“Bling” is Black?

Conspicuous Consumption in the South: Deconstructing “Bling” Culture in South Africa to Foster Behavioural Change Towards Sustainable Livelihoods

Carme Martínez-Roca and Malik Vazi
“The ‘new’ South Africa has been built with ‘crooked timber’” because...

- It has inherited a value system that places wealth at the centre of society
- ‘Bling’ is the sign that one has made it. (Gumede)
Value system:

- Wealth & its ostentation as a sign of White supremacy

“Being classified Black was tantamount, inter alia, to being deemed unworthy of certain modes of consumption”

Who has made it because can have a ‘bling’ lifestyle?

“The display of wealth South Africa’s new black elite is raising eyebrows among the poor majority”

What is the value system?  Who ‘has made it’?
Culture:
A relatively small set of shared meanings which explain...

- Enabling factors for ‘Black Bling’:
  - Policies: Black Economic Empowerment
  - Lack of resources: poverty

- Reinforcing factors for ‘Black Bling’:
  - Social rewards or punishments:
    - Media coverage
    - Social status

- Predisposing factors for ‘Black Bling’:
  - Beliefs, knowledge in a society: Bling is Black

...of a particular group of people.
### Corruption Perception Index Results in South Africa, 2002-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Enabling Factor for ‘Black Bling”: BEE

- **Black Economic Empowerment**
  - “Tenderpreneurs”
  - Black Africans

  - “Used & dumped”
  - Lend their names to firms
  - Other racial groups

---

*Enabling Development for Sustainable Lifecycles*
Corruption Perception Index Results in South Africa, 2002-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Black Economic Empowerment = "Tenderpreneurs" = Black Africans

Identify beneficiaries of corruption in South Africa

"Used & dumped"
Lend their names to firms

Other racial groups

Enabling Factor for ‘Black Bling”: BEE
“Those without certified accomplishments, such as the poor and the ‘newly rich’ have a relatively stronger motivation to impress via conspicuous consumption” (Moav & Neeman)

‘Bling’ is Black, poor and/or uneducated...

“Households in South Africa spend on average the equivalent of a year’s income for an adult’s funeral that is financed, in many cases, by borrowing”

“Households in South Africa” = 11,000 of a district of a province

“In many cases” = 25% of all funerals

Enabling Factor for ‘Black Bling”: Poverty
“Those without certified accomplishments, such as the poor and the ‘newly rich’ have a relatively stronger motivation to impress via conspicuous consumption” (Moav & Neeman)

‘Bling’ is Black, poor and/or uneducated...

“Households in South Africa spend on average the equivalent of a year’s income for an adult’s funeral that is financed, in many cases, by borrowing”

Scrutinize and contest potentially biased research

Analyze the potential relation between poverty and conspicuous consumption... not forgetting about demographics

Enabling Factor for ‘Black Bling’: Poverty
### Content Associated to the Word ‘Bling’ in 40 Articles of Three Newspapers Published in South Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>“Bling” associated to Black Africans</th>
<th>“Bling” associated to Foreigners</th>
<th>“Bling” associated to South African lifestyle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City Press</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail &amp; Guardian</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Star</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

75% associate ‘Bling’ with Black Africans
Content Associated to the Word ‘Bling’ in 40 Articles of Three Newspapers Published in South Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>“Bling” associated to Black Africans</th>
<th>“Bling” associated to Foreigners</th>
<th>“Bling” associated to South African lifestyle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City Press</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail &amp; Guardian</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Star</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

75% associate ‘Bling’ with Black Africans

Reinforcing Factor for ‘Black Bling”: Media

Scrutinize and contest potentially biased information in the media
“Coloured and Blacks spend between 30 to 50% more on a basket of visible consumption than comparable Whites” (Kaus)

“Different groups may develop different ways to express their relative position within society”

Reasons for conspicuous consumption: “catch up” with more privileged and “keep up” with the Zungu

Reinforcing Factor for ‘Black Bling”: Social Status
Reinforcing Factor for ‘Black Bling’: Social Status

“Coloured and Blacks spend between 30 to 50% more on a basket of visible consumption than comparable Whites” (Kaus)

“Different groups may develop different ways to express their relative position within society.”

Reasons for conspicuous consumption: “catch up” with more privileged and “keep up” with the Zungu

Analise in which way White population in South Africa express their relative position in society

Do not use race as a variable of research
Hypothesis: there is the belief in South Africa that ‘Bling’ is Black

Research to:
- Reduce stereotypes and prejudices
- Help all groups accept responsibility
- Move towards togetherness that:
  - Expand people’s freedom
  - Engage people in shaping development equitably and sustainably

“Our inability to promote the common interest in sustainable development is often a product of the relative neglect of economic and social justice within and amongst nations” HDR 2011

“In time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible – a more human face” (Biko)