



Fake News, Representations of Reality and Intermediality One-day conference 11 January 2019 University of Paris Diderot

In 1978, thirty years after Apartheid was officially established by the National Party, the South African government faced a political scandal over a secret propaganda war that was designed both to influence local public opinion and rebrand the racial institution at international level¹. Exposed by two *Rand Daily Mail* journalists², the Information scandal was nicknamed 'Muldergate' by reference to the early 1970s' Watergate revelations that lead to Richard Nixon's resignation. Nowadays, the political masterful manipulation would have been better described with the 2017's word of the year 'fake news'³. With the ANC in exile, 'the issue of culture began to rise steadily in prominence within the movement, particularly in the 1980s⁴. This intensifying interest in culture saw rising numbers of workshops, festivals and seminars devoted to the issue, interviews and public pronouncements by leading ANC figures, and the high-profile Culture in Another South Africa (CASA) conference held in Amsterdam in December 1987⁵.

As the end of Apartheid approached, lawyer and activist Albie Sachs's thoughts on 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom' started with the controversial proposition of reconsidering 'culture [as] a weapon of struggle'⁶, stressing his concern on how art could address the new political era. To what extent has the freed South Africa emerged as a changed society in the 21st century? A report published by the World Bank in March 2018 reveals that South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world⁷. This report is an analysis of South Africa's progress in reducing poverty and inequality since 1994 : while poverty levels are lower today they still remain high, wealth inequality has been rising and consumption inequality has increased. Moreover, 'poverty levels are consistently highest among female-headed households, black South Africans, and children below the age of 15 and these groups tend to have a higher risk of falling into poverty'⁸. **24 years after the advent of democracy, a 'post-apartheid apartheid', as some have dubbed it, has somehow emerged. Within this context, has culture been re-reconsidered as a weapon of struggle? Have conceptions emerged of what culture's role should be both in external critical information work about this 'post-apartheid apartheid' and in internally focused work of nation-building?**

In the 2010s, events such as Nelson Mandela's death and the Marikana massacre have been catalysing anguishes about the fabrication of national narratives, icons and images. This has led to a partial deconstruction of representations as carriers of colonial and apartheid ideologies, or post-apartheid ideologies pertaining to a 'rainbow nation' perceived as a construct. In what is sometimes referred to as the post-post-apartheid era⁹, what role can and should the media play in the depiction of South African realities, in South Africa and abroad? In parallel, social media have begun to transform the relations between images, information and audiences. As social media shaped the way student movements shared information to local communities and to the world, new modes of production and distribution of filmed images have emerged, for instance with the form of the web-series.

These new developments interrogate the relations between media: **what current interactions between the press, social media and visual media (photography, videos and films in particular) do we need to analyse in order to make sense of the evolving relation between the spectacular, the informational and the ideological? In the age of fake news, we need to reflect on intermediality or the intermedial, broadly understood as 'configurations which have to do with a crossing of borders between media, and which thereby can be differentiated from intramedial phenomena as well as from transmedial phenomena (i.e., the appearance of a certain motif, aesthetic, or discourse across a variety of different media)**¹⁰.

- *We encourage papers from all disciplines, which propose to articulate the concept of intermediality in their studies of events and representations. Researchers are invited to send a 300-word abstract and a short bio-bibliographical notice to confrsa11january2019@gmail.com before 31 October 2018.*
- *Conference organizers: Annael Le Poullennec (Institut des mondes africains (UMR 8171) / PSL University), Ludmila Ommundsen Pessoa (University of Normandy -Le Havre, Group for Research on Identities and Cultures GRIC EA 4314), Florence Binard and Michel Prum (Group for Research on Eugenics & Racism, GRER/ICT (EA 337)- University of Paris-Diderot).*
- *Working languages: English and French*





¹ The objective of revitalizing and refreshing the country's image had been introduced by Minister of Information Cornelius Mulder in his statement to Parliament on 23 September 1970. South Africa must be presented 'as it is, namely that of a beautiful, prosperous country where democracy is being practised in the full sense of the word, and where political parties are represented in parliament, as elected by the people - an example to the whole world'. *South Africa Hansard*, 23 Sept 1970. *South Africa Hansard*, 23 Sept 1970. Quoted in Burgess, Julian. *The Great White Hoax: South Africa's International Propaganda Machine*. Africa Bureau, 1977.

² Rees, Mervyn and Chris Day. *Muldergate: The story of the info scandal*. International Specialized Book Service Incorporated, 1980.

³ Fake news is 'very real' word of the year for 2017, 2 November 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/nov/02/fake-news-is-very-real-word-of-the-year-for-2017>. Accessed 7 June 2018.

⁴ In July 1982, the watershed Culture and Resistance conference was held in Gaborone, Botswana under the auspices of the Medu Art Ensemble, an organisation formally unaffiliated but whose members were, at least by the early 1980s, largely ANC. Later the same year, the Department of Arts and Culture was established and in 1985, following a National Executive Committee (NEC) address in which ANC president Oliver Tambo made prominent reference to the role of "cultural workers", the movement launched its own in-house cultural journal, named *Rixaka*.

⁵ Shirli Gilbert, "Singing against apartheid: ANC cultural groups and the international anti-apartheid struggle." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33.2, 2007, pp. 421-441, p. 430.

⁶ 'we should ban ourselves from saying that culture is a weapon of struggle'. Paper prepared for an ANC in-house seminar on culture in 1989 in Lusaka. Albie Sachs, "Preparing ourselves for freedom: culture and the ANC constitutional guidelines." *TDR (1988-)* 35.1, 1991, pp. 187-193, p. 187.

⁷ Sulla, Victor; Zikhali, Precious. 2018. *Overcoming Poverty and Inequality in South Africa : An Assessment of Drivers, Constraints and Opportunities (English)*. Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/530481521735906534/Overcoming-Poverty-and-Inequality-in-South-Africa-An-Assessment-of-Drivers-Constraints-and-Opportunities>. Accessed 9 June 2018.

⁸ 'Poverty remains high for an upper middle-income country with more than half (55 percent) of the population of South Africa being poor at the national upper bound poverty line of ZAR 992 per person per month in 2015 prices. In addition, with a consumption per capita Gini coefficient of 0.63 in 2015, South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world. Furthermore, unemployment reached 25.1 percent of the workforce in 2015 and was 27.7 percent in the third quarter of 2017.', Sulla & Zikhali p. xii.

⁹ See Chapman, Michael, 'Conjectures on South African Literature', *Current Writing* 21(1&2), 2009, pp. 1–23; Du Preez, M. 'The Post-post-apartheid era has started', *News24*, 2016; or, in the French context, Dubresson, Alain, and Philippe Gervais-Lambony, "S'est-il vraiment passé quelque chose d'important en Afrique du Sud en février 2018?", *EchoGéo*, 2018.

¹⁰ Rajewsky, Irina, 'Intermediality, intertextuality, and remediation: a literary perspective on intermediality', *Intermedialités: histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et des techniques/Intermediality: History and Theory of the Arts, Literature and Technologies*, 2005, no 6, p. 46.

