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IMAGING AMMAN THROUGH REAL-ESTATE ADVERTISING DISCOURSE

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Majd Musa

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Abstract

This article investigates the role real-estate advertising discourse of early-twenty-first-century megaprojects in Amman, Jordan, plays in creating an image of the city. It addresses power relations through which real-estate advertising in the city is produced and interpreted, including the power of corporations and the public. The research draws upon major theoretical understandings of discourse, analyses texts and images of advertisements and marketing brochures of three megaprojects designed for the city in the 2000s – The New Downtown of Amman (Abdali), Jordan Gate, and Sanaya Amman, and interprets the city residents' readings of advertising materials, which were sought through in-person interviews. The article finds that real-estate advertising discourse that promotes recent megaprojects in Amman constructs the city as a competitive regional and global centre. The article infers that advertisement of Amman's megaprojects hides the real power relations involved in the production of these developments, where the private developers have the greatest agency followed by the agency of state and city officials. The article concludes that although the city inhabitants have the least agency in the generation of megaprojects and advertising discourse surrounding them, they exercise some power as they make sense of the advertisements, sometimes resisting and other times accepting the developers' preferred reading of these advertisements. In addition to testing the applicability of discourse theories to advertising in Amman, this article helps stimulate critical readings of real-estate advertisements, which can undermine the role advertisement texts and images play in shaping the city's built environment and its perception.

Majd Musa

M. Musa*

Department of Architectural Engineering, University of Sharjah, PO Box 27272, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

*Corresponding author's email address: m.musa@sharjah.ac.ae

INTRODUCTION

Early-twenty-first-century Amman, Jordan, has witnessed a vigorous construction boom, accompanied by an increasing real-estate advertisement previously unknown in the city. This advertisement appears in national and regional newspapers, and real-estate supplements and magazines, as well as on TV. In addition, brochures and advertisements of new projects are disseminated at conferences on real estate and urban development as well as at national and international real-estate exhibitions. This advertisement is especially significant when it comes to recent megaprojects, which were made possible through the city's attraction of capital – mostly foreign capital – as well as the city's and state's supporting economic policies, planning regulations and, sometimes, public-private partnerships that these developments involve. Real-estate advertisements on the new megaprojects in Amman create an advertising discourse whose role goes beyond informing the public about these large-scale urban developments, which are reshaping the city's landscape and people's interaction with the built environment.

This article, therefore, investigates the role of real-estate advertising discourse surrounding early-twenty-first-century megaprojects in Amman. The article examines how this discourse builds an image of the city – how it creates certain impression of the visual appearance of the city and projects certain ideas about it, what image it builds, and why. It explores power relations through which advertisement of recent megaprojects was produced and interpreted, as it looks into the agencies of the different parties involved in and affected by this advertisement: corporations, the state, and city residents. The research methods include the review of literature on discourse and advertisement as they relate to the urban built environment, capitalism, and the exercise of power. The research engages Foucault's theorisation and Marxist scholars' understanding of discourse, which at first appear to have nothing in common. The research methods also include analysis of texts and images of advertisement materials on three megaprojects planned for Amman in the 2000s – The New Downtown of Amman (Abdali), Jordan Gate, and Sanaya Amman, face-to-face interviews with city residents about the ways they understand advertisements, and interpretation of the public's readings of advertisements.

The article is structured in three sections. The first section reviews literature on the meaning of discourse and its reflective and constructive roles and how power, be it that of capitalists or others, plays in discourse formation. This section also briefly reviews literature that addresses the relationship between discourse and the built environment and locates the current study within this literature. The second section provides the research findings, and it discusses and analyses real-estate advertisements of Amman's megaprojects and the public's readings of these advertisements. The third section presents the research conclusions, relating them to significant theoretical understandings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Expressiveness and Constructiveness of Discourse

The term “discourse” is one of the most complex and controversial terms. The first meaning of this term that comes to mind is that discourse expresses thoughts and ideas on a certain topic, whether in writing or in speech. The Merriam-Webster's Dictionary also defines discourse as “a connected speech or writing,” “a linguistic unit ... larger than a sentence,” and “a mode of organizing knowledge, ideas, or experience that is rooted in language and its concrete contexts” (“Discourse,” n.d.). English-language dictionaries generally define

discourse in relation to language and as a means to “express” pre-existing things or situations. Markus and Cameron (2002, p. 10) find that the dominant meaning of the term “discourse” in linguists’ work is, quoting Fairclough (1995), “social action and interaction, people interacting together in real social situations.” Markus and Cameron expand this meaning, which they believe implies spoken language, to include written language.

Another body of theory on discourse is the one that sees meanings as being created in discourse, which a scholar such as Williams (2003) believes may include text, images, films, or even the built environment itself. Discourse in such theory becomes “a social construction of reality, a form of knowledge” (Fairclough as quoted in Markus & Cameron, 2002, p. 10). The “constructive,” as opposed to the “reflective” nature of discourse, is often associated with social constructionists, postmodernists, and post-structuralists, though, as shown below, in its broader sense it is not irrelevant from Marxist theory.

One of the most influential works on the theorisation of discourse as constructive of reality is the work of Michel Foucault. In his *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969/1972), Foucault analyses discursive formations and defines discourses as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). Discourses, according to Foucault, should not be reduced to signs, texts, and speech. It is through discursive formations that objects, or subjects, are produced and reality is constructed. As Mills (2004) and Crysler (2003) point out, what Foucault’s definition of discourse entails is that humans’ perception of objects and events and the way they interpret them depend on discursive structures.

In his later work, Foucault investigates power relations and introduces them as central to understanding discourses. As Hall (1996, p. 11) puts it, Foucault’s discourse becomes “a regulative and regulated formation.” Thus, who produces discourse becomes a matter that depends on social power relations, and power relations are constituted through discourse (see Foucault 1974/2007, 1975/1995, 1976/2003). Power supports a kind of discourse about a “natural rule” or a norm; it defines a “code of normalization” (Foucault, 1976/ 2003, pp. 38-39). Such a discourse, in its turn, reinforces power and the exercise of power through discourse (Foucault, 1976/2003).

Discourse and Power Relations

Foucault (1984/2003; also see Foucault, 1982/2003) understands power as relational and traceable in different social activities. Power relations, Foucault asserts, “exist at different levels, in different forms,” and they are “mobile, reversible, and unstable” (p. 34). Foucault’s power is a “disciplinary power” (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 216). Unlike sovereign power, disciplinary power is “exercised” not simply “held.” It is exercised “over” and “through” the subject, or individual, the capacities of the body, and groups of individuals to regulate their behaviour (Dean, 1999, p. 19). According to Foucault (1975/1995), institutions such as prisons, schools, or hospitals, and state agencies such as the police, may exercise discipline. Foucault’s power is “not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with” (Foucault, 1978/1990, p. 93). Rather, it is “the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (p. 93).

Although many scholars and theorists agree on Foucault’s understanding of discourse as both constructive of what it speaks and constructed through power relations, they do not necessarily agree on the way Foucault understands power relations through which discourse is produced. Marxist scholars differ from Foucault’s understanding of power, linking power to material production. They believe that the capitalist class that controls the means of material production dominates other classes in society. As Mills (2004) puts it, Marxists think of the

issue of power in a binary way: the powerful and the powerless. They, thus, diverge from Foucault who sees power as having different degrees. Where Marxists' power is embodied in a structure such as the capitalist class, Foucault's power is not a structure.

According to Marxist theorists, “[capitalists’] ideas, their views and accounts of the world and how it works ... dominate the outlook of capitalist society” (Williams, 2003, p. 37). Capitalists' ideology is “the dominant ideology of the society ... [that shapes] the thinking and action of all other classes in society, including the working class” (p. 37). Lefebvre (1991), for example, identifies the hegemony of one class as an important aspect of capitalism. In this, he follows Antonio Gramsci, who argues that the dominant class uses “consensual control” to maintain its rule over the rest of the society. Unlike “coercive control,” consensual control involves processes of “negotiation, mediation, and compromise” through which the public assimilate the worldview of the dominant class (Williams, 2003, p. 54; also see Bates, 1975). Lefebvre argues that hegemony extends to culture, knowledge, and ideas and it works through “human mediation: policies, political leaders ... institutions and experts” (p. 10). He argues that the capitalist class uses knowledge to maintain its hegemony. Similarly, Ralph Miliband (1969; cited in Williams, 2003, p. 38) views media discourse as a part of the “process of legitimation” for capitalism and its tenets. He argues that since media are businesses mostly owned by capitalists, they generate discourses that promote private business as significant for a good economy and for democracy. Such discourses disseminate ideas and values that are meant to enhance the domination of capitalist class, making the public believe that such domination is natural and inevitable. It follows, then, that Marxist scholars, like postmodernists, social constructionists, and post-structuralists, see the “real” constructed through discourse. Marxists, however, differ from these scholars by seeing discourse as constructed according to capitalist interests.

Discourse and the Urban Built Environment

Crysler (2003, p. 4) asserts that “texts and writing play an instrumental role in shaping the critical and imaginative space in which members of a built environment profession – architecture, planning, urban design – operate.” Similarly, Markus and Cameron (2002) see a strong relation between discourses and the built environment. For them, language shapes buildings and the way we understand and experience them. Their argument is in line with King's argument (1996) that, in a competitive world, cities and corporations know that it is not enough to actually build the “tallest” structure or building. “The myth,” King writes, “needs to be created discursively and then disseminated around” (p. 104).

Real-estate advertising, particularly advertisement of megaproject developments, is among discourses on the urban built environment that have received some attention in the past two decades. Brownill (1994), for example, shows how the imagery and rhetoric used in the advertisement of Canary Wharf, UK, serve to create a new positive image for the previously deteriorating site of this development. According to Brownill, the brochures and advertisements of Canary Wharf not only serve the marketing of this development but also have an ideological component, which conceals the power relations involved in this development. These advertisements present the high-end megaproject as all “positive and impartial” (p. 149). They speak of “social regeneration,” at the time of the development's history when polarisation between the rich and the poor, as well as homelessness, was increasing. Similarly, Dovey (1999) shows how advertising of corporate office towers in Melbourne, Australia, reflects values of “the corporate elite” (p. 108) it primarily addresses. Collins and Kearns' (2008) argument is relevant here. According to these scholars, real-estate advertisements of residential developments on the coasts of New Zealand hide the negative impact of these developments on the public, which includes the significant increase

in property prices and the establishment of the idea that the beach is a private space that only property owners can enjoy. Likewise, Ülkü and Erten (2013) point out the role advertising plays in deepening class segregation in Istanbul, Turkey, by establishing new upscale gated communities in the city as essential for an ideal life style associated with exclusivity, security, health, and order. Addressing the context of Amman, Musa (2017) argues that advertising discourse on new megaprojects presents the city residents as modern and manipulates their identities in ways that benefit capitalists as it promotes a culture of consumption and shapes the city inhabitants into modern consumers. The current article belongs to this scholarly body of knowledge, expanding on Musa's work by investigating and grounding in theory advertisement as it relates to the creation of a new city image of Amman and to the exercise of power in "writing" and "reading" discourse.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Amman's contemporary megaprojects create an image of Amman as a global city with a spectacular downtown and iconic high-rise buildings designed by starchitects and executed with innovative technologies and materials; a city with distinguished places for work, living, and entertainment. These megaprojects have been conceived to make the city competitive on a global scale, attracting regional and international businesses and tourists along with the capital they will invest in the city and the money they will spend, and strengthening the city's economy. Thus, a photo of Amman featuring tall buildings at The New Downtown – the largest megaproject to take place in twenty-first-century Amman – has accompanied a recent news item posted on a major Jordanian newspaper lauding Amman's improved rank on the list of global cities by Globalization and World Cities Research Network ("Al-Urdun," 2017). The producers of Abdali, as well as other new megaprojects in the city, understand that it is not enough to build spectacular developments and record-breaking high-rise buildings to build the image of these developments and the city as global. The image, as King (1996) tells us, needs to be constructed and disseminated through discourse.

Advertisement Analysis

The largest advertising on the city's megaprojects is the advertisement that the developers of The New Downtown of Amman have created. The ongoing Abdali project was begun in 2004 in a central area of the city. It is developed by Abdali Investment and Development (AID) through a public-private partnership. So proud of their advertisements are AID that describing these advertisements, praising their scale and quality, and even, on a few occasions, explaining the messages they convey became an integral part of the developers' discourse on the Abdali project. Among the earliest advertisements of The New Downtown are those used to be posted on the site's construction fence (Figure 1). AID's CEO commented that the advertisements on the development's construction fence "provided Jordan and the world with views that embodied ... [the developers'] vision of the [Abdali] project" ("Sharikat al-'Abdali," 2006). This comment reveals that the developers directed their advertisements not only to the city residents and Jordanians but also to the "world." Thus, the advertisements' text says "let us welcome the world," a phrase that emphasises the globality of the project and implicitly suggests that Amman and its residents were not open to the world and needed a development such as Abdali to facilitate such openness. Advertisements' texts also include phrases such as "a vision come to life" and "let tomorrow start today," which, along with the previous phrase, represent Abdali as the embodiment of a shared vision of how the Abdali site should be developed and how Amman's built environment should look in order to bring a bright future to the city and its inhabitants. According to the Abdali advertisements, this

development will “accompany Amman into the 21st century” (Abdali Investment and Development [AID], n.d.b).



Figure 1. View of Abdali advertisements posted on the construction fence of the Abdali development (Source: Author, 2007).

In line with the Abdali advertisements, advertisements of the unrealised Sanaya Amman speak of this development as “a new triumphant chapter in the Jordanian future growth story” (Limitless, n.d.). Sanaya Amman, which was to be developed by the Dubai-based Limitless and scheduled to be completed in 2011 but has been cancelled after Limitless was hit by the 2008 economic crisis, would have consisted of an upscale twin-tower residential complex along with retail and recreation facilities in a scale and luxury not yet heard of in the city. According to the advertisements, “[Sanaya] marks a new era in Jordan’s journey towards further urban development” (Limitless, n.d.). It is a means to boost the city’s economy and support the local community (Limitless, n.d.). Sanaya will fit and contribute to Amman’s “continuous modernization and growth” (Blink Studio, n.d.). Similarly, the advertisements of Jordan Gate portray this upscale development as a product and means of modernisation in Amman and the country. Jordan Gate, which was begun in 2005 as a public-private partnership but ended up privately owned by Gulf investors, consists of a hotel tower and an office tower on a podium housing a high-end shopping mall and entertainment facilities. The advertisements promote Jordan Gate as an architectural representation and stimulator of Jordan’s economy that announces a new start for the country (Bayan Holding, Gulf Finance House, & Kuwait Finance & Investment Company, 2007; Bayan Holding, Gulf Finance House, & Kuwait Finance & Investment Company, 2007-2008; Jordan Gate Company, n.d.).

At the same time that the advertisements emphasise the modernity and globality of the city, they represent Amman, and the country, as unique with rich heritage. This is a means to define for the regional and international audiences of these advertisements what is special and distinctive about the advertised developments – in this case, their context. As Harvey (2001) points out, striking a balance between commercialisation and distinction through discourse, including advertising discourse, is a significant strategy for the production of the urban built environment, as well as other products, particularly under the capitalist mode of production. The emphasis of advertisements on Amman’s architectural heritage can be understood in light of the city’s competition with Gulf cities, especially Dubai, which as Al-Asad (2007) and Elsheshtawy (2010) point out lacks historic buildings and sites. It can be argued that tradition-inspired contemporary developments in Gulf cities such as Dubai and Doha, which as Salama (2014) rightly argues relate to the question of identity, are a means

to create a distinctive city image that compensates for the missing historic built environment. In Amman, the Abdali advertisements highlight Jordan's ancient landmarks, speaking of "the world-famous Petra site" and "the ancient city of Jerash" (AID, n.d.a). These advertisements even compare Abdali to the country's ancient landmarks, claiming that just as the country's historic monuments served as hubs for ancient civilisations the Abdali development will transform Amman into a competitive global hub (AID, n.d.a).

The Abdali advertisement constructs this development as a leading regional and global business centre, as the place for major national, regional, and international businesses. The Abdali developers are explicit about the constructive role of the advertisements. Thus, commenting on the Abdali advertising campaign featuring one of the first advertisements of Abdali, "The Downtown Comes Soaring to Life. Witness Its Rise," the developers say that the advertisement will institute the Abdali development as the future business centre ("Abdali PSC," 2008). It is not surprising, then, that the advertisements speak of this development as the destination for businesspersons (AID, 2008b, 2010) and "the business hub of the future" that will set "new foundations for business excellence" (AID, 2008a) and "make Jordan the first and ideal choice for regional firms and investors" (AID, 2010). The advertisements speak of Abdali's high-end office buildings and their "integrated services" that conform to the "latest technical specification" (AID, 2010). They emphasise the smart buildings of Abdali and, even refer to this development as a smart city (AID, n.d.a, 2009; also see AID, 2008a, 2008b). They speak of the broadband, high-speed Internet connection, extensive wireless network, and audio and video communication systems at the Abdali office spaces as well as everywhere in The New Downtown (AID, n.d.a, 2008b). Such "impressive technology," according to the Abdali advertisements, will provide secure and reliable connection to businesses around the world, making the work of multinational companies easier and faster (AID, n.d.a, 2008b).

Advertising discourse on the city's megaprojects depicts these developments as the unparalleled place to live and entertain, as places fit for global Amman. Jordan Gate's advertisements pitch this development's upscale shopping and leisure amenities and luxury hotel (Bayan Holding et al., 2007; Jordan Gate Company, n.d.). The advertisements of Sanaya Amman speak of this development's splendid apartments, gourmet restaurants, designer stores, and excellent leisure amenities (Blink Studio, n.d.; Limitless, n.d., 2009). And the Abdali advertisements speak of the The New Downtown as "the favored destination" not only for businesspersons but also for tourists and wealthy international travellers (AID, 2008a). These advertisements even describe the Abdali development as a "microcosm of the perfect city" (AID, n.d.a). They emphasise the high-end quality of the different components of this megaproject: the upmarket office spaces (AID, 2010), "upscale facilities," "contemporary luxury apartments," "shopping facilities that [will] sparkle with global brands" (AID, 2008a), and "spectacular high-rise buildings" (AID, 2008b). By portraying the spectacular upscale New Downtown as a microcosm of the perfect city, the advertisements define the perfect city as the place that caters to the rich and disregards the complexity of urban life that most city residents experience.

Initially, it might seem that the advertisements of megaprojects solely address wealthy businesspersons, tourists, and others, who can afford the kind of consumption patterns these developments encourage. However, a closer look at these advertisements reveals that they also address the average city residents. For example, the Abdali developers comment that the advertisements of The New Downtown will enable the *public* to "envisage" Abdali in the near future and "permit their vision to come to life" ("Abdali PSC," 2008); hence the frequent use of the phrase "live the vision" in the advertisements of this development (see AID, 2008a). The advertisement images, according to the developers, will engage the public in Amman with the Abdali project as these "representations" will "make their eyes familiar" with

this development and the new shape of the city centre (“Sharikat al-‘Abdali,” 2006). In other words, the developers wanted city residents from all walks of life to create an idea of Abdali based on the pictures and texts of the developers’ advertising discourse. Furthermore, the Abdali developers wished to persuade the city dwellers that the realisation of the Abdali development would be a materialisation of the city residents’ own image of a new downtown, not the developers’ image. There is no better way to draw the public into Amman’s megaprojects than making them believe these projects are a dream come true: the modern developments they desperately need to bring a better future to the city and its inhabitants.

Ironically, the developers did not engage the public in the city with the Abdali development when they first conceived it (see Musa, 2017). The Abdali developers did not ask the opinion of the city residents regarding how the central site of the project should be developed, what functions the new buildings and open spaces should serve, or what form this megaproject should take. The developers did not take the needs of the city inhabitants into consideration when they conceived Abdali as an upscale megaproject. They even went so far as to finalise the Abdali plans before purchasing privately owned property on the site. The public were marginalised when their marginalisation benefitted the developers just as they were encouraged to become a part of this project when their participation as consumers of Abdali’s spaces and commodities served the developers’ interest.

Advertisement of Amman’s megaprojects portrays the city as global through emphasis on the grandness of these projects and their tall buildings. Here the image in the advertisements plays a significant role. In all of the advertisements analysed in this study, the image is predominant, taking up a large area, which is not surprising considering the emphasis the developers put on the appearance and spectacularity in the conception of these developments. This is not to mention that images of buildings in the media are no less significant a medium than the buildings themselves, sometimes even more significant, to command people’s attention, communicate certain messages, and construct the meaning of these buildings (see King, 1996). There is no more telling example of the use of the image in advertising Amman’s megaprojects than the large advertisement of the Abdali development that used to cover one of the façades of a mid-rise building on a busy street in Western Amman (Figure 2). This advertisement features a 3D render of The New Downtown with many glistening tall buildings dominating the other buildings in the neighbourhood. The image of the advertisement is dramatic, but only a small number of these high-rise buildings will eventually materialise. The Abdali developers clearly thought an enormous advertisement would help convey the idea of The New Downtown as a spectacular, globally competitive development. The advertisement itself became a part of the competition to produce the biggest product as can be inferred from the developers’ remark that it is the “largest outdoor sign in the Levant,” an advertisement that is “worth noticing” (“Abdali launches,” 2010). This advertisement, according to the developers, is commensurate with The New Downtown as it “displays the magnitude and grandeur of the project” (“Abdali launches,” 2010).

The Abdali advertisement “The Downtown Comes Soaring to Life” features similar imagery, which also portrays a flock of oversized birds heading towards Abdali. The developers describe these birds elsewhere as “majestic birds” that have migrated to Abdali (“Abdali PSC,” 2008). They “symbolize the bustling energy” flowing into Abdali and “foreshadow the stirring human migration” to this development (“Abdali PSC,” 2008). By providing their interpretation of this component of the advertisement’s image, the developers meant to construct the Abdali development as the lively city centre to which city residents, and others, would be attracted. The advertisements’ emphasis on tall buildings at the Abdali development is not surprising given that tall buildings, be they office, residential, or hotel buildings, are among the most important image-constructing components of this

development. They have been conceived as the landmarks of Abdali, which will help make this development “a modern landmark for Amman” (AID, n.d.a). High-rise buildings have become markers of modernity and globality with which the Abdali developers were keen to associate this development (Musa, 2017).



Figure 2. View of a large advertisement of the Abdali development posted on a building façade in Amman (Source: Author, 2010).

Like the Abdali advertisements, advertisements of Sanaya and Jordan Gate emphasise the height of these developments' buildings. In the foreground of the advertisement titled “Sanaya Amman,” at the bottom right corner, appears a blonde painter in modern clothes putting the final touches on a painting showing the landscape of Amman (Figure 3). In the background of the image appears the city's landscape depicted on this painting. Unlike the undulating landscape of mountainous Amman, the painting shows a low-rise cityscape with regular elevation overlooked by Sanaya's high-rise buildings. Similarly, the image of Jordan Gate's advertisement unsurprisingly titled “Jordan's Highest Landmark” shows surrounding buildings toned down and mostly reduced in size. The unreal depiction of the developments' context was a means to emphasise the distinctive height of these developments and establish them as superior to the surrounding urban fabric. Such a strategy in advertising discourse, which is not limited to real-estate advertisement in Amman, is intended to increase the value of the developments and earn the developers great profit.

Advertisements of Amman's contemporary megaprojects convey the message that the city is global through emphasis on these projects' high-quality designs. Thus, the Abdali advertisements speak of the “world-class” “inspired” designs of this development's high-rise buildings and describe them as “works of art” (AID, n.d.a). Likewise, Sanaya's advertisement pictures and texts convey the message that Sanaya has innovative iconic designs. The painter who appears in the foreground of the image in the “Sanaya Amman” advertisement painting the Sanaya development and the surrounding urban fabric helps convey the iconicity of this development (Figure 3). One of the messages that this feature of the advertisement communicates to the audiences is that Sanaya is aesthetically significant and unique and enhances the landscape of the surrounding area, as well as Amman, thus painters admire it and make it the topic of their paintings. Another relevant message is that Sanaya is a creation of an artist, and hence a work of art. The concept of the image of this advertisement is not different from advertisements of large-scale developments, particularly high-rise

buildings, in other cities in which the advertised project is presented as a masterpiece created by a world-famous artist, which endues the advertised development with an “aesthetic ‘aura’” (Dovey, 1999, p. 108). But how do the public in Amman interpret this advertisement of Sanaya and other megaprojects’ advertisements? How successful have the developers been in creating a global image of these developments, and the city, through advertisement?

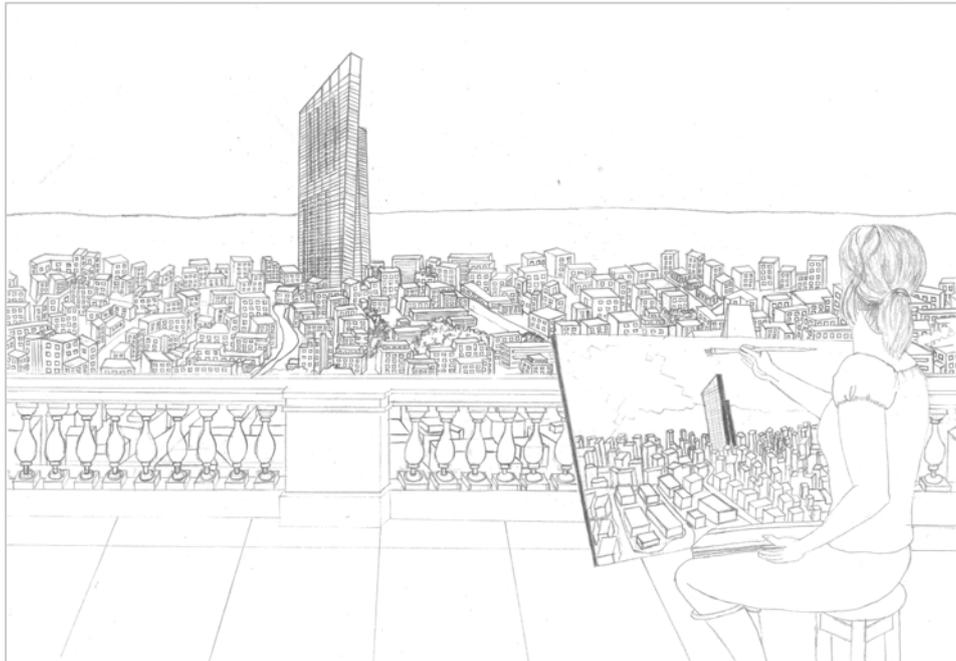


Figure 3. The image of the “Sanaya Amman” advertisement featuring the high-rise buildings of the Sanaya development towering above the city’s landscape (Source: Redrawn by Nora Eltayeib from Limitless’s advertisement in the catalogue of *PropertyLink’09 Exhibition: The 4th International Property & Real Estate Investment Exhibition*, back cover, 2009, Amman: Zara Expo).

The Public’s Readings of Advertisement

City residents have different understandings of the megaprojects’ advertisements, which at times fully match the developers’ intended message, but at others only partly match this message or even contradict it. Thus, some city inhabitants reading the “Sanaya Amman” advertisement do not agree that Sanaya is a masterpiece of architecture that could have enhanced the image of the neighbourhood or the city. They take issue with the way the painter in this advertisement looks, saying that the blonde in modern clothes looks like a Westerner (personal communications, October 17 & 18, 2010). Although there are women in Jordan who look like this painter, these are not representative of the great majority of Jordanian women. Therefore, some thought the advertisement’s image was intended to convey the message that since a Westerner admired the Sanaya buildings and made them her painting’s topic, Sanaya must have been a world-class development worthy of admiration by everyone (personal communications, October 17 & 18, 2010; “This insane,” 2009). More likely, the developers wanted to communicate the message that women in Amman had a lifestyle similar to that of women in contemporary global cities, thus conveying the globality of the society and city.

Some people in the city have readings of the Jordan Gate advertisement different from the developers’ preferred interpretation. For example, Ahmed says that the advertisement

referring to Jordan Gate as the tallest in the country is misleading since the Abdali development will have buildings taller than Jordan Gate's buildings (personal communication, September 30, 2010). Ahmed has a point; Rotana Hotel in The New Downtown eventually surpassed Jordan Gate in height to claim the title of the tallest building in the city. Had the Sanaya development been realised, it would have been taller than Jordan Gate too. In a world where competing for the tallest building is common, the developers of Jordan Gate should have anticipated that by the time this development would have been completed it might not have been the highest in the country as the advertisement states. However, the developers used the advertisement to construct Jordan Gate's buildings as the tallest in the country and capitalise on this construction regardless of the reality, a strategy that also the developers of The New Downtown used but was not always successful as the public comments show. For example, Fatima says, "When it comes to buildings' height neither the Abdali development nor the city in general is [globally or regionally] competitive" (personal communication, February 3, 2010). Andrew says, "There is a major disconnect between the Abdali development and its context; it does not integrate well" (personal communication, January 17, 2010). Abdali as it appears in the advertisement "The Downtown Comes Soaring to Life," Andrew adds, "looks like Dubai, but never will be Dubai." For him, Abdali and other contemporary megaprojects in the city will "destroy Amman's once unique image." In fact, other individuals in the city have similar views regarding the relation between the Abdali development and its context as it appears in the advertisements. Thus although Jamal thinks Abdali is a modern centre and a landmark of Amman, he finds this development's buildings as featured in the advertisements disconnected from the surroundings and lacking in harmony (personal communication, January 31, 2010). That Abdali does not have a unified image definitely was not a message the developers wanted their advertisements to communicate, especially that these developers were very keen to control the look of Abdali through strict regulation of buildings' shapes and finishes, among other things.

Research participants also commented on some misrepresentation of the context of the advertised developments. For example, several individuals pointed out that the level landscape portrayed in the image of the "Sanaya Amman" advertisement was not Amman's since the city had a hilly topography (personal communications, September 2, October 17 & 18, 2010). Ammanis take pride in the topographic nature of their city; they see it as an integral part of Amman's character, which makes the city and its landscape "unique." Taking this away even through misrepresentation in advertisement is something many in the city cannot tolerate. Many city residents also understand that the scale of the Sanaya development is exaggerated in the "Sanaya Amman" advertisement (personal communications, September 2, October 17 & 18, 2010); some refer to Sanaya's depiction in this advertisement as a "giant" and, even, a "monster" (personal communication, September 2, 2010; "This insane," 2009). Some people find the dwarfing of the city's landscape in this advertisement along with the exaggerated size of Sanaya offensive to the city and its inhabitants, and they even think that city officials should have expressed concern about the advertisement and stopped its circulation altogether (personal communications, October 17 & 18, 2010; "This insane," 2009). However, the city could not exercise power over the developers.

Some in the city think that the "Sanaya Amman" advertisement should have been dismissed as irrelevant since Amman dwellers know the advertisement's image distorts the city's landscape and embellishes the size of Sanaya and it is obvious that this development in reality will look different than it does in this image (personal communication, July 21, 2010). But this advertisement, like other advertisements of Sanaya and large-scale developments in the city, is not only directed toward the city residents but also targets residents of neighbouring countries and beyond. Many of these receivers will form an idea of Sanaya and

Amman through this advertisement. Furthermore, to say that everyone in the city understands that the advertisement's image is a fabrication will be inaccurate. Some individuals who identified exaggeration in advertisement dismissed it entirely. Among those are Mansour who concludes that the Jordan Gate advertisement is not realistic, rather it is imaginary, and Ahmed who says that "the developers want through this misrepresentation of Jordan Gate's context to convince the public that this development is the best in the country" but they could not convince him (personal communications, October 3 & September 30, 2010). Although Mansour and Ahmed's comments imply that these men expect advertising discourse to reflect reality, the comments show that some of the public are aware that the developers use advertisement to shape people's views of the advertised developments in a way that would serve the developers' interest.

However, the awareness of this role of advertisement is far from universal. The Abdali advertisements were successful in creating the image of this development in the minds of the city residents as globally competitive. Almost everyone interviewed over the course of this research made a similar comment as they read the advertisement "The Downtown Comes Soaring to Life": they said that the Abdali development looked like large-scale developments in Dubai and American cities. That Abdali is comparable to spectacular modern developments in a wealthy city such as Dubai, which has become one of the top ten global hubs for business and tourism (Nagraj, 2014b), and American cities, many of which have become the epitome of modernity and globality, is an important message the Abdali developers wanted their advertisements to convey. Some in the city view the similarity between Abdali and developments in Dubai and American cities favourably, assuming that it will bring Amman and its inhabitants the riches and international status of these cities (personal communications, January 19, 2009, October 7 & 19, 2010). Razan even thinks that with spectacular developments such as The New Downtown, Amman, and Jordan, can beat Dubai as a destination for businesspersons and tourists (personal communication, January 19, 2010). However, in 2016, after a good part of this development had been completed, Jordan ranked 118th out of 190 countries in the Ease of Doing Business Rank by The World Bank while the United Arab Emirates occupied the 26th position. In addition, Jordan remains far behind the Emirates on the list of tourist destination. In 2014, Dubai was tourists' most favourite city for shopping and hotel accommodation (Nagraj, 2014a). The advertisement wanted to create a perception of the Abdali project and Amman, which was different from the reality, and to some extent it was successful. Thus, Razan says that The New Downtown will be a landmark suitable for twenty-first-century Amman, a comment she seems to have borrowed from the advertisements. Noura has a similar view; she thinks that the Abdali development as presented in the advertisements is "beautiful" and "it is about time the city ... created orderly buildings like those in modern cities" (personal communication, January 19, 2010). Likewise, Fatima says, "Less spectacular buildings will not reflect the spirit of the time" (personal communication, February 3, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Advertising discourse on Amman's early-twenty-first-century megaprojects was produced through the power of corporations investing in the city to serve corporate interest, which seemed to have aligned, at least partly, with the interest of the city. This discourse was designed to create the image of the new projects as outstanding developments and convey the message that Amman is a competitive regional and global city; a city with distinguished work, living, and entertainment spaces, which makes it the perfect place for regional and international businesses as well as tourists. Advertisements feature images of monumental, spectacular developments and high-rise buildings. They speak of megaprojects as a product and a means of the city's and country's modernisation. They speak of the city's megaprojects

as contemporary globally competitive developments like those in other global cities, emphasising these projects' state-of-the-art technologies, unmatched designs, and internationally renowned designers and stressing the role of these developments in transforming the city into a most advanced regional and global hub. The role advertising discourse plays in creating a global city image for Amman is in line with Harvey's understanding (2001) that under the global capitalist economy, discourse, including advertisement, is significant for defining products and the built environment. The absolute role of capitalists in creating this discourse is in line with Marxist scholars' theorisation of capitalists' domination of discourse. Obviously, Foucault's power relations were not at work in the construction of advertising discourse on Amman's recent megaprojects.

Advertisement presents recent large-scale developments in the city as a materialisation of a vision for Amman that the public share with the developers. It hides these projects' negative impacts, including social polarisation and straining of the city's infrastructure, presenting them as developments that serve the city and its residents, whereas in actuality they primarily serve the interest of corporations. Advertisement of Amman's megaprojects hides the real power relations involved in building these developments, where the private developers have the greatest agency followed by the agency of state and city officials, and the public have the least agency.

City residents exercised power in making sense of advertisement, although to different degrees. Some were aware of the advertisements' constructive role and resisted the developers' preferred reading of these advertisements, thus resisting the power of corporations. Others tended to understand advertisement as expressive of reality and, thus, they discarded the advertisements that they thought were unreal. Some were only partly able to resist the power of the advertisements' producers. Other city residents, however, were overwhelmed by the developers' advertising discourse and did not exercise any power to resist it. Rather, they were passive receivers of advertisement, unconsciously adopting the ideas and meanings that the developers intended the advertisements to communicate; their perception of the advertised developments was completely shaped by the developers' advertising discourse. This last group of Amman inhabitants demonstrates Foucault's theorisation (1969/1972) of discourse as a means to shape reality. However, given the varied interpretation of advertisement by the public in the city and the resistance by some to the developers' preferred reading of advertisements, it is safe to conclude that when it comes to the understanding of Amman's built environment through advertisement, discourse did not completely succeed in constructing the global image of Amman. Foucault's theorisation of discourse as constructive of reality only partly applies here.

Advertising on Amman's megaprojects influences the way prospective developers and property owners conceive their future developments. In addition, real-estate advertisements disseminate images and ideas that contribute to the way architects in the city design their projects. The new large-scale development consisting of a group of glazed mid-rise buildings in the Sixth Circle area, near Jordan Gate, and new high-rise buildings in the surroundings of the Abdali development are but two examples of the effect of the circulation of images of, and ideas on, the city's megaprojects through advertisement. Advertising discourse that accompanies Amman's megaprojects defines certain norms regarding what good architecture should look like. This discourse establishes new architectural and urban vocabularies and forms, which help reshape the city's built environment. The developers are aware of the role their megaprojects and advertisement play in shaping future developments in the city. Thus, the Abdali developers proudly point out in their advertisements that The New Downtown introduces to the city a "new language of architecture" (AID, n.d.a), a language fit for a global Amman. It is the responsibility of the architects designing for the city to be critical of this language. It is also the responsibility of decision makers to consider

carefully what image they want for their city: a generic image dictated by real-estate advertising and the developers behind it and serving corporations or a specific image dictated by the culture and needs of the city residents.

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