

THE REITZ VIDEO: INVITING OUTRAGE AND/OR PITY?

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ABSTRACT

This article reflects on the initial local, national and international reaction, including media reaction, in February and March 2008 to the publication of the Reitz video at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, and interprets meanings attached to the reactions within the framework of an existential communication critique. Given the fact that the University of the Free State serves as a microcosm of society at large, these meanings could be seen as having particular relevance for any discussion on race and culture in South Africa. The research problem is two-fold: Firstly, to determine the nature and extent of the initial reaction to the Reitz video which came to light on 26 February 2008, and secondly, to interpret possible meanings attached to the reactions within the framework of the cultural-philosophical views expounded in the renowned works of Gustave le Bon [The Crowd (1896)] and José Ortega y Gasset [The Revolt of the Masses (1930)]. Thematic content analysis is employed followed by critical and rational argumentation within the delimitations of the study. It was found that there was a general failure on the side of the intellectual elite and mass media to provide depth dimension to the issues at play. The prevailing public mind which focused and continually emphasised the idea of racism being alive and well in South Africa was hardly questioned or contextualised within an understanding that human communication is always influenced by socio-cultural circumstances.

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INTRODUCTION

We are what our world invites us to be, and the basic features of our soul are impressed upon it by the form of its surroundings as in a mould. Naturally, for our life is no other than our relations with the world around.” (Ortega 1932: 43)

Most of us would agree that the publication of the Reitz video in February 2008 ignited a crisis, albeit initially for a smallish University of the Free State (UFS) community. There is no doubt that the Reitz in-house video was never foreseen to be able to cause (even potentially) the outcry and revolt among so many interest groups in the global village. Maybe it is, among other matters, because (to quote Ortega in *Man and crisis*) “...man is always, at every moment, living according to what the world is to him...” (Ortega 1959: 53). And for some, the world is very small.

When a crisis occurs – and often only when a crisis occurs – we look at where we come from. We want to know why we reacted in a particular way or why we hold a certain opinion – an opinion which is sometimes as much a surprise to us as to those who we share it with, or force it upon. And a surprise it is only some of the time. Mostly, we react along almost predefined lines.

We are often predictable. We are often predictable because, as the 20th Century Spanish journalist and philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset, notes, “I am I and my circumstances”. Or, to paraphrase René Descartes, I think like those who came before me, therefore I am like those who came before me. Ortega goes even further and suggests that he who qualifies as mass man lives without consciousness. Therefore, he must repeat today what he did, but forgot, yesterday (Maldonado-Denis 1961: 684).

In this article, background to the Reitz video is provided, followed by a note on the methodology used and the theoretical framework within which the research findings could be interpreted. The concepts of culture and traditions; Ortega’s concepts of generations and mass man; and the renowned French sociologist and social psychologist Gustave le Bon’s concept of the public mind are clarified during the course of the argumentation.

BACKGROUND: THE EVENTS PRECEDING THE REITZ VIDEO

In June 2007, the management of the University of the Free State announced a hostel integration policy for its 23 hostels according to which a traditionally white hostel must take in 30% black first year students, and vice versa. While some role-players welcomed the policy, others, amongst them the conservative white Afrikaans political party Freedom Front Plus (FF+), called it “forced integration” and predicted racial conflict as evidenced in previous attempts at hostel integration in the 1990s (Cloete 2008a: 10).

In July, the FF+ announced that it planned on taking the UFS to court in a bid to stop the implementation of the policy.

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August 2007 saw several protest marches: the FF+ student branch led white students in a march to protest against the policy, while members of the black South African Students' Congress (Sasco) took part in a march to support the policy.

During September 2007 the UFS convocation voted with a 69% majority that the policy be recalled. UFS council took the proposal under advisement, but decided to go ahead with the implementation. Only one member of the council voted against implementation.

The FF+ withdrew its court case due to "technical inconsistencies" in October 2007. The decision was welcomed by the rector at the time, Prof. Frederick Fourie, who stated that "all energy can now be focused in implementing the policy".

During December 2007, Education Minister Naledi Pandor warned that the government would send in the police if students refused to accept the policy.

In his speech at the opening of the university in February 2008, Prof. Fourie said that diversity targets in most of the hostels had been met. However, traditional black men's hostels had a 0% occupancy by white males, while only 5% of female students moved into traditional black female hostels. House committees from black and white hostels staged a sit-in in front of the main building to protest against the apparent lack of feedback from UFS management. Black and white violence during the strike led to damage of nearly R3 million. Ten students were arrested, and the UFS secured an interdict against all registered students.

Then, on 26 February 2008, in what seemed like an unrelated event, word got out of a video filmed by four students of the predominantly white male hostel, Reitz, in which a mock initiation ceremony of black workers is played out. The video – apparently made for a cultural evening during September 2007 – is a fierce attack on the University's integration policy. What followed was one of the darkest, most intense periods in the university's history of more than a century. Reaction from groups and individuals – local and abroad – filled newspaper space and dominated the airwaves.

NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

The authors were participant observers of the events as it unfolded on the Bloemfontein campus of the UFS. After the publication of the video and the ensuing mass reaction, the renowned works of Gustave le Bon, *The Crowd* (1896), and José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930), sprung to mind. The magnitude of the subject matter persuaded the authors to revisit these works.

The focus of this study is to investigate the nature and extent of the *initial communicative reaction* to the Reitz video on community, provincial, national and international level in major South African newspapers; and to interpret possible meanings attached to these reactions within the cultural-philosophical views expounded by Ortega and Le Bon. Given the fact that the University of the Free State serves as a microcosm of society at large, these meanings could be seen as having particular relevance for any discussion on race and culture in South Africa.

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Thematic content analysis was employed to analyse 163 newspaper articles and reports published in newspapers in South Africa¹ during the period 26 February to 10 March 2008. From these articles, 287 responses (reactions) were identified from all major role-players, who were identified and categorised as follows (with the number of reactions by a role player and the category as a whole in parenthesis):

- **The UFS community (96):** black and white current students (20), the rector and vice chancellor (8), UFS management (9), UFS council (3), UFS staff (5), parents of current students (1), student body (3), student leadership (9), the Reitz 4 (6), the cleaners who appeared in the video (5), current Reitz students (1), Reitz student leadership (3), Reitz Old Boys (8), Reitz parents (2), Reitz whistleblowers (1), alumni (2), former UFS rectors (2), Nehawu (5), UVpersu (3)
- **South African education community (17):** University of Stellenbosch (2), University of Cape Town (1), University of Pretoria (2), University of North West (Potchefstroom campus) (1), National Department of Education (8), HESA (2), High School Jim Fouché (1)
- **Formal political and governmental organisations (56):** DA (7), Freedom Front Plus (7), ANC (5), Independent Democrats (2), UDM (1), Young Communists' League (1), IFP (16), ACDP (2), Sasco (2), Cabinet (1), HNP (1), SACP Youth League (1), Free State provincial government (6), Mangaung Local Municipal Council (1), South African Human Rights Council (3)
- **Civil society (19):** Church groups (Dutch Reformed (1), VGKSA(1)), FAK (2), AfriForum/Solidariteit (5), Free State Agriculture (1), Afrikanerbond (1), ATKV (1), Dames Aktueel (1), Dameskring (1), Regslui vir Afrikaans (1), Rapportryersvereniging (1), Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns (1), Die Voortrekkers (1), Afrikaner-Alliansie (1)
- **Prominent South Africans/commentators (12):** FW de Klerk (1), commentators (1), Dr Dorian Aiken (1), Dr Andries Bezuidenhout (1), Prof. Kader Asmal (2), Johnné van Huyssteen (1), Raenette Taljaard (1), Dan Roodt (1), Irvin Khoza (1), Danny Titus (1), 81 prominent South Africans (1)
- **Media (87):** columnists (9), letters to the editor (44), editorial (14), international (as published in SA newspapers) (20)

Only the initial reaction of these role-players was taken into account. However, in some instances the obvious directional change in reaction was noted, for instance the initial official reaction of current Reitz residents, the four video-makers, as well as the workers who appear in the video, which differs from later reaction.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From a communication perspective, the Reitz video calls critical issues in communicology to mind, including the impact of culture, tradition and generation as well as the ideas of mass man and the public mind.

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Culture, tradition and the generation

Culture has always been an important vessel for communicating and sustaining belief systems. Information about a race or a group's culture is communicated by parents to their children, and is often passed on by church and social groups which we choose to belong to. Especially when growing up, this exposure is extremely selective. Knowledge and experience of others are limited. Action takes place within one's circumstances (Jansen & Steinberg 1991: 117), or as Ortega puts it, "here and I, I and here are forever inseparable" (Van Schoor 1968: 57).

What a person regards as the meaning of his or her life derives largely from those collective interpretations which are passed on from generation to generation, possibly creating an entire society without much individual thought – the masses, as Ortega calls them (Ortega 1959: 97). Mass man's opinions are based on those of "the others"; the source of knowledge indicated as "they" when starting an argument or statement with "they say" (Ortega 1959: 92). "They", says Ortega, refers to the "irresponsible I" or the "social I". By choosing the opinion of "them", mass man has replaced himself with the solitude of the mass (*ibid.*).

Ortega refers to these collective interpretations as absolute beliefs (Jansen & Steinberg 1991: 117). It embodies the "spirit of the times", or *zeitgeist*. These absolute beliefs are never perfect, and force the individual to find solutions for the problems that arise as a result of this (cf. Van Schoor 1968: 61).

Ortega's view of the existence of absolute beliefs is supported by Le Bon, who states: "The memorable events of history are the visible effects of the invisible changes of human thought. The reason these great events are so rare is that there is nothing as stable in a race as the inherited groundwork of its thoughts" (1917: 14). Le Bon even ventures to state that "every civilisation is the outcome of a small number of fundamental ideas that are very rarely renewed" (1917: 67).

The generation, says Ortega in *The Modern Theme* (1961:15), is a dynamic compromise between mass and individual. To Ortega "it is the most important conception in history" (1961: 15). People of the same age constitute a generation (Jansen & Steinberg 1991:118), with age here defined not as a date, but as a "zone of dates" (Ortega 1959: 47) – the members of a generation are "men of their own time" (Ortega 1961: 15). Such a generation, explains Jansen and Steinberg (1991: 118), may be distinguished from other co-existing generations by its peculiar set of perspectives, which is expressed in cultural productions. However, each generation's set of perspectives rests upon that of an earlier generation (Ortega 1959: 53; cf. Van Schoor 1968: 157; Ortega 1961: 16.). Van Schoor explains that the concept of the generation encompasses a two-sided unit: The inherited and experienced ideas, values and convictions of the *previous* generation, and the *new* generation's own experience thereof (1968: 157).

When the current generation coalesce with the old, and submit to them, the old regime continues. In the instance where the current generation forms part of a movement

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towards relegation and substitution, and when there are no attempts at preserving a previous set of beliefs, “the old are swept away by youth” (Ortega 1961: 18). These are years of innovation and creative struggle (Ortega 1961: 18) – an idea which correlates with Le Bon’s view that traditions have to be substituted in order for progress to take place (1917: 93).

In terms of the reaction to the Reitz video, it is evident that the old regime – specifically the divide between black and white – is still in force, albeit not in the official, institutionalised manner of apartheid. Both black and white members of the current generation (the youth) is building on and reacting in a manner prescribed by the belief system inherited from the previous generation.

Mass man and the public mind

Ortega’s concept of mass man or the masses (1930) and Le Bon’s concept of the crowd or public mind (1896) show many similarities.

“The masses” is a term used by Ortega to describe the majority of the people, a multitude, a formless and amorphous heap of persons whose essential mission is to follow the minority. Minorities must lead and the masses must follow (Maldonado-Denis 1961: 682). Although Ortega used “the masses” and “mass man” interchangeably, mass man is essentially a psychological type, while the masses is a social phenomenon. Maldonado-Denis (1961: 683) explains it as follows: “The fact is that mass man is led by his own psychological make-up to unite with other mass men in the formation of a mass in the sociological sense.”

This ties in with Le Bon’s concept of the popular mind, which he considers to be “the last surviving sovereign force of modern times” (1917: 14). Le Bon (1917: 26) defines a crowd in a psychological sense as follows: “Under certain given circumstances, and only under those circumstances, an agglomeration of men represents new characteristics very different from those of the individuals composing it [and] a collective mind is formed.”

It is very important to note that Le Bon’s concept of a crowd only refers to a gathering that is influenced by “certain predisposing causes” – not all gatherings of people are considered representing a collective mind. When formed, however, this collective of public mind exists irrespective of the characteristics, occupations, level of intelligence, etc. of the individuals that form part of the crowd. And, postulates Le Bon, it is this very fact that crowds possess in common ordinary qualities that explains why they can never accomplish acts demanding a high degree of intelligence (1917: 32). Moreover, states Le Bon (1917: 36), by the mere fact that he forms part of an organised crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation.

Among the characteristics of the public mind are impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, and the absence of judgment and of the critical spirit (Le Bon 1917: 40). The public mind is very simple and very exaggerated – a suspicion transforms as soon as announced into incontrovertible evidence (*ibid.*).

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Mass man's reaction to a crisis is encapsulated by the fact that he has only appetites: He insists on his rights but denies that he has any obligations (Maldonado-Denis 1916: 685). Coupled with this, mass man is intolerant and violent towards all who dare to think and act differently (Van Schoor 1961: 32).

Le Bon likens this intolerance to religious sentiment, and explains that intolerance and fanaticism are the necessary accompaniments of such a sentiment (1917: 82). These two – intolerance and fanaticism – can be found in all men grouped together when they are inspired by a conviction of any kind. As mentioned earlier, shared convictions are what constitute a generation. This could explain the almost sectarian loyalty of the then residents of Reitz to their hostel and traditions (fanaticism) and their rejection of the integration policy (intolerance), as well as the unified and intense reaction of the current black students towards the video (fanaticism) and their sense of urgency for change borne out of generations of oppression (intolerance). In its darkest hour, the Bloemfontein campus almost resembled a war zone.

Le Bon (1917: 90) postulates that all the beliefs and opinions of crowds or the masses rest upon two kinds of factors: remote factors and immediate factors. The remote factors include race, tradition, time, institutions and education (Le Bon 1917: 90). These are the factors that prepare the ground in which new ideas germinate, says Le Bon (*ibid.*). The immediate factors, on the other hand, serve as the source of active persuasion – “they are the factors which ... set it [the idea] loose with all its consequences ... it is due to them that a riot breaks out ...” (Le Bon 1917: 90).

Of these remote factors – the strong foundation of belief – race has by far the biggest influence. It dominates the characteristics peculiar to crowds or the masses. Closely tied to race is tradition, which represents the ideas, the needs and the sentiments of the past. Tradition, explains Le Bon, is the synthesis of the race: “A people is an organism created by the past, and, like every other organism, it can only be modified by slow hereditary accumulations.” (Le Bon 1917: 93). However, it should be noted that “race” and “culture” should not be seen as synonyms, an idea that MacDonald (2006: 165) explains as a “conceptual problem” which would mean that “cultures are rendered as fixed ... that races and cultures are coterminous”. He explains:

“...[R]acial and ethno-cultural groups are not and never have been interchangeable in South Africa, something the ANC recognized when it conceived of races as clearing houses for the political affairs of tribes and the white state recognized when it defined both Afrikaners and English-speakers as ‘whites’” (MacDonald 2006: 165).

Born out of race *and* tradition are political and social institutions (Le Bon 1917: 97). These institutions are determined by the character of the people they govern, and therefore they have no intrinsic value. “Those which are good at any given moment for given people may be harmful in the extreme for another nation.” (*ibid.*). Government determines which kind and level of education a people receives, and it is through education, says Le Bon (1917: 113), “that the mind of the masses is improved or deteriorated”.

The vehicle for these four remote factors, namely race, traditions, institutions, and education, is time (Le Bon 1917: 96): “It causes the birth, the growth and the death of all beliefs. It is by the aid of time that they acquire their strength and also by its aid that they lose it. It is time in particular that prepares the opinions and beliefs of crowds...”

The reactions to the Reitz video – although in most cases exact opposites – are quite similar when viewed against Le Bon’s statements regarding race and especially tradition or culture. These reactions have the same origin and carry the message of South Africa’s history of racism – first introduced by colonisation, then cultivated by institutionalisation and perpetuated through the cultural inheritance of each new generation. Tradition guides men, says Le Bon (1917: 93), and especially when they are in a crowd.

A reaction of a black student confirms this: “White students operate in packs – they only act like this when they are in a group...” (Rademeyer 2008a: 8). Given the reaction of black students in terms of violent protests following the video, this sentiment could be – and according to Le Bon is – applicable to not only white students but black students as well. “...the individual forming part of crowd acquires, solely from numerical considerations, a sentiment of invincible power which allows him to yield to instincts which, had he been alone, he would perforce have kept under restraint” (Le Bon 1917: 33).

The revolt of the masses

When a crisis occurs, the system of convictions belonging to a previous generation give way to a vital state in which man remains without these convictions, and therefore without a world (Ortega 1959: 86). The end of the ideology of apartheid is such a crisis – a change of a system of convictions.

In a column in *The Times* Prof. Jonathan Jansen² comments on the Reitz incident by referring to what he calls “knowledge in the blood”: “Here is a story about emasculation writ large among young white men who came into the new South Africa with the racial knowledge but without the racial power of the past” (Jansen 2008: 10).

The equilibrium between the absolute belief and the actual experience of this generation (the youth) is thus disturbed – and the masses are revolting in an attempt to find a solution to correct this imbalance. This disequilibrium does not only exist for the white younger generation, but also for the black younger generation. Theirs is the exact opposite: They came into the new South Africa with the promise of an equal distribution of power, but now have to contend with that promise not being delivered on. Both these groups found themselves without the world into which they, and especially their parents, were born, and both reacted in a way traditionally characteristic of their culture:

With some shame we recognize that the greater part of the things we say we do not understand very well; and if we ask ourselves why we say them, why we think them, we will observe that we say them only for this reason: We have never tried to rethink them on our own account, or to find the evidence for them (Ortega 1959: 92).

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But what prompts the masses – the public mind – to revolt?

As mentioned before, Le Bon (1917: 19) explains that while the mind of the masses is prepared by remote factors such as race, tradition and time, it is immediate factors that lead to an outburst. These include images, words and formulas.

Le Bon refers to the particularly powerful influence of images. “Crowds, being only capable of thinking in images, are only to be impressed by images” (Le Bon 1917: 76).

The Reitz video gave the crowds, all the generations exposed to it, a “motive for action”; a force so powerful that Le Bon considers it to be a “natural force, a supernatural power” (1917: 117). Here was tangible evidence of racism at work and the video provided fertile soil for, among others, the aggrieved and politically correct to climb on the propaganda bandwagon.

Such an outburst could of course serve the purpose of making mass man aware of his circumstances. This feeling of unease forms part of what Ortega, in *Man and Crisis*, calls the fundamental insecurity of living (1959: 34). However, instead of learning as an individual or progressing as a generation, mass man’s revolt is mostly an effort to remove the sense of unease.

This sense of unease could explain the outrage or revolt of the media, especially the international media, whose reaction was one of outright condemnation. Again, here they had tangible evidence of racism, says Charlene Stanley from e.tv (personal communication, 7 July 2008). Some reactions even likened the video with Nazi Germany or the conduct of American soldiers at the Abu Gharib prison in Iraq (Smith 2008a: 6; 2008b: 4). The central message contained in the reaction of international media was that of the reality of racism in the rainbow nation. Time.com (Smith 2008a: 6) reported on the incident by saying that some 16 years after Nelson Mandela’s release from prison “his dream of a rainbow nation is far removed from reality”.

ANALYSIS AND REFLECTION

It could be argued that the Reitz video is a *cultural* production of a generation. In numerous interviews it was mentioned by the Reitz 4 (Van Rooyen 2008a: 1; Rademeyer 2008b: 8; 2008c: 1), parents of current Reitz residents (Cloete *et al.* 2008: 2) and the residence head of Reitz (Van Vuuren 2008: 4) that the video was produced for a “cultural evening” at the hostel. It even won first prize in the competition (Van Rooyen 2008a: 1).

Looking at the content of the video, the “cultural traditions” of this group – white, Afrikaans males – is remarkably similar to those of the generations preceding them. In several interviews the value of hostel traditions – especially at Reitz – has been mentioned, including the fact that “it has always been like this at Reitz” (Dlodlo 2008: 2). This generation’s parents, it should be noted, grew up during apartheid, which could explain the new generation’s perspective. Our present is made out of the material of the past (Ortega 1959: 53).

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The power of culture and traditions is further underlined by the reaction of the parents of the video makers and current Reitz students, as well as Reitz Old Boys.

The essence of the message contained in this reaction is that of boys will be boys – it was a “student prank” was the reaction of one of the fathers of the Reitz 4 (Dlodlo 2008: 2). He goes on to say “if someone cannot see the humour behind all of this it is probably cultural differences” (Dlodlo 2008: 2). The reaction of this group was almost completely defensive. Not only did they defend hostel traditions fiercely, but blame is also placed on the university’s lack of consultation with students regarding the integration policy. In an interview with *Volksblad* (Dlodlo 2008: 2) the father of one of the Reitz 4 blames the media for biased reporting, followed by a statement in which he blames the UFS and the media for not contacting him or his son – “I’ve heard my son’s side of the story and the rest I had to read and hear in the media”.

It is important to note that within the space of the two weeks of this analysis, the Reitz community went from defending their actions to unconditional apology “for making such a video and the consequent harm done by it” and an expressed desire to be given the chance to be a leader in the successful implementation of the integration policy (Cloete 2008b: 2).

In between these two opposites came the announcement that the UFS is considering closing the hostel. During this time, the primarius of the hostel was quoted as follows: “The guys are worried about the possibility of closure. We have been made out to be the world’s worst racists, but we are no worse than any other residence on campus in terms of traditions. We admit it was a mistake. To apologise is the only thing we can do. We need to walk to path of reconciliation” (Cloete 2008b: 2).

But this generation does not only comprise white people, it also includes black people of the same age; black people whose parents also grew up during apartheid, experiencing an entirely different side of the ideology and its practices. And, as is evident from the analysis of the reactions of the different groups, the younger generation not only reacted along the same lines as their parents did during apartheid, but in some instances also used the same rhetoric to convey their perspectives.

This is evident in reaction from white students saying they “feel scared and threatened”, and black students allegedly threatening to “throw petrol bombs” at white hostels. These could be mistaken for reactions during the height of apartheid, but instead came from young people who were in primary school when apartheid ended. They did not grow up with the actual experience of being threatened by the *Swart Gevaar* (black threat) or having to take part in the Struggle, which included throwing petrol bombs at apartheid structures. Their parents, however, did.

The analysis has brought to light several examples of the influence of an inherited belief system.

- An opinion piece in *Volksblad* (Du Toit 2008: 11) carries the following statement: “One wonders if Afrikaners, if they are not simply racists, have an inherent

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feeling of superiority over black people: A belief that the ‘white man’ will always be better than the ‘black man’”.

- Several newspapers reported that black students told of many instances of racism and violence at the hands of the residents of white male hostels. When asked why these instances were not reported, a female black student explained that a security guard on duty at a residence told them not to “worry about it. It is just part of their culture” (Tromp, Molosankwe & Visagie 2008: 4).
- A black student tells a reporter of *Saturday Star* (Tromp, Molosankwe & Visagie 2008: 4) that she spoke to one of the cleaners who appears in the video. “I asked her why she had allowed the white male students to verbally abuse her. She told me: ‘That’s just the way they were brought up. They can’t help themselves.’”

This last example requires further analysis. Included in the reaction of many of the supporters of the video is the observation that the cleaners appeared to be enjoying themselves; they were laughing and were apparently willing participants. This was also the opinion of the lawyer of the four. He was quoted in *The Star* (Tromp & Molosankwe 2008: 1) as saying “the employees took part voluntarily in the making of the film. As is evident, they clearly enjoyed it...”

From an Ortegan perspective, the behaviour of the cleaners – their participation, shock and humiliation – is also a product of their generation. They were born into and grew up in a society where white people were dominant. Their almost subservient reaction is the result of decades of being told what to do. During apartheid a white child had more power than an adult black man or woman. A gender dimension could also be added to this explanation: traditionally, African men have more power than African women. White men had more power than black men, which means that black women were at the bottom of the hierarchy.

From a communication perspective, this communicative relationship could be categorised as a control mode (Yoshikawa 1987: 320-321, in De Wet 2005: 56-57). One party is perceived as an object to be exploited by the other party. Manipulation represents a distorted communicative relationship between the communicator and the recipient. This is also evident in Martin Buber’s renowned classification of the I-It communication encounter (De Wet 2005: 57). The I-It relation points to a mere relation in which the It is passive and allows itself to be experienced and used.

Most of the reaction to the Reitz video is that of the (predominant) public mind. There were almost no unique reactions amongst those analysed for this article. The major reactions may be summarised as follows:

- The Reitz community’s message was that of a group (or crowd) under fire, and they’ve reacted defensively;
- White students condemned the video, but also said they felt unsafe, referring to the fact that black students allegedly threatened them and reacted violently. They

also feared for the image of “Afrikaners”, and blamed UFS management for lack of consultation and “forced integration” – a Freedom Front Plus term often repeated by white role-players;

- Black students reacted with disgust and anger, and many instances of other racial incidents were brought to light. They blamed UFS management for slow pace of transformation;
- UFS management, council and staff condemned the video;
- The cleaners who took part in the video were hurt and humiliated; they felt their trust was betrayed; and one demanded action against the hostel;
- Political parties condemned the video: the DA made special reference to the role of the Freedom Front Plus in the debacle; the Freedom Front Plus distanced itself from the video, and also made a reference to the damage to the “Afrikaner’s” reputation; the ANC, the National Department of Education and Cabinet condemned the video and demanded action from UFS management;
- Several Afrikaans institutions, such as Free State Agriculture, condemned the video and also distanced themselves from the students who made it;
- The reaction in letters to newspapers mostly represented the two opposites: One side condemned the video, while the other side defended the video makers and Reitz residence; and
- Alumni distanced themselves from the UFS for two reasons: They were ashamed to be associated with an institution where something like this could happen or they blamed UFS management for the policy of “forced integration” (and, consequently, the loss of traditions).

CONCLUSION

The messages contained in most of the reaction of the different groups/generations have confirmed the tendency of man to live within his circumstances (Jansen & Steinberg 1991: 117). Given the reactions to the video, Ortega’s call to the intellectual minority of each generation to make (their) “countrymen aware of the crisis and uniting them in the national interest” (Jansen & Steinberg 1991: 117) is in play. This élite interprets its circumstances, as well as the typical experiences of the mass to provide them with a framework of guiding perspectives for approaching life’s problems (Jansen & Steinberg 1991: 117).

While Ortega defines the élite as an “intellectual or cultural minority that is constantly involved in creating culture”, there are others – individuals and institutions – that serve the purpose of acting as a sounding-board, or mirror, or creating awareness of the quality – or lack of quality – of existence in a society. Amongst these would be a truly responsible, balanced media, which should not only reflect mass man’s experience of

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an event, but also the ideas, opinions and convictions of those who do not merely “react to external compulsion” (Ortega 1932: 47). The prevailing public mind; “the collective mind ... formed by an agglomeration of men [and] representing new characteristics different from those of the individuals composing it” (Le Bon 1917: 26) should be questioned, but was hardly questioned or interrogated in the case of the Reitz video.

It seems that with the Reitz video there was failure on the side of the intellectual elite as well as the media. The intellectual elite may well have fallen prone to what Ortega calls the “barbarism of specialisation” (1932: 78). Considered by mass man as “someone who knows” (Van Schoor 1968: 173), the specialist is actually nothing more than “the prototype of mass man” (Ortega 1932: 79). The specialist, living in the confines of his laboratory and discovering new facts (*ibid.*), is prone to becoming an “learned ignoramus” – someone who “knows very well his own tiny portion of the universe”, but is “formally ignorant of all that does not enter into his speciality” (Ortega 1932: 82).

Only a few of the reactions analysed for this article could be labelled as having what Ortega calls “depth dimension” (Van Schoor 1968: 54): The ability to look at an object, concept or event and seeing reflections or associations with surrounding objects, concepts or events. Very little debate took place among the intellectual elite in the coverage analysed.

The majority of the reactions and commentary by the media failed to move beyond the superficial. Media practitioners across the spectrum and across boundaries were oh so politically correct.

In mitigation, several role-players across the spectrum – directly or indirectly – referred to the effect of a generational communication solution in order to ensure that new messages are communicated from generation to generation.

For Ortega solution of a problem means “being clear with myself about the thing that was a problem to me, suddenly finding, among my ideas about it, one which I recognize as my actual and authentic attitude towards it” (1959: 109). This is the flipside to Ortega’s generational coin; the exact opposite of mass man: the excellent man. It plays out like a modern-day action cartoon: The villainous Mass Man pitted against the virtuous Excellent Man. Ortega’s excellent man is he who demands more of himself; he faces his obligations as something he must fulfil (Maldonado-Denis 1961: 685). Only by doing this can a generation change its opinions and progress from merely trying to remove its sense of unease during a crisis to becoming a generation of excellent men.

This conversion is what leads to the emergence of a new man. And Ortega especially urges the younger generation to seek for this conversion (1959: 152). While “the mass, in face of any problem, is satisfied with thinking the first thing he finds in his head”, the excellent man “only accepts worthy of him what is still far above him and what requires a further effort in order to be reached” (Ortega 1932: 45).

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It is extremely difficult to change or exchange traditions. And even if such changes have been introduced, it still takes time. “Why,” asks many of those reacting to the video, “are we still struggling to adapt to a new society more than a decade after apartheid ended?” And why, one might add, do people so fiercely defend and protect their traditions?

The answer to both of these questions could be time. Maybe not enough time has passed for people to adapt to a new way of life – far removed from apartheid – to an open society where freedom and equality are internalised in the hearts and minds of most people, especially the academic youth.

Endnotes

¹ *Volksblad, Beeld, Die Burger, Kampus-Volksblad, Bloemnuus, The Times, Mail & Guardian, Rapport, Express, Kampus-Beeld, The Star, Die Burger Oos-Kaap, Cape Times, Son, Business Day, City Press, People’s Post, The Weekender, Daily Sun, The Citizen, Saturday Star, Die Kerkbode, Afrikaner.*

² These comments were made before Prof. Jonathan Jansen was appointed Rector of the University of the Free State in March 2009.

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