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See finish! Scunnered!! A Vernacular Critique of Hierarchies of Knowledge in Marketing

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See Finish! Scunnered!!: A Vernacular Critique of Hierarchies of Knowledge in Marketing

Abstract

Our paper presents a critique of how a totalising consumer voice predominates, as does a globalised marketing knowledge. We argue that it is time to release ideas from the marginalised, the unhinged and the peripheral. We feature a fictional dialogue between two characters using vernacular language: Ọmọ Naija, a Pidgin-speaking Yorùbá woman from Nigeria, and Rab, a Glasgow Patter-speaking man from Scotland. The conversation traverses two important areas of critique regarding hierarchies of knowledge in marketing: 1) decolonisation and 2) marginalisation of the vernacular. Our characters draw upon ancient and contemporary thinkers, writers and cultural icons to substantiate their critiques. Our analysis foregrounds how hierarchies of knowledge in marketing serve academic imperialism, an untranslatability of vernacular life and ignore the terroir of everyday existences.

Keywords: Decolonisation, Marginalisation, Slang, Class, Nigeria, Yorùbá, Glasgow, Critical Marketing, Social Marketing

Introduction

This paper aims to critique hierarchies of knowledge in marketing that are produced and reproduced through a failure to decolonise, and by marginalising the vernacular. We join discourse in marketing that criticises dominant epistemic structures, norms and practices (Crockett and Grier 2021; Sreekumar and Varman, 2016). We also contribute to a growing corpus of non-traditional knowledge production through creative expression such as conversational storytelling, poetry, art, videography, plays, paintings, photo-essays, novels and web blogs (Schroeder, 2015; Sherry and Schouten, 2002).

Our work features a fictional dialogue between two characters, Ọmọ Naija and Rab, representing our cultural origins as authors. Ọmọ Naija represents our first author, a Nigerian Yorùbá female academic who speaks Pidgin. Rab represents our second author, a Scottish male academic from a working-class background who speaks Glaswegian Patter. Ọmọ Naija and Rab converse in vernacular to offer a form of conversational storytelling and analysis (Nykänen and Koivisto, 2016). They offer a critique of knowledge hierarchies in marketing traversing two important and coinciding areas: 1) decolonising knowledge and 2) the marginalisation of the vernacular. Channelled through Ọmọ Naija and Rab's conversation, our analysis foregrounds how existing hierarchies of knowledge in marketing serve academic imperialism, cause an untranslatability of the vernacular life, and ignore the terroir of everyday existences. We identify how decolonisation and embracing vernacularity can enrich marketing theory.

The remainder of our paper is structured as follows. First, we consider discourse on hierarchies of knowledge in marketing. We identify a need to pay greater attention to decolonisation through foregrounding African knowledge and amplifying vernacularity. We introduce our methodology using fictional dialogue as a form of creative production. We then present the conversation between Ọmọ Naija and Rab in which they offer critiques of

colonialism and marginalisation of the vernacular. Finally, we offer some discussion and concluding remarks.

Hierarchies of Knowledge in Marketing

The marketing discipline is dominated by Western knowledge. Marketing theories, concepts, ideas and practices are largely framed through the project of capitalism (Fitchett et al., 2014; Hirschman, 1993). The majority of journal articles, conference keynotes and textbooks are written by White, Western Males. The result is that marketing is heavily shaped through Western knowledge systems (Jafari et al., 2012) that are often imposed on 'Global South' contexts. Western philosophies, theories, ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies dominate the discipline (Raciti, 2021), with ideas from the Global South marginalised or fetishised (Jafari et al., 2012).

As Varman (2018: 49) articulates, the marketing discipline functions according to an ethnocentric, Anglo-European, colonial agenda – one in which the three leading journals (*Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, and *Journal of Consumer Research*) published fewer than 3% of papers covering issues outside the 'Global North' in 2017. Poole et al. (2020: 2) illustrate how hierarchies of knowledge pervade our discipline in describing how "marketing is missing a cohesive critical perspective that orients realities of power, privilege, and oppression within existing marketing strategies and an overall framework that promotes inclusive, fair, and just marketplaces". In this paper, we specifically pay attention to decolonising knowledge and foregrounding vernacular language as important foci for challenging hierarchies of knowledge in marketing.

Decolonising knowledge

Decolonisation refers to the unravelling of colonialism and its various effects with the purpose of achieving indigenous emancipation. However, decolonisation does not simply refer to the political and geographic act of withdrawing from a former colony. Rather, decolonisation has taken on a wider meaning of freeing people, their minds and their language, economies, politics, culture and societies from colonial ideology (Smith, 2012; Thiong'o, 1986). The imperialistic ideology underpinning colonialism was always something that was and is more than political, geographic and physical power through invasion. Colonialism also adopts psychological, social and cultural forms that determine and perpetuate the predominance of the coloniser's ontologies, philosophies, ideologies and knowledge (Meghji, 2020).

Nkrumah (1965) identifies through the concept of neo-colonialism that continuity of power, domination and oppression emerges through various ethnocentric economic, political, educational, social and cultural mechanisms deployed by colonial powers. This creates enduring effects that are passed down through generations, leaving a colonial legacy. A decolonising agenda focuses on restorative justice through fostering cultural, psychological and economic emancipation. This challenges the perception that to be colonised means to be inferior. Decolonisation also offers a powerful vehicle for the critique of dominant power relations and culture, including academic scholarship and professional practice (Meghji, 2020).

Marketing scholars are increasingly drawing attention to the need to decolonise knowledge (Jafari et al., 2012; Türkdoğan, 2018; Varman, 2018). Philosophy, concepts and ideas from non-Western cultures are being increasingly introduced to marketing theory (Karababa, 2012; Kravets and Sandikci, 2014). Critiques of dominant knowledge hierarchies in the marketing discipline have highlighted a failure to acknowledge how racism and racial

inequality structure markets and consumer experiences (Crockett and Grier, 2021). Racism in marketing communications has been highlighted (Mitchell, 2020). The marginalisation of Global South, and Indigenous scholars, philosophies, knowledge and methods, and the need for a more plural discipline has been articulated (Bádéjọ́ et al., 2021a; Raciti, 2021). Furthermore, critics note the lack of representation, problematic hiring practices, and considerable pay inequalities for Black, Asian, and Latinx scholars in the marketing academy (Grier and Poole, 2020; Poole et al., 2020).

While such work is crucial to begin the process of decolonising marketing theory, this existing literature predominantly works through African American or Latinx (Thomas et al., 2020), rather than Black African perspectives. We argue that an important component of a decolonising agenda for marketing is to integrate ideas from Africa. Africa is the cradle of human civilisation and has a rich history and complex cultural tapestry. There are 54 countries and over 3,000 different ethnic groups speaking more than 2,100 different languages in Africa (Mensah, 2008). Africa has been shaped by colonialism; slavery; war; political, economic and social instability; and globalisation and neoliberal market ideology (Mensah, 2008).

Africa remains marginalised in marketing theory, discourse and practice (Dadzie and Sheth, 2020). Marketing practice often imposes ethnocentric perspectives to frame African consumers and consumption in ways that essentialise and reflect Western intellectual imperialism (Pfeiffer, 2004). However, scholars have begun to identify the contributions that African perspectives can bring to marketing theory, for example how Ghanaian's experiences of permanent liminality and spirituality as they transition to Pentecostalism can encourage us to rethink mind/body dualisms towards in/dividuality – a sense of stable and bounded core self, concomitant with a sense of a multiplicitious social self with permeable boundaries (Appau et al., 2020).

We submit that African knowledge (Bádéjọ́, 2009; Oyéwumi, 1997) – holds considerable potential to broaden the horizons of marketing theory. We acknowledge that Africa possesses an enormous corpus and rich diversity of philosophies that are polyrhythmic, plural, relational, collectivist and multiplicitous. In this article, we draw upon the rich knowledge traditions of the Yorùbá from modern-day Nigeria that represent the first author. Philosopher Sophie Oluwọlé (2015) has identified the potential for Yorùbá knowledge to drive a decolonising agenda. Yorùbá Ifá[1] philosophy adopts a relational metaphysical and ontological position in which the mind, body and spirit are as one (Bádéjọ́, 2009).

Oluwọlé (2015) identifies that Ọrunmila's[2] concept of binary complementarity (according to which the other is the necessary condition for one's own existence as a human being) is an important contribution to philosophical thought. This complementarity is evident when considering the relational dynamic of markets in traditional Yorùbá culture. As Ṣótúndé (2009: 153) explains, "*bí a bá sọko sọ́ja, ará ilé ẹni ni í bá* [every mischief done at the marketplace comes home to roost]". Yorùbá philosophy views life as a journey and life on this world as a marketplace, with a home being in heaven in the afterlife (Oluwọlé, 2015). Through this journey, behaviours are guided by moral values such as iwá-pèlé (kind and gentle behaviour) that shape dynamics in the marketplace. Ifá divination offers guidance that human activities are not limited to earth but are revisited in heaven – even in the context of the market. This emphasises treating everyone in the market fairly, even those who are strangers, as not doing so – not having iwá-pèlé – will have consequences in heaven (Okéwándé, 2020). Essentially, this represents a form of marketing ethics as a component of Yorùbán metaphysics (Adebọwálé, 1999).

[1] Ifá is the ancient body of Yorùbá philosophy, ontology, medicine and cosmology.
[2] Ọrunmila is the principal Òrìṣhà, a deity and an anthropomorphic representation of Yorùbá literary corpus and guardian of Ifá.

Complementarity derives from the polyrhythmic nature of Yorùbá philosophy (Bádéjọ́, 2009). After Oluwọlé (2015) and Bádéjọ́ (2009), we define polyrhythmicity as an arrangement of multi-faceted rhythms and flows, each of which has its own independent orientation, function, logic and wisdom, but which come together to create a circular, commutable whole that resists linearity to embrace adaptability and transformation. As a result of polyrhythmicity, women were always acknowledged and played important roles in Yorùbá social life. Women were never subjugated but were recognised as different but equal (Bádéjọ́, 2009). As Oluwọlé (2015) explains, Yorùbá women held status and were members of the judiciary, pharmacologists, community politicians, and led and ran markets. Contemporary Nigerian culture and language fuse traditional Ifá beliefs with experiences of post-colonialism and the use of a common vernacular lingua franca in the form of Pidgin. Indeed, Wole Soyinka (1965) identifies the use of Naija Pidgin as a vehicle for subaltern resistance to colonial oppression. Our character Ọmọ Naija introduces some of these ideas later on.

Vernacularity

Our other area of focus is on the marginalisation of the vernacular in marketing. Vernacular refers to the native and informal language used by people inhabiting a particular country (such as Nigeria) or region (such as Glasgow) that is often considered as lower status than codified languages (Yule, 2016). Vernacular can be an independent language, a regional dialect, a distinct stylistic register or a sociolect[3] – especially among lower socio-economic classes (Trudgill, 2016). The use of vernacular is subject to linguistic prejudice known as 'linguicism', with speakers subject to asymmetric power relations and class oppression from elites (Trudgill, 2016). However, studies on the vernacular in marketing are limited.

[3] Sociolect is a form of non-standard language used by a socio-economic class, profession, age group or other social group.

Scott (1993) has drawn attention to the complex relationships between language and consumer culture in which vernacular is used as a form of identity, taste and political expression. Studies in consumer psychology have examined how the use of vernacular impacts consumer behaviour, such as food consumption (Cleveland et al., 2015) or service interactions (Wang et al., 2013). Brownlie and Hewer (2011) draw attention to practices of vernacular creativity, but don't specifically focus on language.

The broader realm of qualitative research offers some playful examples of the use of blue-collar vernacular to critique knowledge hierarchies (see Saldaña, 2014). Yet, we argue that the absence of the vernacular is an important omission in marketing theory as it often represents the market's and consumers' language and meanings. We draw attention to McLaughlin's (1996) ideas on vernacular theorizing, which fosters the idea that critical theory that questions ideology and cultural practice is not something merely practised by academic elites. Rather, theorizing is also conducted by those who speak and embody the vernacular – by politically literate and savvy consumers, television viewers, labour organisers, the unemployed, and the average person in the street (McLaughlin, 1996).

Vernacular is political, subversive and can be associated with a decolonising agenda (Agha, 2015; Soyinka, 1965), whether through Naija Pidgin in the face of neo-colonialism or Glaswegian Patter in the face of British pseudo-colonialism.[4] This politicisation of the vernacular is particularly apparent in notably politically conscious places such as Nigeria and Glasgow (Gardiner, 2006; Soyinka, 1965). Glaswegian vernacular, taking one example, also reminds us that there are non-dominant White Western voices that might be useful in decentring knowledge enquiry in marketing. There exist vernacular-informed theories on markets, marketing, consumers and everyday consumption that are seemingly untapped.

[4] Glasgow has a complex relationship with the British state, being the site of Red Clydeside labour radicalism in 1919 which saw British Army tanks on the streets and, more recently, voting 'yes' in the 2014 Scottish Independence referendum.

Thus, we submit that deconstructing hierarchies of knowledge in marketing can benefit from engaging with decolonisation through African perspectives such as Yorùbá philosophy and by paying close attention to the vernacular to enrich marketing theory.

Methodology

We draw upon fictional dialogue as a form of conversational storytelling and analysis of extant marketing literature, ideas and discourse (Nykänen and Koivisto, 2016). We join a literary tradition that celebrates alternative forms of expression such as poetry, art, storytelling, videography, plays, paintings, photo-essays, novels and web blogs regarding marketing concepts and ideas (Schroeder, 2015; Sherry and Schouten, 2002). Such creative expressions have emerged in response to Brown and Kerrigan's (2020: 147) observation that "our books and articles are stuck in a rut…constrained by convention, by expectation, by the review process, by journal submission guidelines". Indeed, St. Pierre (2011) calls for creative expression that eschews the empirical and positivistic structure that qualitative research claims to have moved beyond but within which it remains largely rooted.

Our work offers a form of 'writing differently' that is emerging across the business disciplines (Gilmore et al., 2019). Such work seeks to break with conformity and challenge the established norms of writing and knowledge production. The idea of writing differently encourages us to consider writing creatively, affectively, emotionally, ethically, powerfully, and dirtily (Pullen, 2018; Rose, 2020). While marketing has "found room for offbeat forms of communication", the norms of writing in our discipline remain largely normative (Brown and Kerrigan, 2020: 148). However, one form of expression that is being embraced in marketing theory is storytelling.

Storytelling is increasingly discussed in marketing as a powerful tool for representing consumers' lived experiences, shaping practice, and influencing consumer behaviours (van

Laer et al., 2014). However, the writing and sharing of stories by marketing scholars as a form of theorizing remain the exception, with Brown and Kerrigan (2020: 148) lamenting that "tales, yarns and fables are conspicuous by their absence". We use fictional dialogue as a feature of a conversational storytelling approach (Nykänen and Koivisto, 2016). Our approach enables us to represent ideas, ways of living, and story characters as holding thoughts and beliefs which motivate particular understandings of the world (Fowler, 1977). Readers often interpret fictional narratives with reference to their own minds, concepts and ideas, reflecting their thoughts on what characters say and considering how they might act in similar circumstances (Nykänen and Koivisto, 2016). We use our fictional narrative as a device to challenge dominant hierarchies of knowledge in marketing.

Our two characters, Ọmọ Naija and Rab, are exaggerated extensions of ourselves as authors and people in that they represent aspects of our cultural, social and academic backgrounds. Ọmọ Naija represents the first author, a Nigerian Yorùbá female scholar who can speak Pidgin. Rab represents the second author, a Scottish male scholar from a working-class background who can speak Glasgow Patter. Our characters differ from us in that they converse freely in the vernacular and openly critique marketing knowledge hierarchies, whereas we both, as academics, are usually more restricted due to the politics of academia. Therefore we use our characters as literary devices to express our cultural and linguistically diverse heritage and to offer our critiques and ideas on decolonisation and vernacularity in marketing theory.

See Finish!

The conference dinner drones on (awards still to come). Some escapees hang out around bar tables dotted outside in the corridor. Rab is finishing a conversation with an old colleague. Ọmọ Naija glides over, 'Are you Rab?' Ọmọ Naija ignores academic hierarchies

as a recent PhD graduate in approaching an Associate Professor – their common love of critical theory giving her the impetus to challenge some of Rab's ideas. It seems like a strange combination. Ọmọ Naija, a proud Yorùbá intellectual working in the Anglosphere academy and whom Rab noted was very well-spoken yet code-switched into Pidgin with ease, and Rab, also an expat, struggling to remain close to his Glaswegian working-class roots – his distinctive accent forcing Ọmọ Naija to pay close attention to all that he said. Yet as they exchanged ideas, the apparent hierarchies seemed to dissipate, and there was a meeting of minds on how alternative perspectives are critical to marketing knowledge. Their conversation turns to how knowledge production is hierarchical and how this holds us all back…

Ọmọ Naija: Padi mi, you know wetin dey vex me pass about this hierarchies of knowledge in marketing matter?

Rab: Happenin? Whit's that? Ah heard there was some mad special issue an that aboot it? Merkitin Theory wuz it, aye?

Ọmọ Naija: The fact that there are so many other ways of knowing and being, but only Oyibo knowledge dem sabi appreciate. Imagine even for Naija, colonialism and Christianity don brainwash us so tey even my own people don forget say we too get our own knowledge system wey make sense die.

Rab: Aye man pure pish, it's heavy bad darts! It's like there is only wan way tae hink and it does ma nut in!

Ọmọ Naija: Imagine the corpus of Ifá – the literary corpus of Yorùbá knowledge, history, philosophy, religion, culture and tradition – demonised, devalued, degraded and essentialised to a system of divination.

Rab: It's shady. Merkitin pure dinghies theory and ideas fae most o the world. When ah read the books and papers it disnae really speak to whit I saw growing up in Glesga.

Ọmọ Naija: If no be for the efforts of UNESCO to safeguard and protect Ifá from becoming extinct by adding Ifá to UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage, this see finish of the Yorùbá traditional thought and identity go just continue like dat until we no even get ourselves anymore. Instead of we trust our imó (sense experience).

Rab: Dae ye hink thit Yorùbá folk are noo totes brainwashed wae Western consumer culture? Ah mean, whit aboot Yorùbá ideas aboot markets and merkitin and consumption an aw that?

Ọmọ Naija: As a woman, e dey pain me say marketing no know about gender roles and relations for Precolonial Naija, as in na women get market. Na we dey run tins (Oyéwumi, 1997). Na this Yorùbá polyrthmic way wey we take day see the world make us respect our women so tey na we dey control our markets. Go to any market even now in Naija you go see women full ground. In fact they call us iyalode!

Rab: Aye it's like a multiplicity innit? Ah hear ye – it's no like merkets were invented in America in the 20th century. An these stories about wummin huvin separate but equal status in society and running the tradin and the merkets an that ur cool.

Ọmọ Naija: Enh henh na! Falola (2007: 1) don talk am before Naija women de central to trade:

"Among the Yorùbá, they were the major figures in long-distance trade, with enormous opportunities for accumulating wealth and acquiring titles. The most successful among them rose to the prestigious chieftaincy title of *iyalode*, a position of great privilege and power".

Rab: Wow – so wummin ran the joint? Jus like Weegie wummin who ur heavy fierce ☺

Ọmọ Naija: I'm telling you! Guy, Naija women get mind. We sabi business die. We get market sense. Make you come Naija na, come see with your own korokoro eyes, we be entrepreneurs, traders and caretakers. Naija women no dey carry last. We respect our customers like we respect ourselves o because we know say if we no respect our customers na we go suffer am las las. So even if we vex say dem too dey price our market we go still form iwá-pèlé for them make dem buy our market, make sufferhead no kill us, because man must chop.

Rab: I gotta check this.

Ọmọ Naija: I con dey reason am say, this wahala of human trafficking and discovering that na women in Naija dey run dis (dark) market system (Bádéjọ́ et al., 2021b). Na today? As I see am, these women just dey reproduce what they know how to do naturally…just with human trafficking…but na condition make crayfish bend. So we need to change their condition back in a more positive direction that doesn't simply

reproduce the oppression of capitalist hegemony (Varman, 2018). Instead we need to return to form, leveraging our gender roles combined with our collectivist ideals to recreate our marketplace – a circular economy.

Rab: Ah get ye – this rampant neoliberal capitalism isnae the answer but it's interesting how the Naija ways of daeing hings challenges existing understandin.

Ọmọ Naija: The late great Fẹla Anikulapo Kuti talk am for his song Coffin for head of state (Kuti and Africa 70, 1981). Im talk say:

> It is a known fact that for many thousand years
> We Africans we had our own traditions
> These moneymaking organizations
> Them come put we Africans in total confusion

Rab: Aye Fẹla was pure sound. Wis he no' a global star?

Ọmọ Naija: Confirm. If no be for Fẹla. All these new Afrobeat stars like Wizkid and Burns Boy, Tiwa Savage, Yemi Alade, Olamide and all of them would not be enjoying the worldwide success they are now. He brought Naija Pidgin to the world. He marketed Pidgin and made African ideas and issues matter in the marketplace.

Rab: Ya dancer!

Ọmọ Naija: Fẹla no lie at all. Me sef, despite growing up with a strong Yorùbá identity and knowing of the concept of the Òrìṣhà and seeing Babalawo's devoted to the practice and preservation of this important knowledge system. Pipo bin dey think say Ifá no get levels at all. As if Ifá no be person culture. Imagine downgrading your own history to mere 'ritual', 'fetish' or 'jazz' that only illiterate pipo or pagans did.

Rab: Really, that's pure rank!

Ọmọ Naija: Yes. And I didn't even question this way of thinking. Like my fellow Naija pipo I saw Babalawo's as jazzmen you only see in secret but you can't admit to anybody because they will finish you with insults.

Rab: So music's like Fẹla challenged Yorùbá to be political and validated the struggle?

Ọmọ Naija: Yes. And then there was also Da Grin (2010). He did for Yorùbá what Fẹla did for Pidgin. His dialectic rap paved the way for contemporary Naija artists like Olamide, Phyno, Lil Kesh, Naira Marley, and Zlatan. You know Da Grin was told rapping his way wouldn't successfully cross over. But he proved – his songs like the monster Pon Pon Pon – that language is not a barrier in the marketplace. He said if Oyibo pipo wan understand im music, make dem learn Yorùbá.

Rab: Right, so he also took a stand against the colonising of your culture? How aboot you, when did you decide to stand up?

Ọmọ Naija: It was not only I came across my inspiration for becoming a scholar after resting this path for so long – Professor Sophie Oluwọlé – that I started to question the way Ifá has been falsely re-represented to us through colonialism and globalisation, and how we sef continue like mumu to perpetuate and reproduce this false representation view of Ifá.

Rab: Aye, sometimes ye need that bit of inspiration tae hink aboot who ye ur and whit ye represent innit. Whit is Sophie gieing it?

Ọmọ Naija: It was only after I read Sophie's *Socrates and Orunmila: Two Patrons of Classical Philosophy (2015)* na im I con begin dey think critically about my history and identity as a Yorùbá, and the significant contributions of Ifá. Imagine Sophie herself said that she was taught that "Africans never originated any cogent tradition of philosophy" (Buxton and Whiting: 145).

Rab: Jeez oh! That probs explains why merkitin has pure patched African knowledge – if even folk like Sophie were telt that African philosophy disnae exist.

Ọmọ Naija: This statement so ginger am she spent the rest of her career as a scholar on a "crusade to rediscover, revive, criticise, amend and promote Indigenous African Knowledge" (Buxton and Whiting: 145).

Rab: Good on er and quite right. A load o' this whitewashing ay knowledge Sophie cries aboot is pure heavy social Darwinism.

Ọmọ Naija: Rab, as I dey so, my eye don tear. My mission as a critical scholar is to continue Sophie's work. The marketing world must know say no be only Oyibo people sabi everything, Naija no dey carry last. In fact, "it is heretical to identify and/or characterise African thought from definitions derived from Western Concepts and traditions of thought" (Buxton and Whiting: 145).

Rab: RIP Philosopher Queen!

Ọmọ Naija: RIP, Iyami. After you, na you.

Rab: Whit aboot African spiritualities cos ah hink huv seen that talked aboot in JCR?

Ọmọ Naija: Well you know what I find so funny and so sad about this colonialism kwanta? The irony of how nowadays most Oyibo people no dey wan hear about the very same religion that they invested so much time and energy to 'enlighten' us in Africa. To the extent that I can't even admit out loud in this part of the world that I am a Christian, and I go to church unless somebody first volunteers that information, which is rare.

Rab: Ah hink it depends – in Glesga folk like ma wee nana she wis doon the chapel aw the time and wis pure proud eh talking aboot the Monseigneur and aw that. She kept a wee bowl o' holy water in the scullery of her hoose and used tae bless us aw the time.

Ọmọ Naija: Ha ha yo nana is so funny!

Rab: Anyway – well how dae ye balance yer African spirituality wi Christianity?

Ọmọ Naija: You mean how I go talk say I be crusader for African knowledge, I believe in Ifá and the Òrìṣhàs but I be Christian too, which is fundamentally not African?

Rab: Aye?

Ọmọ Naija: Paradoxically, na because say I be Yorùbá that I fit hold opposing views and not just tolerate this cognitive dissonance but actually welcome and embrace it. Because to be Yorùbá is to be polyrhythmic, to value dignity, respect for elders, harmony, community, circularity and adaptability as cardinal virtues. To cherish peaceful co-existence. To understand and accept that good and evil, light and darkness can and do co-exist and not necessarily in binary opposition as Oyibo people tend to view things.

Rab: Ye know that sounds a lot like Glesga – we are mair collective and lookin oot fir wan another is the go. Life there is so mad, ye huv tae accept the co-existence of the good 'n' the bad.

Ọmọ Naija: Confirm. So since I also grew up with the teachings of Jesus Christ and I respect the guy no be small, why I no go call myself Christian? And if I wear the crucifix, if I pray and worship, why does that to make me feel less of a scientist? Marketing suppose to dey reason African spirituality which does acknowledges multiplicity (Appau et al., 2020)?

Rab: That sounds like the kinda chat that aw these postmodern philosophers hit oot wae?

Ọmọ Naija: Dat na the one tin wey dey vex me about Karl Marx, as much as I respect the guy enh, when im talk say religion be the opium of the masses. Oga, Marx, abeg. Make I school you on the concept of the Yorùbá ideas of binary complementarity and polyrhythmicity. I dey even suspect say Giles Deleuze actually borrowed a lot from Ifá to articulate his ideas about multiplicities.

Rab: Ah so Yorùbá assemblages of consumption came before these wans we see written aboot noo in the merkitin journals?

Ọmọ Naija: But padi mi, make I save the long talk for another time. But in short, binary complementarity, polyrhythmicity, the corpus of Ifá and the Òrìṣhàs help me to believe in different ideas about religion and spirituality – because there are so many Òrìṣhàs! Hundreds! Each Òrìṣhà is a confirmed and celebrated deity in their own right with followers. So my being and re-becoming Yorùbá means that I can believe in African knowledge, I can believe in Ifá and the Òrìṣhàs and I can also be a Christian – Jesus to me is just another form of Òrìṣhà. As is Mohammad and Buddha.

Rab: Sounds like these ideas can tell us a lot about consumer identity!

Ọmọ Naija: If no be for my Yorùbá thought and identity, how I wan fit entertain other thoughts and perspectives without accepting them to paraphrase Aristotle. How my liver no go cut to admit my ignorance when I don't know something? The Yorùbá believe that there is no absolute truth so that would make us the original post structuralists – our postmodernist views helped us to uphold collectivist ideals without

subsuming the individual need and right to self-actualisation, to dignity and humanity, the right to worship as we please, and to live by faith and with eternal optimism.

Rab: For real? Certainly, puts a new slant on aw these postmodern marketers?

Ọmọ Naija: No be Stephen Brown born postmodern marketing – na we.

Rab: Ha ha!

Ọmọ Naija: Why would you not want to amplify that?

Scunnered!!

Rab: Well, wan thing that really scunners me is the pure lack of the vernacular in merkitin.

Ọmọ Naija: As in, ehn!

Rab: Aye, ah mean it's aw very well being aw posh and wanking aff using fancy pants language in these journals.

Ọmọ Naija: *Hiss* Language wey no even make sense.

Rab: And these merkitin campaigns using pure heavy strait-laced normative chat trying to punt stuff to Mondeo Man and Soccer Moms. But I mean, naebody in Glesga talks like that. Where's the Patter (Munro, 2013)? It's no' like vernacular like Glesga Patter is unknown.

Ọmọ Naija: Glesga Patter funny die. It resemble Naija Pidgin small.

Rab: The worry is, if we don't use it, if the merkitin machine keeps reproducing normative ideas of language, then use of the vernacular becomes a scale for oppression, exclusion and failure of representation. You even get this happening in Glesga itsel – a schism between those who speak 'properly' and those who use Patter. This is sumthin that the Weegie rapper and author Loki explores in his lyrics – contrasting the lifestyles, consumption tastes and use of language in Glesga between Trendy West Endies and Schemies:

> "aw the intellectual snobs…student's talking politics, culture and pilates there's more than wan kind o' coffee and they huv it in glasses." (McGarvey, 2017a)

Ọmọ Naija: Ha ha. But the tin be say, Naija marketers been dey use Pidgin to sell products and services and ideas tey tey. But we still have a schism between those who speak 'phoné' we call them 'ajebota' because they get money, and those who no get money, we call them 'ajekpako' and they speak 'broken' English, which is another name for Naija Pidgin but ajebota tend to look down on them.

Rab: I mean, come oan! Other disciplines acknowledge the vernacular. Where's the vernacular language that people use everyday? People in Glesga dinnae talk aboot Fast-Moving Consumer Goods, market-mediated practices, illicit consumption and all that kinda shit. Nah, we talk aboot goin fir yer messages, hingmaes, shim shams, getting a wee turn, daeing me a wee homer, and getting blootered!

Ọmọ Naija: I no fit laugh! But again marketing as a discipline suppose show other ways of marketing from around the world that actually preferences the vernacular. Like I said before, in Naija, vernacular full ground. Our music, our movies, advertisements, media etc. Marketing dey take mi time to recognise alternative perspectives from other parts of the world.

Rab: Take our bard: Rabbie Burns. Aww his poetry is in the vernacular, and he used it as a form of critique of the ruling classes and their down casting of the poor:

> I see how folk live that hae riches;
> But surely poor-folk maun be wretches!
> Luath
> They're no sae wretched's ane wad think;
> Tho' constantly on poortith's brink,
> They're sae accustom'd wi' the sight,
> The view o't gies them little fright.
> (Burns, 1786 [1988])

Rab: So, we should be givin voice to those that speak the vernacular. I mean there's aww this chat noo aboot consumer resistance (Peñaloza and Price, 1993). And jeez, vernacular language and the use o' slang is subversive, deviant – an act of resistance, a political act (Agha, 2015).

Ọmọ Naija: Na true you talk. But those that speak the vernacular already have a voice, we should be amplifying their vernacular. What they need is a podium and mike to

#SoroSoke. Fela Kuti also mostly sang in the vernacular, and he had worldwide crossover success and pioneering a whole new genre of music. He is proof that you don't need to be 'proper' to appeal.

Rab: Aye. Yet our discipline totally pies it! There was a show oan the Telly wi Loki innit on BBC the other week. They telt us that Glesga pied convention by becoming even more vocally distinct from its neighbours. The challenges of Glesga life, the collectivist politics, and the tight-knit communities this bred led to a desire to fight back against oppression through a strong expression of identity through Weegie vernacular (MacFarlane and Stuart-Smith, 2012).

Ọmọ Naija: Gbam!

Rab: Yep, but instead, merkitin language, I mean it's mostly unrecognisable and unrepresentative. Fir a discipline that claims to be so in touch wae the almighty consumer, how comes we dinnae even manage to represent how they talk and hink aboot hings? There's hardly anyhing oot there in the literature oan this stuff!
Ah mean there's a few odd papers aboot how regional accents influence service encounters (Wang et al., 2013). But even the effects of regional accents on merkitin communications is rarely researched (Mai and Hoffman, 2014), let alone anyhing aboot vernacular!

Ọmọ Naija: It no just make sense!

Rab: Aye well. Even wae aw the merkitin aroond food and drinks an that. Everything is all about 'Fusion food'. And 'Nose-to-tail eating' for wan. I mean poor folk in Glesga have been trying to avoid eating tripe and shit like that forever. Then some posh celebrity Chef waltzes in and it's the business aw eh a sudden! Whit is that aw aboot? In a way aw that nose-to-tail stuff is appropriation, colonisation and rebranding of working-class food and the names we cry it. And, as Rab C Nesbitt said about Glesga, "If God wanted us to know aboot cuisine, he wid never have gied us crispy pancakes!"

Ọmọ Naija: Ha ha, we dey chop tripe steady for Naija! We call it shaki haha. Don't come to Naija if you hate it haha.

Rab: Ah mean there's the odd funny af examples, like wen Irn Bru had that belter o' a piss take o' Coke.

Ọmọ Naija: Wetin be dat?

Rab: Aye well, mind when Coke hud they hings wi the names on the bottles? 'Share a Coke' they cried it.

Ọmọ Naija: Yeah, I remember.

Rab: Well, anyway. Irn Bru pure clamped them a peach. They brought oot hunners o' bottles wi the same word 'Fanny' on them. And ran a TV ad wi aw the chat aboot being called 'Fanny'. It wis pure class man! Whit this showed wuz that Coca-Cola

didnae really understand Weegie consumer culture and that putting names on bottles might be good for them in other places, but left them open to ripping the piss oot them in Glesga. Plus, you know Irn Bru is the local hero in Glesga and they know how to use our humour and language.

Ọmọ Naija: Wahala be like 'Fanny'

Rab: Aye, and Irn Bru is still the top selling drink in Scotland – beating Coke Ha ha! I'll bet the Yankies dinnae like that chat ☺

Ọmọ Naija: Hmm. Who be this Irn Bru sef?

Rab: But, then ye even find this oppression of the vernacular in wan o' the areas I work in – social merkitin. The whole idea there is tae market positive behaviour change. Getting people tae quit smoking fags (MacAskill et al., 2002), or tanning booze aw the time (Hughes et al., 1997). Or even savin oan yer eleccie bill (Gordon et al., 2018), or sorting oot wean's oral health so they dinnae end up wi wallies! (Lindridge et al., 2013)

Ọmọ Naija: Yeah, na my kain work be dat.

Rab: And ye know, supposed claims o' social merkitin ur that it is 'consumer oriented' and understands people and communicates tae them in their ain terms (French and Blair-Stevens, 2007).

Ọmọ Naija: Yea we know how far for social marketing, but we no too sabi do am.

Rab: I mean there is a wee bit mentioned about how when daeing social merkitin research with participants that ye should use their ain language an terminology to aid discussion (French and Gordon, 2019). There is the odd note about social merkitin campaigns that used vernacular language like patois (Regional Strategy Tested in Caribbean, 1984). And how social merkitin communications should use simple, clear and easily understood language (Eagle et al., 2013). But that's it. Nothing really aboot use o' the vernacular.

Ọmọ Naija: So, your kwanta be say social marketing suppose lead the way.

Rab: The only memorable exception I've seen was a paper by Susan MacAskill an that (2002) aboot smoking in lower-income communities in Glesga. The title wis 'You Cannae Just Take Cigarettes Away from Somebody and No' Gie Them Something Back'.

Ọmọ Naija: Finally!

Rab: Aye! And as well as using a title featuring a direct participant quotation and vernacular language, the paper itself featured numerous quotes from people speaking Glesga Patter. And whit was guid aboot it was the authors didnae try and translate it – they let they Weegies and whit they said speak fir itsel. Seen thur voice and felt thur power an didnae label em as poor wee curious beasties. Like Spivak (1988) says, we

cannae essentialise the so called marginalised – its aboot fair and balance representation. But, that's a complete rarity.

Ọmọ Naija: *Hiss*. As in enh! Social marketing just dey dull person nowadays.

Rab: Like you mentioned earlier – it's intersectional. Class, ethnicity, race, gender as well as language is at play here in being oppressed (McGarvey 2017b; Shelton, 2001).

Ọmọ Naija: Before nko?

Rab: Aye, well, take Maud Sulter's art 'Twa Blak Wimmin' (Sulter, 1997). Just cos someone speaks the Glesga Patter – don't just assume they are only White scum.

Ọmọ Naija: She wrote in Scottish vernacular?

Rab: Aye sometimes. So, these people being marginalised through the invisibility of the vernacular They might be Black, White, Asian, mixed-race, poor, female and so on as well. And as Sulter (1993) said:

"the cultures of [places like] Ghana and Scotland are not as disparate as they might at first seem – clan-based societies with long memories and global diasporas".

So, ah guess whit am saying here is that merkitin's ignorance of the vernacular is part of these hierarchies of knowledge that form an intersectional oppression. Where is the Glesga Patter? The Pidgin? The Patois? I mean come oan – if we keep ignoring the

vernacular in merkitin journals, practice, ideas and language, we are gonnae keep reproducing these hierarchies of knowledge!

Ọmọ Naija: Not to mention that talking in vernacular like Pidgin dey sweet belle. I can't even imagine life without Pidgin or Glesga Patter!

Rab: Otherwise if we keep careering further doon the use of standardised language – received pronunciation or Standard American English – we fail to acknowledge the rich tapestry of ways of talking and ways of knowing among consumers, consumption, merkets and merketing across the world.
Oor merketing journals, and the theory and language we use needs to be broken apart. It's time to inject mair o' the vernacular!

There shouldn't automatically be an ascribed superiority to standardised language. After all, to borrow from Rabbie Burns:

> "The rank is but the guinea's stamp…
>
> The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor, Is king o' men for a' that…
>
> That Man to Man the warld o'er, Shall brithers be for a' that"
>
> (Burns, 1795 [1988])

Ọmọ Naija: Any way, na way!

Discussion and Conclusion

Our fictional dialogue between Ọmọ Naija and Rab offers a critique of hierarchies of knowledge in marketing, joining others who seek a more polyvocal discipline (Crockett and Grier 2021; Sreekumar and Varman, 2016). There is an identified need to decolonise marketing theory (Raciti, 2021) and we argue that African knowledge has much to offer here. Ọmọ Naija reflects on how we can break apart dominant epistemic structures through learning from Ifá philosophy, and vernacular Naija Pidgin language to help theorise marketing, consumers and consumption in different ways. Yorùbá ontology offers two ways of knowing imó and igbàgbọ́ that are both equally valid, which challenges Western hierarchies of knowledge in which scientific facts are given primacy. Imó refers to knowledge that is understood through first-hand lived experience (e.g. empirical evidence), whereas igbàgbọ́ refers to knowledge that you come to believe through second hand verification or through faith. Imó and igbàgbọ́ are classic examples of binary complementarity in which there is no privileging of either forms of knowledge. These ideas can help encourage us to move beyond the clashes in ontology and epistemology between marketing science and interpretive consumer research (Brown, 1996) – to integrate rational, empirical, scientific and interpretive perspectives with secondary and faith-based knowledge.

The Yorùbá philosophical foundation of polyrhythmicity shapes gender ideology according to which women symbiotically held important and fluid roles in society - including leading the organisation of markets and consumption (Badéjọ́ et al., 2021b). Yorùbá gender roles are organised and can be de-constructed and re-constituted as the need arises – oriented towards a functionality-based logic shaped by the notion of wisdom as determined by age and seniority (Badéjọ́, 2009). This encourages us to rethink how we theorise gender inequality in marketing as immutable (see Bettany et al., 2010). Yorùbá philosophy promotes women's agency, does not recognise patriarchy, and provides insights about an alternative logic for

gender relations. Therefore, polyrhythmicity as a philosophical concept can help challenge binaries and categories in marketing theory and encourage us to acknowledge diversity, multiplicities, adaptability and transformation. This thinking troubles the individualised, categorised and responsibilised consumer subject understood as a production of Western neoliberal capitalism.

The Yorùbá tenet of iwá-pèlé from Ifá oral tradition creates a sense of consistent marketing ethics in which people are expected to treat one another fairly, with dignity and respect. Importantly, Iwá-pèlé offers a spirituality-based logic of marketing ethics that shapes good behaviours at the individual and social level that are manifested in the marketplace. This challenges Western marketing ethics that are often governed by the capitalistic logic of corporate social responsibility or adherence to manufactured ethical guidelines to protect brand value (Schlegelmilch and Öberseder, 2009). Such work can complement existing scholarship drawing upon subaltern studies (Spivak, 1988) that have enriched understanding of consumer resistance to capitalism, globalisation, and imperialism (Varman and Belk, 2009).

Rab shares his observations on how marketing has paid scant attention to the vernacular. In a sense, the marginalisation of the vernacular, whether Naija Pidgin or Glaswegian Patter, represents colonisation of the mind and language (Nkrumah, 1965). Rab argues that this flies in the face of the supposed consumer orientation and real-life relevance of marketing. If we fail to connect with, understand, represent and theorise through the vernacular, we fail to properly understand markets, marketing, consumers and consumption, and the language and meanings threading through them. This isn't simply about translation or applying, reinforcing and reproducing existing marketing concepts in diverse contexts; it is about honouring the equal resonance and value of African, indigenous and vernacular knowledge, theories, concepts and people that can help advance the marketing discipline.

After McLaughlin (1996), we draw attention to how vernacular theorising can assist us in conceptualising topics such as consumer resistance and subversion – considering even how language is used to resist colonial oppression. A focus on the vernacular can help tell us more about bricolage or illegal and dark markets that can be a feature of everyday life in places such as Glasgow or Nigeria. In paying attention to the vernacular, we identify that language is an important dimension of intersectionalities (Block and Corona, 2016) that entangle with other factors, including race, ethnicity, class and gender, and which should inform marketing theory. Vernacularity also points to how there is no such thing as a monolithic White privileged culture. We argue that enriching theory through vernacular forms an important component of efforts to decolonise knowledge (Ramanathan, 2013) and enrich marketing theory. Decolonisation and foregrounding the vernacular is not about dismantling existing pillars of knowledge. Instead, it is about being attentive to power relations in the academy that privilege particular knowledge and voices over others. We argue for a flatter ontology and a horizontal, reflexive and dialogic approach that generates inclusivity and encourages a co-constitution of knowledge production (Meghji, 2020).

In practical terms, we offer some suggestions for how decolonising knowledge and foregrounding the vernacular can be achieved for marketing theory. As Türkdoğan (2018) identifies, one fruitful approach is to facilitate intellectual dialogue between the West and non-West, and between those who speak using standardised language and vernacular speakers. This could be achieved through joint forums, research and writing projects, for example work that involves collaboration in joint efforts to decolonise marketing theory (e.g. Kariippanon et al., 2020). Prioritisation of research funds for studies focusing on philosophy, ethics, markets, marketing and consumers from Africa can add to the growing body of non-Western marketing literature (Appau et al., 2020; Martam, 2016). Platforming of vernacular consumers and more work that represents their lived experiences using their own forms of

language and ideas is another suggestion. Conferences and workshops can also play a role in challenging knowledge hierarchies, with events being held more regularly in non-Western nations and which platform non-Western and vernacular speakers.

Journals could also consider inviting publications in languages other than English, perhaps offering translations of articles to foster readership across the globe. Increasing the numbers of special issues, special sections and regular publication series of non-Western and vernacular writers and ideas can also help. Offering avenues for creative production of marketing theory such as poetry, song, videography and storytelling featuring Global South and/or vernacular speaking people is another suggestion.

We acknowledge some limitations with our work. First, our focus on decolonisation and the vernacular draws upon Yorùbá, Naija Pidgin, and Glaswegian perspectives and should be supplemented by knowledge from around the world to enrich marketing theory. Second, we acknowledge our use of vernacular risks creating new inequalities in accessibility, readability and translatability. At one level, we are 'performing the inquiry' and encouraging readers to learn and understand our language and ideas as we did with each other, while sensing the marginalisation we experience. Furthermore, subversions in the face of power hierarchies will usually, by their nature, marginalise to some degree. However, we provide translations in the Appendix to assist the reader. Third, we acknowledge that decolonising and acknowledging the vernacular risks the popularisation and market capitalisation of knowledge, as seen with African American hip-hop culture. We argue it is important to focus on creating the space and freedom for African and vernacular ideas to be given recognition through forms of cultural relativism whilst guarding against cultural appropriation. Finally, our work only touches upon elements shaping knowledge hierarchies in marketing; further research that engages with (dis)ability, neurodiversity, LGBTIQ+ and alternative geographic and political perspectives is needed.

Conclusion

All of us as marketing scholars can play our part by considering whose ideas we are using, quoting and citing in our work. We argue that embracing the decolonisation of knowledge through, for example, introducing African philosophy, ideas and methods, and through engagement with vernacular life, language and theorising has much to offer marketing as a discipline. Therefore, we call on scholars to join these efforts that will help topple hierarchies of knowledge in marketing and bring about a more polyvocal discipline.

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Appendix: Vernacular Translations

Pidgin

abeg = please

ajekpako = someone who was raised on the street or is street smart

ajebota = highly privileged, rich ‘spoilt’ kid

Babalawo = father of the mysteries – a high priest of the Ifá oracle

carry last = we are not losers

dat na = that is

die = so much, too much

dem sabi = they know

dey = doing

enh henh na = and so…?

gbam = you’ve hit the jackpot

get mind = strong and bold

iyalode = a high ranking female chieftan

Iyami = mother

jazzmen = slang term for Babalawo

kain work be dat = what kind of work is that?

korokoro = face to face

kwanta = problem

liver no go cut = don’t have the guts

Oyibo = white man

me sef = my self

mumu = fool

my eye don tear = being aware of what’s going on

na condition make crayfish bend = doing the needful under certain circumstances

Naija = Nigeria

na we = we are

nko = what about

padi me = my good friend

no get levels = got no standards

phoné = to speak properly or in a posh or foreign accent

pipo = people

run tins = run things, in charge

sabi = to know something

see finish = contempt

small = little

so ginger = so excited

#SoroSoke = speak up

Sufferhead = being poor/punished

sweet bellé = makes you feel good

tey = taken a long time

vex = anger

wahala = trouble

wetin dey = what’s up?

wey = that?

Glaswegian

aboot = about

aye = yes

blootered = drunk

clamped = shown up and shut up

cry = call (as in the name of something or someone)

dinnae = does not

dinghies = ignores

gieing it – giving it (meaning what is somebody saying about something)

heavy bad darts = seriously not good

hink = think

hingmaes = a thing, something for which the name is not known or has been forgotten

homer = work done by a tradesperson cash in hand and off the books

mair = more

messages = grocery shopping

nana = grandmother

patched = ignored

peach = great

pies = ignores

pure pish = not good

rank = disgusting

scunner(ed) = the be in a state of disgusted irritation (past tense)

scullery = pantry

shim shams = something slightly dodgy or illicit

sound = great

swedgers = ecstasy

tanning = drinking

ur = are

wae = with

Weegie = Glaswegian

whit = what

wis = was

ya dancer = excellent