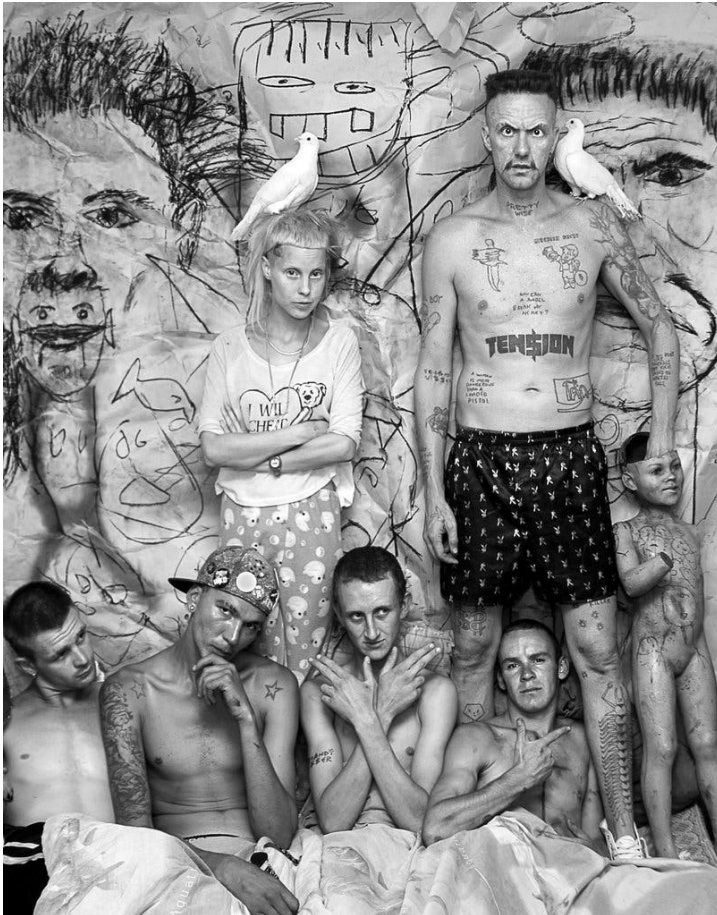


TOPIC: Race & Representation in Post Apartheid Media.

Is Die Antwoord the answer?

How the South African music group shapes the conversation about whiteness in the post apartheid era.

// Katharina Georgieff



The post- apartheid era in South Africa comes with the the massive task of re-constituting identity and society itself. It's important to introduce new symbols to the culture, such as a new national flag, national anthem and sports teams. One music group has reintroduced white afrikaan culture to the public: Two weird looking guys, one girl, Yolanda Visser and her spouse who calls himself Ninja. They look kinda strange, almost eerie, and their lyrics contain mostly explicit language. Die Antwoord raps and sings in a mixture of english and afrikaans. The harsh images in their music videos display an unpleasant look at the characters they portray: mostly poor, white afrikaaner, living in the suburbs of s South Africa.

Die Antwoord became a massive Internet hit, with their most viewed youtube video having 53 million views. Photo: Roger Ballen for New York Times

INFOBOX

Afrikaners are a South African ethnic group that stems from dutch settlers that colonized the country in 1652. The languages afrikaans developed from the dutch vernacular. Afrikaans was spoken by slaves and settlers and developed distinct characteristics during the 18th century. It is still the third most spoken language in the country.

Pretty wise

In 2010 a video got uploaded to youtube titled „Die Antwoord - Enter The Ninja (Explicit Version)“. After a short time it went viral, people probably didn't quite get what they were looking at, but as it is the case with many internet phenomena, this can be the key to success. One user commented on the music video:

„Die Antwoord is like a strange mix between trying to figure out if you actually like it and just in general wondering what the fuck you need to smoke to come up with this shit.“

After „Enter the ninja“ went viral, Die Antwoord was known worldwide. They were playing huge concerts and making South African music famous. From now on, they were often cited to introduce a new side of afrikaaner culture to a larger audience. In „Enter the Ninja“ we see Ninja „Pretty wise“ being tattooed over his throat. In the introduction he says:

„Hundred percent South African culture. In this place, you get a lot of different things. Blacks, whites, coloureds. English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, watookal, whatever. I'm like all these different things, all these different people, fucked into one person.“



Enter the Ninja by Die Antwoord

So quite from the beginning, it was obvious that culture and identity play a crucial role in their art. But is Ninja really the spokesperson, he claims to be? Die Antwoords music genre can be placed in alternative hip hop. Hip hop has always been a genre that offers the possibility for hybridization. Ethnic and local influences are being used by the artist to create something new, while representing their culture. To understand how Die Antwoord frames afrikaan cultural practices, language and social knowledge, we need to take a closer look at one of their music videos.

Zef- what?



Die Antwoord participated in several, so called mock-documentarys, including the short film „Zef side“, that was directed by Sean Metelerkamp, a South African filmmaker. The movie Zef side once again reinforces the significance of their South African origin.

Die Antwoords music videos often take place in the suburbs of Capetown. Photo: Sean Metelerkamp.

But what is Zef? Zef is a South African counter culture movement. Die Antwoord describe themselves as being Zefstyle. Yolandi said: *“It's associated with people who soup their cars up and rock gold and shit. Zef is, you're poor but you're fancy. You're poor but you're sexy, you've got style.”*



Zef side by Die Antwoord and Sean Metelerkamp

Zef rose to popularity after the apartheid, so it's directly connected with the post apartheid identity quest. However, the term *Zef* exists since the 1960's and was used to describe a white low-class social group from South Africa. The post apartheid Zef movement was a response to political changes, that also concluded consequences for white people on a social level. Christopher Ballantine (2014) wrote a paper on this subject and explained this response from the artists standpoint, as "the need for self-reinvention in music that is ironic, unpredictable and transgressive." (p.105). Zef as a political movement displays a type of disgrace, experienced by white people after the apartheid, as well as feelings of shame. It also glamourizes poverty and seeks pleasure in ugliness.

The short film *Zef side* by Die Antwoord shows the inhabitants of the suburbs of cape town: toothless, drained looking women and men. Seemingly endless lines of the same looking houses decorate the streets. The patio where Yolanda and ninja perform is scattered with scrap metal, old buckets and empty alcohol bottles. Here, Die Antwoord uses a multiplication of clichés to portray the white working class. One must acknowledge, that they're not part of the social group (anymore), since they're making quite a lot of money with their music. The portrayal of the white lower class is of course exaggerated, which could be a way to further alienate whiteness in order to distance South Africa from its past. That transforms post apartheid identity „into an intertwined, multicultural nationalism, celebrating the hybridity of South African culture“ (Chruszczewska, 2015: 64)



Zef is often referred to as „Poor White Kitsch Chique“ Photo: Bill Didona

Cultural theorist Katarzyna Chruszczewska (2017) also claims, that "Die Antwoord uses hip hop means of mixing and sampling to re- imagine South African aesthetics, reconstruct post- apartheid identities and eventually, embrace a freak identity that escapes defined categories of class and race." (p.80) While I agree, that they use south African aesthetics to reconstruct post-apartheid identity, I'd argue that they use quite stereotypical imageries of class and race to do so. Hence, they're performance doesn't really escape these categories but more so plays within those cultural norms and further exaggerates them to a point of alienation.

So, is Die Antwoord the answer?

Die Antwoord definitely is an answer, yes. But what was the question?

It was not how whiteness in South Africa should be portrayed from now on.

But it may be the answer to how art and performance can open new conversations about post apartheid identity. Their performance has been the reason for many debates on post apartheid culture, and has therefore shaped the political and cultural discourse.

It is definitely not the answer all South African people would give. While the one side praises Die Antwoord as geniuses many South Africans where actually white upset, that the music group got so much attention globally. One user claimed: „While their international popularity has given us quite a bit to be proud of, they aren't highly-regarded here due to their trashy and excessive way of expressing themselves often to the point of becoming downright vulgar. They tend to bring out the worst in both South African working class and Capetonian culture generally speaking.“

So, even if there's fear that Die Antwoord is portraying a false side of South Africa post apartheid white culture, one could argue that that's not the job of the artists. They can never give the full answer, as they commit to a specific style, a specific presentation of something. Art isn't here to



Before the couple invented Die Antwoord, they created other art projects by their birth names Watkin Tudor Jones and Anri Du Toit. The short film "Picnic" is a satire of the christian south african middle class and their beliefs around societal norms.

Photo: Watkin Tudor Jones and Anri Du Toit.

give the whole answer, but to pose further questions and to show one of many side of a story . In that case, it is a story of identity and reinventing culture, that has yet to be told.

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