http://bit.ly/1pXc8By>

11:32 AM - 8 Jul 2014

⁶Abbreviated A.S.A, the Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa, is an independent entity organized and financed by members of the marketing communications industry of South Africa. Its purpose is to manage South Africa's voluntary, self-regulating system of advertising. The A.S.A works with a variety of marketing communication industry stakeholders to ensure that advertising content in the country meets the requirements of its Code of Advertising Practice and to control advertising content in the South African public's interest. (*Watchdogs: Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa*, retrieved 2010-07-05)

⁷ Even though audience in the field of media studies is sometimes considered to be groups or individuals targeted by and often built by media industries (the target audience), the medium of distribution in the case of Feed A Child, television/and later YouTube, makes it difficult to discard the fact that a wider audience is going to receive the message and their reactions will also matter. In this study, I limit the scope of my analysis of audience to the South African public. The various interactions I have gathered are from tweets of South Africans. I also use interviews conducted by the South African news channel eNCA in the streets of Johannesburg. This precision is important because Hall's encoding decoding model doesn't make the distinction between the targeted and untargeted audience. The reactions I collected reveal that there are different reactions from the South African audience. This actually confirms the polysemic nature of the advertisement. In my analysis, I make no distinction between the targeted and the untargeted audience. All the reactions I gathered are from the South African public without distinction of class, gender or race.

Siwaphiwe @Siwa_Mbara

@SiviweT @_everythingty There is no way one can justify that. ITS WRONG. Ogilvy has no regard for the dignity of the black child #feedachild

8:31 AM - 8 Jul 2014

Marie Perold @Marie_Perold

I get what the #feedachild ad was trying to say, but its just not suitable for the SA society with our racial history and current tensions

Feed A Child said it was baffled by these reactions and committed a letter supposed to be an apology in which the organization is actively defending its intended position:

The Shocking Truth about Feed A Child's Latest Commercial

APOLOGY FOR OFFENCE CAUSED BY OUR RECENT COMMERCIAL

The management and associates of Feed A Child extends our unreserved apology to any person(s) or group(s) who have been offended or hurt in any manner by our recent commercial that was shown on national television and YouTube. Our intention was not to cause offence.

We acknowledge the fact that the advert could be seen as insensitive or distasteful and we take heed to the fact that many perceived the advert as racist. This was most certainly not the intention, and again we apologize.

Unfortunately the core message of the commercial became diluted or even lost through the interpretation thereof. The core message of the commercial was to draw attention to the extremely important issue of malnutrition and raise awareness of the plight of many

children in South Africa who go to bed hungry. The commercial requests assistance to help us as an organization (and many other organizations who do similar work) to address the situation.

The decision has been made to withdraw the advert from all media. We realize that the advert has gone viral on social media however, with the effect that it is no longer in our power to pull the advert from all media altogether.

If anyone wishes to share their views they can contact Feed A Child directly via email (management@feedachild.co.za)

The average domestic dog eats better than millions of children

Feed A Child aims to provide support for the devastating impacts caused by poverty and malnutrition in South Africa. Our main mission is to make people aware of the fact that there are thousands of children out there that they work with on a daily basis that don't even have access to one meal per day. Feed A Child's most recent television commercial is based on this shocking societal truth - many domestic animals in this country are better fed than a lot of children. The commercial is intentionally emotive to trigger the necessary awareness on this issue to generate engagement and contributions. There was no intention to cause offence.

We are monitoring responses to the commercial and are open to any feedback on the commercial however believe that it remains valid and is serving its important purpose of raising awareness.

Those wishing to donate can SMS “child” to 40014 to contribute R20 or [click here](#).

If anyone wishes to share their views directly with us they can do this via email:
management@feedachild.co.za.

#FeedAChild

You can help us realise our vision by making a tax deductible contribution today,
supporting our projects.

Make an on-line donation using PayFast

Contact us for more information on how to contribute towards our projects. Make
an EFT donation

Payment Detail

Account Name: Feed A Child Bank:

ABSA

Account Nr: 924 978 0157

Branch: 632005

2. Objective

This work analyses Feed A Child's 2014 fund-raising campaign advertisement using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication in order to understand the connections between the author's purpose, the audience and the complexity of the message from the moment of its encoding through that of its decoding. In this analysis, I pay close attention to the racial question, concluding that even though Feed A Child is raising an important question as far as the social situation in South Africa is concerned, the organization's rhetorical choices are not only offensive but they confine blacks in a ghetto of deficiency and the ad's images attempt to make this acceptable. Hence, the ad's message is struggled over in the heated tensions that have emerged. The following questions provide the basis of my analysis: What is Feed A Child's message? What does the audience receive as message? What does this advertisement mean? Is there a fixed meaning to this advertisement?

From these questions I make the following argument:

Even though Feed A Child's advertisement is addressing a real social issue which is the direct consequence of historical and current economic racism in South Africa, the ad's visual syntax has crossed the socially accepted lines of provocation and shock and have touched the parameters of discontent in the collective memory of South Africans which is an offensive move. These choices have caused the meaning of the message to be struggled over.

3. The theory of encoding/decoding

In the elaboration of his encoding/decoding model of communication, Stuart Hall has been influenced by Umberto Eco's work: "Towards a Semiotic Inquiry into the Television Message". In this work, Eco examines the messages contained in the media and how the audience interprets them. Eco's argument is that in any given communication instance that has to do with television messages, there are three parameters at play: the intention of a sender, the objective structure of the message and the reaction of the audience to these elements. In this process, the message must then be encoded into a set of signs by the sender. These signs must then be transmitted and decoded by the receiver in order to understand the contained messages. The code system must be shared by both the sender and the receiver in order for the communication to succeed (103).

As is true of every system of signs, signs and their correlations are to be seen in relation to a sender and an addressee; based on a code supposed to be common to both; emitted in a context of communication which determines the meaning of the three previous terms. (3)

Eco's point is that in order for a communication to be successfully delivered and received, the system of signs must be commonly understood by both the sender and the addressee. Between the moment of coding and that of decoding, there are actually a producer and a receiver of the message who, in the process, can achieve a common ground of understanding if the audience actually decodes and understands the message the way in which the author intended. However, Eco mentions the possibility that the addressee's codes and subcodes and context can produce an interpretation unforeseen by

the sender. In such cases for Eco, when the addressee cannot isolate the sender's codes or successfully substitute his own codes or sub-codes for them, the message becomes pure noise. Eco uses the phrase "aberrant decoding" referring to a reverse situation, i.e., when the audience responds in quite a different way from what the author intended.

This approach is further developed by Stuart Hall in "Encoding/Decoding". Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication essentially states that the meaning encoded by the sender and the meaning decoded by the receiver are two separate moments in the production of meaning. That is, the senders encode meaning in their messages according to their structures of knowledge, relations of production and technical infrastructure, and the messages are decoded by the receivers according to their structures of knowledge, relations of production and technical infrastructure. This can result in the two instances producing two different meanings. This is so because "the community of the users have such freedom in decoding as to make the influencing power of the organization much weaker than one could have thought. Or just the opposite" (Hall *The work of representation* 6). Hall lays emphasis on the fact that rather than "misunderstanding" or unsuccessful communication, there is actually a "lack of fit" between the moment of the production of the message encoding and the moment of its reception decoding. This lack of fit between the codes has a great deal to do with the structural differences of relation and position between sender of the message and its audiences. Hall notes that what have been called "distortions" or "misunderstandings" arise precisely from the lack of equivalence between the encoded message/meaning and the decoded one.

Hall posits that there are three different positions audiences take when they decode

the meanings within cultural texts, particularly televisual discourses. They are the dominant-hegemonic position, the negotiated position and the oppositional position (59). The dominant-hegemonic position is when the viewer, or audience member, is located within the dominant point of view (60). Within this position, there is equivalence in understanding. Both sender and receiver are working with the same rule set, assumptions and cultural biases despite certain frictions that may occur due to issues of class structure and power, specifically between the elites who are able to dictate the rule set and the non-elites who must adopt the elite's rules as dominant (60). The negotiated position is when the audience member, or receiver, decodes the sender's message within the context of the dominant cultural and societal views (61). The messages as encoded are largely understood, but in a different sense than the dominant hegemonic position. The receivers in the negotiated position are not necessarily working within the hegemonic viewpoint, but are familiar enough with dominant society to be able to adequately decode cultural texts in an abstract sense (61). However, it is entirely possible for the audience member to decipher the message as a more personal message, which is when their own biases and viewpoints influence the decoding process. This "near view" of the message usually occurs in certain situations that are close to the audience member, as opposed to the general "long view" they take of cultural texts in the abstract (61). The oppositional view is when the audience member is capable of decoding the message in the way it was intended to be decoded, but based on their own structures of knowledge, often sees another, unintended meaning within the message. (61)

Looking at the images in the advertisement, it is possible that the instances of coding and decoding achieve a common understanding and the coded message reaches the audience

in its “preferred” form and the audience in turn responds to the advertisement the way the author wants (i.e. donating). However, what arises from observation is the fact that there is a significant lack of equivalence between Feed A Child’s message and the audience’s response. Feed A Child encoded images in a particular way with the expectation that the audience would decode its meaning in the same way and respond with donations. However, in this process, it is important to note that the meaning of this short video, which conveys a specific message from the author’s point of view, is not a fixed entity in itself; it doesn’t depend solely on the author’s intention. Hall characterizes the communicative process as one that in the first instance, generates a message and meaning through its practices, its technical infrastructures, and relations of production. In the second instance, the consumption or reception of the television message is also “a moment” of the production process itself;

the consumption or reception of the television message is thus also itself a ‘moment’ of the production process in its larger sense, though the latter is predominant because it is the point of departure of the realization of the message. Production and reception of the television messages are not necessarily identical, but they are related: they are differentiated moments within the totality formed by social relations of the communicative process as a whole (53).

Feed A Child’s advertisement and its message has been decoded not as a critique of the economic racial situation in South Africa. Rather, the ad’s audience has generated its meaning and reads the advertisement as strengthening the colonial clichéd ideology that this audience has associated with racism. This audience, as John Fiske would describe it,

is not constituted of mere passive watchers of the television screen, but rather are active audiences, engaging with the program in ways the producers never could imagine (Fiske 79).

4. The moment of encoding

According to George and Trimbur, we are caught every day in the web of visual images. In nearly every public and private space, images on billboards, on magazines, on television, in film and video, on or computer screens compete for our attention: “they carry messages from corporate advertisers, nonprofit organizations, public and private institutions, and friend and families and they ask us to buy, to give, to believe, to subscribe, to respond, to understand, to act” (198). In this visual arena where the battle for audience is critical for survival, the technical and cultural means of persuasion are often put in play, and innovation and constant creativity are what guarantee attention. Shocking and provocative messages are often used to grab public attention. Feed A Child’s advertisement falls in this category. In its apology letter, Feed A Child admits that there was an intention to shock: “the commercial is intentionally emotive to trigger the necessary awareness on this issue to generate engagement and contributions.” The risk taken by Feed A Child in testing the limits of social tolerance ties with the objectives of any advertisers: grabbing its audience’s attention and urging the audience to act in a certain way.

Advertising in modern society has become a very demanding art. According to Jurate Banyte et al., Advertising “stimulates, inspires, irritates, troubles, and sometimes becomes a fairly unnoticeable detail of the environment” (35). In order for an

advertisement to remain moving in the minds of consumers, advertisers resort to “shock” which is one of the infrastructures/principles in advertising. Shock advertising is created to affect emotional and shake thinking (Moore and Harris, 37), to touch people at a fundamental level and encourage them to take action (Huntington, 5-6). Shock advertising is a conscious attempt to shock the consumer by violating social, cultural, moral and religious values of society (Jurate et al. 35). In spite of the negative attitudes that people might express vis-a-vis an ad, Juarte believes that “shock appeal in advertising has become a popular means of conveying consumer-oriented content. Shocking advertisements have been especially successful in social advertising, where consumers accept them with more tolerance than in commercial advertising” (35). There are ongoing discussions about the purpose of shock advertising. An analysis of scientific literature as Jurate et al. posit, reveals that active argument has been on going about the purpose of shock advertising. It is argued that shock tactics are “used to make people stop and notice an advertisement” (35). In this line of thinking, Mat Williams (2009) states that “shock is an effective means to capture attention and a fast way to communicate a message for any organization”.(11). In the same vein, Frendley (1996) argues that, “shock advertising attracts interest of the press and the company’s name appears in the center of public attention”. This background reading of the literature in this field makes it clear that Feed A Child’s advertisement falls in the normal production line in the field of advertising in which the emotional aspect is very important because “it affects feelings of the audience. Striving for exceptionality and persuasiveness, advertisers tend to use dramatic emotions, they create the messages that would shock the consumers” (Jurate et al. 36). However, Jurate et al. note that there is a debate concerning who has the right to

use shock tactics: charity institutions solving issues that must be communicated, or business organizations whose main aim is profit? Are the things that are widely used for commercial reasons allowed when a social mission is pursued? According to Jurate et al., there is no unanimous opinion of marketing specialists as far as the marketing strategies are concerned. “The critics of shock tactics in advertising accuse the creators of shocking advertisements of emotional manipulation” (35). Moore and Hutchinson (1983), Bello, Pitts and Etzel (1983), Dahl (2002), and Williams (11) emphasize the efficiency and positive impact of shock advertising on the audience, while Barnes and Dotson (1990), Phau and Prendergast (2001) stress consumers being offended by it (Jurate et al. 1). In fact, Jurates notes that, “despite thirty years of ongoing discussions, the impact of shock advertising on consumers still remains the relevant object of scientific research” (36). Thus the shock approach remains problematic in that it can bend the balance on either side, that is, it can be successful in achieving a communicative goal or be offensive and provoke outrages. The work of Chenesey (2000) and Van Putten and Jones (2008) reveal that “consumers judge shocking advertisements ambiguously, they are differently perceived in commercial and social advertising context” (36)

In analyzing the impact of shock advertising of consumers in different advertising context, Jurate et al. note that even if there has been a successful practice of shock advertising, a “majority of authors define consumer response triggered by controversial products as negative” (36). The “use of provoking and controversial, and/or offensive advertisements captures the consumers’ attention” (37). In many instances, “the violation of socially acceptable norms is the stimulus that attracts attention to a shocking advertisement and

prompts elaboration of it” (37). In the same move, Dahl et al (2003) according to Jurate et al. argue that surprise caused by violation of socially acceptable norms attracts attention and stimulates elaboration, retention, and, consequently, certain behavior. Jurate et al. insist on the fact that, to “create an effective shocking advertisement, it is necessary to evaluate its possible emotional impact and to have a clear understanding of consumer behavior that is desired to be provoked” (37). This is so because “in order to achieve emotional effectiveness of advertisements, one should imagine the advertisement and decide how people with different characters will react to it, whether it will grab their interest” (Jurate et al. 38). Studies performed by Ogilvy Research and Development Center in 2009 show that “advertisements that are liked by people, help to sell more than those which irritate them” (Jurate et al 38). Hence, in spite of the exigencies of the advertising art (shock advertising), the complexity of society demands advertisers to become “good psychologists, philosophers, and sociologists because advertising should affect not only mind but also will and feelings” (Juarte et al. 38). Thus, it becomes even evident that shock advertising is becoming a challenge for advertisers because “shock advertising might be absolute success or complete failure” (Jurate et al. 38). “Consumer reaction to the use of shock effect may be individual as it is affected by normative, contagion, and ambivalence dimensions. The success of shocking advertisement depends on how a consumer will react to it” (40). According to Jurate et al., despite the purpose of shocking advertisements, they ought to be handled with caution. Wilson and West (1995) argue that “just because non- profit organizations are performing a noble deed, they are not granted the right to create and use any kind of harrowing or threatening images” (42).

4.1. Feed A Child's intended message

In raising questions about the “current challenge in South Africa,” the message the NGO claims to convey is that:

One in ten children suffers from severe malnutrition and dies within the first 12 months of life. More than 1 in 5 are physically underdeveloped due to malnutrition. The consequences of malnutrition are severe and include stunted growth, anemia, decreased learning capacity and a weakened immune system. Yet, that is not the worst. On average, one child dies every five seconds as a result of malnutrition¹!

Despite this sad situation, many South Africans paid little attention and continued taking more care of their animals than their fellow citizens. Why not opt for an attention-catching model to arouse more concern among the public? Thus, Feed A Child claims that “The commercial is intentionally emotive to trigger the necessary awareness on this issue to generate engagement and contributions.”

The problem is that the audience doesn't approach the text from the same positions as the author. Whatever strategy a text adopts, creates conditions for a polysemy in the decoding of a message. This can always become a doubled-edge sword that can push the balance on either side. The reality is that the audience response to any artistic production cannot be perfectly predicted.

The way Feed A Child's advertisement images have been articulated are such that the advertisement generates a meaning. The various elements that constitute the

¹“I Can Feed A Child.” *I Can Feed A Child*. Web. 13 Dec. 2014.<<http://www.feedachild.co.za/>>.

advertisement, both visual and non-visual, are represented in such a way that they convey a certain meaning. Feed A Child intends the advertisement to carry an anti-economic-racist message that is raising an important question regarding the social situation in South Africa. This message is represented through an arrangement of images that creates a certain meaning. Feed A Child's message is built on intentionality; this is so because broadcasters actually have and exercise "intentions: to communicate effectively, ensure balance, entertain and inform etc." (Morley 4).

A close reading of the visual syntax of Feed A Child's advertisement indicates from all points of view that the NGO has a target audience to whom its message is addressed: the white bourgeoisie and anyone who takes better care of his or her dog than his fellow citizens. The ad's images are arranged in such a way that they carry a certain meaning articulated by the author. Through the white woman in the video and the role she plays, the author is reminding the target audience of the reality it usually doesn't perceive. The image of a child being fed like a dog and the contrast with the message, "a dog is better fed than a child", has a certain significance in connection with the target audience's way of life. Feed A Child's objective is to urge those who see in the actions of the white lady an image of themselves to question their routines and do something. Given its advocacy², the organization stands a good chance to convey this message i.e. poverty in South Africa has a strong racial component.

² Feed a Child is registered in terms of Section 18a Public Benefit Organizations (PBO) in the following categories: Food Water Education Healthcare and Medical Services Sustainability. Since its creation in 2008, its mission has been: To provide sustainable solutions for the uplifting of human dignity affected by the devastation of poverty. To create and encourage a culture of self-sustainability that positively impacts the economy of the country and all its people

Looking through the clichéd images used in the advertisement and the position and role played by each of the two characters one reads a real story of the actual realities in the country:

the old white elite and their corporations have largely retained control over the country's vast wealth. The gulf between the wealthiest and poorest South Africans has grown so wide that post-apartheid South Africa is now ranked as one of the three most unequal countries in the world. (Clarno 3)

The advertisement is a carrier of a message intended to urge people to formulate virulent reactions in regards to the social situation in the country. In fact, in South Africa today, the hard regime of apartheid based on racial segregation is no more. However, what is persistent is economic apartheid. Hence, Clarno's argument is that bringing down the apartheid state freed black South Africans from the confines of the white supremacist regime. But, post-apartheid South Africa "remains one of the most unequal countries in the world" (1). Clarno argues that, a small black elite and a growing black middle class have emerged alongside the old white elite, which still controls the vast majority of land and wealth in the country. "Poor black South Africans have been relegated to a life of permanent unemployment, informal housing, and high rates of HIV/AIDS in the townships and shack settlements of the urban periphery" (2). While rooted in the history of colonialism and apartheid, these conditions cannot be dismissed as simply the lingering effects of the old regime. "Waves of strikes, social movements, and popular uprisings have made clear that the struggle in South Africa continues."(2) The portrayal of the two characters in Feed A Child's commercial provides some evidence of the overall social

inequalities in South Africa. The objective of the NGO is, therefore, to ring the bells of economic discrimination and urge those in possession of social economic power to consider treating their fellow citizens better than their domestic animals. This is the meaning Feed A Child is trying to convey through the images in the ad:

The average domestic dog eats better than millions of children

Feed A Child aims to provide support for the devastating impacts caused by poverty and malnutrition in South Africa. Our main mission is to make people aware of the fact that there are thousands of children out there that they work with on a daily basis that don't even have access to one meal per day.

Feed A Child's most recent television commercial is based on this shocking societal truth - many domestic animals in this country are better fed than a lot of children. The commercial is intentionally emotive to trigger the necessary awareness on this issue to generate engagement and contributions. There was no intention to cause offence.

The intentions of the sender are reaffirmed in the organization's release, but what does the audience receive as the message?

5. The moment of decoding

According to Carrielynn Reinhard, traditional mass media technologies and networks "were utilized by the media industry to transmit to the people; any feedback from the people was minimal and oftentimes ignored unless it came in the form of consumerism" (4). For McQuail and Webster, according to Reinhard, the audience in this move was always perceived as an undifferentiated mass whose temporal, spatial and social distance from the producers meant that consumers could not talk back to the

producers (McQuail,1997; Webster, 1998, “audience-as-mass”). Reinhard’s point is that audiences were categorized not by determining the audiences’ needs, but the industry’s needs. Thus, academic research “was most interested in understanding the people as passive consumers and cultural dupes that were either unwilling or unable to resist the power of the media products in determining their thoughts, feelings and behaviors” (Webster 1998 “audience- as-outcome”). However, Hall’s encoding/decoding model makes it clear that the audience has never been passive. They are active agents that are more obviously active with the emergence of interactive media technologies.

In its apology, Feed A Child rejects allegations of racism. The organization is in no way expressing regrets but rather defending its intended position. The word *apology* here espouses its original sense of a defense and not a manifestation of guilt or remorse. What Feed A Child tries to discard is that the audience necessarily generates its own interpretation of the ad. Eco’s question is fundamental in any approach to audience: “When I send a message, what do different individuals in different environments actually receive? Do they receive the same message? A similar one? A totally different one?” (238). Following Eco’s articulation, Robert Rossen in his essay “Something Strong Within as Historical Memory” applies this idea to the film audience. His argument is that spectators are memory workers who

do not come to a film as empty vessels passively waiting to be filled. Rather, they are purposive social actors with specific cultural and historical baggage, and as a result the information and interpretations presented in a film become socially relevant only after they have been refracted through the idiosyncratic

viewpoints of a diverse array of spectator groupings. (116)

As argued earlier, the problem of shock advertising is that it can be successful or very damaging. Everything depends on how the audience reacts to it. In this case, the balance has been negative, resulting in a massive criticism of the end product. Phau and Prendergast (2001) concur with this approach and state that shocking advertisement may cause greater interest, but appeal to consumers using less intense means is more acceptable, better perceived, and stimulates purchase. Walker (2004) according to Jurate et al., argues that prior to implementing controversial campaigns, advertisers should find the fine line between communication with a market and offending people (Jurate et al. 39). Feed A Child's rhetorical choices have crossed the socially accepted lines of provocation and shock and have touched the parameters of discontented collective memory, which has resulted in massive contestation and rejection of the ad. These are other examples of public reaction as expressed in tweets³ by SouthAfricans:

@MrSkota: "Feed A Child SA does not respect us. NOT at all . Oh but what Feed A Child SA was trying to say was that some white people do treat their dogs better than their workers. I'm out."

@AlexanderHampel: "Definitely the wrong way to get a message across. Who approves these ads? Hugely racist. What do you think? Feed A Child #feedachild."

³ These tweets are reactions from The South African viewers to Feed A Child's ad after it was shown on South African News TV Channels.

Source: <http://www.timeslive.co.za/thetimes/2014/07/08/hungry-child-ad-sparks-race-row>

@Melfunktion: “I’m not surprised by that Feed A Child ad where the rich white woman feeds the black kid like a dog. Outraged, but not surprised .”

@MsLeloB: “People Outraged about the #FeedAChild ad as expected but is it not reality? Use that energy to Feed A Child not lodge complaints.”

@CurateZAR: “That advert was in such poor taste. Don’t think there’s a way to go around it. What were [they] trying to achieve? Just wow. #FeedAChild.”

Drawing from these statements, the claim I am making is that even if Feed A Child is determined to arouse awareness in South Africa and urge those in possession of social economic powers to consider treating their fellow citizens better than their domestic animals, its approach has been perceived by a significant part of the audience as offensive.

The audience draws on its own structures of knowledge, reads through the advertisement and generates meanings that link it to racism, which in the South African context can be traced back to colonialism and apartheid. Colonialism established an ideological system of dominance that normalized and circulated the ill treatment of the colonized people. This system is what stood at the foundation of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Hence, the audience views the advertisement as reproducing a past it fought so hard to overcome. This is actually the unacceptable and the triggering element at the center of the struggles over the meanings of Feed A Child’s ad.

Racial and cultural stereotypes have always served as a powerful means of subjugation and oppression. Feed A Child’s advertisement casts two actors who embody

South Africa's history. Between 1948 and 1990, the country's all-white government enforced existing policies of racial segregation under a system of legislation that it called apartheid. Under apartheid, nonwhite South Africans (a majority of the population) were forced to live in separate areas from whites and to use separate public facilities, and contact between the two groups was limited. Racial and economic segregation and white supremacy had become central aspects of South African policy. For more than four decades, blacks in South Africa were submitted to a code of law that deprived them of so much that they end up occupying positions considered subhuman. During these years,

whites were always privileged, chosen, always in charge-the *baas* (boss), always serviced, ever the beneficiaries. Black people worked for whites; the reverse was legally prohibited. They cleaned homes, washed soiled clothes, scrubbed floors, made the bed, polished shoes, cooked food. They nursed babies and the elderly, provided childcare until teenagers could care for themselves and then still, tended gardens, delivered goods, provided services (Goldberg 520).

Under apartheid, being black was a burden "always borne on the back". White men could eye, even sexually abuse, black women ... yet joke about black animosity with their friend (Goldberg 521). Apartheid constructed the architecture founded upon the supreme sacralization of race, "racial sacralization was both predicated upon and produced the idea of a constrained sense of community, of whites as ordained to lead and be served by those set apart as not white" (ibid 526)

This ugly memory is what emerged in the reception of this ad. The portrayal of the

two characters in the advertisement reminds people of the legacy of apartheid. Below are some reactions from the South African audience that illustrate this remembering:

Fridays Morning Show @Powerxtramornin

Feed A Child: Wow It's like they are trying to bring slavery back. What a stupid & ridiculous advert.
5:51 AM - 6 Jul 2014

rujeko hockley @rjkhckly

Just... NO/WHY. Tone deaf doesn't begin to cover it. History isn't over, people. Feed A Child like a dog: <http://bit.ly/1pXc8By>
11:32 AM - 8 Jul 2014

I get what the #feedachild ad was trying to say, but its just not suitable for the SA society with our racial history and current tensions
10:51 AM - 8 Jul 2014

Given this historical context, it is inconceivable that this advertisement would not have provoked hostile reactions. The advertisement evokes an image that in Homi Bhabha's perspective, helps to strengthen the mythical representation of black men and women in South Africa. This representation played a strong role in the way blacks were treated, violated, and assigned the position of subhuman.

In the discussion of his notion of "fixity," Bhabha argues that stereotype is a major discursive strategy of colonial discourse. According to Bhabha, the colonial discourse of dominance depends on the "concept of fixity in the ideological construction of the otherness" (18). The major discursive strategy of this discourse is the stereotype which Bhabha defines as a "form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always in place, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (18)

The discursive reduction of blacks in South Africa to an essential position of deficiency has been widespread even though this essence of lack is unsupportable. It is this ambivalence that is integral to the structure of colonial discourse and ensures the stereotypes “repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed” (18). Bhabha posits that it is important that we go beyond the identification of images as positive or negative to an understanding of the process of subjugation made possible through stereotypical discourse (18). The attitude that in this case aims at portraying the black being as a child or a dog participates in strengthening the overall process of subjugation. In the ad, the audience perceives a kind of replica of the colonial game of image reproduction. The discourse they quickly associate with that of the colonizer is mainly intended to comfort the colonizer in a position of dominance.

The decoding practice of this advertisement takes into consideration an array of factors. Looking at this ad, it is important to note how South Africans are portrayed. The white and wealthy lady is assigned a comfortable and dominant position, whereas the young black boy is confined to a position of subjugated subject. Such identification gives this commercial cultural significance. Once the two characters are identified as white and black, the reader is no longer looking at the commercial but through it. The two characters are assigned special significance because of their relation to the historical turmoil that the country and its black citizens have gone through. This then crosses the

socially accepted lines of provocation and shock and touch the parameters of discontent in South Africans' collective memory. These choices have caused the overall purpose of the message to be problematic and, therefore, provoked heated reactions from the public, which reads every image in this advertisement against what isn't there.

In the author's expectation, the black boy in the subjugated position is where he should be. The advertisement is actually articulated around certain kinds of claims on identity. The two characters in the advertisement are to be represented the way they are. According to David Morley, the author's "level of conscious intention and activity is itself framed by a whole set of unconscious ideological practices" (112). Thus this way of portraying the blacks through the young black character does not need to be consciously expressed.

In the articulatory process of these images, the author establishes the relationship between the images and the powerful positioning behind them as naturalized. The black man is a subhuman. Thus the role he occupies in the advertisement is an expected fit for him. Blacks then equal dogs, equal poor, equal the needy. The result of this ideological production builds on cliché and creates a psychological basis of looking at black men. This pushes the view to a point where, from the author's position, whenever one sees a black man or child, one can then assume he carries those characteristics: poor, subhuman, needy (historically colonialism and racism have made this possible). The colonial ideology behind the scene of Feed A Child's advertisement works to fix this meaning in its images and language. Hall's argues that such "Stereotyping fixes the meanings that are given to groups" (Hall *Representation and the media* 19). Historically, the limited images of black

men have affected the way the South African society perceives black men in the real world. Blacks have been considered as sub-humans. The author then build on this knowledge about the world and constructs these images and representations that further fix that knowledge as reality.

Hall identifies race as an especially powerful principle of classification. Race and its association to being genetically black in this case becomes biologically associated to fixed qualities that drive along a whole range of things: subject, poor, ready to serve and even reduced to the status of animal. The author understands that if the character is black, it means that he can naturally be assigned the position of a dog.

6. The problem with Encoding/Decoding

Feed A Child's claim is that there was no intention of racism. Here is what Alza Rautenbach, Feed A Child's Founder and spokeswoman says about what the organization intended to convey in its: It was unfortunate that what the charity had intended to be a strong statement against a social ill had turned into a racial issue. What if this advert changed a child's life? What if this advert changed 3.5 million children's lives? What if this was your child going to bed hungry tonight, and this advert can change that?

The child was a character that the agency used. It wasn't chosen for any specific reason – and yes, the idea was to use multiracial people, just as our country is. It doesn't help to have an advert that is not representative.

Reading through this declaration, it is clear that Feed A Child resorts to a position of power in trying to impose a meaning upon the text. Hall sees in this exercise of power

through language an ideological attempt to absolutely “fix” a close up meaning. However, Hall insist that meaning is always generated contextually within chains of signification. He claims that it is “important to look at the semantic field within which any particular ideological chain signifies” (Hall *signification, representation, ideology* 112). Marx according to Hall emphasizes the fact that the ideas of past weigh on the brains of the living. Blacks have historically been discursively constructed according to a regime of meanings that have connoted them as despised and inserted them into the discourses of abuse, and chained them into place in discourses and practices of social and economic exploitation. These tenacious associations make it difficult to dismantle the connotations around the word and the fact of being black.

Even though much of the logic behind representing and treating blacks as sub-human has been broken with the end of Apartheid, the discourse and the ideology of class and race fixing still prevails in a variety of new “modern” ideas. Feed A Child as Hall would argue, struggles “around the chains of connotations and the social practices which made racism possible through the negative construction of blacks” (Hall *signification, representation, ideology* 112). Power and ideology in this case attempts to fix the meaning of images and language. Feed A Child through the voice of its CEO is openly reminding the audience: I can tell you what these images mean. This is the ideological attempt to fix the one true meaning.

However, this is an inadequate response to the way the audience receives and understands the message. The audience reaction is not in accordance with the CEO’s argument. In the various reactions, one can trace a kind of struggle over being black. Ideologically speaking, blacks exist in the relation to the contestation around the historical

chains of meaning that are being reproduced. The effects of these struggles over the connotations of black from Hall's perspective, "mainly aims at stopping the society from reproducing itself functionally" (Hall as John Fiske would describe it 113).

The difficulty with using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model is that it reaches a point where one becomes unable to decide between two instances of meaning production. If both the author and the audience generate different meanings, then it appears that there is no way to understand messages. Hall's claim is that the author as much as the audience generates meaning. If this is the case how then is meaning actually negotiated? How are we to decide what is the meaning of the advertisement?

Determining meaning based on the author's text and intention is too author-centered, and requires approaching Feed A Child's advertisement by making reference to Feed A Child's ethos, which might have a great impact on the way the advertisement is read. A critique of this position is justified if we build on Roland Barthes' articulation of the death of the author. Barthes brings the author's influence on the meaning of a given text to question. He makes the claim that this traditional approach to reading a text has long reduced a fuller appreciation of an artistic production. According to Barthes, the traditional critical approach to literature raises a thorny problem: how can we detect precisely what an author intended? His answer to this question is that we cannot. It doesn't really matter what Feed A Child has to say about its intentions. What is at issue is the advertisement that the audience is evaluating. Barthes articulation helps in collapsing the paternalistic view of an artistic production as he declares the death of the author. Barthes, who views the author as tyrannically the center of the artistic

production, calls for the author's substitution, leaving aside his or her person, his or her passion or belief and sticking to the text itself. Barthes' claim is that classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is "the only person in literature." (2) This has contributed to undermining possibilities offered by artistic productions. Barthes wants to overthrow this myth, which smothers and destroys; hence, he advocates for the birth of the reader which, must be at the cost of the death of the author. Barthes is hereby restoring the viewer's place and his angle of reading, which happens without a consideration of "the author, his person, his life, his taste, his passions." The author is not the owner of the discourse anymore. For the viewer, what speaks is the art itself and not its author. Giving no more room to the author than that of the writing instant enables Barthes to approach the text not as "a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the message of the author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (146). Barthes believes that "once the author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes futile. To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (147). For Barthes, the way forward is simple: by refusing to assign a text ("a secret") and the world as a text an ultimate meaning, one is liberating what he calls an antitheological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases" (147). The same critique can be applied to Hall's theorization of the audience as generator of meaning. If it is admitted that Feed A Child's audience is always going to generate a meaning, it is important to

note that this meaning is not completely an independent one. The advertisement as a text is not completely open to the reader, it is not merely as stated by Morley “a site upon which the reader constructs the meaning” (5). The audience is not the writer of the text, but producers of meaning who have to work on material which has been pre-selected and organized in particular ways by an author. More, the audience is not a single body of people with the same views, ideas, and thoughts. It is difficult for an audience to generate a single and common meaning to a text. Accordingly, Morley’s point is that a text is always polysemic, “words or images can produce different meanings in different contexts” (6). Hence, there is actually room for negotiation between the two communication instances. This negotiation is built on the relationship between people, things, objects and events, real or fictional and the conceptual systems of a culture which can operate as mental representations of them. Hence, the meaning of the white woman feeding a black child lies not in the representation in the images, or in the audience’s interpretation but in the real negotiation over these meanings.

7. Negotiating Meaning

According to Stuart Hall in his works that follow “Encoding/Decoding”, meaning is the combination of contingent/indefinite contextualized elements that constitute the whole order. This idea is developed in his theorization of articulation as a differential ensemble of signifying sequences. “The theory of articulation recognizes the complexity of cultural fields. It preserves a relative autonomy for cultural and ideological elements” (Middleton 8). Articulating principles “operate by combining existing elements into new

patterns or by attaching new connotations to them” (ibid 8). Articulation is used in cultural analysis in order to grasp the various connections in play but also to look at the way the connections are made possible, i.e., the way different sorts of thing are connected to one other. (Slack 112). According to Lawrence Grossberg, articulations require contextualization, because they are always “complex: not only does the cause have effects, but the effects themselves affect the cause, and both are themselves determined by a host of other relations. Articulations are never simple and singular; they cannot be extracted out of the interlocking context in which they are possible” (Grossberg, 56). Another important element in the articulatory process is that of the arbitrariness of closures, because “the association of different distinct elements can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary belongingness” (Hall *Critical dialogues* 115).

To understand the tensions in Feed A Child’s advertisement, one has to look at the various elements that are linked together: elements of identity, history and the current social condition. This has to be built on the already existence contingency among Feed A Child’s message, the context of production and the various codes and actors in the ad. Meaning in this case will arise as the emergence of negotiation between the encoder and the decoder.

For Hall, most advertising works by attempting to win identification. Hence the viewer should be able to identify with and place him/herself into the image within the field of what is being represented to him/her. If there no identification going on at all, i.e. the viewer says: “I don’t know what it would be like to feel like that person. I’ve never seen anybody like that. I can’t imagine myself ever being like that, etc., even in my fantasies,”

(*Representation and the media* 16), it then becomes difficult for the meaning to pass. It is not as if the images in themselves have a meaning but the meaning only exist in relations of looking at the image with what the images construct to the viewer that they have a meaning. Not a single meaning to every viewer but “whole range of potential meanings” (17). Every meaning that the viewer generates depends on a certain engagement with the images: “psychic, imaginary engagement – through the look with an investment in the image or involvement in what the image is saying or doing” (16). Hall lays emphasis on the fact that if the viewer is concerned about the proliferation of images in his/her culture on a daily basis, it is mostly because the latter is constantly constructed by these images through fantasy relationship to these images in a way which implicates the viewer in the meaning. What really bothers the viewer and urges him/her to react in a certain way after viewing certain images is that the viewer is caught in the images and eventually has “an investment, in the meaning which is being taken from it” (*Representation* 17). Hence, Hall moves from the word “identity” or “identityclaim,” to “identification” and makes the claim that the viewer can only get something out of the images if he or she positionshim/herself in relation to what it’s telling. Through the act of looking, the viewer becomes implicated in the production of meaning.

Not taking these factors into consideration and putting into action clichéd representations that ignore the diverse nature of the audience leads to misunderstanding including in some cases heated reactions. What the Feed A Child is struggling with in its apology is to claim a meaning to this ad. Through the voice of its CEO, one can trace elements of accusing of the audience of getting the message wrong and schooling the audience in getting the right message:

“The core message of the commercial was to draw attention to the extremely important issue of malnutrition and raise awareness of the plight of many children in South Africa who go to bed hungry.”

Because there is no true fixed meaning, “there will never be a final settled meaning” (*Representation 7*). There will likely always be multiple interpretations of what is going on in the advertisement and those meanings will be struggled over in attempts to fix them. The meaning of Feed A Child’s advertisement lays in the negotiation between the two instances (encoding/decoding). The meaning generated by the decoding instance depends on how the various elements in the advertisement get articulated articulated. The meaning of this advertisement is not fixed and it changes in this negotiated relationships. In his definition of Culture, Hall posits that it is “Culture is a way in which we make sense of or give meaning to things of one sort or another” (*Representation 9*). People don’t make sense of things in the same way and the way they make sense changes.

Meaning is located in practice because the image in itself has no fixed meaning; “images have potentially a wide range of meanings” (*Representation 18*). Thus, members of the audience respond differently. Meaning is thus in the end interpretation, which is influenced by the different makers of meaning. Making meaning is always a process of interpreting what is represented, which is dependent on historical and cultural context. This is so because images seem to have a stronger meaning only within a certain context. The powerful interpretation that sees racism in the Feed A Child’s advertisement can be accounted for in the context of extreme racism in South Africa. One might reasonably agree that Feed A Child should have been

more creative with its advertisement in the sense that the same idea might have been expressed using the same characters differently. If the author had taken into consideration the parameters of codes the message might have been received with the intended effect and the tension might have been avoided.

To relay meaning, visual language depends on familiarity, patterns of use, composition, references to other images and the context in which the image appears (George et al., 198). Like verbal language, visual language does not convey one stable message to everyone who reads it. Meaning depends on the reader as well as the text. When an author produces a text, he or she doesn't do so in a vacuum. The end product is destined for real people who may or may not agree with the author. It is possible that in the production process, the author ignores this and ends up creating a text for a general group of readers. However, in *Practical Argument*, Laurie Kirschner and Stephen Mandel argue that producing a text without a clear sense of audience is a mistake because the author has to define "an audience and keep it in mind as he or she writes" (15). This is important because it helps in determining which material to include and how to present it. Hence, in putting on screen certain ideas, a producer should take into consideration the overall atmosphere of the cultural context of its audience. Feed A Child's commercial works to anchor a meaning for a specific audience, in this case, the target of the NGO is likely the wealthy South African petite bourgeoisie represented by the wealthy white woman in the ad. However, the meaning of an artistic production is not fixed; Hence, not every individual of the audience reads a message the same way. The audience "reactions typically depend on how well an author is able to address the rhetorical

situation” Arola et al. (21). The rhetorical situation here refers to the set of circumstances in which an author creates a text. To communicate effectively, there are certain parameters an author has to consider: the audience, the purpose of the communication and most importantly the context in which the text will be read.

The whole process of representation here “comes with a kind of identification tag linked to it” (Hall *Representation and the media* 16).

The tension over Feed A Child’s advertisement arises mainly because the conceptual maps on which people generate meaning understand and experience the social context differently from one to another. In which case, these individuals would interpret or make sense of the world in totally different ways. Hall argues that people of the same culture, can actually communicate given that they “share broadly the same conceptual maps and make sense and interpret the world in roughly similar ways” (*The Work of representation* 4). This actually explains the reason why people usually say: “we belong to the same culture” (*The Work of representation* 4). Because people interpret the world in roughly similar ways, they are actually in Hall’s terms building “up a shared culture of meanings and thus construct a social world which (they) inhabit together” (ibid). Culture is therefore defined in terms of “shared meanings or shared conceptual map” (Hall *The Work of representation* 2). One way to look at culture and its exigencies is to think about it in “terms of shared conceptual maps, shared language systems and the codes which govern the relationships of translation between them” (*The Work of representation* 7) As far as Feed A Child’s controversy is concerned, it is important to underline the fact that, it is not always enough to share conceptual maps. One important

thing to consider in order to be able to represent or exchange meanings and concepts is the access to shared language which is the second system of representation involved in the overall process of constructing meaning (Hall *The Work of representation* 4). This is so because the shared conceptual maps of a culture must be translated into a common language in order for its individuals to correlate their concepts and ideas. The concepts of language and communication actually complete Hall's circle of representation. Language here refers to a wide range of things: "the language spoken and written by people of the same culture, electronic languages, digital languages, languages communicated by musical instrument, languages communicated by facial gesture, languages communicated by facial expression" (*Representation* 11) the use of gestures, clothes, advertisements to communicate meaning. In the case of South Africa generally and this controversy specifically, the problem of communicating across what are significantly different cultures has been literally ignored in the encoding of the advertisement.

8. Conclusion

The complexity of media messages articulated through visual images is so important that there is always a need in every given context to rethink the articulatory structure before putting it out on the media. When an author produces a text, he or she doesn't do so in a vacuum. The end product is destined for real people who may or may not agree with the author. It is possible that in the production process, the author ignores this and ends up creating a text that generates conflict. In *Practical Argument*, Laurie Kirschner and Stephen Mandel argue that producing a text without a clear sense of audience is a mistake because the author has to define "an audience and keep it in mind

as he or she writes” (15). This is important because it helps in determining which material to include and how to present it. In his production exercise, there is always critical background work that ought to be conducted in order to avoid misunderstanding in the reception phase. Even though it is always difficult to predict the reactions from the other side of the scene, it is always important to evaluate the methods put in place to persuade an audience. Feed A Child’s message, supposed to be specifically full and penetrating for a given meaning, has proven to be ineffective communicative. Reading through the articulated images brings forth a certain reality: the post-apartheid rainbow nation “is caught between expansive wealth and abject poverty, between visible conviviality and daily death, between hope and creeping hopelessness” (Goldberg 530). If this is a fact, I have been arguing that the approach adopted in its depiction is in line with the core principles of modern day’s advertisements that resort to shock advertising in order to grab attention. However, this method has its flip side which occurs when the audience is not in line with the preferred reading. Hence, the problem emerges as this audience perceives in the rhetorical choices adopted by Feed A Child not an actual critique of the economic racial situation in South Africa but, a colonial ideology of subjugation built on clichéd images.

There is always the need to shift toward a ground on which the negotiation of codes limits disjunction between production and reception. Anticipating the work of negotiation can take into account the various contextual and cultural elements that articulates the various struggles that have historically shaped system of codes in a country like South Africa. The context in which communication takes place is in fact the major factor influencing the nature of the negotiation. In several ways, the speaker and listeners’

intentions and the relationship between speaker and listener, as discussed previously, contribute to that context. In addition, the context of the physical location and timing of a communicative event will similarly influence interpretation of meanings.

‘culture’, then, is in terms of these shared conceptual maps, shared language systems and codes which govern the relationships of translation between them. Codes fix the relationships between concepts and signs. They stabilize meaning within different languages and cultures. They tell us which language to use to convey which idea (Hall *The Work of representation* 7).

This is so important because in a culture, codes are the guidelines to understanding and action. They tell the community of users “which concepts are being referred to when they hear or read specific signs. (Hall *The Work of representation* 7). Accordingly, Hall believes that the arbitrariness by which relationships between the conceptual and linguistic (linguistic in a broad sense) systems codes of a culture are fixed, makes it possible for people to speak, to hear intelligibly and establish the translatability between their concepts and their languages. This enables meaning to pass from speaker to hearer and be effectively communicated within that culture. However, this avenue of shared codes is “not given or fixed by gods. It is the result of a set of social conventions. It is fixed socially, fixed in culture” (*the work* 8). It is this set of signs that makes people cultural subjects:

They learn the system and conventions of representation, the codes of their language and culture, which equip them with cultural ‘know-how’ enabling

them to function as culturally competent subjects. Not because such knowledge is imprinted in their genes, but because they learn its conventions and so gratefully *become* ‘cultured persons’-i.e. members of their culture. They unconsciously internalize the codes which allow them to express certain concepts and ideas through their systems of representation-writing, speech, gesture, visualization ... and to interpret ideas which are communicated to them using the same systems. (Hall *The Work of representation* 8)

The audience’s rejection of Feed A Child’s ad is built upon a cultural shared code system that doesn’t accept taboo provocations. The act of denunciation of the clichéd representations of white and black citizens of the country is one of denunciation and rejection of stereotypes. This act of resistance makes stereotypes un-habitable and tries to destroy their naturalness and their normality. This is so as far as that remain comfortable within the overall oppressive ideological machine.

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10. Appendices

Appendix A: Transcripts of interviews conducted by eNCA in the streets of Johannesburg on Jul 7, 2014 6:11pm by Yusuf Omar

Interviewee reactions

1-“The video is very disturbing and it portrays a lot of racism”

2-“It does not become a racial thing as opposed to social

issue” 3-“I feel it is a very offensive video you know as a

mom!”

APPENDIX B: Feed A Child’s Message of Apology Source:

http://www.feedachild.co.za/FeedaChild_Dogs_eats_better_than_children_commercial.html

The Shocking Truth about Feed A Child’s Latest Commercial

APOLOGY FOR OFFENCE CAUSED BY OUR RECENT COMMERCIAL

The management and associates of Feed A Child extends our unreserved apology to any person(s) or group(s) who have been offended or hurt in any manner by our recent commercial that was shown on national television and YouTube. Our intention was not to cause offence.

We acknowledge the fact that the advert could be seen as insensitive or distasteful and we take heed to the fact that many perceived the advert as racist. This was most certainly not the intention, and again we apologize.

Unfortunately the core message of the commercial became diluted or even lost through the interpretation thereof. The core message of the commercial was to draw attention to the extremely important issue of malnutrition and raise awareness of the plight of many children in South Africa who go to bed hungry. The commercial requests assistance to help us as an organisation (and many other organisations who do similar work) to address the situation.

The decision has been made to withdraw the advert from all media. We realise that the advert has gone viral on social media however, with the effect that it is no longer in our power to pull the advert from all media altogether.

If anyone wishes to share their views they can contact Feed A Child directly via email (management@feedachild.co.za)

The average domestic dog eats better than millions of children

Feed A Child aims to provide support for the devastating impacts caused by poverty and malnutrition in South Africa. Our main mission is to make people aware of the fact that there are thousands of children out there that they work with on a daily basis that don't even have access to one meal per day.

Feed A Child's most recent television commercial is based on this shocking societal truth

- many domestic animals in this country are better fed than a lot of children. The commercial is intentionally emotive to trigger the necessary awareness on this issue to generate engagement and contributions. There was no intention to cause offence.

We are monitoring responses to the commercial and are open to any feedback on the commercial however believe that it remains valid and is serving its important purpose of raising awareness.

Those wishing to donate can SMS "child" to 40014 to contribute R20 or [click here](#).

If anyone wishes to share their views directly with us they can do this via email:
management@feedachild.co.za.

#FeedAChild

You can help us realise our vision by making a tax deductible contribution today,
supporting our projects.

Make an on-line donation using PayFast

Contact us for more information on how to contribute towards our projects. Make an
EFT donation

Payment Detail

Account Name: Feed A Child Bank:

ABSA

Account Nr: 924 978 0157

Branch: 632005