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Viewing the "New" South Africa

Representations of South Africa in Television Commercials: An Experiment in Non-directive Methods

Rehana Ebrahim-Vally
Denis-Constant Martin

Centre d'études et de recherches internationales
Sciences Po

VIEWING THE "NEW" SOUTH AFRICA

Representations of South Africa in Television Commercials: An Experiment in Non-directive Methods[1]

Rehana Ebrahim-Vally[2]

Denis-Constant Martin[3]

Résumé

L'apartheid fut édifié sur la base de perceptions du corps justifiant leur classification hiérarchique. Il visait à séparer les personnes porteuses d'apparences physiques différentes de manière à préserver la pureté de la « race blanche » et sa domination en Afrique du Sud. Le corps, par conséquent, offre une entrée pertinente pour comprendre les changements qui se sont déroulés en Afrique du Sud depuis 1990 en tâchant d'aller au-delà de la surface des phénomènes observables, en essayant de faire surgir les représentations de ces changements que se sont forgées les Sud-africains. Cette étude présente une enquête expérimentale visant à comprendre les représentations de la « nouvelle » Afrique du Sud qui ont cours parmi les jeunes Sud-africains au commencement du 21ème siècle. Elle part du principe que la mise au jour et l'analyse des représentations sociales exige, au moins au stade initial, l'utilisation d'entretiens de groupe non-directifs ; elle montre que les images du corps telles que projetées dans des publicités télévisuelles peuvent servir de consignes efficaces pour démarrer des entretiens portant sur l'état de la société sud-africaine au début des années 2000. Quatre clips publicitaires diffusés à la télévision sud-africaine en 2003 furent sélectionnés pour les besoins de cette enquête et utilisés comme « consigne » pour lancer trois entretiens collectifs avec des jeunes Sud-africains, auxquels fut ajouté un entretien de contrôle avec des étudiants français. Ces publicités furent analysées en s'inspirant des méthodes de la sémiologie du cinéma ; les transcriptions des entretiens, à l'aide des méthodes proposées par Guy Michelat et ses collègues du CEVIPOF (FNSP, Paris). Les résultats de cette expérience indiquent que, si les transformations qu'a connues l'Afrique du Sud depuis 1990 sont, chez les jeunes interviewés, unanimement considérées comme positives, elles sont perçues avec ambivalence et éveillent parfois des sentiments contradictoires. L'avenir de l'Afrique du Sud est, dans le même temps, envisagé avec beaucoup d'optimisme et d'angoisse ; les relations entre Sud-africains sont à la fois décrites comme harmonieuses et vécues dans une grande tension. Ce sont ces ambivalences et tensions que permet de mieux faire émerger l'utilisation d'entretiens de groupe non-directifs démarrés par la projection de publicités télévisuelles.

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Abstract

Apartheid was based on particular perceptions and hierarchical classifications of the human body. It aimed at separating people with different physical appearances in order to preserve the purity of the "white race" and its domination in South Africa. To understand the changes that have taken place in South Africa since 1990, to go beyond the surface of observable events and reach the social representations of these transformations that have developed among South Africans, the body, or more precisely images of the body, provide a good point of departure. The present study presents an experimental small scale survey aiming at uncovering social representations of the "new" South Africa shared by young South Africans at the dawn of the 21st Century. It argues that studies of social representations require, at least in their initial stage, the use of non-directive collective interviews; it shows that images of the body as displayed in TV commercials can be used as efficient prompts to start discussions about the present state of South African society. The survey used four commercials taped on South African TV in 2003; these clips were used as prompts in three non-directive collective interviews with young South Africans, to which was added a test group consisting of French students. TV commercials were analysed using methods inspired by the semiology of cinema; the transcripts of the interviews were analysed using methods borrowed from the French school of political sociology. The results of this experimental survey show that, if the transition from apartheid to a democratic non racial society is considered positive, it is perceived with ambivalences and sometimes contradictory feelings: the future of South Africa may at the same time be envisioned with great optimism and heavy anxieties; relations between South Africans can be described as harmonious and be lived amidst acute tensions. Ambivalences and tensions, which remain very often untold, are precisely the dimensions of the representations of the "new" South Africa among young South Africans that non-directive collective interviews help to apprehend more clearly.

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INTRODUCTION

Freedom generates euphoria. Nelson Mandela's release from jail in 1990 and the first free and fair and inclusive elections of 1994 provided an exemplar illustration of the association of liberty with happiness. This form of gaiety in fact expressed a form of earnestness that captured individual's feelings of change in the country. 1990 and 1994 have become important landmarks in this process of transition from an authoritarian and racist rule to a democracy. The political organisation of the country was totally overhauled and the 1996 Constitution included a Bill of Rights with socio-economic rights fully integrated and which makes it one of the most progressive Bills of Rights in the world. New economic policies were designed and implemented, though not without disputed modifications in their orientation. Life in South Africa is radically different from what it used to be before 1994. People are no longer persecuted for their beliefs nor the colour of their skin but this does not mean that the country has been touched by a magic wand making the atrocities and violence of the previous government to suddenly disappear. Political equality is South Africa's greatest achievement but this hard attained right is not a social reality. South Africa remains an extremely unequal society with the gap between those with access to resources and others seeking the same increasing. The liberal turn taken by the government since 1996 is not doing much to address this situation as wealth production among the previously marginalised South Africans is targeted to a select few. The majority of the previously disenfranchised South Africans under apartheid continue to live precariously and alleviating their burden in making ends meet remains a challenge for the ANC state. If the wealthy now belong to all the groups formerly delineated by apartheid, a large majority of the poor are still black. Nevertheless, all South Africans, *de jure*, enjoy the same civil rights, and the social codes governing interactions between Africans, coloureds, Indians and whites have been affected, if not totally altered, by legal and political reforms.

The political changeover in South Africa which began in 1990 gave rise to a myriad of publications in both the academic and popular press. These works range from describing and witnessing a living miracle to an adroit analysis of elections and voting patterns. Several studies have been devoted to examining different cultural aspects, or the impact of government policies in specific sectors like health, education, reduction of poverty, etc. However, mutations in social representations as understood and construed

by South Africans of the society they live in is an important area of research. Apprehending social representations is not an easy task as this requires going beyond the obvious expressions of joy and discontent in South Africa, to reach the mental templates which underpin them. This demands time, and a rigorous methodology to ensure comprehensive results that reflect the complexity of the task at hand. The essential question "what has really changed for South Africans since 1990?" cannot be answered by describing physical and visible changes as these may only touch the surface of society. For a more comprehensive picture which looks at the complexities of change, one has to try and understand how South Africans perceive these changes and on which images of a transforming society do they base their appreciation or not of the current evolutions, and consequently their strategies to adjust to such transformations.

Advertising

Various survey methods can be used to grasp elements of social representations (Jodelet dir. 1993; Molinier 1996). Cultural productions and activities, avoiding the usual censorship of language and formalized social interaction, provide a field where, under symbolic garb, they can be detected (Martin 2001). Advertising, considered as a "sub-field" of cultural production, therefore appears to be a privileged domain for the detection of social representations (Gallissot 1993: 14), as it is an area where production, circulation, reception, and modification can be precisely observed.

Advertising does not only promote goods, but also particular world visions, argues Erving Goffman (1998: 185); it stabilises the main categories of culture and publicizes them; and can thus be seen as a reflection of social mutations (Gallissot 1993). Advertisements offer models of social organisation; trying to convince and seduce, they target the affectivity of the consumer (Vernette 2000) and influence social imaginaries (Mattelart 1990). Advertising, however, cannot be understood as a one way, manipulative, process where corporate managers and ads designers would use their expertise to instil in the mind of powerless consumers not only the will to buy a certain product, but particular social conceptions as well: the agency of the consumer can never be understated. As a matter of fact, advertising should be approached as an interactive process that allows social actors to confront their various perceptions of their living situations and negotiate the possibilities of changing them (Gallissot 1993). The

imaginaries of ads designers and of consumers meet and adjust to each other in the advertising process. The established “ritual idioms” (Goffman 1998) of a society are both displayed and contested by attempts to foresee consumers’ desires and meet them through the use of attractive aesthetic forms. Advertisements can be conservative, but can also disrupt conventions and project a world that is “ahead of itself” (Gallissot 1993). They can transmit existing social representations, and contribute to their consolidation; they can also record their mutations, and suggest new images, new desires, new types of relation between human beings and things, between human beings and human beings.

Bodies on Television

Today, television has become the premier choice for advertising. As television is daily watched by millions of people it now has an outreach that still needs to be equalled. It remains the most popular medium combining images, sounds and written messages. The success of advertisements demands a sharp inventiveness from advert designers as they need to capture the attention of television viewers during the pause moment specifically created for purposes of advertising. Thus the format and length of TV advertisements, from 10 seconds to one minute or more, depends on the channel and the time of broadcast, for the success of TV adverts lies in their ability to attract and persuade viewers, who generally become inattentive during this particular moment. Advert designers thus have to be resourceful in transmitting the value and interest of a product in an extremely short time. The impact of TV advertising has become a crucial and mandatory step in the introduction of a new item as well as maintaining consumer interest in established products. It is almost as though TV advertising can act as reminder to consumers about the credibility and place of products in their everyday life. Television advertisements can then be regarded as playing an essential role in making products known to viewers and their impact on assessing consumer behaviour patterns can also not be ignored. TV ads like print and radio advertisement that aim at making products an integral part of a person’s quotidian can be seen as a performance as they stage life, as it is assumed to be, as it seems desirable, as it could become. They play on emotions, on attitudes, on rapports and relations that viewers can engage in, are part of, or desire to become part of. It does this by creating scenarios that reflect the aspirations of viewers or comforts them in the choices they have already made.

Advert designers are guided by a basic principle of making people into potential consumers of products they create advertisements for. The ingenious ad designer is aware of the importance in creating a relationship between the viewer/potential consumer and the product. In achieving this, the potential consumer is very often overtly or subtly written into an advert. The product advertised is supposed to say something about the user, address certain needs, or fulfil a desire. Very often, TV adverts are not about the product but about people in different life situations. Such advertisements feature and use the human body, as the object to which the product is destined, as the instrument that will handle the product and suggest that it must be bought. The majority of TV ads use the human body as the primary vehicle of communicating product information and since products advertised are to be consumed in different ways, the advertisements have to reflect this. They show body movements meant to create links at several levels: links between persons and things seen on the screen, as well as links between what is presented on the screen and people in front of the screen. In TV ads, the body is fully revealed as a complex system of signs, a symbolic structure that underpins the relationship of the individual to the world. Cultures and social organisations fashion bodies: they inscribe on their surface conditions and statuses, belongings and identities, and they invest them with imaginary constructions. “The body metaphorises the social, and the social metaphorises the body. Within the realm of the body, social and cultural issues are symbolically enacted.” (Le Breton 2000: 88) From bodies emanate meanings which are highly suggestive as they more or less explicitly titillate sexually driven desires and evoke hidden memories of childhood experiences. Even words have to be embodied to make sense and generate human ties (Dolto 1984).

Bodies in South Africa

Uses and representations of the body in the making and screening of television advertisements in South Africa largely reflect the socio-cultural milieu of the country. From the moment of first contact between the white Dutch sailors led by Jan van Riebeeck and the indigenous peoples of the Cape in 1652 to the abolition of apartheid in 1994, the body was used as the primary instrument of differentiation. The construction of difference that ensued was based on visual perceptions of each other, making the colour of one’s skin and the shape and form of one’s phenotypical features the basic measure in the politics of discrimination. The body, thus, became the indicator of privilege and subordination.

People were hence classified and placed into different categories because body type, skin colour and other physical characteristics were used to determine the degree of "civilisation" of the other (Todorov:1996) . The colonial experience for all indigenous peoples was humiliating and degrading as an individual's worth was determined through physical attributes: the coloniser was always the better.

From the moment of contact between the coloniser and the colonised, the body was used as an instrument to classify people into different categories. In South Africa until the formal abolition of apartheid in 1994 people were classified into different categories first according to the body phenotype. Within this classification which the apartheid ideologues "refined" over time, the body was the instrument they exploited to "emphasise" their superiority. Yet, they too had to admit that the contact between their ancestors and the indigenous people produced a body type that was "new". In their endeavour to maintain the "pristine" and "pure" shape of the white collective body, they needed to keep the menacing "other" out. It was during the apartheid era that determining a person's whiteness or blackness became a pseudo-scientific exercise where hair, nose and body language were used as indicators of measure. These indices were applied to determine the "true" nature of the person under examination. Thus, by the sole judgment of the investigating officer, a person's nature could officially change and persons previously classified as "white" could become "black", and vice versa. The colour of a person's body thus became the business of the apartheid state as families would be broken up to satisfy the perverse idea of racial purity. According to the apartheid understanding of race and community, it was the state that determined social and racial memberships of each citizen. The most obvious way was the Population Registration Act of 1950, where each South African was classified according to their physical characteristics. The purpose of such intricate classification of ordinary South Africans based on bodily appearances was designed to protect and promote the "superiority" and "purity" of whiteness. The law and ruling social conventions therefore dictated that all social interactions — and indeed sexual intercourse — be governed by classification based on skin colour and bodily appearances. The vast majority of "interracial" contacts were officially limited to uneven or skewed working relations where the physical appearances of an individual determined the highest post she or he could occupy.

In their concern to keep the races apart, the various governments under the apartheid regime exercised rigid control over the media. For many decades after televisual broadcast had been become part of the quotidian in Europe and North America, the South African state still continued to view it as a social "evil" and was finally

inaugurated in South Africa on 5 January 1976. It was also the year of the Soweto uprising which heralded the decline and finally the end of the apartheid state in 1994. The apartheid state resisted the introduction of television broadcast as it was afraid of the impact it might have on its policies of segregation. The apartheid state was founded on principles of control and coercion as it sought to control even the most intimate aspects of human life when it criminalised all forms of interaction between blacks and whites. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (Act n°55 of 1949), the Immorality Amendment Act (Act n°21 of 1950), the Population Registration Act (Act n°30 of 1950), and the Group Areas Act (Act n°41 of 1950) which laid the foundation of segregation were also used in the broadcast and entertainment sectors. Radio stations were specifically designed for different races and ethnic groups as the state fanatically believed that blacks and whites lived in their own worlds without any possibilities of exchange of ideas or of contact between these two worlds. In this worldview blacks and whites had to be separated and blacks had to accept the superiority of the white race. Cinemas and films had to reflect this, and to ensure this became the task of the Censorship Board.

In the Nationalist logic of segregation where knowledge was racialised, films from abroad could not be viewed by all. All films entering the country were screened for appropriateness by the Censorship Board. “Offensive” parts were cut and films were classified as viewing for all or as viewing for whites only. Films like Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? (United States, 1967, directed by Stanley Kramer) with an overtly race mixing theme were banned for all. Instead a South African made film like Katrina (South Africa, 1969, directed by Jans Rautenbach) that made the phenomenon of passing a sin and punishable by law endorsed the apartheid state’s racial ideology and was meant for all. In its zeal to implement its ideology and its worldview the apartheid state used everything — from legal instruments to illegal methods — to enforce the separation of “races”, the internalisation of racial hierarchies, and the racialisation of knowledge. In their fanaticism films were scrutinised to ensure that those selected for blacks would not corrupt the design of the apartheid state and its ideologues, which was to protect the endangered purity of the white race by any form of contact, even on screen. Nothing was to interfere with this project and, within the ideology of apartheid, television was interpreted as a danger rather than the introduction of advanced technology. The reasoning behind this was that it was much easier to control films through the censorship board and cinemas were automatically segregated through apartheid laws. If the apartheid state could have used technology to beam different programmes to different people based on the colour of their skin, it would have adopted and even refined such technology for it would have complemented its ideology.

During the apartheid era, the South African government regarded television as a threat for a society organised along racial lines. They were concerned, that unlike in the milieu of the cinema where racially segregated viewing could be enforced and controlled, television could actually undo their racially constructed fortress. Technically speaking, it was possible to control the transmission of all programmes through the Censorship Board but, they could not risk, nor imagine depriving White audiences of "quality" programmes. Furthermore, the state was anxious that not being able to control the content of programmes, foreign images of "interracial" contacts would eventually reach South African screens. Such concerns were discussed in Parliament and were cited as reasons to delay, even prevent, the introduction of television in the country. Dr. Albert Hertzog, who was Minister of Posts and Telecommunications in the 1960s and who vehemently opposed the introduction of television, related the following scenario to Members of Parliament in 1964: "It is afternoon and the Bantu house-boy is in the living room cleaning the carpet. Someone has left the television set on. The house-boy looks up at the screen, sees a chorus line of white girls in scanty costumes. Suddenly, seized by lust, he runs upstairs and rapes the madam." (cited in Nixon 1994: 52)

Not being able to counter the reality that television was part of a technological savvy state and neither being able to resist the demand for its introduction, the government eventually decided in favour of it but tried to control the screening of programmes as tightly as possible and to turn them into ideological propaganda instruments that would exacerbate cultural and linguistic cleavages between "racial groups". Comforted by this idea of controlling the content of programmes, SATV was launched in 1976; and TV 2/3, which was specifically directed at black audiences, in 1982.

The introduction of television in the country soon became anathema to the state as it was not the static medium they thought they could engineer and control. While the authorities could control the content of programmes broadcast, the funds to maintain the television broadcast centre or permit the purchase of foreign programmes and even the financing of locally made programmes required television as a broadcast station to generate its own revenue as the state could not possibly fund the entire TV broadcast budget. The state had no option but to allow the private sector to enter the domain of television in the same way that it allowed it be part of radio broadcast for example. The success of TV broadcast impacted seriously on other forms of media as they were soon compelled to compete against the popularity of the television. Furthermore the media was also affected by the political, social and economic events in South Africa from the mid-1970s. Such news had to be relayed to the public even in the form of state propaganda

but could not be ignored and as students of communication have rightfully argued such events and their communication did play a leading role in the South African transition (Jacobs 2003: 30). After 1990, the SABC was reorganised; programmes were opened to local and international realities; its language policy was revolutionised; new faces appeared on the screen in previously unseen situations. Local soap operas such as Suburban Bliss, Generations and Yizo Yizo engaged crucial issues regarding the organisation and the transformation of South African society, featuring actors belonging to all categories of the population and speaking many of the 11 national languages (Letsie 2005; Smith 2003; Teer-Tomaselli 2001). The number of TV viewers increased considerably and accordingly in 1992, for the first time, television advertisements became more profitable than advertisements in the printed media (Cros 1998: 390).

Media advertising too was an area of concern for those politicians in the apartheid state afraid of a perceived "negative" impact it could have on housewives as they would neglect the inner sanctum of the family by desiring the commodities advertised. W.C. du Plessis warned Parliament in 1953 of the spiritual dangers he perceived in advertising (Nixon 1994: 53), a sentiment and belief also shared by Albert Herzog. It was politicians like them who were not only slaves to the apartheid ideology of racial segregation but saw danger in everything they could not control. In the case of advertising, it would corrupt the image of Afrikaner women as the volksmoeder (the mother of the nation and imbued with high sense of Christian Nationalist values) and also give blacks the "wrong" idea about becoming western (Nixon 1994: 65). Thus delaying or even preventing television broadcast and questioning the merits of advertising were done to maintain racial segregation. But this status quo could not last as advertising generated much needed revenue to sustain media broadcast. Advertising, unlike radio or television broadcast, was uniquely market oriented and this carried a clout that could not be ignored.

Advertising agencies during the apartheid era had to observe the state's ideology of racial segregation. Blacks and whites, when they appeared in the same commercial, had to be segregated or seen as upholding the laws of the country even if the object of advertising was to make products interesting and attractive to viewers as they are always in search of bigger markets. Even before 1990, advertising agencies in South Africa needed to circumvent the apartheid laws to broaden their markets. They needed to design advertisements that would appeal to both black and white audiences without having to make separate adverts for racially identified consumers. Advertising agencies were adopting a global approach and for some of the products were opting for a more systematized approach. This approach allowed advert designers to experiment with

original copy strategies and scenarios that were more attuned to the realities of a rapidly transforming society.

After 1990, changes indeed took place in the advertising industry; today, even if it is still largely controlled by foreign corporations, blacks are beginning to make inroads and many are in decision making positions in a sector previously dominated by whites. In addition to this we also find ad agencies formed by entrepreneurial blacks who were previously locked out of this sector. Despite these changes within the advertising world, advertisements in the press have fewer images of blacks than whites and continue to reflect images that are still very much part of a system “normalising” old stereotypes about race and gender (Øverland 2003).

In such contradictory contexts, where the ad agencies are looking to include blacks but continue to produce commercials that still follow − what can best be described as − a tried and tested format from the past era, advertisements can be seen as interesting indicators of change. Today, more than ever in the history of advertising in South Africa, social representations and a politically correct demographic profiling informs the logic of designing advertisements. The place of television in the lives of South Africans, the specificities of this media (concurrent transmission of images, sounds and written texts) as well as of TV programmes, we believed, would provide a good field where to search for social representations. We then decided to focus on advertisements because realities and ideologies — as they exist in one given moment of social evolution —, aspirations, desires and dreams — which spur social change — have all to be taken into account in the conception and production of promotional clips. The format of TV ads also influenced our decision as they have to condense in a very short time a fictional scenario showing the world as it is and as it could become, in order to make a product desirable in the one, the other or both the depicted worlds. This is achieved through a technique of repetition and novel depictions of a familiar world which actually work to reinforce positive features of the advertised product. This method of communicating with the viewers using their world is explained by Stuart Hall (1980) as processes of encoding and decoding messages, blending world visions and desirability of goods condensed in ways that may make it easier to detect social representations.

Representations

A two pronged method can be used to capture elements of social representations in cultural productions and like Roland Barthes we too consider that some of the most fascinating contemporary “myths” could be found in advertisement: “myths” where meaning and form play hide-and-seek and where ideas are literally shaped. He showed that ads could be analysed using the tools of semiology (Barthes 1957). The first treatment of promotional clips, in the perspective of a research on social representations, consists of a semiological analysis of selected TV commercials. It allows analysts to propose their own interpretations of representations communicated in advertisements. This first phase of interpretive analysis, which is legitimately based on “cultured intuition” and rigorous method, is however not fully satisfying when dealing with social representations because it does not cover the whole process of “encoding/decoding” and fails to deal with the “decoding” part of the process. For, at that stage, the viewers/consumers do not only decipher the message as it was intended by the producers and transmitters appropriate it, accept it or reject it in part or in totality; they react to it and decide to forget it, make a note of it or to act on the basis not of what the producers and transmitters proposed, but on the basis of what they make of it, and of what they hope to do with it. This is true of the promotional dimension of an advertisement: the consumers remember it or forget it; decide to buy the product, or not, or maybe later. It is equally true of its “representational” dimension: viewers/citizens interiorise it, or not; accept its suggestions, or not; modify the social representations already present in their mind, or not; choose to adhere to and use whatever new representation may appear in the process, or not.

The methods that can be used to include the “decoding” phase of the process of communication are tightly related to the definition of social representations. “Representation, Stuart Hall suggests, is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the "real" world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people or events.” (Hall 1997: 17, emphasis in the original) Concepts are organised in “conceptual maps” which are shared among members of the same group and language is here considered as a signifying practice in a very broad and inclusive way, encompassing not only verbal language but other means of expression. This definition of representation can be refined by using the works of French sociologists and psycho-sociologists. In their acceptation, social representations are “[…] the product

of and the process through which an individual or a group reconstruct the reality with which they are confronted and give it a specific meaning." (Abric 1993: 188) This process produces a form of common knowledge, a code that enables individuals or groups to make sense of the world. "[R]epresentations reveal part of the systems of meanings and values through which social actors perceive who they are and what they do." (Donégani, Duchesne & Haegel 2002: 275) They are geared towards practice and therefore dynamically associate a mental activity, expressions through various languages and action decided upon with regards to collective meanings attributed to society and its organisation (Jodelet 1993; Mannoni 1998). The relationship between "conceptual maps", mental processes producing meanings, on the one hand, and expression through languages accompanying or leading to actions, on the other, is one of symbolisation (Jodelet 1993: 43). Social representations are closely related to symbolic organisations. "These organisations encompass perceptions of political universes, in a narrow understanding, but cannot be reduced to them. They consist, more broadly, in (unevenly structured) systems of representation of society, of convictions (and feelings) regarding what is legitimate, and what is not; what is thinkable, and what is not; what is real, and what is illusory; they touch upon conceptions about fate and existence […] These organisations remain mostly implicit [...]" (Michelat & Simon 1985 : 32) What bears on the choice of methods to be used in a study of social representation is the fact that, as "conceptual maps", as "mental processes" they remain largely implicit. When they are expressed, it is usually in a fragmentary fashion and through symbolic languages.

Non-directive Methods

Symbolic analysis which forms the core of the semiological analysis is what analysts use to construct their interpretations. But, for analysts to reach the "concepts" which are in the "minds" of people requires other mechanisms which would stimulate the utterance through verbal language, and in forms that can be recorded Semiological and symbolical analysis must be complemented by non-directive interviews, as in the present case with viewers of TV ads. From his clinical experience as a psychotherapist, Carl Rogers suggested, in 1945, that the non-directive method could also be useful as a technique for social research. "[I]t gets, he argued, at deep attitudes of the person interviewed without injecting the bias on the part of the interviewer. It is especially valuable in attitude surveys and research in personality." (Rogers 1945: 279) He

confirmed conclusions drawn by sociologists of the Chicago school after a survey conducted at the Western Electric (Roethlisberger & Dickson 1943). It is now generally agreed that non-directive interviews are the most appropriate survey method for research on systems of representations and values, on symbolic expressions, on the affective dimensions of social conducts. It is also considered that, because they reach the level where social forces and individual subjectivities interplay, they can lead to the apprehension of the cultural models of a society as construed and carried by its members (Donégani, Duchesne & Haegel 2002: 275; Maître 1975: 254-5255). In non-directive interviews, the interviewee is given the role usually played by the investigator in other types of interviews. The interviewee is treated as the bearer of the knowledge, both individual and collective, which the researcher is trying to reach. The probing becomes the preserve of social actors; the role of the interviewer is to stimulate and support the free flow of the interviewee's ideas, and to accompany the discovery of usually undisclosed attitudes, perceptions and opinions in a way that allows the expression of ambivalences and contradictions (Duchesne 2000).

Non-directive interviews usually begin with a prompt, the one and only question the interviewer is generally supposed to ask (although the imperative of communication between interviewer and interviewee implies that exchanges are necessary, even if the investigator must try to avoid sending the interviewee in a direction he or she has not freely chosen). However, in research on particular topics, projective tests can be substituted for the verbal prompt. Pictures, sound recordings, videos can be used as stimuli to facilitate the discourse of the interviewee (Lavabre 2002). We thought that TV commercials could also very well be used to start non-directive interviews aiming at collecting elements of social representations in a period of intense social transformation.

Non-directive interviews are generally conducted in face to face situations. They can also be organised as non-directive collective interviews. In a situation of collective interview, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee becomes less formal, and evades more easily social preconceptions (due to differences in education, in social origin, in familiarity with power) that may cause interferences in their interaction. In a non-directive collective interview, the discussion is driven by the internal dynamics of the group; it develops mainly in the form of exchanges between participants and produces a collective discourse that is very rich in traces of social representations (Yannopoulos & Martin 1978). The method has a "liberating effect" and is particularly adapted when researchers look for what social norms tend to hide and make hardly accessible, for shared social meanings and visions, especially when they are replete with ambivalences

and contradictions (Duchesne & Haegel 2005). This is why we decided to use non-directive collective interviews in our research on social representations in South African TV advertisements.

We proceeded as follows: First, we videotaped primetime programmes on the public television channels SABC 1, 2, and 3, then we carefully watched all the commercial breaks included in and between these programmes, and we eventually selected four promotional clips. The selection was necessarily subjective (that is, it took place at the meeting point of two subjectivities: one female South African and one male French) and was based on what seemed interesting to us in terms of bodily presentations and interactions between characters belonging to the various groups distinguished during apartheid. The advertisement clips were used as prompts to trigger discussions among the participants in three groups which we organised in Gauteng, South Africa. One of the groups was composed of young men from Mamelodi (an African township located a few kilometres to the East of Pretoria); the two others of students, from the University of the Witwatersrand (a formerly "white", English speaking university, with a reputation of opposition to apartheid), and from the University of Johannesburg (at the time of the interviews, it was still the Rand Afrikaans University, (a formerly "white" Afrikaans speaking university with a reputation of having supported the apartheid regime). A test group was organised in Paris, with French students viewing the same clips as their South African counterparts. This was done to check convergences and divergences in representations of South Africa held by South Africans and by foreigners. The selected advertisements were subjected to a semiological analysis. The collective interviews were taped and transcribed, and analysed. In qualitative research using non-directive methods, statistical representativity is not an issue because it is not the number of individuals interviewed that matters but the in-depth character of the interview: the enunciation in a particular situation of a specific discourse — abounding with elements of cultural models and social representations — by people who are treated as spokespersons for the groups they belong to (Beaud 1996; Duchesne 2000). However, in the present study, if the number of interviewees complies with the heuristic conditions of a non-directive investigation, it may appear that they are not diverse enough (Duchesne 2000: 12). While we acknowledge this flaw, we do not consider it as invalidating our research.

Our aim is not to offer a comprehensive reconstruction of social representations of a transforming South African society — but we hope that that this work would contribute to a better understanding of such representations. Given the limited means with which it was undertaken and the deliberately narrow scope of the investigation, we primarily want to

draw attention to the potential of a type of method (a study of cultural production combining semiology and non-directive collective interviews) that is hardly used in the analysis of changes of social perceptions. We hope that the detailed description of our study which follows, and the conclusions we draw from it, will support our assumptions.

To select the commercials we wished to use as prompts for the non-directive collective interviews, we videotaped prime time programmes twice on each of the public television channels: SABC 1, 2 and 3. “Prime time”, being the time when the majority of TV viewers belonging to all categories of consumers are watching television, this is also the time of day when interested companies and individuals want their ads to be broadcast, especially if they hope to increase the impact of the product in the hearts and minds of the general public. We therefore argue that commercials/advertisements inserted in and between prime time programmes would be the most representative as they are the most likely to display changes in representations of South African society. The videotaping took place in July 2003 as both of us were in Pretoria and could work together. Not having professional equipment at our disposal, we used the humble home VCR to record the programmes and to analyse the same. The drawback of this method was that we did not have the possibility of time coding the cassettes, with the result that all indications of time and duration are approximates. However, we do not think it in any way affects the content of our analysis.

Selecting the Ads

To select the advertisements we would be using, we needed to record them during prime time viewing. This process was started on Monday, July 7 (SABC 1) and Tuesday, July 8 (SABC 2), from 6 to 8pm. On realising that the number of advertisements during the 6 to 8 pm slot were not enough, required us to augment the choice of advertisements by increasing the recording time to 9pm. Consequently, we continued on Wednesday, July 9 (SABC 2), Thursday, July 10 (SABC 3), Sunday, July 13 (SABC 1), and Monday, July 14 (SABC 3), from 6 to 9 pm. In total, we recorded 16 hours of TV programmes composed of soap operas — foreign and South African programmes (like the popular The Bold and the Beautiful, Generations, Isindigo, and 7de Laan) —, games, comedies, variety shows, and films. The news, read at 7 or 7:30 pm., indeed occupied a focal position in these programmes.

In South Africa, as almost everywhere in the world, programmes are frequently interrupted by commercial breaks. On average, there were four or five commercial breaks per hour, which meant that across the three national channels, an average of 13 ads were shown every hour. The duration of the ads varied from 5 seconds to 2 minutes, the most frequent formats being 30 and 40 seconds. In the programmes we taped, the peak occurred on Monday, July 14, with 17,33 ads/hour, while there was a low of 6,33/hour on Sunday, July 13. On the average, the commercials occupied 6'30" of every hour of the prime time programmes we recorded, with, again, a maximum of 8'36" on Monday, July 14, and a minimum of 2'50" on Sunday, July 13. We did not take into account programme announcements, teasers or information announcing the sponsor of a particular programme.

SABC 1, MONDAY, JULY 7, 2003, 18-20h

- 8 commercial breaks = 4 / hour
- 19 ads = 9.5 / hour
- total duration: 10' = 5' / hour
- shortest ad: 10"
- longest ad: 1 minute

SABC 2, TUESDAY, JULY 8, 2003, 18-20h

- 8 commercial breaks = 4 / hour
- 28 ads = 14 / hour
- total duration: 13'10 = 6'35 / hour
- shortest ad: 10"
- longest ad: 1 minute

SABC 2, WEDNESDAY, JULY 9, 2003, 18-21h

- 13 commercial breaks = 4,33/hour
- 46 ads = 15,33/hour
- total duration: 26'= 8'40/hour
- shortest ad: 10"
- longest ad: 2 minutes

SABC 3, THURSDAY, JULY 10, 18-21

- 13 commercial breaks = 4,33 / hour
- 43 ads = 14,33 / hour
- total duration: 20'45 = 6'55 / hour
- shortest ad: 5"
- longest ad: 2 minutes

SABC 1, SUNDAY, JULY, 13, 2003, 18-21h

- 11 commercial breaks = 3,66 / hour
- 19 ads = 6,33 / hour
- total duration: 8'30 = 2'50 / hour
- shortest ad: 10"
- longest ad: 45"

SABC 3, MONDAY, JULY, 14, 2003, 18-21h

- 15 commercial breaks = 5 / hour
- 52 ads = 17,33/hour
- total duration: 25'20 = 8'36 / hour
- shortest ad: 10"
- longest ad: 2 minutes

SUMMARY

Between 4 and 5 commercial breaks / hour
- minimum: Sunday 13, SABC 1 = 3,66 / hour
- maximum: Monday 14, SABC 3 = 5 / hour

On average 13 ads / hour
- minimum: Sunday 13, SABC 1 = 6,33 / hour
- maximum: Monday 14, SABC 3 =17,33 / hour

On average 6'29" of commercials / hour
- minimum: Sunday 13, SABC 1 = 2'50" / hour
- maximum: Monday 14, SABC 3 = 8'36" / hour

Shortest ad: 5"
Longest ad: 2 minutes

Total number of commercials: 207
Number of different ads: 126
Ads shown only once: 86

During the 16 hours of prime time programmes we videotaped, 207 promotional clips were shown, which, when repetitions are taken into account, meant that we had to choose from 126 different ads. We watched these clips several times and selected those that met the following criteria: the ads had to display a situation that could be identified as South African and they had to be English speaking; they had to include human beings belonging to two or more of the various "population groups", as defined by apartheid Population Registration Act of 1950 and they had to show a certain amount of body movements. On this basis, we first short listed 16 clips to eventually arrive at a selection of four ads which offered the criteria we wanted to use as prompts for the non-directive collective interviews. One of them was broadcast three times on SABC 2 and 3, and also had an Afrikaans version shown on SABC 2. One was shown twice, on SABC 2 and SABC 3. Two were shown only once, on SABC 1, and on SABC 2 respectively. Their length ranged from 15" to 45". They advertised extremely different products: a generic material, glass, a banking service, a brand of soap, and a beer.

To analyse the ads, we drew inspiration from methods of the semiology of cinema, as proposed by Christian Metz (1968, 1972) and Odile Bachler (1988). The four basic elements composing a film (images, sounds and music, speech, and written messages) were treated separately, and then reassembled in the analysis. The structure of the clips, the symbolism of the images, and the position of written messages were analysed by

viewing the clips shot after shot. The correspondence of spoken commentaries and dialogues, and sounds and music, with the images was double-checked in additional viewings.

SELECTED ADS[4]

CONSOL GLASS (30”):

- Tuesday, July 8, ca. 18h43, SABC 2, inserted in *Once and Again* (American soap opera)

FIRST NATIONAL BANK (30”):

- Tuesday, July 8, ca. 18h44, SABC 2, inserted in *Once and Again* (American soap opera)
- Wednesday, July 9, ca. 18h10, SABC 2, inserted in *Geraas* (variety and music show, South African in Afrikaans)
- Thursday, July 13, ca. 19h27, SABC 3, between end of *News at 7* and weather report
- Thursday, July 13, ca. 20h43, SABC 3, inserted in *Guiness World Records*

VASELINE INTENSIVE CARE (15”):

- Wednesday, July 9, ca. 20h41, SABC 2, inserted in *Ditaba / Dikgang* (news)
- Monday, July 14, ca. 18h50, SABC 3, inserted in *Isindigo* (South African soap opera)

CARLING BLACK LABEL (45”):

- Sunday, July 13, ca. 19h26, SABC 1, inserted in *Let’s Talk / Asikhlume* (current affairs programme)

[4] In spite of our efforts, we have not been able to locate the owners of the rights of the commercials included in this document. If any of these owners object to our showing the commercial clips online, they should kindly contact the Director of CERI, at: info@ceri-sciences-po.org

Projecting the New South Africa

Consol Glass

Abstract

A young white fair haired man is seated on a sofa; he holds an almost empty bottle, without any label, in one hand. At first, he seems sleepy, and then he starts striking the bottle and plays a regular beat. The camera moves on and shows another young white man, with brownish hair, who also holds a bottle and seems sleepy. But the latter awakens when he hears the beat played by the first man. He clinks his bottle with the one hold by the fair haired man, as if he wanted to hob-nob with him (shots 1 and 2). A male voice over emits a satisfied “Hmmmm”. Then the camera shows a young black woman who starts to smile. It comes back on the brown haired man who begins tinkling his bottle with his ring. A female voice over says “Heeyy”. The camera moves on again and shows a smiling black man who also holds a bottle; then, sitting on a sofa, next to him, another young black woman (shots 3-6). Two hands beating on a large metal can are shown in the next shot. In addition to the beat coming from the metal box, a rhythm box is now heard (shot 7). The camera moves towards yet another young black woman who whistles in a bottle and makes sounds that complement the rhythmic pattern already produced by the combination of struck bottles, beaten can, and the rhythm box (shot 8). Then appears a young white man with a guitar; he plays a three notes melody that comes over the rhythmic pattern (shot 9). Another black woman strikes a bottle (shots 10 and 11). The camera comes back to the guitar player (shot 12), and then focuses on a young smiling black man wearing dreadlocks (shot 13). The different characters are shown, one after the

other, expressing joy and pleasure, some of them beating rhythms, the guitarist playing his instrument. The movements of the camera are swift and fast, shots become shorter (less than 1 second), and the editing suggests a scene where all the characters are gathered, play music and enjoy themselves together (shots 14-22). In the two final shots, first a black couple moves as if dancing, the woman clapping her hands, both seeming totally elated (shot 23); then a young white woman blows a bottle, smiles, and finally the punchline is revealed in surimpression: "Consol Glass / IT'S GOOD. IT'S IN GLASS." (shot 24)

Analysis

The Consol Glass clip runs for 30 seconds and comprises 24 shots. Although there are lots of camera movements and cuts, and its aesthetic is clearly influenced by musical clips (and by Coca Cola TV ads), the rhythm given by the editing is moderate, gentler than in most musical videos, a little faster towards the end. Music does play a central role in this ad. There are no commentaries, no dialogues; a voice over twice emits sounds connoting joy, happiness and contentment. Music — first a beat, then a rhythmic pattern, to which is finally added a melodic dimension with the guitar — is actually the red thread running through the ad, leading to the punch line in which, at the very end only, the product being advertised is revealed. The whole scenario is organised to create a surprise. It evokes advertisements for soft drinks, but the bottles bear no label. The idea is to associate youth (black and white), shared enjoyment (making music together) and glass, thereby conferring qualities of modernity, playability, and adaptability to the material (faced with a strong competition from synthetic products that may be considered more "modern"). At the beginning, the characters look sleepy. Glass (beats struck on the bottle) awakens them and arouses pleasure. The joy is communicative and passes from youth to youth, from boys to girls, from whites to blacks. The pleasure is fully shared in the communion of rhythm. It generates music: a melody is added, and the various characters revel in it, in full "harmony".

The social image that this commercial projects when viewed in normal conditions of TV watching is one of a happy reunion where young whites and blacks can share the pleasures of making music, enjoying it and dancing to it. It seems to be fully congruent with the idea of the new South Africa: a "Rainbow Nation", young, dynamic, and resourceful. However, this image is constructed by using techniques which truly belong to the "old" South Africa. A viewing of the ad shot after shot reveals that the impression of togetherness is artificially created by the editing, but that in reality blacks and whites are never shown within the same shot. Characters are filmed in close-up; the camera focuses

on faces, hands, occasionally a leg, and there are never more than three persons within the same shot; this may result from a deliberate aesthetic choice, the consequence nevertheless is that, even where two or three characters appear within the same frame, they are all either black or white. Also, even if whites initiate the rhythm from which music will emerge, it is only in shots 7 and 8, when the focus is on blacks, that the rhythm pattern emerges, and then, when a white boy plays the guitar (shot 9), that music is fully realised. As in conventional stereotypes, blacks are associated with rhythm and whites with melody.

The Consol Glass ad is very interesting in that it attempts to project a social image which seems aligned with the official ideology of a transforming South Africa, yet it relies on techniques and stereotypes which in fact contradict the ideology of transformation it seeks to promote.

First National Bank

Abstract

The ad opens on a view of a security room in an unidentified building, probably a shopping mall. The camera moves around and stops on a series of 6 monitors, on top of which are a cap and a walkie-talkie. The monitors are placed on a table, on which can also be seen two mugs and a bludgeon. The camera continues to move and shows the two security guards who watch the monitors. One is black, the other white; they wear the same uniform (shot 1). The camera then focuses on one of the monitors where two ATM booths appear, with a sign “BOB”, alongside the First National Bank logo (a black tree

with an orange sun in the background). Two men are using the machines in the booths. A voice over says “Introducing the First National bank ATM cash…” The man in the left booth turns around and goes out looking at a slip. The voice over continues “…bonanza you can win your share of over…” He then starts a series of gestures which cannot be clearly identified, but may evoke movements in a break-dance or robot dance. He goes out of sight while the voice over goes on: “…one million rands a month simply by making a cash withdrawal at any BOB ATM using your FNB ATM…” In the meantime, the man in the right booth also came out and watched the other man’s antics (shot 2). The two security guards are shown next, their heads slightly bent, expressing dubitation. The voice over concludes “…card.” The black watchman asks “Eish… where does he come from?” The white watchman signals he has no idea and shrugs his shoulders (shot 3). The ad ends on a general view of the security room, with a small superimposition that reads “Valid until 31 July 2003” (shot 4), followed by the FNB logo in full frame, with a superimposition of the motto: “How can we help you?” duplicated by the voice over which says: “First National Bank how can we help you?” (shot 5)

Analysis

The whole scenario is based on the contrast between dullness and a strange vivacity signifying a joyous surprise. Places shown in the commercial are gloomy: the unidentified hall where the ATMs are located — it could be the entrance of a parking lot, or of a commercial mall — and the security room. This impression is reinforced by the slowness of rhythm the editing confers to the images — five long shots, with slow camera moves, in 30 seconds —, the thick imperviousness of the guards, the impersonality of the voice over which sounds like recorded voices one can hear making public announcements in an airport or a commercial mall, and the unexciting musical background sounding like an asthenic Lionel Hampton orchestra. In a striking contrast, the winning customer wears an orange shirt — the colour of the sun in the FNB logo — and moves rapidly, with jerky movements. The place does not look specifically South African; the winner’s dance cannot be related to any particular origin. However, consumerism, winning money, and security are very much part of life in today’s South Africa. What makes the scene unmistakably South African is the way the black watchman says “Eish…” Then, everything falls into place, and the message begins to be understandable, beyond the plain commentary of the voice over. The scene takes place in the new South Africa, where security is a problem and where white and black people can work together, at the same level, without considerations of hierarchy. In this society where money is important, to become rich is a matter of luck and ingenuity. It is smart to be a FNB customer, as FNB really takes care of its clients. In addition to that, FNB is the bringer of luck because it affords its customers

the opportunity to participate in a lottery draw whenever they withdraw cash from their BOB/ATM machines. Although the winner in the clip looks rather white, it is the aborted dialogue between the security guards that gives the most important clue as to the meaning of the intended message: they do not know where he comes from. Wherever he comes from and whoever he may be — as defined by the previous regime —, he is entitled to win and the only "identity" that matters is to be a FNB "card carrying" person: the only "positive" affiliation that may bring happiness and wealth.

The FNB ad shows South Africa as a consumer society where money matters, and where chance can make this happen. This society is now an egalitarian one where people from different backgrounds work together for the safety of all, and where all, irrespective of their origins, can benefit from the good fortunes, as long as they are the faithful customers of a bank…

Vaseline Intensive Care

Abstract

The first shot shows the face of a white man, slightly from behind, and the face of a black woman, who turns her head to look and smile at the man. Her gaze seems unfocussed and she seems to be looking at the same time at the man and at the camera. The shot fades to black and a voice over says "Now there is something completely new…" (shot 1) Then the woman is shown showering and the voice over continues "…from Vaseline Intensive Care:…" (shot 2) A cross fade brings the focus on the woman's soapy hand, then on her neck and the upper part of her bust; her hand moves towards the right

and in the space liberated appears in : “1. washes away germs”; during this shot, the voice over says: “…a soap. Not only Vaseline Dual…” (shot 3) Then slow camera movements discover the woman’s left shoulder, the lower part of her face, part of her right breast, her bust covered by a bath towel; another superimposition appears: “2. keeps in your skin moisture”; the woman’s hand slowly slides out of the frame until only her forefinger remains visible; the voice over goes on: “…Action soap washes away germs but it also keeps in…” (shot 4) In the following shot, the woman is back where she was in the first shot, facing the white man whose eyes are closed. She feels his face with her fingers as if she were caressing him or as if she were blind and trying to know who he is. He takes her hand and caresses her forearm; the voice over continues: “…your skin moisture…”; the woman keeps feeling/caressing the man’s face until her face appears in full frame, looking fixedly at the camera with a blank gaze but smiling; the voice over continues: “…New Dual Action soap…” (shots 5-7) Then the whole scene becomes visible: the place may be a café or a cafeteria; a group of people are seated around a coffee table on which lie magazines, a bowl and a glass. The “star” couple is holding hands and all, men and women, blacks and whites, look towards them; everyone starts laughing. The voice over concludes: “…from Vaseline Intensive Care.” (shot 8) The last shot shows water running down in a shower; the flow stops and five bars of soap are displayed, one of them unpacked. In the upper left corner of the screen “Dual Action” appears in superimposition, while the voice over gently intimates: “Take Vaseline Intensive Care of yourself.” (shot 9)

Analysis

This commercial is a typical soap advertisement. It displays images of a feminine body showering, with suggestive hand movements spreading creamy, supposedly alluring, foam on specific parts of the body, especially the face and the bust. The Vaseline ad remains fairly “decent” though, and does not show anything under the upper curve of a breast. It differs from most other soap ads in that it features a mixed couple in which the woman is blind. In the present clip her blindness is not obvious; but the clip we taped is actually the final part of a series of advertisements promoting this new Vaseline soap, and in the previous episodes it appeared clearly that the woman using the soap is blind. The scenario plays on the particular capacity for feeling, from “seeing with their fingers” blind persons have to develop. A blind woman therefore must know better than a seeing one what makes her skin, and other peoples’, soft and attractive. The ad wants to convey the idea that this new soap is both a pleasant soap — it smoothens the skin and keeps its moisture in — and an efficiently hygienic one — it washes away germs. And probably also that this is a soap men can use: if it is pleasant to touch the man’s skin, it’s certainly

because he too uses the soap. The clip advertises a new brand and the opening shot clearly associates this newness, not only with the product, but with the situation: the voice over emphatically declares “Now there is something completely new” while a black woman and a white man are shown together; a few shots later they will be shown holding hands, indicating that they are probably lovers. This double newness is a source of happiness: in a soft and peaceful atmosphere, undisturbed by the weak sounds of a mellow muzak, the couple is cheerful, and their friends seem to be in high spirits.

The use of a blind woman, in this ad (actually played by an American model) as the main character, carries several meanings in a country like South Africa. She definitely possesses a particular ability for reading and recognizing features and textures — good looks and smoothness — with her fingers. In addition to that, since she, a black woman, fondles a white man, it may also signify that South Africa has transformed to become colour blind. If this is the case, this “newness” is shown as not only decent, clean and healthy, but also as generating joy. The message in this ad can then also be seen in diametrically opposition to the apartheid era where a person’s skin colour was used do determine their degree of decency or hygiene.

Carling Black Label

Abstract

The ad opens by showing a savannah at dawn. We only see the feet of men walking alongside a thick wire. A deep male voice over begins: “Our company started…”; an electronic cloud serves as background music (shots 1 and 2). Then we see hands

typing on a laptop computer keyboard, and the camera moves up to “reveal” the face of a black man. The voice over continues: “… small…” (shot 3) The arms, then heads of black workers suggest they are involved in a serious collective activity ; a very South African sounding choir (harmonies inspired by Makwaya religious choirs and to some extent by Zulu ensembles such as Ladysmith Black Mambazo) accompanies them (and will keep on singing until shot 20), singing Siyenza, which means “we are doing it” in isiZulu (shot 4). Other workers are pictured busy with a large spool, wires, and various pieces of equipment; the wire moves forward (shots 5 and 6). An African looks into the eye-piece of a surveying instrument, while a white man looks on (shot 7). Arms of black workers manipulate tools that cannot be seen within the frame; the voice over continues “…but…” (shot 8). Hands are holding pens and drawing lines on a map; voice over: “…everyday we are…” (shot 9). Back to the scene in shot 8; voice over: “…taking…” (shot 10). Black and white arms pull together; voice over: “…a bigger challen…” (shot 11). They move the large wire spool, then in the background appears an electric pylon, and the black man who is leading the team; the voice over finishes: “…ge.” The foot of the pylon, besides which two workers are standing, is shown from above in a high-angle shot, then the camera moves around and zooms in a low-angle shot towards the top of the pylon (shots 12 and 13). A worker, wearing a helmet, signals something with his arm; another worker is shown at the top of the pylon; the camera focuses back on the foot of the pylon (shots 14 and 15). A white face from behind, then a black face also seen from behind appear, followed by two black and a white workers pushing together; then again, the man at the top of the pylon, a black worker handling an insulator, a wheel and a wire, and other black workers (shots 16-20). With shot 21, the musical background changes radically, the choir makes place for an orchestra with a brassy tone evoking a kind of triumphal march, as can be heard in Hollywood western or war films. This change announces the transition from sequences showing men at work to sequences showing them when their task is finished. The sun is setting, men working on the pylon come down after one of them has signalled with his thumb up that everything is OK, a signal mirrored by another worker tending an electric control board; all workers converge, while the camera shows the completed pylon on a background of savannah in the sunset (shots 22-28); the voice over resumes: “Men who meet the challenge head on…” (shots 29 and 30). Workers open a trunk; voice over: “…deserve…” (shot 31). The trunk contains bottles of beer; voice over: “…a beer…” (shot 32). An African worker puts on a clean T-shirt; voice over: “…that has taken…” (shot 33). A worker carries a crate of beers on a background of electric lines in the savannah; voice over: “…the world…” (shot 34) On the same background, a few workers are seated at a round table, others are coming to join them; voice over: “…and won.” (shot 35) The bottles are opened and the label is revealed: Black Label (shot 36). The men are drinking their

beers in a congenial atmosphere, behind them a line of mountains opposes a dark contrast to a purple sky, while in the plain electric lights are shining; the choir that was heard from shots 4 to 20 is discreetly brought back and merges with the orchestral music; the voice over resumes: “Carling Black Label…” (shot 37). Pictures of smiling faces and of beer bottles; voice over: “…more…” (shot 38). Laughing workers hob-nob with glasses and bottles; superposition: “Not for sale to persons under 18”; voice over: “…refreshment more reward…” (shots 39 and 40). A black worker drinks his beer and expresses total contentment; superposition: “Carling Black Label”; fade to black; voice over: “…at the end of the day.” (shot 41)

Analysis

The Carling Black Label is certainly the most elaborate ad in our sample. It lasts for 45” and contains 41 shots, many of them being one second or less, especially when they show men working on the pylon. The camera moves a lot, turns around, tilts up and down, suggesting energy, rapidity, and sometimes risk. The clip can be divided into an introduction, three parts, and a conclusion. The introduction (shots 1-4) shows need for modernisation and development, it juxtaposes an empty savannah with a computer; the setting is South Africa: a black engineer handles the computer, black men are shown at work, and the choir sounds unmistakably South African when it affirms “we are doing it”. The first part (shots 5-12) introduces the idea of a challenge, which the voice over emphasises (shots 9-12: “…everyday we are taking a bigger challenge.”) A difficult and dangerous one, that cannot be met but by the co-operation of everyone: blacks and whites, engineers and workers; and only co-operation can bring “light” to the country. The second part (shots 13-28) shows that the challenge can actually be met, that progress and development are indeed taking place, in spite of the risks. The third part (shots 29-36) suggests that a work well done, a challenge met deserve a reward: a Carling Black Label beer; then only (shot 36), is the product being advertised revealed: the clip does not promote the South African electricity company, Eskom, nor a construction company, but a drink of international standard (shots 32-35: “…a beer that has taken the world and won.”) The conclusion (shots 37-41) draws the lesson from the story told in the ad: not only does a work well done deserve a reward, in the form of an African beer of international repute shared by all who have contributed to completing the task, irrespective of rank or colour; it also brings moral satisfaction, because it means more people can enjoy the benefits of electricity, of “light”, and modern life. The superimposition in the last two shots (40 and 41) of the two musical backgrounds used in the clip — the choir signifying South Africa, and the orchestra accompanying the victorious challenge — suggests a South African success

story (“we are doing it” / we’ve done it). All South Africans can participate in the modernisation of the country and share the same pride, and the same beer...

This narrative of a day’s efforts illustrates the idea that a good beer is earned and is not a lazy person’s drink. It is actually a reward for intelligent and hard working people. Carling Black Label, the beer of intelligent and problem solving professionals, gives the themes of hard work, challenge and risk a broader meaning by associating them with development and modernisation, and also plays on sentiments of national pride. A South African beer has “taken the world and won”; similarly, if all South Africans team up and work (“do it”) together, they can bring the “light and benefits” of modernity to their underprivileged countrymen (who do not yet enjoy the advantages of electricity) and, possibly, ensure a better place for South Africa on the world scene. It is also an ad with only male characters, with the obvious message that Carling Black Label is the beer for brave, intelligent and industrious men.

Representations of South Africa

The four commercials in our sample carry representations of South Africa, more precisely of the new South Africa. This was one of the principal reasons why we selected them and no particular conclusion can therefore be drawn from this observation. What can be examined from these advertisements is the type of representations of South Africa they convey and the type of associations with the new South Africa they suggest.

Togetherness, Harmony, and Cooperation

The general image they offer is one of togetherness, harmony and co-operation: co-operation at work (FNB, Carling Black Label) leading to or juxtaposed with happiness; harmony in leisure (Consol Glass, Vaseline), associated with sharing and contact. When South Africans representing several of the groups that were isolated by apartheid are pictured together, the main themes behind the commercial messages are: communicative cheerfulness, through the medium of music (Consol Glass); equality before luck (FNB); newness of a situation allowing closer contact (Vaseline Intensive Care); modernisation and satisfaction derived from a work well done for the benefit of all (Carling Black Label).

The dramatic mechanisms used to reveal both the commercial messages and the underlying themes are diverse. Consol Glass is built on circulation and movement: from individual to individual, from drowsiness to creative activity. FNB plays on the contrast between boredom (security guards at the beginning, ATM customers, general environment) and interest aroused by surprise (security guards in the second part of the clip, winning customer, other customers). Vaseline Intensive Care alternates between focus on a social scene and focus on the product, gestures of contact (between the woman and the man; between the hand and the bust of the woman) creating the connection between the two. Carling Black Label relies upon a complete narrative development in which a day's work is fully described, from dawn to dusk; in which a project is fully realised, from surveying a bare area to switching light on to illuminate the homes of the people who live there.

Music and Dance, Blindness and Light

The symbolic threads that run through the commercials are all associated with body movements. That, again, is certainly caused by the criteria we used for selecting the sample. However, what makes the bodies move varies according to the clips. In Consol Glass, music is the main symbol: in the absence of commentaries and dialogues, it leads the narration, cements togetherness, and brings joy; it may also, if the repartition of rhythm and melody between whites and blacks is taken into account, still reproduce ancient racial stereotypes. In FNB, a bizarre dance triggers interest in a universe of ennui, expresses joy, and qualifies the lucky winner as "unidentifiable", someone whose origins are impossible to detect, stressing the fact that chance ignores categories. In Vaseline Intensive Care, the woman's capacity to feel with her fingers is due to her blindness: she can know people by touching them, she can recognize softness; when touching becomes caressing, she indeed remains colour blind (although the "mixed couple" conforms to the rather conventional idea of a white man with a black woman). Carling Black Label uses two levels of symbolism. Music here does not provoke movements but gives them a meaningful background; music complements and underlines the commentary: it is used to emphasise the genuine "Africanness" of the efforts undertaken to meet the "challenge" by supporting words in isiZulu; the South African Choir is heard when the voice over is silent, in shots 4 to 7 and 13 to 20, implying that South Africa is like the company being advertised: it "starts small", but must meet a "big challenge". The "triumphal" orchestra accompanies the march towards victory (electricity is connected) and its reward (drinking beer). The two merge, emphasizing a South African victory, at the conclusion of the clip.

Light is brought by the electric line under construction, it obviously symbolises development and modernisation, with all it means in terms of a better and more comfortable life; it may also be understood as bringing “enlightenment”, humanism, rationality and social progress, in a country that has been governed for a long time by dehumanizing, irrational, and retrograde forces.

Finally, it is interesting to notice that the theme of surprise runs through the four clips in our sample. Vaseline Intensive Care puts forward the idea of newness: the newness of the product, but also the newness of the situation (shot 1: image and voice over), that may come as a surprise. Consol Glass and Carling Black Label use a strategy of teasing: the product being advertised is only introduced at the end of the clip while, before, the narrative tries to make viewers believe that they are being shown the qualities of something different: a drink in Consol Glass; electricity in Carling Black Label. Therefore, the conclusion comes as a surprise. FNB is named in shot 2 of the clip, although the security room shown in shot 1 does not seem to announce a bank. Here the element of surprise is not very strong, however it is the whole message that is constructed around a dual idea of surprise: the surprise expressed by the winning customer in a “surprising” dance.

Conclusion: The Surprise of a Happy Brotherliness

A tentative interpretation of the representations of South Africa underlying these four ads can now be proposed. It might be a bit far-fetched to consider that they suggest the passage from the “old” to the “new” South Africa came as a surprise; nevertheless, the ubiquity of the theme of surprise must be taken into account. Those who devise advertising campaigns frequently use teasing strategies based on the eventual revelation of a brand that the ad did not lead to expect. But in our sample, the aggregation of the new South Africa, body movements, and surprise cannot be ignored. If it is not the advent of a “new” South Africa that is truly astonishing, it may be the way it happened, and what the country became.

In spite of the difficulties it is confronted with (insecurity alluded to in the FNB ad), this “new” South Africa is depicted as a happy, hard working, and developing society, where people enjoy equality, and where hard work is doubly rewarded by moral

contentment and shared enjoyment. It is a place of movement and activities involving everyone, where contacts are normally free, and where interesting and surprising events take place. It is a developing and modernising country, revelling in the happiness of brotherliness, without any discrimination; all are now associated in toil and pleasure — music in particular for which South Africans are specially gifted —, and drinking has become a social activity legitimized as a recompense for a job well done. This is indeed an idealized view of South Africa at the beginning of the second Millennium; the dream of a society as it could be, as it should be, not a reflection of its present state. It signals changes that have happened since the beginning of the 1990s. It shows that displaying images of these changes may help to sell goods and services, and therefore contributes to normalizing situations and behaviours which would not have been tolerated twenty years before.

Introduction

Three interview groups were organised in South Africa, to which was added a test group gathered in Paris. All the interviewees were between 20 and 35 years of age. In South Africa, all the interviewees fell within the age category defined as youth[5]. They were recruited among or through students or former students of Rehana Ebrahim-Vally (in South Africa) or Denis-Constant Martin (in France), and they participated in the discussions on South African TV commercials on a voluntary basis (participants in the Pretoria group were indemnified for their transport from Mamelodi to Pretoria). The Pretoria group comprised young African men with differing levels of education and living in the "township" of Mamelodi. The two other South African groups consisted of young women and men studying at the University of the Witswatersrand (Wits) and the then Rand Afrikaans University (RAU, which has now become the University of Johannesburg); they included male and female, white and African students.

The position of the interviewers vis-à-vis the interviewees was one of seniority. Their status as university teachers and researchers to a certain extent influenced the attitude of the interviewees toward the interviewers. The students tended to consider the researchers as "experts" and sometimes returned questions to the interviewers for confirmation. This made the management of the non-directive nature of the interviews slightly more difficult, but we attempted not to elude the questions while answering them in a manner that would not influence the dynamics of the discussions. As far as we can judge, the freedom of speech and of association of the interviewees was not affected by the particular relationship obtaining in the present case between interviewers and interviewees. The other factors that bore upon the relationship between interviewers and interviewees in the South African groups were:

[5] Youth, in Section 1iv of the National Youth Commission Act of 1996, is defined as "persons between the ages of 14-35." cf: www. polity.org.za/html/govza/legislation/1996/act96-019.html

1. the perception of the “professors-researchers” as “outsiders” (Denis-Constant Martin is French, and was acknowledged as such; Rehana Ebrahim-Vally is South African of Indian descent);
2. some of the interviewees seemed to consider that the interviewers did not have the experience of South Africa they had;
3. others appeared to wish to take advantage of the presence of people they supposed knowledgeable about other societies, France and India, to obtain from them information about these societies.

Although the perception of the interviewers as “outsiders” might be disconcerting, especially in the case of Rehana Ebrahim-Vally, in an indirect way, it nonetheless facilitated the free flow of ideas and associations on the topic under discussion, and stimulated the articulation of representations of South Africa, since the interviewees not only debated South Africa among themselves with lively animation and spontaneity, but sometimes also made a point to present very clearly to the “outsiders” their ideas about “their” country. This confirms conclusions drawn from other experiences of intercultural collective interviews (Yannopoulos & Martin 1978; Martin 1997): that, given a pre-existent familiarity with the society to which the interviewees belong, and of course the linguistic ability to converse with them, a position of exteriority (real or imagined) does not hinder the free utterance of ideas and elements of social representations.

The premises in which the interviews took place indeed reinforced the perception of the interviewers as scholars and “experts”, and even “outsiders”. The Pretoria group met in the offices of a European — therefore foreign — organisation; the Wits and Paris groups respectively met where Rehana Ebrahim-Vally and Denis-Constant Martin usually work; and although none of the interviewers teach at the Rand Afrikaans University, they were still perceived, in this setting, as University teachers. It is difficult to know — although it seems unlikely — whether the tenor of the interviewees would have been radically different, if the discussions had taken place on more “neutral” grounds.

The discussions were taped on two separate voice recorders, which proved useful since on one occasion one of the recorders failed to record the beginning of the discussion. The recordings were transcribed by Phineas Riba, a student of Rehana Ebrahim-Vally and who also participated in the Pretoria group. The analyses were based on the written transcripts; verifications on the recordings were made when necessary.

Method of Analysis

The method for analysing the transcripts of the collective interviews was inspired by the oral teachings of Guy Michelat, Senior Research Fellow Emeritus at the National Centre for Scientific Research (Centre for the Study of French Political Life, CEVIPOF, Paris), articles he published (Michelat 1975; Michelat & Simon 1985), and the writings of researchers he trained (Donégani, Duchesne & Haegel 2002; Duchesne 2000; Duchesne & Haegel 2005; Lavabre 2002; Yannopoulos & Martin 1978).

The transcripts of the different discussions are regarded as a trace of one global discourse on the same topic. However, in a first stage, each one was analysed separately before the results were finally amalgamated. For obvious reasons, the analysis of the test group (Paris) was treated separately. The internal organisation and functioning of the groups must be taken into account: in particular the presence, or absence, of one or several "leaders" who often tend to orient the discussion[6], as well as the displaying of disagreements, tensions, or the eruption of conflicts within the group. Within the South African context, the composition of the groups (in terms of gender and former "racial" classifications) is still of utmost importance. Consequently, the collective discussions were subjected to two types of analysis, which though they overlap through repetition allow us to approach the same utterances from different perspectives and angles.

Thematic Analysis

In the first instance, the analysts needed to decipher the various meanings of the collective interviews. In other words what were the major themes that emerged and in what contexts were they put forward. To do this, we (i.e the analysts) began by finding sentences likely to convey an autonomous meaning. At this point, we took into consideration the context within which the enunciation was made but did not place emphasis on the order of succession of the utterances. In this way, we compiled a register of independent themes. We paid particular attention to what was exceptionally uttered and to what was surreptitiously proposed, as it is often a sign of a question or a problem which

[6] In these collective non-directive interviews, we deliberately chose not to interfere with the group dynamics which led to the emergence of one or two "leaders" from within the group. This allowed participants to voice their thoughts and opinions even if these were in disagreement with those of the self-assigned leaders. This gave the discussion an extra edge as interesting and salient points were made during moments of disagreement with the self-appointed leaders.

is particularly important to the speaker(s), or which is especially fertile in recognising ambivalences and contradictions (Duchesne 2000). These themes were then reorganised on the basis of the closeness of their meaning/s. This reorganisation in clusters of themes provided the ground for the establishment of links between the themes and the relationships which are graphically represented. This allowed us to “stabilise” the figure and thus retain only those links that appeared to carry the most meaning (Donégani, Duchesne & Haegel 2002). The advantage of this method is that it allows us to interpret the different themes and also see how they are connected to each other. Working out such interconnectedness between the different themes is not done in a vacuum: in fact it is the experience and even intuition of the analysts in identifying and isolating themes in the collective discourse that sharpens the analysis. Using the aspect of intuition in such contexts is not arbitrary as it presupposes knowledge of the topic/s under discussion, of the interviewees’ cultural and social milieu and the analysts’ intimate knowledge of the transcripts.

Structural Analysis

At the second stage of the task, the analysts returned to the themes they had already identified and considered their order of succession — taking into account any possible influence of the interviewers’ input in the discussion — to discover, any chains of associations that bolstered the discussion. They used these to discern the logic behind the sequence of the various utterances so as to uncover the underlying structure of the organising ideas presented in the discussion and thus interpret the chains of associations. Moreover this also allowed the analysts to detect sensitive moments in the discussion which could have influenced the build of tensions with the consequence of alliances and oppositions within the group being formed.

The combination of thematic and structural analyses is a means to combine the apprehension of the group’s coherence by homogenising differences and aggregating similar points of view, and the uncovering of tensions, contradictions and ambivalences that drive the sequence of individual utterances (Duchesne & Haegel 2005: 90-92).

Conclusion

The results of the thematic and structural analyses conducted on each of the interviews were merged. Finally the conclusions independently drawn from each interview were also amalgamated. The identity or originality of themes present in the discussions and the logic of their succession were examined to find elements of social representations or disagreements and differences in the representations shared by all the interviewees in the various groups. The comparison between the results of the analysis of the South African groups and the results of the analysis of the French group underlines the specificity of the insiders' representations of the society they live in, and the particular images that a group of foreigners have formed of South Africa.

Pretoria: A Cloudy Rainbow Nation?

The first group met on July 17, 2003, at the offices of a European organisation in the centre of Pretoria. It consisted of five young men (between 20 and 30 years of age) from Mamelodi. Three of them were unemployed at the time of the interview; the two others were studying (one of them was doing a MA in social anthropology supervised by Rehana Ebrahim-Vally). The participants were brought from Mamelodi to Pretoria by minibus. The discussion lasted 2h08.

Thematic Analysis

Four main themes were identified in the Pretoria group:

- confusion-trickery,
- differences between blacks and whites,
- legacies from the "old" South Africa,
- the "new" South Africa,

and to which can be added a few themes that, although they appeared less central, do bring some additional light on the main themes: representations of masculinity, creativity, rewards won by working hard, and the sense of touch.

After the clips had been viewed, the discussion naturally focused on the ads, and the Mamelodi group emphasized how confusing they found them[7]. Later in the discussion they regarded these ads to offer a fairly good image of South Africa as it is today:

> "All these adverts are very relevant to South Africans because it looks like the South Africans today they want to know what's happening in each and every advert that is shown on TV. They take very much interest in that. So that is why I think in the South African context I think is relevant. They are showing… they are depicting, I mean South African way of living. You know, mixing, partying and it's like job orientated. They said they are job orientated and there is a party element involved. I mean that's the way of life the South Africans are actually focusing on right now. They mostly focus on partying and at the same time they are busy focusing on careers and all the stuff."

The confusion they refer to may therefore be related to their perceptions of living in today's South Africa, and they briefly alluded to the fact that part of this confusion is linked to the question of being white or black, to the relationship between whiteness and blackness, and what it entails:

> "I don't know Sir if you know about this other guy Happy Sindane [*Rehana Ebrahim-Vally: Yes Happy Sindane*] There was an ad, the Dulux advert. Okay let me explain what is happening with Happy Sindane Sir, he claims he is a white guy, he was abducted by his nanny[8] when he was five or three years old. Now people… he's got this thing like he is confused he doesn't know if he is white or black […] Just because he is confused he is not sure if he is black or white; they can use him in a Dulux advert; 'any colour you can think of'[9]."

Whites, according to some in the Mamelodi group "show an extreme degree of ignorance" of their "surroundings"; Afrikaners, some of them opine, cannot speak Zulu; and though the English language is everywhere, it cannot convey the same feelings as African languages. There are things that have not changed since 1994. Old black people still show deference to white people:

> "Maybe it will change in five, six years time, but not now. And I'm sorry, I'm not being racist […] I mean there are some things that will never change in South Africa. They will never change. Maybe to us they will change; but if you look at for instance my grandmother when she sees a white person she will always treat the white person with the greatest respect […] when I see a white person I see a person, I talk as if I talk to my friends."

Inspired by what they had seen in the ads screened, they had the following to say about interracial contact in post-1994 South Africa. Blacks and whites do not work together in security companies; blacks will not be appointed to positions of supervisors in

[7] The Mamelodi group was referring to the content of the advertisements viewed and not to the selection.
[8] A black woman.
[9] The Dulux ad slogan.

the private sector. They will, however, in the public sector, and this shows that changes have indeed been taking place in South Africa. The middle and upper classes are now mixed, mixed companies have been launched:

> "A lot of companies now they're mixed partners. It's not the old days that only white people start companies. Black people are starting companies with white people as partners. They go into partnerships, black and white."

Youth start getting together, at school and on week ends:

> "Most of the time now if you go to clubs or to high schools, mostly it happens in high schools, where all the mixed races start getting together on week ends and spending time together."

A black woman can "feel" a white man and find him good looking, one can see whites dating blacks, and some of them eventually get married:

> "´Cause now you can see… okay my parents do not approve it, but I saw a white guy and a black chick they were dating. My parents don't approve it, but it's a new world, times have changed, it's real; they do date, they do go out, they do get married."

Hard work and what it represents impressed the informants in this group. To them all hard working people, regardless of their colour will be rewarded. This all male group seemed to share the view that men, engineers and labourers — which in the popularly perceptions of South Africans are regarded as male only domains —, are the real, tough, hard workers. The South Africa of 2003 which the informants commented on is a country where "people of different cultures" come together and even share ideas; it is really a "Rainbow Nation". It is a country with a great potential, in spite of its weaknesses. To demonstrate these weaknesses they talked about goods produced in South Africa and which they regard as not of a very high quality and also of poverty and crime which make life difficult for many people. Despite such reservations, they spoke with much enthusiasm as they believe South Africans can be proud of their "country as a whole", with its "different types of people", its creativity, and its ability to marry hard work and an inclination to "party hard". Food, dress, landscapes, and the philosophy of *ubuntu*[10] are sources of pride, and can make South Africa look great in the eyes of foreigners. If South Africa were cleverly marketed, it could earn a lot of money:

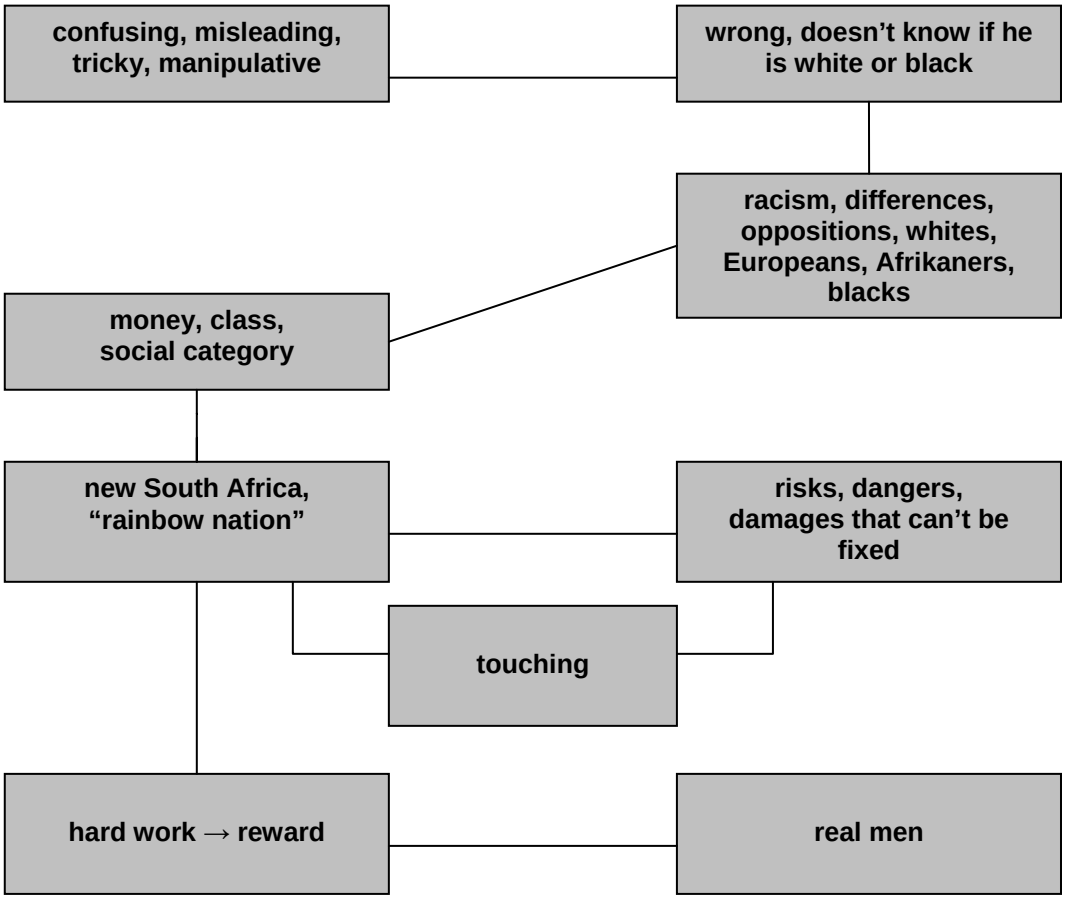
[10] A philosophy of African humanism proposed by President Thabo Mbeki.

"I think the identity is very important, because foreigners, when they come to visit; if you take them to places like Mamelodi and they see, they meet people who are wearing jeans and all the stuff; clothes that they are used to. If you take them to places like rural Kwa-Zulu Natal where they're still wearing (i-)*bheshu*[11] I think that reflects our identity as people, because that's what they want to see actually. I think that is very relevant to this campaign of proudly South African[12]. So they must also… our food that we eat, we eat maybe *umngqushu*[13], spinach and all that, *mogodu*[14] and all the stuff. You take people to restaurants that cook that kind of food, then they can get a feel that these people are South African and all the stuff. And in a way we are promoting the food that we South African people are eating and all the stuff. So I think South Africa is doing well in terms of advertising."
[…]

"I mean we've got lots of different types of people, South African cultures, everything. We've got a whole lot. So I think South Africa is marketable, you can market South Africa. We can. If we can get the right people, we can. [*Denis-Constant Martin: So the right people?*] Yes, the right people who can market South Africa as a whole I think we can make a lot of money. We can make a lot of money."

[11] Zulu term for skin buttock covering worn by men. Today if Zulu men dress in their traditional attire, they would wear the African humanism proposed by President Thabo Mbeki.
[12] A campaign launched by the South African government to promote locally manufactured products as an employment creating incentive.
[13] Xhosa term for samp or *stamp mielies* in Afrikaans. It is a coarse maize porridge frequently cooked with dried beans.
[14] Sesotho term for tripe.

PRETORIA: THEMATIC CLUSTERS



Structural Analysis

Structure of the Discussion

The Pretoria discussion was quite convoluted; the same themes appeared on several occasions in different contexts, which indicate a high degree of ambivalence and, perhaps, anxiety. The entire discussion was governed by a tone of scepticism which was adopted from the start (A). It led to an examination of identity problems and to the acknowledgement that there were some idiosyncrasies that could not be "translated" or communicated (B). This raised the question of change: of what has changed, what can change, and what will not change (C). Finally, the discussion focused on South Africa, what its inhabitants can be proud of, and its current problems (D); the participants concluded with an optimistic, but probably very ambivalent, examination of the new South Africa's potential (E).

A. The first reaction of the participants, after having viewed the clips, was one of scepticism. They found the ads not convincing, misleading, and tricky. They emphasised their independence or their ability to choose (including, in passing, their capacity to choose who they want to be). In this first phase of the discussion, they touched upon differences between men and women, blacks and whites; they linked strength, intelligence and blackness, and showed a penchant for the idea, suggested in the Carling Black Label ad, that hard work must be rewarded.

One of the participants, who can be considered as the "leader" in the discussion, asked the interviewers (he continuously talked to Denis-Constant Martin and addressed him as "Sir") how advertisements are produced. The questions, and the answer, mark a transition in the discussion.

B. The participants then addressed the topic of (South African) identity: it is expressed and perceived in language and dress, it can be identified by foreigners, from the outside, but there are idiosyncrasies (especially linguistic ones) that are not "translatable". There is an intimate part of one's identity that cannot be shared outside one's group of origin. In this sequence, participants also discuss the question of social differences.

At this juncture, the participants asked to see the clips once more. The discussion resumed from a question asked by the interviewers: "Do these ads, in any way, reflect the realities of South Africa today?"

C. The reactions focused on the problem of change: on what differentiates the "new" South Africa from the "old" South Africa in terms of race relations and conflict between generations. Participants tried to assess what can change and what will not change.

D. After a new prompt from the interviewers ("An ad is also something that is aimed at making you think of something, not only the product, but also what can be associated with the product. So, is there anything else you would like to say about the ads?"), the participants zeroed in on national identity and pride. In their opinion, South Africans seem to be characterised by their capacity to combine hard work, fun and creativity. The co-existence of different people was associated with interdependence and introduced a debate about the "Proudly South African" campaign. For the participants, although some South African goods are of an inferior quality, South Africans can be proud of their food and beers, their landscapes and game parks, and their cloths — rural, traditional, but also fashioned by upcoming designers. They can also be proud of their country as a whole, with its diversity of people and its humanist philosophy of *ubuntu*. If the current problems — poverty and crime — were solved, South Africa could be efficiently marketed to the outside world, and could increase its earnings.

E. The final sequence in the discussion provided an extremely coherent picture of the new South Africa as perceived by the participants and can be summarised as follows:

- South African identity is related to nature and traditions (modernisation and engineers, as featured in the Carling Black Label clip, are "forgotten" in the last part of the discussion);
- this South African identity could be "sold" to foreigners and could bring in money (to improve the lot of poor South Africans).

In this picture, South Africans are portrayed as:

- intelligent,
- capable to choose (who they want to be),
- hard working,
- adept at mixing work and play,
- creative,
- diverse and interdependent.

The new South Africa is:

- the South Africa of the youth,
- socially unequal,
- a rainbow nation with doubts, and problems: “a cloudy rainbow nation” ?

Analysis

The participants began by expressing their scepticism regarding the effectiveness of the ads: they found them uninteresting, and to a certain extent misleading. This critical approach to the clips they were shown allowed them to assert their independence of mind, and their capacity to choose (including who they want to be), right from the start. After having positioned themselves as both avid watchers of TV ads — with a wide knowledge of the commercials broadcast on TV (a culture that was displayed all along the discussion) — and critical viewers, who are independently able to make up their minds and do (and be) what they aspire, they naturally moved to the question of identity to emphasize, at this stage, that there is a core of intimate, untranslatable components to being South African Africans. This assertion introduced the question of change: what has been transformed during the last decade? What has been inherited from before? Are there things that will never change? A new prompt from the interviewers took the participants back to the question of identity, but now it was approached from a slightly different angle. They discussed South Africa as a whole, the national identity of the country, focused on what they can be proud of and showed a certain amount of ambivalence. Finally, this led them to draw a very detailed portrait of the new South Africa, hinting at problems the country was currently confronted with, without dwelling much on them, and emphasising South Africa’s potential, particularly in the eyes of foreigners.

This rather positive conclusion partly constructed around the representations participants had of foreigners’ visions of their country, and the latter’s willingness to contribute to its development, coming after other optimistic commentaries and allusions to opinions outsiders may have about South Africa, was symptomatic of a perception undoubtedly shared by all participants in the group, who are proud to be South Africans and consider their country as capable of accomplishing great things. That this perception was uttered in a strongly optimistic manner, in spite of the precarious situation in which the participants found themselves, was probably due to the context of the collective interview. For various reasons (safety, difficulty to find an acceptable meeting place, noise level, etc.) we decided to organize the group in Pretoria and the participants were brought from Mamelodi to the city centre by minibus. All the participants were black males, one of

the interviewers was an “Indian” South African woman who lived and studied in France for several years, the other was a French white man; the participants were all Africans, either students or unemployed, all of them coming from underprivileged milieus. The group met at the offices of a European organization[15]. It was therefore not surprising that the participants may have perceived themselves as “representatives” even “ambassadors” of (African) South Africa in front of, if not foreigners, at least people who belonged to an international sphere and were regarded as somewhat detached from South African realities. Feelings of a gap between the interviewers and the participants were probably made more acute by the fact that the former were academics, and the latter either students (one of them studying under one of the interviewers) or drop outs with a basic level of education. Although the discussion was quite lively, and participants did speak to each other, their collective discourse included a level specially intended for the interviewers: the assertion of their independence of thought right from the start amounted to claiming a right to talk in front of “professors”; the “leader” of the group persistently included a “Sir” at the beginning of his interventions as if he wanted to signal that he was specifically addressing Denis-Constant Martin whom he identified as the “dominant” person in the interviewer partnership. The element of pride in their elaborations on South African identity, the positive view they projected of their country were in all likelihood linked, at least in part, to the particular situation of the interview, although we assume that, if this situation impacted on the tonality of the discourse, it radically altered neither its content, nor its structure.

[15] The reason to use the offices of an European organisation in South Africa was a practical one. We had been offered the use of the boardroom for an entire afternoon. Those in the Mamelodi group who experienced the need to focus on the image of South Africa for foreigners were most probably influenced by the place in which the interviews were conducted for they had no contact with any of the personnel in the office.

Summary of the Pretoria group

A – SCEPTICISM

- demonstrates intelligence / independence of the viewer (ads do not mislead us)
- implies the viewer's ability to choose (who he wants to be)

. sub themes:

- o differences : males / females; blacks (have ideas) / whites (ignorant); between languages
- o association strength / intelligence (engineers) / blacks
- o association hard work / reward

transition : question to researchers

B – IDENTITY

- displayed / perceived in languages and dress (women's hats)
- shown to / seen by the outside world
- idiosyncratic (not translatable)

. sub theme:

- o social differences

transition: question from researchers; second viewing of the ads

C – CHANGE

- old South Africa vs. new South Africa
- race relations
- opposition between generations

→ interrogations: what can change ? / what will not change ?

. sub themes:

- o sixth sense (exclusive to Africans ?)

transition: question from researchers

D – NATIONAL IDENTITY AND PRIDE

- association work / play / creativity
- association mixing (interracial) / interdependence
- discussion of the "Proudly South African" campaign
  - . in which domains is South Africa inferior ?
  - . in which domains is South Africa OK or superior?
    - ▪ food and beer;
    - ▪ cloth, rural and traditional;
    - ▪ *ubuntu*;
    - ▪ countryside and landscapes ➔ nature and "traditions"
- tourism (= South African identity as seen by foreigners)
  - . can bring money → improvement of living conditions
  - . implies fighting against crime and poverty

. sub theme :

- o social differences

E – CONCLUSION

- South African identity is related to nature and traditions (modern hard work / engineers are "forgotten" in the last part of the discussion)
- South African identity can be sold / marketed to foreigners and could bring in money for poor South Africans

- South Africans are :
  - ▪ intelligent
  - ▪ capable to choose (who they want to be)
  - ▪ hard working
  - ▪ mix work and play
  - ▪ creative
  - ▪ diverse and interdependent

- The new South Africa is:
  - ▪ the South Africa of the youth
  - ▪ a Rainbow Nation with doubts ("a cloudy Rainbow Nation" ?)
  - ▪ socially unequal

Conclusion

The representations of South Africa held by the group of young African men from Mamelodi interviewed in Pretoria showed profound ambivalences. The tone of their discourses was decidedly positive, and they stressed opportunities offered for realising the dream of a “Rainbow Nation”, where people can socially mix, work, and party together. However, behind this optimistic description of the new South Africa (which in spite of the critical posture adopted at the beginning of the interview, largely converges with the images projected in the commercials), one can detect two series of questioning that, to a certain extent, tend to darken it.

The first, mentioned just in passing towards the end, was also discernible in the exchanges about money and social differences, and was related to problems generally considered as extremely detrimental to the harmonious development of South African society, and to foreign investments: namely crime and poverty. These problems though concealed behind expressions of identifications with the new South Africa, and of pride in the country, were nevertheless present under the surface.

The second series of questioning was probably more fundamental: it dealt with the question of identity and conveyed feelings of anxiety regarding what is becoming of South Africa and of South Africans. Behind the glorification of the new South Africa lay deep and heavy interrogations about what it is, what it will become, and what types of social relationship it will accommodate (between men and women, between blacks and whites, between social classes). There is an unresolved dissonance between vocal adhesion to the “Rainbow Nation”, identification with the conformist representations of the new South Africa, and concern about the evolution of the country since 1994. This anxiety is caused not only by “objective” problems mentioned at the end of the interview, but mainly by more fundamental questions relating to the components and meanings of being black in a “non racial” South Africa.

Wits: Anxiety and Hopes within a Negotiated Peaceful Coexistence

The second group was organised at the University of the Witwatersrand, where Rehana Ebrahim-Vally is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology. It met on July 21, 2003, in the seminar room of the Department of Anthropology and consisted of five students: 2 women from Swaziland, one from Lesotho, and two South African men: one presenting himself as a "South African Greek" (hereafter referred to as A), the other one being African (hereafter referred to as B). The discussion lasted for one hour and five minutes and was largely driven by the two South African men.

Thematic Analysis

The themes that were dealt with in the discussion were most often approached with reference to advertising. The interviewees, again, displayed a very large knowledge of TV ads, and were able to relate the clips in our sample with other commercials, some of which were broadcast a few years before. The participants' focus on ads, and what they conveyed, did not preclude them from debating other topics, especially matters connected to their visions of the new South Africa, but these visions or representations transpired in the collective interview through metaphors drawn from their knowledge of the culture of advertising. To them, ads provided a cognitive stock where they could look for metaphors of the society they live in, for references to which they could hint at to introduce in a non-antagonistic fashion their point of view about South Africa and the changes it has been witnessing since 1990. For it was striking that in the "debate within the discussion" that took place between the two South African men, each one of them attempted to clearly state his opinions without openly opposing the other's point of view, which was often noticeably different. Their dialogue within the framework of the group could, in itself, be considered as an active projection of shared elements in differing representations of the new South Africa.

The whole conversation was framed by a recurrent examination of the meaning and consequences of advertisement in general. The participants balanced between the feeling that ads are misleading and the impression that they honestly reflect South African realities:

> "But again I think – well this is just an opinion – I think these adverts sometimes they might mislead. For instance someone from another country, let's say Bulgaria, he doesn't know anything about South Africa and he comes here and he saw the adverts while he was in this country, like the security, white and black guy security, white guys and black guys trying to put the electricity poles. But when he gets here most of the people who are working there, they are black people, you see. So in that way it gives us… it misleads us, and someone who gets to South Africa and he sees this, it's a complete lie in a sense, you know. So I think sometimes the adverts they must be a bit real, they must face reality in a sense." [B]

> "South Africa is like shaping, or the ads are shaped by the social background of who we are as South Africans? I mean notably so we can assume or let's just agree that ads that are here now are not ads that were there before elections. I mean the first South African democratic elections. So I'd really say politically and socially that's how we get to see ourselves on the adverts. That's the reflection of who we are." [B]

Ambivalence towards the commercials was compounded by interrogations about the effectiveness of the ads — including remarks on how the participants themselves can sometimes be influenced by ads they have been exposed to — and found its resolution in an analytical comment, made in a very academic fashion, on the polysemy of commercials, a comment to which none objected:

> "Carol Taylor[16] was saying something about how rituals are complex, they are multilayered and they are multi-meaningful. Everything is always up to interpretation […] So in advertising it's always… there is always open to interpretation." [A]

> "And also if I say an advert, just one advert, can be a multi-presentation of many events or items, probably the location in which the advert was shot can show a lot of different things that can strike someone's liking about certain things, not really about the advert itself." [B]

Their agreement on the possibility to give the ads multi-meanings symbolically implied that several visions of South Africa could coexist and be debated without generating conflict. Two chains of themes introduced in the discussion can be constructed from there. Both of them pass through the topic of change, which was twice alluded to, more explicitly in the following intervention:

> "I mean if I compare TV ads done at this present era and as done during the past regime, I'd say that's very much different. I mean look now there are lots of things exposed about the past South Africa than it were then, I mean than things were then. So now we get to see lot of… probably more pictures on TV, more documentaries on TV that some of the ads take something from them, you know to like get all these people together. Like this racial thing. You wouldn't much of see a black person on TV, sitting on the tea-table, having a nice cup of tea, or reading a newspaper. You know he wouldn't be given much of a time; unless it was a special black channel for those people, then you would. But now it's a national television

[16] A lecturer in the Anthropology Department at Wits and who teaches a course on *Ritual and Power* to second year students. Some of the students in the group were taught by Carol Taylor.

> station everyone watches it like that; and **everyone is doing their own thing** like that. So I think yes, very much it has evolved." [B]
> [emphasis added]

The first chain leads to fears aroused by the present state of South African society. Fears began to be articulated after the display and use of body and sex in advertisement had been exposed. The danger of promoting a certain image of the body in ads was almost immediately associated with a broader hazard, likely to explode like a bomb:

> "Oh but it's interesting to see how **adverts can actually be quite detrimental**. I mean at this point in time, there are more people affected with diseases related to the body, like anorexia, bulimia, you know diseases where the body is affected, than ever before, psychologically affected. I mean before when there wasn't that much advertising on television, and stuff like that; anorexia wasn't that big a thing. Now women go and they see… they wanna use L'Oreal, they don't look as beautiful; why not? You know, I'm not thin enough. Then they get anorexia. So it's very interesting to see how influential on a person's health, advertising can actually be." [A]
> [emphasis added]

> "Strategically they are done beautifully, for you not to realise that [alcohol can be bad]. You just see it's an ad, so what? But **at the end of the day, this thing is just like a bomb-chain, you know. It explodes here and like that and like that, and revolves around.**" [B]
> [emphasis added]

In the course of this rapid exchange, the idea that politics (the government, laws, Parliament) has something to do with what is being discussed emerged. Students in the group expressed their feelings of anxiety a number of times during the session and linked the same to various problems South Africa is facing: especially AIDS, and violence towards women. The perspective of death was introduced using an example from outside South Africa (the Colombine School shootings, in the USA), and developed through the correlation between the location where a commercial may be shot and a graveyard[17], and of course attached to AIDS:

> "There are AIDS adverts, I mean there is this awareness kind of a thing. They will show you what it's really like, that's realistic, it's no fun: you don't use a condom, you die, you know. There is no other alternative for that. Abstain, be faithful, condomise[18], something like that. I mean except the three of them or except each of the three you die, you get AIDS or something like that." [B]

[17] The importance of location has been stressed by the participants, in particular because it can convey several meanings behind the product being advertised.
[18] ABC (Abstain, Be faithful and Condomise) forms part of the anti-AIDS campaign promoting safe sex launched by the SA government.

A second chain of themes derived from the topic of change and led to interrogations about the new South Africa and the relationships that may be established between blacks and whites. At this point, which can be considered as the centre of gravity of the interview, the discussion clearly became a dialogue between the white South African of Greek origin and the African South African students, with only the student from Lesotho interpolating a word of caution about stereotypes and the racialist dimension sometimes given to differences — and treatment of differences — which are perfectly normal. The end of the discussion took the form of a kind of "negotiation" between the two South African "leaders" of the group, the white one reckoning that it is fair that blacks and whites should switch roles, the black one emphasising that it is not so much a question of the ones replacing the others, but of going along "with the culture of the people", probably meaning the majority of the people. Long excerpts of this dialogue must be quoted here to illustrate both its intensity, and the attitude of tolerance the two speakers wanted to demonstrate.

Median dialogue:

> — "If we saw the ads, there were a black person, a white person. And that's like including everyone to do that. But if you saw much of white people, someone would say: why would I wanna get there? If we saw too much of a black person, it would be like: this is too much black, this is too much Soweto. You know what I mean? Just like that." [B]
> […]
> — "I can say **South Africa is probably the middle point where the African and the European aspects have to be combined** into advertising for everything. Because in this country, let's be honest, the European factions have most of the money, while the African people have the numbers, they have the quantity, they have the population, while the European and the Caucasian aspects have the money. So they have to facilitate for those. While in France it's mostly the Caucasians. In America it's the Caucasians, it's the white people, they have the money, and the numbers. That's why we have adverts like that, and other countries don't." [A]
> — "I don't know. Still on the political note though, I don't know if… like I said I don't know which body or policy of adverts regulates which ad goes on air, which one can't; on what grounds, you know. But I'm sure that **in South African terms, we wouldn't have much of a certain race ads dominating over the other**, rather even if they are very well, nicely done and beautiful, but still I'm sure that SABC as a South African Broadcasting Corporation, television station, it wouldn't allow too much of a race to… like do this; you know like over a certain number of times. It was gonna look at the end of the day like this is racially motivated, this is racially restricted to be done like that. So getting all the races together in one ad summarises the rest, in my opinion." [B]
> — "Ja, that's true but it's that sort of idea that, you know **races. That's the sort of thing we have to try and stay away from**. But it's very difficult to do, but you have to remember, politically, we are not even ten years old. South African democracy it's only like nine years old. We're still young, we've got a long way to go before we can even consider that sort of thing, you know." [A]
> […]

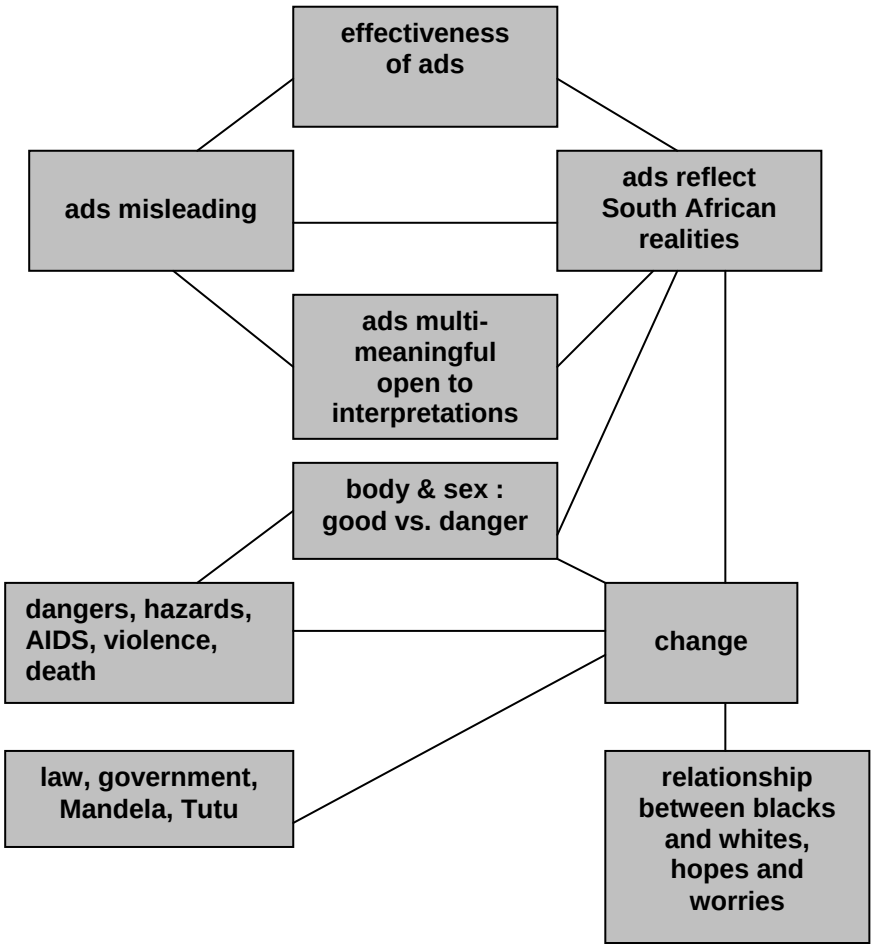
— “I think the other thing with the adverts; sometimes other adverts can make; let’s say for a product, it can choose to go for white people only or for black people only. For instance Wella for hair, mostly it’s for… like material of hair; my hair is not like his hair. For sure the product he would be suitable to use that product. So **I cannot say, you know what, this is racist because there are only white people there. No I have to consider that my hair is not like his. So I think sometimes it’s us who have stereotype minds**, we tend to think, you know what, this is all white advert, and there are no black people, so you switch off the television, you start having attitude, not considering that that advert it goes for the… the product targets the people who have these kinds of things; their hair and whatsoever.” [Lesotho student]
— “Definitely, I’d like very much to see a white person in a *Black Like Me* advert, quite honestly. But what I like, there was a specific… I can’t remember. What is nice is if the advert is not corrupt, not necessarily directed towards race. I mean there was this brilliant Metro FM advert that was out a year or two ago where it said you know **what determines whether you are African? Is it your skin colour? And it showed a person of a light African colour. Is it your hair colour? It showed a black woman with blonde hair and stuff like that. And it basically said at the end that it’s your soul that’s African, not your skin colour… not your… you know, your soul is African, not your race.** It would be nice to see more adverts like that.” [A]
[emphasis added]

Final “negotiation”:

— “If I can remember from my old days, it was the Cremora[19] advert; the one with the white guy goes to the fridge and he calls out and he says: honey where is the Cremora? It’s on top of the fridge – it’s not on top of the fridge [group laughs]. And then I saw one, I think the last one I actually saw was ’bout three or four years ago where **they had African people doing it, and then they switched roles**. So they had a black man calling out to his black wife.
[Rehana Ebrahim-Vally: Why do you think they did that?]
They wanted to increase the exposure, I mean. Like we said before if it’s just white people in an advert, it’s not gonna appeal to the black people. So they had to do that. And the reason why they probably don’t have a white person in it is because the white person would look at it and say, hey! I remember that Cremora ad from back in the days, it was a white man. I think I’ll go buy some Cremora.” [A]
— “Probably it’s just like Coca-Cola ads. It’s like they have been there for as long as I cannot remember. I’ve seen in some anthropology book, Coca-Cola ads done in Hong Kong and Coca-Cola ads done in India and in Africa. You know all of them were like, you know, underpinned to some cultural celebrations of some kind. You know you see someone putting on a Coca-Cola can on top and this Indian woman wearing nicely and all that in this traditional garment. And then it’s like so nicely done. I’m like this is cool. In Hong Kong you see these people performing the traditional stuff and they are drinking Coca-Cola. So it’s like Coca-Cola in a way is like trying to get into the society through this cultural thing. I don’t know. **Not really to replace, but rather to go along with the culture of the people**.” [B]
[emphasis added]

[19] Quite a popular advertisement for instant milk powder.

WITS: THEMATIC CLUSTERS



Structural Analysis

Structure of the Discussion

The structure of the discussion in the Wits group appeared relatively simple; it developed in three stages: (A) an evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of ads; (B) a review of problems caused by or shown in ads, leading to a series of considerations gravitating around the issue of death; (C) a dialogue between the two main speakers in the group who try to find a compromise about change in South Africa they can both agree on.

A. The discussion started with an attempt at assessing the ads: the participants evaluated their qualities and their effectiveness. Interventions by the two women from Swaziland stressed the positive effects of showing all the races together, the working class and the youth; but they were almost instantly "forgotten" as the debate on the quality and effectiveness of the ads continued. Ads, the participants found, often displayed stereotypes, especially about women; and in a more general sense they found such ads to be misleading especially when they pretend to represent South African realities.

B. One of the negative sides of advertising is that it uses and abuses the body and sex. The uses and positioning of the body in advertisements can therefore have detrimental effects on the viewers. The questioning about the power of ads was turned around to interrogate what power can be exercised on advertising. This line of questioning brought the role of politics (law, parliament, government) into the discussion and introduced the topic of the interaction between advertising and society: which is shaping which? And also, who holds what kind of power? The Europeans have the money, the Africans have the numbers[20]; South Africans should try to stay away from race, but since the new South Africa is still young, it is very difficult. A question by Rehana Ebrahim-Vally about women was left unanswered, and the discussion further investigated questions of race and racism. The white student suggested that the message delivered by an ad not included in the sample be heard: *it is not the skin colour that makes the African, it is the "soul"*. After a brief return to the question of the effectiveness of the ads, the discussion focused on social problems affecting today's South Africa: women abuse, violence, murders, AIDS. The tension created by the suggestion of social problems bearing dramatic consequences (death being a risk not only for individuals but for the country as a

[20] Interestingly, the white South African student uses the word "aspect" (the European or Caucasian aspect, the African aspect) which denotes that they are part of the same ensemble, but also suggests different ways of looking.

whole) was temporarily smoothed out by resorting to an “objective” academic source which legitimates the possibility of giving the same phenomenon various interpretations. After a moment of a somewhat uneasy silence, a follow up question asked by Denis-Constant Martin invited the participants to come back to the topic of place (“location”) they had touched upon before. Graveyard as a location where clips could be shot re-introduced the idea of death and danger, associated with AIDS.

C. Interestingly, the mention of the role played by Nelson Mandela in AIDS awareness campaigns allowed interviewees to shift from danger to change. Change, first brought in under the light of danger, could now be approached from a more positive angle. Ads shown in South Africa have changed, television has been made “national”, and generally speaking “everyone is doing their own thing”. Whites and blacks have switched positions. But what is at stake in the new South Africa is not the replacement of white people by black people; it is that all accept to “go along with the culture of the people.” This seemed like the ideal reconciliatory position where the will of the majority as expressed in “culture of the people” is a requisite.

Analysis

Wits students did not deviate much from the general “rule of the game” as indicated by the professors-interviewers. The origins of the interviewers (real or assumed) were indirectly acknowledged by references to advertisement in India and in France. The participants discussed not only the ads in the sample, but also advertisement as a genre. This broadening of the perspective allowed them to address crucial issues regarding the evolution of South Africa after apartheid. A critical and almost negative assessment of commercials, and especially of the way in which they can create an artificial image of the body, led them to ask questions on the issue of power, and to ask who holds power. They were interested in understanding how advertisements are regulated and where power is located in South Africa. The latter question opened the door for a debate on the respective places of blacks and whites in the new South Africa, which tended to focus on dangers threatening the country, epitomized by frequent allusions to the risks of death. The rather sombre and macabre approach to changes in post-apartheid South Africa was reversed by a reference to Nelson Mandela. The mere mention of South Africa’s most revered citizen produced a volt face in their attitude: the participants moved from disconcerted individuals weighed down by issues of crime and disease to positive and content individuals filled with hope. The result of this complete turn around in attitude was that their discussion was transformed into a dialogue or a “negotiation” where the two “leaders”

of the group, separated by their slightly differing views on the country and experiences of black and white South Africans, were searching for a common ground.

Summary of the Wits group

A – ADS AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

- what makes a good ad?
- reservations about ads: can be misleading
  - ➔ misrepresentations of South Africa?

B – BODY, SEX, AND RACE: RISKS AND DEATH

- publicity can have negative effects
- ads have a political and social dimension, they have changed after the 1994 elections: they are a reflection of who we are
  - . question of power: who holds power, whites or Africans? The question should be forgotten, but it is impossible
- the meaning of violence (rape, hate, murders): is it possible to be "proudly South African" in a violent South Africa?
  - . South Africa misunderstood or misrepresented; plurality of interpretations possible
  - . the "Proudly South African" campaign and the importance of location
  - . silence

Denis-Constant Martin: location?

- graveyard
- AIDS → death cannot be ignored
  - . Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu

Denis-Constant Martin: changes in South African advertising?

- ads have evolved (presence of black people)

Rehana Ebrahim Vally: memories of ads from apartheid times?

C – OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

- blacks and whites have switched positions
- but everyone must go along with the culture of the people

Conclusion

The Wits interview took the form of a courteous, and often witty, conversation between educated South(ern) Africans. Their attempts at assessing the ads, and the hesitations that it induced, led them to use the hermeneutical concept of complex phenomena, which are "multilayered" and "multi-meaningful". Fears and anxiety about the present state and the future of South Africa, questions and concerns about relations between blacks and whites were voiced and associated with the changes they perceive and/or witness. Nelson Mandela's mediation, combined with the academically supported legitimacy of variety in opinions, drove the participants, and especially the two main

protagonists, to express a global adhesion to change, even if they saw it in slightly different perspectives. The representation of South Africa which surfaced in the Wits group combined deep concerns (the insistence on lethal hazards threatening the country was significant in this respect), with anxious hopes for the future, and a belief in the possibility of peaceful coexistence and negotiation (as evidenced by the dialogue between the "leaders" of the group), as long as stake holders agree on the importance of changes between black-white relationships, and on the acceptation of majority rule, not only in politics but also in social and cultural dealings.

Rau: The Good and the Bad in Freedom

The third group met in the seminar room of the Department of Anthropolgy and Development Studies at the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) in Johannesburg. RAU, during the apartheid era, was the Afrikaans medium tertiary institution in Johannesburg and was thus one of the former white, Afrikaans/Afrikaner controlled universities that was required to transform after 1994. The participants were RAU students, and all but one was female. There were four black women [hereafter referred to as BF], two white women [WF] and one white male [WM]. They were, at the time of the interview, studying development, commercial management, information science, political science, anthropology and psychology, and all had a wide knowledge of commercials shown on TV. The discussion lasted an hour and eleven minutes and was extremely lively, with participants frequently interrupting each other or speaking at the same time. The "leader" who stood out from the beginning was a white woman who was studying communication, and who worked in a data capturing company, checking the time of broadcast and duration of commercials shown on public TV channels. Both her study and work experiences gave her an edge on knowledge of advertising which she used extensively during the interview. The other white participants in the group also spoke freely. This group provided an excellent illustration of the fact that, even though some participants intervened more often than others in the debate, dissent was openly expressed when they stated opinions with which the other, less active, interviewees disagreed. The black students, on at least two occasions, very explicitly vented their disagreement with the white "expert's" vision of South Africa, and in a very serene manner, their irritation at her (probably unconscious) attempts to impose her points of view. In this group, the interviewers, who were "strangers" to this University, were much less taken into

consideration than in the Pretoria and Wits groups. The discussion developed spontaneously from the original prompt, and did not need many follow up questions.

Thematic Analysis

In the middle of the debate, the “leader” suggested that the group could form an “Independent Assessment Committee” on TV advertising. Actually it did act as if it were already appointed to do so. The projected commercials were assessed, and classified as “good” or “bad”, their quality being defined by a combination of criteria that included the aesthetic quality of the clips (some ads were “nicely done”, others “badly executed”) but relied heavily on their moral content. For, in the eyes of the participants, “good” ads were not only expertly produced; they were also required to promote “positive human attributes”, specifically: aid and mutual support. Positive evaluations of ads also took into account what, at least in the opinion of the “leader”, made South Africa special and unique: humour, people and culture (especially heard in the African musical background of the Carling Black Label clip), feelings of friendship, and togetherness; these factors gave the “good” ads a “good atmosphere”, typical of the “special flavour” that characterizes South Africa.

Within this system of classification, two chains of themes can be identified. The first chain of themes briefly associated the “bad” ads with “transition” through the mediation of sex. One of the reasons why a number of ads were considered “bad” by the participants was that they used and abused sexual teasing, and were indecent, or bordered on indecency. The “transition” in ads for a brand of fruit juices was given as an example: it started in an “innocent, normal, straightforward” manner and changed to “sex-selling”, a progression which was condemned. What seems important here is the use of the word “transition” to signal a negative progression.

good and bad ads

bad	good / moral duty
- irritating - unoriginal - indecent - laughable - does not work - can't relate to it - do not reflect reality / misleading - hysterical - sad - badly executed / not done nicely - ads copying other ads ("copy-catting") - not good enough to stay in my mind	- show mutual support / promote positive human attributes . to handicapped . to old women . to lady with kids . kindness, generosity, thoughtfulness . kids must help parents - show diversity . races . multilingualism - show the culture - show youth - good atmosphere - music - humour - cleverness - togetherness - friendship - openness - facilitate constant connection

"Transition" is part of the vocabulary of late 20th century political science, and has been frequently used in and about South Africa to analyse the changes in its political and social system at the turn of the 1990s[21]. Students participating in this group must have been quite aware of this. One could therefore wonder whether their negative connotation of "transition" in advertisement did not symbolically signal worries about the direction of the South African political transition. Since the theme of transition was not spontaneously taken up by the other participants, and did not reappear later in the discussion, it does not seem possible to ascertain the validity of such an interpretation. However, the allusions to difficulties and expressions of anxiety, clearly linked to the demographic and cultural diversity of the country, could also support it and justify a connection between the two chains of themes.

The second chain of themes starts from the "good" ads, and more precisely with the ads which specifically represent South Africa, present its originality and its specificities. That which gives South Africa its "special flavour" are: its "sense of humour", its "cleverness", and its African music. South Africa accommodates a diversity of people and culture, which is a "plus" for the country [WF], and shows the way to its future:

[21] See, for instance: Deegan 2001 ; James, Levy 1998 ; Van Vuuren, Wiehahn 1985.

> "We have such an amazing blend of people in this country in terms of culture, ethnicity what everyone call it. And there are certain ads on TV that you… well for me it really strikes a chord in my heart, because they are uniquely South African, you will not get that anywhere else in the world. It is 'us', and normally they carry the most exquisite sense of humour, that is very unique to South Africa, the South African sense of humour I think. And sometimes it can be a very irritating thing, but most of the time it is executed so well, in really good taste, really good spirit, excellent humour, and when I see ads like that it generally sticks with me and it gives me a warm feeling, and positively predisposes me towards a product or the message that they're actually trying to get across." [WF]

> "We've actually got a lot of humour and you know what I do like about our ads though, the fact that we do have a multiracial society and it's hard… like some people can be quite cynical about it. But at the same time, I do believe it is the way of the future; you know what I'm saying, a lot of the younger generations, maybe our generation and stuff like that are all coming together and kind of uniting and unifying and things like that." [WF]

For the "leader" of the group the idea of a multiracial country where togetherness and friendship prevail stirred up contradictory feelings. In spite of the enthusiastic tone in which she voiced her "patriotism", she complemented her comments on the beauty of South Africa with less optimistic remarks. Those who make the adverts and project this image of the country as a multiracial society should, she advised with the approval of the other white woman, exercise caution and avoid "overemphasising it":

> "But they've got to be careful with their adverts because they can make it up too much. They tend to overemphasise it." [WF]

> — "There's a very fine line; because it's like the joys and the fact that people are coming together, and actually that we are multiracial. Yes, thanks God it's part of our strength, but at the same time […]"
> — "They make it so obvious." [WFs]

They did not elaborate on what they precisely meant by "make it too much" or "make it so obvious", but the two themes dealt with à propos of the making of ads did shed some light on what they had in mind. The diversity of audiences makes it difficult for the agencies that conceive and design the ads to propose scenarios likely to attract a great number of people. In other words, it is difficult to work — and live — with diversity:

> "These are difficult things, we have such a diverse audience here, how do you know what everybody likes and what they don't like. So I suppose it's hard…" [WF]

The same type of difficulty arises when agencies have to select the right actors for an ad:

> "The array chosen might be perfect in terms of casting, but the mission that they put people to is not worth it […] Because in terms of when you go to casting for ads they always try to find… they give you… say we'd like the person to be this and this

> and this. And actually when you see that, and you're thinking but I remember that person they were casting for, it's not what they said they wanted. Do you know what I mean? It's like casting procedure is mainly a prerogative, they have to do it. But maybe during the casting procedure they find someone much better, or someone that they thought suited the part." [WF]

The diversity of South Africa renders it difficult to find the right person to perform particular roles, and the definition of the "right" person may even change while roles are being (re)allocated. For instance, in a particular advertisement for milk, they found the replacement of white characters by black ones unnecessary:

> "It's like the Clover[22]… there was a little white boy who holds a glass of milk and he goes to his mummy, and everyone was touched. And then **they had to put a black little boy**, and it was like, no but it doesn't matter which little boy it is as long as you get that sensation when a little boy is bringing his mummy milk. Because we had this debate at work, because we couldn't understand, how were you detracting from the sensitivity you had in the first ad? Now you're trying to recreate it for the second ad. It doesn't matter what the race of the boy was, just the fact that he did it for his mother. I don't know why they do that." [WF]
> [emphasis added]

These difficulties are clearly tied to the theme of apartheid, which briefly surfaced just before casting was discussed. Apartheid has left "clichés", and "cynical" people interpret what they see according to these "clichés" when it should be necessary to keep a balance between what is liable to "irritate" certain people and what may "irritate" others:

> "That's the one thing that bugs me about the apartheid that happened in South Africa and everything is that people become cynical about things. And when you have an advert that is represented by… say for example like you've got a black family eating supper and they're talking about Knorr, for argument's sake. And the advert is clichéd and everything. But you know it's hard to strike a balance between irritating people and not irritating people, hitting the mark and not hitting the mark. So I think it's so diverse, which is a plus. Like I said I love the diversity of the ads, I like the Consol Glass and I love it man, I think it is so representative of the youth. On the other hand, you know how to…" [WF]
> — "Keep a balance…" [WM]

The theme of apartheid vanished as soon as it appeared. It would probably have been too costly for the group, as a group, to discuss it and expose, if not hold opposing opinions about it, at least divergent sensibilities grounded in different experiences of segregation and racism. Differences of opinion were however overtly articulated, but quite unexpectedly and on issues apparently unrelated to the transformation of South Africa, even if the analysts could link or interpret the first contentious topic of discussion to questions of "race" relations in South Africa. The "leader" was disturbed by the use, in one ad which was not in our sample, of what she termed "coloured terminology" in a

[22] Clover is one of South Africa's leading processor and distributor of milk, dairy-related and other food products.

conversation between a black girl and a white girl. Interestingly enough the word which "does not work" for her, *choma*[23], means friend, pal… The other white woman, on the contrary, found this situation "fine". The black women then reminded the "leader" in no uncertain terms that in a mixed and multilingual society such as South Africa, and more specifically the South Africa of the (black) townships, words circulate, and are eventually incorporated in several languages. The inputs of the black students were so authoritative that the "leader" had to surrender, not with a final surreptitious note of reservation. This dialogue needs to be quoted at length:

> — "There is one ad, I don't know if you've seen it, where the girl, I think it's a white and a black girl, and two of their friends come, and they use a lot of coloured terminology in the conversation. It was very odd. I don't know if you've seen the ad, and maybe you relate to or not. But she's sitting there and she goes to a party and she has to wear white pants, and she uses *choma* and…" [WF1]
> — "No way girlfriend…" [BF]
> — "…No way girlfriend. I'm thinking what are they getting, they're getting American terminology and coloured terminology and they just try to put it all together." [WF1]
> — "They're all related, it's fine…" [WF2]
> — "It just didn't work, it didn't work. I mean I had coloured guys laughing at the ad because, like "did that girl just said '*choma*'? No she didn't" and it's like a whole laugh, maybe that's what they wanted, to be a big joke." [WF1]
> — "No because '*choma*' it's like tsotsitaal[24]." [BF]
> — "For sure, but she […] used *choma* and something […]" [WF1]
> — "But don't you think in South Africa we cannot do that? Go to the township, we do a lot of mixture." [BF]
> — "I suppose we use a lot of slang." [WF2]
> — "Ja, we use a lot of slang." [BF]
> — "You can make a slang sentence of South African words and no one would understand what you are talking about. It's only the people who are in South Africa that would understand. *Lekker my broe. Lekker my charlie, ja china*[25]. And you look at him and say what are you talking about? Is that Chinese? They don't get it. They don't understand it." [WF2]
> — "But I think in terms of it, it was supposed to be a young ad, young people… I think it just turned out to be a big joke. Do you disagree?" [WF1]
> — "They tried." [BF]
> — "They definitely tried. " [WF2]
> — "I must be honest, but you see, maybe again. Because it's maybe a black or a coloured terminology, when I watched that ad it didn't mean… **no, no it was fine, you see the ad, you understand what's going on. If it's cool, that's the ad. But she uses quite a terminology….**" [WF1]
> [emphasis added]

The *choma* dispute occurred in the middle of a discussion about "feminine products" (pads and tampons). Once the question of *choma* was settled the conversation on feminine products resumed and offered, right at the end of the discussion, another occasion for expressing disagreements. While the white female "leader" and the male student agreed that feminine products need not be advertised, but should be distributed

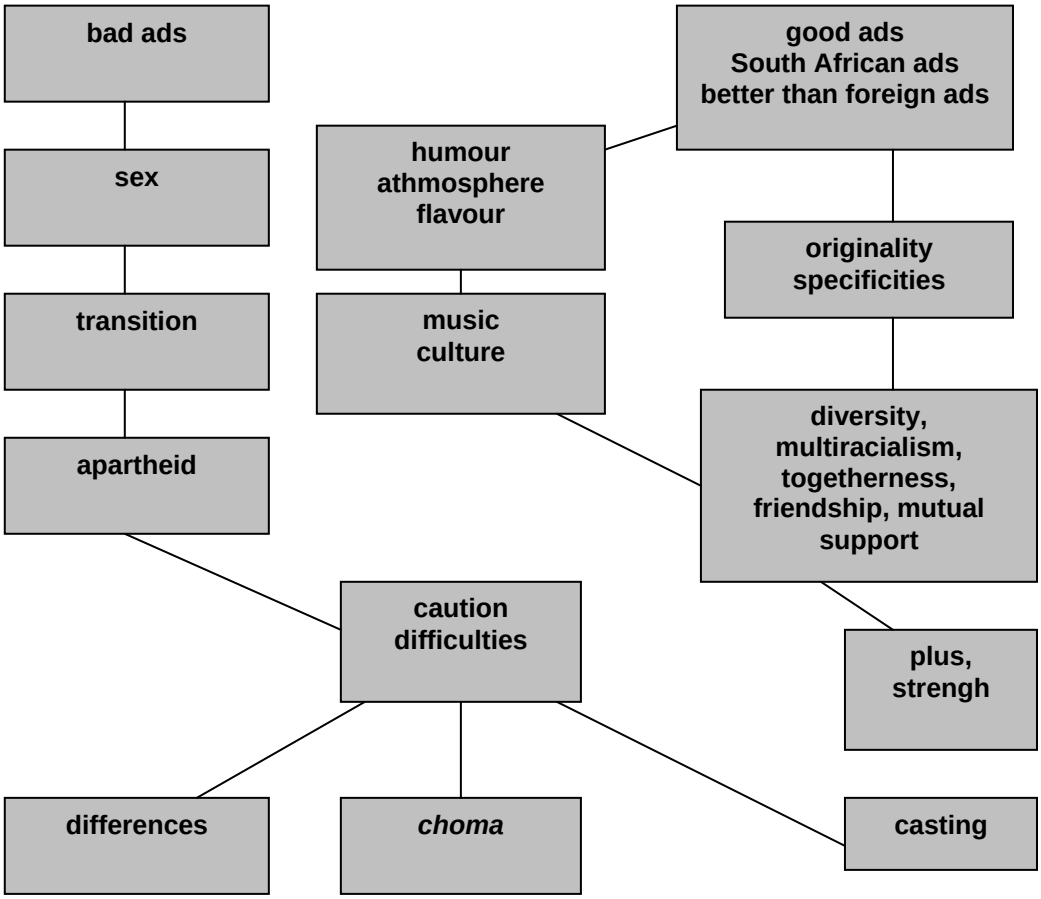
[23] From colloquial English *chum*.
[24] Literally: "language of the urban thugs"; township slang.
[25] It's fine my friend (brother). It's fine my pal; yes my buddy.

free of charge, a black woman insisted that advertisement and the availability of a variety of products guaranteed a freedom of choice: in a diverse country, different people have a right to prefer different products:

— “So they should have the same thing [sanitary pads] on offer subsidised.” [WF]
— “But if you don’t prefer that?” [BF]
— “Hey?” [WF]
— “I don’t think so. What if you don’t prefer that?” [BF]
— “Then you can buy.” [WF]
— “That’s the purpose of marketing...” [BF]
— “I don’t think that it should be…” [WF]
— “Customer preference, I prefer this, you prefer that.” [BF]

Again, on the surface, this little argument had nothing to do with the political or social organisation of South Africa. Yet it focused on the fundamental values which have been promoted in the new South Africa: freedom, and in particular freedom of choice, tolerance of differences. The negative connotation attached to the word “transition” was tied earlier to the use of sex in advertisement. Here, a claim for freedom is voiced in an exchange between women about products which are related to sex, and reproduction. The symbolic meaning of “freedom” is therefore certainly not limited to the possibility of choosing among various types of pads or tampons, but has something to do with differing visions of South Africa, of the ways in which it can or will reproduce and change.

RAU: THEMATIC CLUSTERS



Structural Analysis

Structure of the Discussion

The debate can be divided into three main parts. (A) Participants find South Africa special and unique. **(**B) However, there are problems and difficulties. (C) The indirect suggestion of problems and difficulties leads to circumspect expressions of disagreements, opposing black students to the white "leader" of the group.

A. After viewing the ads, the participants started by assessing their quality and categorizing them into good and bad and eventually agreed that South African commercials are better than foreign ones because they stage, with a touch of humour, a multiracial society: they show the way to South Africa's future, where all will come together and unite. The enthusiasm for what should be understood as the new South Africa was immediately tempered by comments stressing that race should not matter and that, though multiracialism is strength, advertisement designers should not overemphasise it. But the passion for South Africa was brought back by the sense of comedy found in some ads (for beer, considered as an essential element of the South African way of life), and especially by the African music heard in the Carling Black Label clip. South Africa definitely possesses a "special flavour".

B. Beer, and the all male cast of the Carling Black Label clip, introduced the topic of representation of men and women in advertisements, and which rapidly developed into a denunciation of the overuse of sex in recent commercials. A "transition" had taken place, changing ads from "normal" and "straightforward" (simply showing the product they advertise) to "sex selling". The diversity of audiences, and of consumers, makes it difficult to conceive ads that can work for all: men and women, workers and yuppies or buppies[26]. In addition to that, some ads can be deliberately misleading, like those advertising banks. Others, though, promote positive human values and facilitate a "constant connection" between people. The recurrent examination of ads (in general, not only of those that have been shown to the students) made the group act as a kind of "Independent Assessment Committee", which had a difficult job to perform, given the fact that "we have such a diverse audience here". This remark about the difficulty to cope with diversity was immediately followed by the only allusion to apartheid that surfaced in the discussion. Apartheid has generated "cynicism", the consequence being that ads are "clichéds", which makes it difficult to "keep a balance". One example of this difficulty is casting: people

[26] As the emerging black elite is known.

selecting actors for commercials seem to be experiencing difficulties in deciding what they want, and to stick to the type of character they have defined at the beginning; to make things worse, they usually end up "criticising each other".

C. A follow up question asked by Rehana Ebrahim-Vally (*From these four adverts you saw, which one would you like mostly, which one would you like least?*) re-initiated a discussion about good and bad ads, which once more led the participants to insist on South Africa's special flavour. A question from Denis-Constant Martin (*You mentioned that those South African ads had a particular flavour. Could you elaborate a little bit on that? I mean what do you mean by flavour?*) invited the interviewees to be more specific about their conception of the uniqueness of South Africa. Humour, good spirit, music (especially the men's voices), "strike a chord" and allow South Africans to know each other when they are abroad. The feeling of being a South African generates strong emotions. The discussion resumed evaluating the qualities of the ads and focused on "feminine products". A remark about the use of "coloured terminology" started the first real argument in the group: the white "leader" could not understand why the script of an ad was written to make a black girl and a white girl use a word she associates with what she assumes is a coloured way of speaking, while other participants stressed that in a multiracial society, people may freely use the words they want, that "slang" is widely used and can even be heard on TV, in sitcoms such as *Backstage*. One of the black students articulated her opinion very clearly: "You're supposed to listen to different languages", while another one considered that the use of slang or colloquial language made the ads and other programmes on TV "vibrant". The participants came back to "feminine products". The "leader" proposed that pads and tampons should be distributed free of charge; one of the black students disagreed quite bluntly with this suggestion and advocated freedom of choice: different people are entitled to have different preferences.

Analysis

The unfolding of the RAU group revealed that behind a curtain of general agreement on South Africa's uniqueness and expressions of patriotism endorsed by all the participants, differing visions of the country co-exist and may not be easily reconcilable, at least as witnessed within this framework of a brief discussion. The congenial atmosphere of the meeting, which remained good spirited until the end, and the fact that all understood it as an "experience" organised as part of an academic research project (co-directed by a foreigner) forbade that antagonisms be displayed in a violent or even direct manner. Consequently dissent could only emerge and manifest itself using issues that were peripheral and apparently loosely connected with the central question

under discussion. Animated exchanges took place when topics such as language (the *choma* debate) and “feminine products” were addressed, whereas apartheid was quickly pushed aside. Yet, the difference of opinion that appeared more and more pronounced between the white female “leader” and the black women — the other white woman and the white man taking a somewhat intermediate position — had to do with the organisation of South African society, how the question of “races” should be dealt with, and what roles (as in a casting) could be given to blacks and whites.

The assessment of ads provided the backdrop for patriotic declarations, especially on the part of the “leader” who had spent some years in Great Britain and who came back to South Africa because she was “homesick” (A). However, an examination of some of the “bad” ads facilitated the unveiling by white participants of reservations about “transition” and its consequences (B). Although, none seemed to take notice of them and cared to react immediately, they were probably kept in mind so that when the “leader” — who had all along spoken incessantly and had adopted the posture of an expert — exposed her inability to cope with the implications of living in a multiracial society, and to some extent her unfamiliarity with black South Africa (“the townships where we do a lot of mixture” specified a black participant), she was immediately reprimanded, and reminded that in a multicultural and multilingual society, differences have to be recognised and accepted, and that people are entitled to choose not only from among a variety of brands, but also from a personal perspective as identities are no longer prescribed.

Summary of the RAU group

A. Assessment of ads → South African ads are better than foreign ads → multiracialism → South Africa is unique

B. Differences between men and women → ads have become sex selling → some ads are misleading → apartheid → difficulties, caution should be exercised

C. Assessment of ads → South Africa is special because it has an “amazing blend of people” → who may use which language? (the *choma* debate) → dissent n°1: freedom in a multicultural and multilingual country → feminine products → dissent n°2: freedom of choice

Conclusion

Participants in the RAU group at first seemed to converge on an idealised representation of South Africa, a unique country which is home to an incredible blend of people, where all people are coming together, allowing whites to speak as Africans[27]. However the association of "transition" with sex symbolically raised the question of the rebirth of South Africa: of the delivering of the new South Africa. Two different representations of the transformation of South Africa since the 1990s then materialised. On the one hand, white students considered that caution should be exercised, that a balance should be kept between what is liable to "irritate" certain people and what may "irritate" others, and that the "race card" not be played. On the other hand, the black students explained that everyone now had to accept the consequences and obligations of living in a mixed, multiracial and multilingual society, (re)founded on the cornerstone of freedom. The discussion could not develop much further as it took place during lunch time and students had to go to their classes. One can only notice that a form of negotiation was initiated but was cut short due to time constraints.

Paris: An Idealised Representation of South Africa

The final step of this study was to interview French students who formed the test group. This test collective interview was organised in Paris, and it took place on October 21, 2003, in the seminar room of the Centre for International Studies and Research (a research centre of the National Foundation for Political Science), where Denis-Constant Martin is a Senior Research Fellow. The students gathered on this occasion were either former or actual students of Denis-Constant Martin, one of them working on her PhD dissertation under his supervision. There were five women and a man. All but one was studying political science or political sociology; among them, three had followed courses on African Studies. One had in depth experience of India and Pakistan, where she had lived for several years and where she still spends part of her time. One of them studied musicology and ethnomusicology whilst two of the participants had had some experience of South Africa. The musicology student, who is a black woman with relatives in Trinidad and Tobago, visited Gauteng around 1995; the white man, doing political science and

[27] Alluding to a Colgate commercial featuring a beaver, the white "leader" asked: "[…] as Africans, how do we relate to a beaver?"

specialising on Southern Africa, spent two months at the University of Pretoria and had just returned to Paris.

The discussion lasted for an hour and a half, and the debate was lively and friendly[28]. Participants basically shared the same point of view, and no noticeable disagreement was expressed regarding either South Africa or France when it came to the discussion. The woman who had lived in India and Pakistan, and who was also slightly older than the others, assumed a leading role, but everyone had ample opportunity to talk. The interest in South Africa they shared, and the perception of the interviewers as "experts" on South Africa (they knew Denis-Constant Martin was doing research on and teaching South Africa; they had been introduced to Rehana Ebrahim-Vally as a South African scholar), influenced them on several occasions to ask the interviewers about South Africa. Their questions were answered as concisely as possible and in a manner that would not bear heavily on the spontaneous unfolding of the discussion.

Thematic Analysis

The main axis of the discussion was a comparison — sometimes deliberate, sometimes implicit — between French and South African commercials. The outcome of this comparison — into which Indian and Pakistani, and to a lesser extent Trinidadian, commercials were also introduced — was an overall critical appreciation of the South African ads the participants had been shown.

The French group found that the ads did not truly represent South African realities; this because they tended to aestheticise everything, and in particular to idealise "race relations" and bodies. In their opinion, these clips were at a great variance with what they knew of South Africa, from books, films, but also, for two of them, from their experiences of the country; and the disconnection between the image of South Africa projected in the ads and what they assumed they knew of South Africa could only be explained, or justified, by the fact that many South African advertisements include ideas and messages that act as facilitating reconstruction and reconciliation: "a point of departure for hope" (*un point de départ pour un espoir*).

All the interviewees found the ads in the sample rather conformist. In their opinion, the ads were designed in a spirit of "political correctness" and artificially displayed an

[28] The discussion took place and was transcribed in French; the excerpts quoted below were translated in English by the authors.

equal representation of blacks and whites as if quotas were used in the casting of characters, to make the clips look "racially correct". The interviewees further argued that such extreme forms of political correctness, added to the aestheticising of the clip, tended to erase differences: the ads did not show old folks, families, coloured people; they did not even include "very" white people and remained quite "brown" from a visual point of view:

> "In the image I have of South Africa, there is also a blond population… which is representative precisely of… which also is the caricatural symbol of the Afrikaners. In these ads, except very briefly in the first one [Consol Glass] I believe where there is a young blond man with a lock of hair… yet the mixture of people remains very brown…"

The ads seem to exclude every element that could bring some roughness, some harshness (*aspérité*): the youth have no problems in their dealings with banks, and the images of the body they display are fairly decent. They lack spontaneity (except for the FNB clip) and a sense of humour. Finally they are unoriginal and tend to copy international or American models:

> "My impression is that it is as if they had imported a whole model of advertisement from the US or the UK… and yet, dating from… I don't know… like MTV ten years ago, and as if that model were superimposed on a situation without in the least taking into account the national situation to try and see what… national or local […] they superimpose and at the same time they try to incorporate this balance [between the "races"], a well darkened (*bien teinté*) balance but which does not go too far… maybe that's also why the clips make us feel uneasy."

In spite of their aesthetic qualities, more precise comparisons between French (and Indian) and South African commercials indirectly underline the weaknesses of the South African ads. French ads show "normal" (not idealised) bodies and include dialogues. French and Indian ads contain much more humour and satire. French ads are less puritanical in their approach to the body, but they often become obscene, especially when they link sexual relations and toilet paper as they do in large posters that could be seen in the Paris subway, and other places, at the time of the interview. The opinions of the participants did not amount to a simple display of chauvinism, for they exposed the overuse of sex in French advertising, and made it very clear that, although they were sensitive to the advertisement genre as a form of art, they were rather opposed to it being exploited in ways that disregard basic human values and therefore they supported anti-advertisement movements active in Paris in the 21st century. These students were sensitive to issues of race representation and demonstrated this by criticising the "whiteness" of French TV and the fact that there were, at the time, no black announcers

working for the main national networks. It would seem that they extended their general distrust of advertisement to South African commercials, which contributed to convincing them that what they stage cannot be "true".

The participants' cautious and somewhat negative appreciation of the South African ads they were shown is rooted in the firm belief that, because of their "correctness", because of the idealised picture they offer of the country, because they erase differences, avoid humour and spontaneity, and avoid anything potentially contentious, they are not representative of South Africa. The picture of the country given in the ads does not conform to the representations they have of South African society; it sounds "off key", fallacious:

> "The way they play with the lights, which make it difficult to differentiate the origins of the characters in the clips… their extremely aestheticised aspect, the fact that their message is not clear, finally I think everything is off key (*sonne faux*)."

In contrast to the harmony, conviviality and togetherness pervading the ads in the sample, the participants' vision of South Africa was that of a divided society, where there is still a "gulf", a "rift" between blacks and whites, which makes it impossible for them to work together or meet informally as they do in the clips:

> "I am wondering if, to me for instance, the fact that these clips are so caricatural in their politically correct dimension does not finally reveal the rift (*gouffre*) in the society… at least for this generation in today's South Africa, I mean if such a cool (*chouette*) future is so forcefully projected, a future when everyone will feel comfortable together… I wonder if it does not reveal that today there is an inability to make people feel comfortable, exchange and do things together, and that it is necessary, precisely, to use something that is ultra-aestheticised in order to create the conditions for, maybe with a great deal of hope, reaching a situation where it may happen in real life."

Apartheid, the students imagined, is still ingrained in the psyche of ordinary South Africans, and it is still very much a reality in the rural areas. These perceptions, the students gauged from books and documentary films, were substantiated by the testimonies of the two students who had been to South Africa; the more so since they told of different experiences — a black woman (BW) who visited immediately after the demise of apartheid; and a white man (WM) who had just returned from the University of Pretoria — but converged in concluding that they have seen no evidence of any social interaction between blacks and whites:

> "As a matter of fact, I was in South Africa last [European] summer, I was at the University of Pretoria and I talked with many… in particular Congolese… There is a University of Pretoria brochure and it's like in these ads, in all the pictures, systematically, you can see blacks and whites together, and when I talked with the Congolese, they told me it's absurd, it's not true, that struck me […] on the whole campus I myself I never saw blacks with whites, except if they were foreigners… they always kept together, blacks with blacks, whites with whites, coloureds with coloureds, it struck me." [WM]

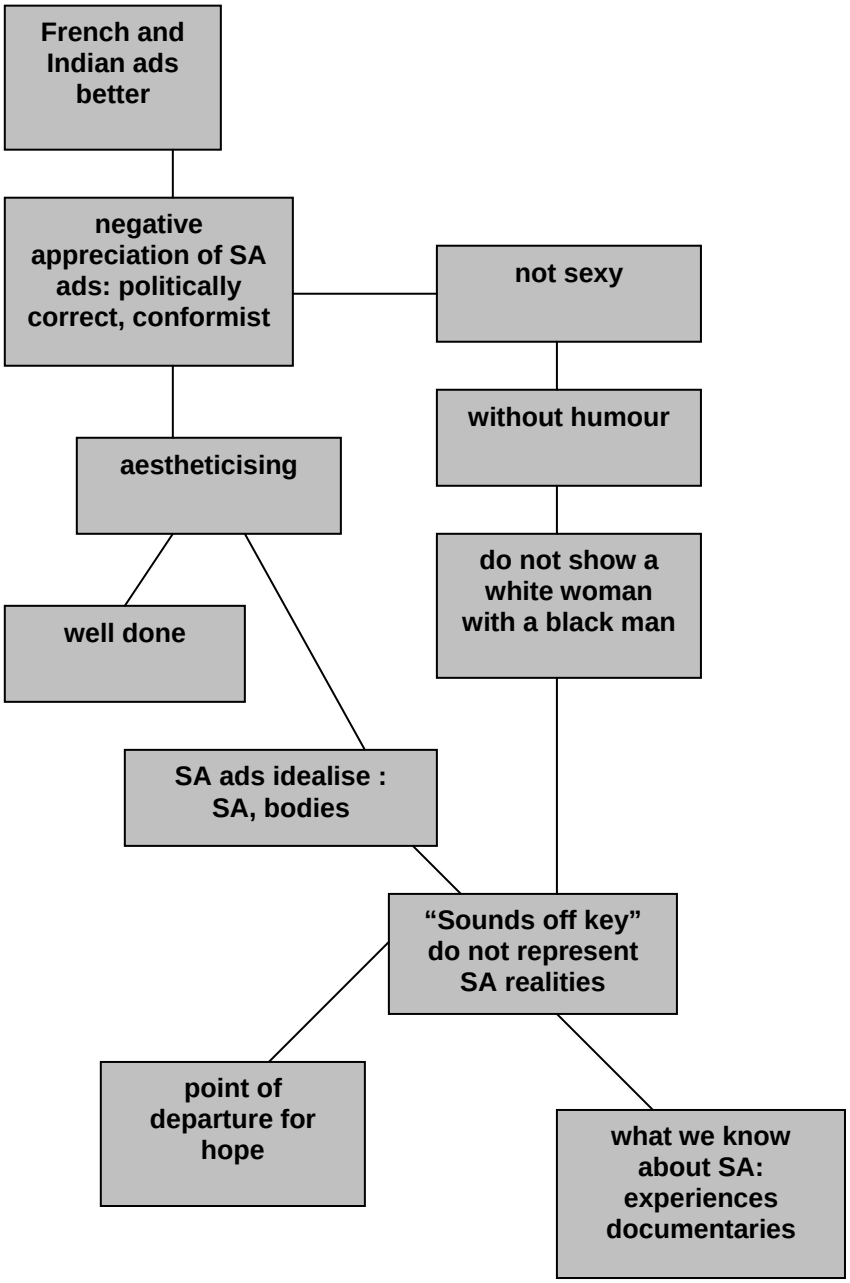
> "My experience of South Africa, that was a little longer ago, but that's right, I have absolutely no memory of something looking like what I've seen in these clips, in any case, at this time it was… yet when I went to South Africa, I think it was in 1995, and everyone was saying 'We forgive, we forgive', at this time it was something rather positive… but in actual fact it was completely different, it was extremely tense… and I remember having found myself in meetings where there were blacks and whites, and the blacks were saying 'Do you realise, two months ago, if I had been seen here, cops would have come to take me in', so they were just enjoying… I would say enjoying the possibility to occupy certain places, to occupy the city, to occupy… that was probably the first thing… but beyond that… there were […] one day I went to the inauguration of an exhibition where there were only whites… the only black, except for me and my brother, was the barman and it was very tense, and people were staring at us… and I think that's when I first realised the… tension. Otherwise, there was no mixture possible in the streets…" [BW]

The only way the participants could resolve the contradiction between what was shown in the ads and their own understanding of the state of South African society was to propose an interpretation of the clips. They did not, they explained, represent what really obtains in today's South Africa, but projected a dream, conveyed a message of hope for the future:

> "What I see, especially in the last ad [Carling Black Label] is a form of union between blacks and whites who are working together for their common future in South Africa, and who gather after work to enjoy the simple pleasure of beer, which is maybe a social link, a common denominator between blacks and whites."

> "As far as I understand it, the message that is perceptible does not so much deal with the products, than with hope. It suggests that may be one day there will be young people around a table who will play music together, and there will be people… blacks, whites, coloureds, whatever you can think of… To me, that's rather that… the message I get, it would be a message of hope in that direction."

PARIS: THEMATIC CLUSTERS



Structural Analysis

The development of the Paris discussion was rather straightforward and can be divided in three main parts: (A) an idealisation of South Africa; (B) comparisons with advertisements from France and elsewhere; (C) apartheid is not dead.

Structure of the Discussion

A. From the beginning, the participants were puzzled by the representation and presentation of South Africa they saw in the clips. By aestheticising social relations, and especially "race" relations, and casting them in an international, or more specifically American mould, these commercials tended to idealise South Africa and homogenise a society the French students deemed much more diverse in every respect. Everything was very politically correct; bodies were young and flawless. The participants wondered if the ads actually were meant to propose a programme for the future rather than reflect contemporary realities. Yet, they found the ads to be very "cold", lacking in spontaneity, very decent but devoid of any sense of humour.

B. A comparison with French advertisements underlined what the participants considered as mediocre and lacklustre in South African ads. There is no doubt that from a technical or designer perspective, South African commercials are expertly done and can compare with the best in the world, but insofar as using the body the French participants found them too stiff. To explain this they compared the use of the body in South African adverts to how the French adverts use the body to convey meanings and messages. The French adverts they argued, use the body with greater flexibility, with humour and with more freedom. They agreed that some of the French ads used the body in a rather obscene way. Compared to the French ads which staged situations closer to the French reality, used bodies that were realistic and not absolutely perfect and where characters talk to each other, the South African ads they found were rather insipid. Advert designers in South Africa, the French group believed, compromised reality for aesthetics. Their ads depicted perfect bodies, were rather serious, and less original as they were aligned to American norms. Further comparisons with Pakistani, Indian, and Trinidadian TV ads, underlined the participants' inability to relate to the clips they were shown. They discussed at length a publicity campaign just launched in France for a brand of humidified toilet paper, which they found obnoxious and stupid; the woman who works in and on Pakistan emphasised that such an ad would never be allowed there, and the participants wondered if it would be accepted in South Africa. The disgust caused by the ads for humidified toilet paper made them think of the anti-advertisement campaign that was developing in the

Paris subway. To show their disgust, people in the “anti-pub” (anti-advert) movement would draw graffiti all over the ad posters and hi-jack the meaning and message on the ad posters. The students found this campaign interesting and sound both from a moral and aesthetic point of view.

C. After the lively interlude on the anti-advertisement campaign, and just as the discussion was losing its momentum, the man in the group explained that he had just returned from South Africa where he spent a month and a half at the University of Pretoria. Relating his experiences in South Africa, he admitted that it was basically acquired at the University where he spent the majority of his time. He admitted that the University of Pretoria was not representative of the country as a whole but stressed the fact that he had seen nothing similar to what is shown in the clips. He was particularly amazed at the lack of interracial mixing on the Pretoria University campus. He noticed that students on this campus preferred to stay within their own ethnic and racial groups. In this way they continued with the former apartheid racial classification: blacks mixed with blacks, whites with whites, coloureds with coloureds, etc. To put it in a nutshell, his impression of interracial mixing viewed through the prism of Pretoria University was that racism was still widespread and that apartheid was still ingrained in the minds of South Africans. The black woman then told of her own experience in South Africa, back around 1995. She confirmed that there was no mixing in those days, and recalled that in spite of the atmosphere of “forgiving”, there was a very palpable tension. Finally another participant spoke of a documentary she had recently seen, which showed how apartheid is still alive in some rural areas.

Analysis

The students in the Paris group were interested in African and international affairs and their competence in these domains was evident. They were not impressed by the ads they had seen and right from the start adopted a rather sceptic attitude. To them the clips projected an idealised and politically, even “racially”, correct vision of South Africa, which can only be understood as the expression of a hope for the country’s future. To explain why they were so critical, they resorted to comparisons with French and Indian advertisements, which on the whole they found to be of a much better quality. However, as it appeared at the end of the second part of the discussion their critical attitude was rooted in a general suspicion of advertisement. This “confession”, spurred by their extremely negative reaction to one particular toilet roll campaign which associated defecating and sexual relations, cleared the ground for the two participants who had been to South Africa. They could confirm that the reality they witnessed was totally different

from that which was shown in the clips, and stressed that apartheid is not completely dead in South Africa. The contrast between the clips and the reality as depicted by the two students who visited South Africa, supported by other sources, generated questions directed at the interviewers, and the discussion turned into a questions and answers session about South Africa and that cannot be considered, and analysed, as part of a non-directive collective interview…

Summary of the Paris group

A. A "racially correct" South Africa
- idealisation of "race" relations in South Africa
- idealisation of bodies

B. South African commercials are technically well done, but follow international models
- comparison with French (Indian, Pakistani and Trinidadian) commercials
- French ads are closer to reality, show "real" bodies, are more humorous
- but advertisements for humid toilet paper, linking sexual intercourse to defecating, is unbearable
- anti-advertisement campaigners are doing a nice job

C. Experience confirms that South Africa is not as shown in the ads
- testimonies of the two students who visited South Africa
- information from documentary films

Conclusion

The Paris discussion was underpinned by a combination of general distrust in advertisement and an informed interest about South Africa by the students who accepted to participate in the collective interview. Their interpretation of the clips they were shown was consequently based on their conviction that ads are misleading and that they had a knowledge of South Africa that could enable them to "read between the lines" of the commercials. The different representations participants had of South Africa converged, whether they had been, or not, to the country. They assumed that social, and "racial", relations could not have changed radically since 1990, and that what the clips displayed was not a genuine reflection of everyday reality. The image they had of South Africa was that of a country where a rift still kept people who were formerly separated apart and where racial mixing was almost non existent. This image was consolidated by the

experiences of the two students who had been to South Africa. Although both of them stressed that their knowledge of the country was limited, since they did not stay in the country for very long, and visited only Johannesburg and Pretoria (specifically the University of Pretoria), the conclusion they drew from their stay — there is no “racial” mixing in South Africa — was accepted without reservations. However, since they could not totally dismiss the South African clips, they resorted to their competence in social science analysis and proposed to interpret them not as reflections of what South Africa was at the time of the interview, but as a projection of what it could become in the future. Yet, this did not alter their opinion of the clips as not very convincing. Obviously, French students were not familiar with South African commercials, and did not appreciate the “sense of humour” some of the RAU students thought to be characteristic of South Africa. They displayed the same “advertisement culture” as the South Africans as they too resorted to using other commercials to make a point. But, not having an in-depth knowledge of South African commercials, they tended to take for granted the bias in our sample. South Africans on the other hand were able to locate the ads against a general background (the genres of advertisement shown on South African TV) and to “decipher” the bias underlying the selection of these four clips, French students tended to think that the sample was really representative. Yet the criteria we used in selecting the clips remained effective in facilitating the articulation of representations of South Africa. The discussion showed that even French, and European, students well informed about Africa still shared a somewhat simplified vision of the country, taking into account oppositions and contradictions, and underestimating the complexity of a social system in which antagonisms and violence do not prevent interactions and convergences.

CONCLUSION: AN INEXTRICABLE COMBINATION OF HOPES AND ANXIETIES

When we asked South African students to participate in discussion groups about commercial clips shown on TV, we did not meet any resistance, not even reluctance, only interest and curiosity. Advertisement has become an integral part of social life. It contributes to the constitution of a cognitive stock, both individual and collective. From this cognitive stock, individuals draw ideas, images, metaphors in order to interpret the society they live in and position themselves in it; the same stock is shared by a great number of those who are exposed to TV ads, that is the majority of people in most countries today, and no doubt also among South Africa's urban populations. The "advertisement culture" displayed by all South African interviewees was absolutely striking. They were familiar not only with the commercials we used as prompts for the collective interviews but with a great number of the ads shown on TV in recent years; they could evoke them, discuss them, and relate the commercials in our sample to innumerable other ads. This shows the extent to which young South Africans, whatever their level of education and the social milieu to which they belong, live with advertisement, integrate it in their daily life, and can "think through" it. However sharing an "advertisement culture" does not imply a commonality of ideas or points of view, neither on advertisement as such, nor on what is projected in the commercials. Indeed every individual reworks and reinterprets what she or he has seen on the screen; however, the basic material on which such reworking and reinterpreting operates is common to most members of a group or a society, and consequently generates similarities, convergences and overlapping in the social images and metaphors every individual produces from TV advertisement.

Commercials and Non-directive Group Interviews

Advertisement contributes to the formation of social representations, which are based on the same sets of images and scenarios but vary according to individual life experiences and concerns. This is the reason why, in our survey, commercial clips have worked very well as a form of projective test aiming at facilitating the utterance of social representations and, at the same time, has generated discussions in which, in spite of the constraints implicitly bearing on the groups, tensions and antagonisms could surface. The

groups, as an academic experiment involving young people, most of them students or former students, were not arenas where divergences and oppositions would naturally be expressed. On the contrary, everything — the relation of the interviewees to the interviewers, the location of the interviews, the particular clips included in our sample — seemed to induce an atmosphere of congeniality and harmony. Yet, if the debates always remained kind and courteous, in at least two of the groups, those that included black and white students, the discussion of commercial clips revealed, behind an façade of adhesion to the new South Africa such as projected in the clips, the existence of divergent conceptions of how South African society should evolve and be organised, leading to opposed representations of the future of the country.

The manner in which different representations of the new South Africa could be uttered in a non-antagonistic fashion during the discussions may probably also be considered as a particular enactment of this "new" South Africa. What was performed in the microcosm of the groups was one aspect of what is daily played in social life: the possibility to disagree about the present social organisation, and to argue about the future; possibilities that were refused to most South Africans before 1990. Of course, the emergence of divisions and conflicts in collective interviews is usual, but the way in which it was managed at this particular juncture in South Africa's history, by these particular groups of young South Africans also tells something of South Africa's reconstruction after three centuries and a half of racist domination, and more than 50 years of apartheid.

Using non-directive collective interviews and showing selected commercials as prompts proved a fertile method to collect elements of social representations in a historical situation when they are likely to transform rapidly. The presence of a strong "advertisement culture", the integration of commercials in mental schemes used to encode and decode social perceptions made the participants immediately connect the representations projected in the commercials they were shown with their own representations. TV ads provided a common ground on which the interviewees could meet, discuss, and agree or disagree. The non-directive quality of the interviews facilitated the free flow of ideas and arguments containing elements of social representations, which the thematic and structural analysis could reassemble to give a more general picture of the ways in which young South Africans (and some of their French counterparts) saw South Africa less than ten years after the first democratic elections. The unfolding and contents of the interviews confirmed what is generally emphasised in the methodological literature: non-directive interviews, and especially collective non-directive interviews, are the most appropriate method to study social representations. What our experiment also

confirms is that this method also works efficiently in a situation where interviewees and (at least one of the) interviewers do not share the same background and experiences; that the cultural distance existing between interviewers and interviewees may even create conditions where the latter make a special effort to explicit for the benefit of "outsiders" what is usually kept implicit, especially when people engaged in the discussion assume they have gone through the same experiences and partake in a social knowledge the researchers do not have. Finally the need to pay a particular attention, in the analysis, to what is fortuitous, fleeting and stealthy was also illustrated in our interviews. Disagreements bearing on issues of extreme importance such as the inheritance of apartheid and the conditions for fruitful interaction between people formerly classified in different categories surfaced during very short episodes, à propos of matters which were apparently of little consequence. Yet, it was precisely in these moments that the most important questions were posed, and that divergent representations, underpinning different answers, could be grasped.

Advertising the "Rainbow Nation"

The four commercial clips we had selected illustrated in various scenarios and aesthetics the ideal of South Africa as a "Rainbow Nation" and emphasised changes which had occurred between 1990 and 2003. Bodily contacts involving people with different skin colours and physical appearances, and suggesting intimate relations between them, are no longer prohibited; indeed they have become such a feature of South African social life (as a reality or as a desire) that they can stimulate the intention to buy certain products. Harmony, togetherness and cooperation provide the weft on which both work and pleasures can be weaved. Colour blindness prevails and good fortune (in the form of beer or money) ignores previous classifications. The free mix of people that South Africa now accommodates, their common inclination towards toil and fun hold great promises for modernisation, development, and possibly leadership on the world stage. Brought together in a nutshell, such was the representation of the new South Africa projected in the four commercials we showed the participants in our interview groups.

In all cases, the first reaction to the clips shown at the beginning of the interviews was one of ambivalence. Scepticism was expressed and the commercials were considered as confusing and deceiving; yet they were said to offer a fairly good

("relevant") depiction of the "South African way of living", especially because they captured the very specific combination of an inclination to party hard and a will to work hard (Pretoria). Similarly, they were seen as misleading and reflecting South African realities (Wits). When classified in good and bad, the positive appreciation of the ads was justified by the fact that they showed the uniqueness of South Africa (RAU). Given the large convergence between the representations of post-apartheid South Africa found in the clips and those expressed by the interviewees, one may infer that feelings of ambivalence that came out right from the start were not only a posture adopted towards advertisement in a collective interview situation in order for the participants to stress their independence of mind. More generally, these initial reactions revealed a broader ambivalence directed at the new South Africa, generated by the way they lived it and in it; an ambivalence the content of which would be substantiated later in the discussion.

Interestingly, the same processes seem to have underlain the reactions of the Paris group. The general reluctance to advertisement shown by the students led them to pass a negative judgement on South African ads, which eventually led to a disenchanted vision of South Africa, a country still deeply divided, where apartheid had not really been eradicated.

Body, Sex and Social Reproduction

Among all the commercial clips that were broadcast during the period when we taped prime time TV programmes, we deliberately selected ads where we thought the presence of bodies, or various combinations of bodies with different features, would trigger allusions to the racial organisation of South African society, as it prevailed before 1994, as it is still very visible today. Although in one instance (Pretoria), contact between bodies (a black woman can fondle a white man) was perceived as an indication that changes have been taking place, the co-presence and interaction of characters with various skin colours and features did not particularly stir up commentaries; as a matter of fact, it appeared unnoticed, as something normal, part of ordinary life that need not be remarked upon. Only the Parisians really discussed it, to underline that the situations of inter-"racial" socialising or working together did not conform to what they knew about South Africa. The South Africans' absence of reaction probably indicates that for a generation of people who came of age after 1990, mixing socially, partying and working

together, is not, or more probably, should not be a problem. One of the participants in the Pretoria group articulated it very clearly: “it’s a new world, times have changed, it’s real.”

The use of bodies in advertising generally, not only in the clips we showed, led to discussing other questions. Here the body — or more specifically sex, its uses and abuses in advertising — worked effectively as a metaphor of the social. In the Wits group, it led to evoking diseases, social hazards, dangers and finally death. The structure of the Wits discussion, as well as the link between AIDS and dying show, without a doubt, that death here does not only mean the demise of individual human beings, but a risk that threatens South Africa as a whole. Discussing the body suggested talking about sex, which of course is associated with pleasure and reproduction, individual and social. Sex introduced danger and the menace of destruction: the capacity of the society to reproduce and perpetuate itself was seen as uncertain, because of AIDS, but also because of crime and poverty. Anxiety is unavoidable whenever the future of South Africa is discussed. At Wits, “redemption” was thought possible thanks to the mediation of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu.

Similarly, at RAU, body led to sex, an association which suggests that “transition” had been, for some of the participants, more difficult to live through than openly avowed. The “leader” in the RAU group — and she most probably also spoke for others — concealed behind vocal proclamations of patriotism reservations regarding the social and political evolution of South Africa since 1990. Underlining her contradictory feelings does not amount to questioning or undermining the sincerity of her patriotism, but simply provides another illustration of a rampant ambivalence. Still in the RAU discussion, towards the end, the body brought back issues related to sex, this time to female sex and “feminine products”. Once again what was at stake behind such topic was clearly reproduction, including the reproduction of society. The theme of reproduction generated a metaphorical sequence: from the idea that when it delivers a child, a body reproduces itself in producing another being, stemmed the thought that when a society transforms — that is engenders a new society — one has a right to assess the degree and quality of the “newness” of the reality born from the process of evolution or “transition”. At RAU, the white “leader” implicitly expressed her apprehension of too much “newness”, while one of the black students stressed that freedom — specifically freedom to mix and freedom to choose — must be an inalienable component of the new dispensation.

In Paris, the body was also used as a metaphor of the social: what was considered as an idealisation of South African bodies naturally suggest that it is the whole image of South Africa presented in the clips that was idealised. This point of view is confirmed in a quite convoluted way when the discussion focused on a campaign promoting a brand of humid toilet paper. Here, again, discussing the body introduced to talking about sex, and the obnoxious association of defecating and having sex. This example served to reveal a general attitude of distrust in and hostility to advertisement, which consolidated disbelief in the picture of South Africa shown in the clips.

Representations of South Africa

If we amalgamate the various themes that emerged in the three South African collective interviews, a general representation of the new South Africa, shared by young South Africans of various origins, with a medium to high level of education, begins to take shape.

Differences and Conciliations

South Africa accommodates blacks and whites, and though in the eyes of the young South Africans the gap between them is not as deep as perceived by their French counterparts, there are still vast differences. The three South African groups evidenced the persistence of fault lines separating white and black young South Africans. In the RAU group, white participants euphemistically reduced the consequences of apartheid to “clichés”, they associated “transition” with changes for the worst, and they stated that the multiracial “coming together” of people in the new South Africa should not be made too “obvious” in the commercials. At Wits, the white leader opined that ads should try and stay away from the idea of races, but that it was still extremely difficult in a democracy that was only nine years old. On the other hand, participants in the “all black” Pretoria group considered that whites ignore “their surroundings”, and one of the black women in the RAU group told the white leader that she should “go to the township”, to get a better idea of how people speak (and live) there.

These fleeting remarks uncover representations some white South Africans have about the “transition” and the new dispensation: they unreservedly and sincerely welcomed the end of apartheid, but apprehend its outcomes; they would prefer the realities of apartheid to be rapidly forgotten; they would be happy to live in a “democratic” and “non-racial” South Africa where social relations are not radically altered, and value systems remain unchanged. These attitudes reinforce the representations many blacks have of white South Africans: they are not aware — and do not really want to become aware — of the social realities of the country they belong to, and are not ready to accept the consequences of South Africa’s demographics. That is why the transformation is not only a matter of replacing whites with blacks, but of going along “with the culture of the people”.

However the gaps and fault lines which in the interview groups appeared to separate white and black South Africans did not seem to be unbridgeable. Indeed, the interview situation facilitated the adoption by the participants of attitudes of toleration and created conditions for negotiating their visions of the new South Africa. Nevertheless, the tenor of the discussions in the two “multiracial” groups (Wits and RAU) probably reflected what happens daily at work, on campuses, in the streets or the alleys of commercial malls: differences do not immediately result in conflicts but can be talked about and peacefully, if not resolved, at least temporarily put aside. The Parisian students failed to recognise the existence of these quotidian micro-processes of conciliation, the more so since the polarisation of South African politics usually conceal their vivacity.

South Africa’s Potential and Dangers

On both sides, black and white, representations of the new South Africa appear ambivalent and even somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, it is a country with a great potential, a country one can be proud of; on the other it is confronted with acute problems. This opposition generates confusion and anxiety, and nourishes confrontations and negotiations.

One of the main assets of South Africa is its diversity (RAU), it gives the country a “special” flavour which is expressed through humour and translates into friendship and a spirit of togetherness (RAU), an aptitude to marry hard work and fun (Pretoria). South Africa is also characterised by its physical nature and its traditions: its landscapes, its food, its dress (Pretoria), and its African music (RAU). It has what it takes to attract the

interest of foreigners, and hopefully their investments that would contribute to solving the problems (Pretoria).

Problems which, of course, are first of all crime and poverty (Pretoria): if they could be “targeted”, South Africa would be a great country (Pretoria), but the threat that has to be defused is no less than death, the death of South Africans, the death of South Africa (Wits).

The question of death and rebirth metaphorically introduced in the Wits and RAU discussions are signs of a rampant anxiety that pervades the three groups. In spite of utterances to the contrary, incertitude and doubts about the future of the country — its capacity to organise for all its inhabitants to live together in harmony; the ability of the government to annihilate crime and poverty, to cope with the AIDS pandemics, to implement economic policies conducive to development and employment, with possibly the support of foreign investors — infused the debates in the three South African groups.

Anxieties and fears are nevertheless counterbalanced by hope. Hope is based on pride in the country and patriotic feeling, the firm belief that it has the necessary resources, natural and human, to overcome the problems it is confronted with at the present. This is the attitude that underlay the conclusion of the Pretoria group, the group whose members were more directly confronted with problems of employment and daily subsistence.

The other South African groups also expressed optimism; but at Wits and RAU, given the mixed composition of the groups, in addition to professions of confidence in the country, the discussion enacted one of the main features of the transformation of South Africa since 1990: the ability to debate and negotiate, intensely or more diplomatically.

This is probably an aspect of South African society that escaped the Parisian students. Their vision of a divided society, where there is no social interaction between blacks and whites, where the citizens’ minds are still saturated with apartheid ideology, excluded the complexities of a society where divisions and mixing, where antagonisms and convergences operate as joint forces behind the evolution of the country. The representation of the Paris group was based on partial information and testimonies which, although undisputable as relations of lived experiences, may not have been representative of the general conditions obtaining in South Africa in 2003. However, the interest of the Parisian students in the country led them to consider that situations staged

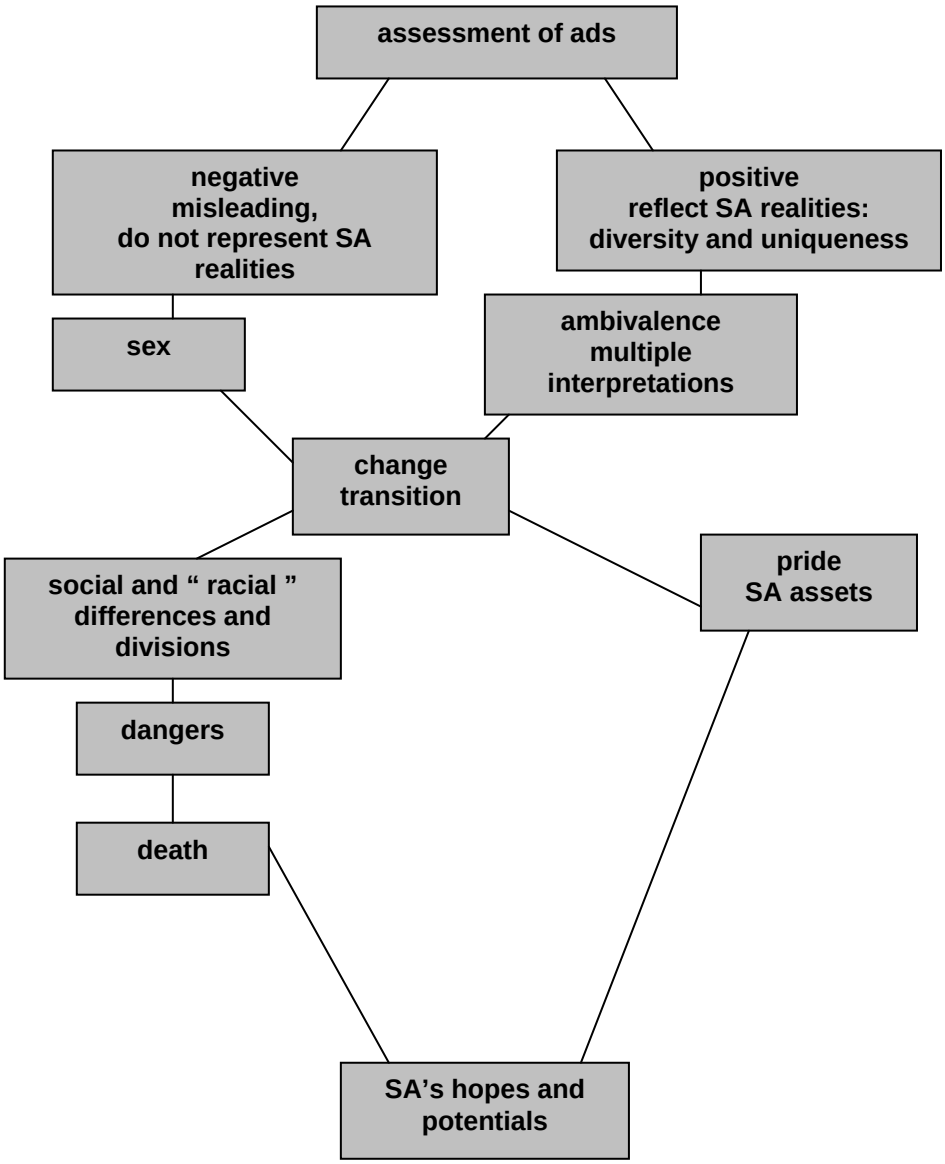
in the commercials were possibly a projection of what South Africa could become, here again considering the future of the country with a moderate optimism.

South Africa has definitely changed. The demise of apartheid and the insistence on freedom — on every kind of freedom — engraved in the Bill of Rights of the 1996 Constitution were indeed the springs of processes of transformation. One aspect of this hardly won freedom is that now South Africans are free to see their country as they wish, to foresee it as they hope. On the background of the popular metaphor proposed by Desmond Tutu, that of the "Rainbow Nation", new representations of South Africa have emerged, that have left traces in TV commercials as well as in the minds of South Africans belonging to different social milieus. Because of the freedom to see and foresee these representations, while sharing a number of common principles, are far from uniform. Interracial harmony, equality, togetherness and cooperation are now accepted by a large majority of South Africans as the basis upon which the society they live in must be organised. Yet there is not a complete agreement on the manner in which these principles can be enacted, or on what they entail. The debate provoked by divergent views in this respect is not limited to the official arena, it is general. Even where and when South Africans do not want to state openly their divergences, they fuel their discussions and interactions. This is probably one of the reasons why the tone and evolution of these discussions sometimes seem unpredictable, why there are sometimes unexpected outbursts of violence in words or acts. The non-directive group interviews showed how agreement on principles and disagreement on their implementation are intricately entangled, and how in certain circumstances their entanglement can be managed, how in other circumstances divergences can be directly expressed without creating unbearable conflicts.

The tension between agreement on principles and disagreement on their consequences is compound by another dissonance. Patriotism, the love for South Africa — whatever differences there may exist in representations of the country — is evidently one of the most widely shared attitudes among South Africans. The image of the "Rainbow Nation" gave patriotism a new content, and thus a new impetus. The belief that South Africa has a great potential is widespread. Yet it is contradicted by realities that weaken it. South Africa is growing more and more uneven; inequality generates crime and hampers economic growth; the AIDS pandemics and the inability of the government to cope with it add another dimension to fears provoked by poverty and insecurity. South Africans are dying; the country is in danger.

The ambivalences expressed in very diverse ways in the group interviews manifest the complexity of the contradictory representations young South Africans have of their country. It is a country they love, they are proud of, they consider endowed with a wealth of assets, material and human; and they do hope it will become the country they idealise as harmonious, hard working and prone to fun. But the difficulties it is confronted with and the inefficiencies of the political solutions that are proposed to combat them make them fear South Africa may collapse, or even die. Hopes and anxieties, confidence and fear are totally enmeshed. Together they appeared in 2003 as the most salient features of the representations of South Africa held by groups of young South Africans.

THEMATIC CLUSTERS (Paris group excluded)



CHAINS OF ASSOCIATIONS (STRUCTURE)

PRETORIA	WITS	RAU	PARIS
.scepticism about advertisement ➔ independence of mind ➔ ambivalence towards ads ➔ new South Africa	. assessment of the ads ➔ display stereotypes, are misleading	. assessment of the ads ➔ classification in good and bad	. assessment of the ads ➔ ads idealise SA
➔ SA identity / idiosyncrasies	➔ ads uses and abuses the body and sex ➔ detrimental effects	➔ SA ads better ➔ SA unique	➔ SA ads dull ➔ French ads better
➔ change	➔ power on advertisement ➔ power in SA: who holds what type of power, Africans / Europeans ?	➔ overuse of sex in advertisement ➔ reservations about "transition"	➔ anti-advertisement attitude
➔ national identity and pride	➔ races and racism in SA	➔ difficult to deal with diversity	➔ SA realities not like in the ads
➔ problems	➔ SA's current social problems	➔ inheritances from apartheid	➔ SA = divided society, no "racial" mixing
	➔ lethal risks (individuals / SA)		➔ apartheid still the rule in rural areas
	➔ Mandela ➔ change		
➔ "new" SA: problems and potentialities	➔ "negotiation": switch roles or "go along with the culture of the people"?	➔ debate: separation or mixing? / differences and freedom of choice	

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