

Too Masculine for Words. Masculinity and Leadership in Post- apartheid South Africa.

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Introduction

Heteronormative masculinity and political power have been tightly interwoven at least since the onset of agricultural societies. Unfortunately, not much seems to have changed since then, as leadership roles are still unproblematically attributed to men who embody such features that are considered manly in a given culture. Consequently, it does not come as a surprise that such characteristics only become noticeable, and thus problematic, when they are either missing or interpreted in unorthodox ways. Studies in power and masculinity abound, both from the point of view of gender studies and from those of political science and sociology. One of the most intriguing and explanatory trends in the studies about masculinities and political power links masculinities to the process of nation-building (Billig 1995; Blanchard 2014; Mosse 1998; Nagel 1998).

This is particularly relevant in the South African context, where the process of nation-building is complicated by the divisions among the different strata of the population created by the colonial state since the 17th century and subsequently engineered by the apartheid state since 1948. Such divisions have direct influence also on gender relations and, especially, on the construal of masculinities. So much so, that scholars involved in masculinities studies identify three different types of normative masculinity that appeal to the different parts of the South African society:



a white masculinity (represented in the political and economic dominance of the white ruling class); an African, rurally based masculinity that resided in and was perpetuated through indigenous institutions (such as chieftainship, communal land tenure, and customary law) and finally a black masculinity that had emerged in the context of urbanization and the development of geographically separate and culturally distinct African townships (Morrell, Jewkes, and Lindegger 2012: 2).

Since the end of apartheid, four men have been at the helm of political power in the country. All of them belong to the previously oppressed black majority and all four are heterosexual. The first president, for just one term, was Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (1918-2013, president 1994-1999), followed by Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki (born 1942, president 1999-2008), who didn't finish his second term in office, Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma (born 1942, president 2009-2018), and, finally, Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa (born 17 November 1952, president 2018 to present).

Nation-building was clearly paramount for all of them – given the past segregation which had been experienced at all levels of society – but each of them offered a different performance of his own masculinity, a performance that had implications for the process of nation-building and that, overall, offered an often-contradictory image of the nation itself if, as Billig beautifully puts it:

Politicians not only live in the eye of the country, but they represent the nation to itself. In addressing the imagined national audience, they dress it in rhetorical finery and, then, these speakers-as-outfitters hold a mirror so the nation can admire itself (Billig 1995: 98).

The analysis presented in this article focusses on the interpretation of masculinity offered to the nation by Jacob Zuma. Indeed, as anticipated before, the masculine aspect of political power gets noticed only when it is either missing – i. e. the president is a woman – or interpreted in an unorthodox way – which might be either not masculine enough or, at the opposite side of an imaginary spectrum, be an overstated and overplayed masculinity in the socio-political context where it operates. Jacob Zuma's

masculinity became very much a topic of political discussion in the South African public sphere, unlike that of his two predecessors and his successor, mainly because it was perceived as being placed on the latter side of the spectrum.

By looking at Zuma's self-representation of his own masculinity, as it appears in his public declarations, and the perception of such masculinity in the same public sphere, in the interpretation that can be found in editorial cartoons, I will try to trace the interplay between hegemonic masculinities in South Africa and political power.

A multimodal dialogue across genres

The analysis presented here is carried out on a corpus which incorporates different text types (normally referred to as 'genres' in discourse analysis) as well as different modes of communication, i.e., the outcomes of the cultural shaping of visual, verbal or aural material through its use in the daily social interaction of people.

The corpus created for my analysis comprises official public declarations by the President, nearly exclusively instantiated through the verbal mode, and a choice of editorial cartoons, where the visual mode takes precedence over the verbal. It has to be specified that the distinction between the different modes in this analysis is kept for hermeneutic purposes, while I adhere to the idea that there is a continuum between modes of communication, and that multimodality is «the normal state of human communication» (Kress 2009: 1).

Indeed, also Zuma's declarations cannot be said to be exquisitely verbal, as they are all performed publicly and they 'make meaning' through the interaction of bodily postures and facial expressions together with the suprasegmental characteristics of the verbal message. This is a basic tenet of the social semiotic (Kress 2009; Van Leeuwen 2005) approach in which the present work places itself. Nonetheless, the approach allows for an analysis of isolated modes which appear to be foregrounded in the communicative event.

From the point of view of genres, looked at as the discourse aspect of social practices (Fairclough 2003), there is naturally a great difference between the texts of which Zuma is directly or indirectly the author and the editorial cartoons and works of art included in the corpus. Indeed, while the predominantly verbal texts that convey Zuma's self-representation are the semiotic aspect of the social practice of leading a country and, at the same time, advancing a hegemonic project – which includes one's idea of hegemonic masculinity – the specimens where the visual mode is the predominant one, i. e. the cartoons and works of art are the sites for criticism of that self-representation, thus they are part of the counter-hegemonic discourse. Nonetheless, it is crucial to underline the most important common denominator that holds the texts together which is the discourse community addressed by all of them: the South African public in general and the voters in particular.

Editorial cartoons present, with varying degrees of independence (see Morris: 1993), the point of view of the cartoonist on a «current political issue or event, a social trend, or a famous personality, in a way that takes a stand» (El Refaie 2009: 184). Although political cartoons might not always be humorous in a broad sense, they generally make use of incongruous or surprising elements in order to get an ironic effect (El Refaie 2003). The characters that populate the world of editorial cartoons are seldom portrayed in a naturalistic way, being caricatured representations the prevailing style. The prevalence of the caricatured portrait is particularly pertinent for the assessment of the relevance of editorial cartoons for contrasting self-representation of political power *vis-à-vis* its representation in the mass media. For instance such an effect results from the use of the grotesque, whereby cartoonists seem to make a claim to being more real than naturalistic representations.

In his seminal work on Rabelais, Michail Bakhtin (1984) discusses the idea of the grotesque by linking its origin to the discovery of some paintings during an excavation in Italy in the fifteenth century. What characterised those representations was an infringement of the borders between the kingdoms of nature. Such freedom and fluidity in the representation then inspired artists such as Raphael to create paintings that fall under the modern definition of the grotesque. In order to start

describing the grotesque in its modern sense, Bakhtin resorts to a definition by L. E. Pinsky:

In the grotesque, life passes through all the degrees, from the lowest, inert and primitive, to the highest, most mobile and spiritualized; this garland of various forms bears witness to their oneness, brings together that which is removed, combines elements which exclude each other, contradicts all current conceptions. Grotesque in art is related to the paradox in logic. At a first glance, the grotesque is merely witty and amusing, but it contains great potentialities (Pinsky 1961: 119-120 in Bakhtin 1984: 32).

The potentialities of the grotesque are what a study of political cartoons should be concerned with. Indeed, «political cartoons are often able to expose a certain kind of essential truth, which encourages viewers to see things from a new angle» (El Refaie 2009: 186) not only through their metaphorical combination of the newsworthy political reality and an imaginary story that they tell, but also by employing visual parodies realised through the grotesque characterisation of their 'represented participants', i.e. the participants in the communicative event that are talked about or pictured in the text, as opposed to the 'interactive participants', i.e. the author(s) and receiver(s) of the communicative event.

By contrasting the instances of self-representation, mainly achieved through language, and those of his representation in the editorial cartoons of two well-known cartoonists, Zapiro (real name Jonathan Shapiro) and Siwela (real name Themba Siwela), I will try to highlight the tension between different types of masculine leadership in the country.

Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma, the spear, and the Nation

Jacob Zuma was born in 1942 in Kwa-Zulu Natal. He lived most of his life under the regime of apartheid and fought against it, both in the ranks of the liberation movement, now ruling party, African National Congress (ANC), in those of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and, most

importantly for this discussion, as a member of the *Umkonto WeSiswe* (Zulu, The Spear of the Nation) the military organisation attached to the ANC. Having fought in the liberation army is a fundamental manly endeavour, and a credential for leadership in the South African context, so much so that people in power are always scrutinized for, and gain credibility from, their 'struggle credentials'¹. Another such credential is his imprisonment in Robben Island from 1963 to 1973, because of his political activity against apartheid. He became president of South Africa for the first time in 2009 and he was re-elected in 2014.

As a first instance of self-representation, I take the biography of Jacob Zuma, which is published on the website of the Presidency of South Africa (RSA, The Presidency n.d.).

The document consists of nearly 3400 words and, after a first sentence where basic biographic data is presented, most of the text is devoted to the narration of the development of his «political consciousness» (RSA, The Presidency n.d.), and his experience as a militant in the struggle against Apartheid. There is no reference at all to his rural upbringing and his life seems to have started with his political awakening. The biography is written in the third person singular, thus pointing toward an impersonal angle of presentation. This aspect is a typical linguistic feature of official biographies written by an interactive participant, rather than by a represented participant. Nonetheless, the presence of instances of evaluative language mainly belonging to the *affect* sub-system of *appraisal*, i.e. that which «is concerned with registering positive and negative feelings» (Martin and White 2005: 42) points the analysis towards a different interpretation. Indeed, the text could be read as free indirect reporting (Fairclough 2003: 49) of a personal narrative rather than as a biography written by a professional. Just to give some examples, readers find «He has fond memories of the mass struggle ...» (RSA, The Presidency

¹ As a demonstration of this, it is noticeable that the public debate that brought to the ousting of Thabo Mbeki from the presidency in favour of Jacob Zuma had, as one of the repeated criticisms, the absence of 'real' struggle credentials for the former, generally portrayed as an intellectual who did not take part in any practical action, as opposed to the evidence that the latter could show for himself.

n.d.) which starts the paragraph addressing his multiple affiliations in anti-apartheid organisations, and a positive evaluation, thus a realization in the sub-system of *appreciation*, i.e. the «evaluation of semiotic and natural phenomena, according to the ways in which they are valued or not in a given field» (Martin and White 2005: 43), of his incarceration on Robben Island which «became a university in the true sense of the word» (*ibidem*) for the illiterate rural boy that he was at the time of his incarceration. What follows in the biography is a detailed account of his missions as a member of *Umkhonto WeSizwe*, the military arm of the ANC. Histories of sabotage and life in exile are a substitute for what in many western countries would have been for some time military operations during WWII.

This is in a way an example of how one should interpret and apply the very important observation about the cultural specificity of masculinities made by Connell (1993) when he states that there are «different institutionalizations of gender in different culture areas» and that «[t]o speak of 'masculinity' as one and the same entity across [...] differences in place and time is to descend into absurdity» (*ivi*: 605). So, we cannot ignore cultural and historical specificities if we are to get to a reasonably comprehensive picture of the constellation of different masculinities across time and space but, at the same time, we need to be aware of the fact that some traits of the relationship of masculinity with political power take on a quasi-universal value because of the impact of different imperialisms on different cultures. Indeed, as Connell states: «Some cultures' gender regimes have been virtually obliterated by imperialism» (*ivi*: 606). Moreover

Surviving cultures have attempted to reconstruct themselves in relation to Euro/American world dominance, an explosive process that is perhaps the most important dynamic of gender in the contemporary world (*ibidem*).

Thus, we can safely say that military experience is a credential for political power in most of the modern world as military training and organisation shape and are shaped around ideas of masculinity (Blanchard 2014). Furthermore, the value of such experience is not limited to the

regular armies but it includes in victorious revolutionary ones, as in the case of *Umkhonto WeSizwe* in South Africa, or the partisan brigades in Italy. Indeed,

nationalism is both a goal – to achieve statehood, and a belief – in collective commonality. Nationalists seek to accomplish both statehood and nationhood. The goal of sovereign statehood, state building, often takes the form of revolutionary or anti-colonial warfare. The maintenance and exercise of statehood vis-à-vis other nation states takes the form of armed conflict. As a result, nationalism and militarism seem to go hand in hand (Nagel 1998: 247)

Zuma's biography, consequently, construes its represented participant as legitimate holder of state power in relation to his military experience in its very first paragraph. Nonetheless, the country is not at war anymore and after having established Zuma's struggle credentials the biography moves on to talk about Zuma's role in the transition to democracy and in the new dispensation of South Africa, by construing the image of a man of peace and a skilful mediator between opposed interests. This is done especially through the reference to his role in the pacification of Kwa-Zulu Natal.

In a nutshell, we can thus say that the verbal, foregrounded, part of Zuma's official biography presents the figure of a very balanced man, who is capable of discerning situations in which force needs to be used (an exceptional situation such as a war or the struggle against an unjust regime), but also as a man who, in times of peace, has the wisdom and credibility needed to mediate between diverging interests. It is the ideal president anywhere, with the specificities required for a South African president.

The picture that accompanies the biography (fig. 1) resonates with the text. Here we have a photographic portrait of the president. Without entering into much detail about the modality of the portrait in visual design terms, we can definitely say that the reality claim of a photograph such as this is very high. This is, in a way, the real Jacob Zuma, the Jacob Zuma that we can see in a real-life encounter.

As it is to be expected from a portrait, the only represented participant here is Jacob Zuma. The process realised through the picture is an analytical process (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 87) where Zuma is a carrier, and a number of possessive attributes are attached to him. These possessive attributes are what interests us here. Indeed, Zuma is represented wearing a western suit with a tie. This resonates with Connell's statement quoted above on the impact of imperialism on the political culture of former colonies and their adaptation to western standards. Indeed, no visual reference to Zuma's Zulu identity is made. He is wearing glasses, which could be seen both as a signifier of old age and one of some intellectual occupation. He is also 'wearing' a very reassuring smile. From an interpersonal point of view, what is important to underline here is that he is looking at the viewer, which takes something away from the analytical character of the picture. Zuma is not only an object, represented participant, that gets described for his possessive attributes, he is portrayed as trying to connect with the interactive participants and thus creating «a visual form of direct address» (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006: 117) and specifically a demand for the interacting participant to enter in some kind of relationship with him. This type of interaction is not surprising as it is predominant in visual representations of politicians, especially in the electoral material.

This interpersonal aspect of the picture coupled with Zuma's smile is a request to enter in a relationship of affinity with the represented participant. Which reinforces the idea of the politician being some sort of a mirror for the nation itself, as underlined in Billig's quote above.

The complex of the biography on the Presidency's page, thus, offers a portrait of a man of courage, given his struggle credentials, and wisdom, constructed both through the narrative of Zuma's post-apartheid endeavours and his picture. These two features are frequently attached to hegemonic ideas of masculinity especially in the political sphere of action (Mosse 1998; Nagel 1998).

Nonetheless, this self-representation, however appropriately realised by Zuma and his communication team, does not seem to be the prevailing one for the South African public, or at least for a consistent part of it.

Indeed, the prevailing image of Zuma is the one represented in the first of the Zapiro's cartoons that were inserted in the corpus (fig. 2).

The cartoon depicts Zuma with a shower on his head that he has been 'wearing' for many years after this first appearance in 2006. The shower is a reference to his declarations while he was responding in court to an accusation of rape.

Indeed, at the end of 2005 a 31-year-old woman, the daughter of a deceased ANC struggle hero, accused him of having raped her. She was known at the time as an activist for the rights of people suffering with HIV-AIDS and she was publicly known as being HIV positive. Even if Zuma was acquitted at the end of the trial, people still criticised him for having had unprotected sex with an HIV-positive woman, thus giving a bad example in a country where the aids epidemic is out of control. Answering to this criticism, Zuma declared that he had taken a shower after sexual intercourse to avoid infection ("SA's Zuma "Showered to Avoid HIV"" 2006).

So, the cartoon is the visual representation of this criticism. If we were to 'transduct', i.e. translate the message in the picture from the visual to the verbal mode, we could say that Zuma's behaviour is effectively wiping out the three main components of the HIV-AIDS prevention message: Abstain, Be faithful and Condomise.

Since 2006, Shapiro has used the shower to convey criticism for Zuma that went beyond the HIV-AIDS issue. In an interview the cartoonist declared: «That shower has become far more than a reference to the ridiculous comment about HIV» ('The Shower Is Gone for Now - Zapiro' 2009). Indeed, in the words of the same author, «[i]t has also become a reference to his tendency to say odd things and behave slightly weirdly» (*ibidem*). This is why the shower has been moving around and at some point, it has disappeared. Indeed, in 2009 Zapiro decided to take it out as a sign of his will to «give the presidency a chance» (*ibidem*).

Through this behaviour Zuma jeopardises one of the main characteristics that common sense ascribes to the male leader in the South African cultural context: that of wisdom, that together with marriage linked to fatherhood. This concepts will be the focus of the next paragraph.

As anticipated in the introduction, heterosexuality is the naturalised type of masculinity also in the South African context. Nonetheless, as it is the case for most cultures, what is expected is the capability of men to dominate this 'natural' attraction to women through wisdom and to channel it through marriage and fatherhood.

Some are more equal than others

As already stated, Zuma's interpretation of masculinity became a topic in the public discourse exactly because it was perceived as overstated. The episode that resulted in the rape trial being a case in point, with Zuma explaining in court that he went ahead with sex because, in his Zulu culture, he could be accused of rape for leaving a woman sexually aroused. This reference to traditional Zulu masculinity expands into the field of marriage and polygamy in his self-representation. Indeed, Zuma has married 6 women so far and he presently has 4 wives.

His last wife is Gloria Bongekile Ngema, married on 20 April 2012. The wedding took place in his rural estate of Nkandla and was attended by Zuma's three other wives. Zuma and Ngema have a child together, but the president has acknowledged paternity of 20 children (not all of them with his wives), but some papers report he might have 14 more.

To see how he represents and justifies this behaviour it is useful to look at his interview with a CNN journalist, Fareed Zakaria, while he was at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2010.

Fareed Zakaria: Mr President, I have to ask you an awkward question, but in preparing for this interview I was actually asked this by so many of the women who are here, but it relates to an issue that they see as one of equality and treatment of women. You have many wives, you practice polygamy. There are many people who say this is symbolically a great step backward for the leader of South Africa to be embracing a practice they say is inherently unfair to women. How do you react?

Jacob Zuma: Well, it depends what culture you come from. People interpret culture in different ways and some think that their cultures

are superior to others. This is a problem we need to deal with. We follow a policy that says we must respect the cultures of others. As a culture, as my culture, it does not take anything from me, from my political beliefs, including the belief in the equality of women. It's my culture and I am sure there are other cultures that do this kind of thing. The problem is that when people think that their culture is the only right one, the only one accepted by God. It does not work that way (Fareed 2010).

Zuma's defence is a two-pronged one; on the one hand he challenges the idea of masculine power by depicting himself as a victim of cultural discrimination, thus not as a powerful agent but as an individual who belongs to a subaltern group. On the other hand, he dismisses the idea that polygamy puts women in a subordinate position by saying that being in a polygamous family is not in contrast with his beliefs in the equality of women.

As it was to be expected, these declarations exposed Zuma to a very thorough assessment of his actions in his personal sphere. So, when the news came out that in the same year his third wife Nompumelelo Ntuli (MaNtuli) had a relationship with her bodyguard, and he sent her away from Nkandla, there was an uproar of criticism. The crisis was resolved at the time as Ntuli was re-admitted to the family home after a traditional ceremony of purification. Nonetheless, in 2015 she was sent away again and also excluded from the Spousal Office, a unit in the government machine that dealt with the necessities of Zuma's wives, for the same reasons.

An example of criticism for Zuma's hypocrisy, can be found in fig. 3 below, in an editorial cartoon created by Siwela in 2015. In the picture there are two foregrounded represented participants, Zuma and MaNtuli, and a group of 10 young women, supposedly naked, under the bed sheets. Despite being all different from one another the women are a collective, as opposed to individual, participant. We can say this because they do not have any features that can make them recognisable as actually existing individuals in South Africa's public sphere. Moreover, they are all involved in the same process, i.e. the relational process that describes a

state: that of being in bed. The grouping is further reinforced visually as the blanket that covers them works as a unifying element for the group as well as a form of separation of the same group from the rest of the picture. Clearly none of the women in the group is one of Zuma’s wives, first of all because they are too young, and secondly because if that had been the will of the cartoonist, he would have caricatured their physical features in order to make them recognisable. The verbal text in the cartoon represents a projection of Zuma’s words in chasing away MaNtuli: «Off you go – I can’t tolerate cheating!».

The words attributed to Zuma in the cartoon do not pretend to be his real words, they are inserted, in a truly multimodal way, to create an ironic contrast with the visual part of the text, which makes it very clear that Zuma had been cheating on his wives. So here Siwela is accusing Zuma of double standards, for himself and for his wives. Which in a way contradicts the answer to the question on polygamy at the Davos forum in 2010. Siwela’s criticism, though, is not against polygamy, that is indeed an established tradition for the upper classes in South Africa and in other parts of the continent, and only partially against the extra-marital relationships of which Zuma is never apologetic, but exactly against the hypocrisy of expecting faithfulness from his wives, while he does not remain faithful to them.

The Spear, or The Emperor’s New Clothes

In this section we will look at how even the celebrated struggle credentials narrated in his official biography for the former president are not exempt from visual criticism. This time the point of departure is a work of art by Brett Murray, a South African painter based in Cape Town, that was part of an exhibition called ‘Hail to the thief II’ which was inaugurated on 10 May 2012 at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg. The painting is an acrylic on canvas titled *The Spear* (fig. 4), with a clear reference to ‘the Spear of the Nation’ and, probably, also a phallic reference.

The inspiration for Murray’s painting is the soviet propaganda poster, created by Viktor Semenovich Ivanov in 1967, (figure 5) that depicts the

leader of the Russian revolution Vladimir Il'ič Ul'janov (Lenin) for a celebration of the October 1917 revolution. The text that is inserted in the picture «Lenin lived, Lenin is alive, Lenin will live» is part of a poem by Vladimir Vladimirovič Majakovskij. The poster is thus a vibrant celebration of successful, selfless, and good leadership in difficult times.

Murray takes that and transforms it into a criticism of bad leadership. Indeed, the picture 'quotes' the soviet poster both through the choice of colours and through the pose of the represented participant. Nonetheless, the somewhat heroic flavour of the poster is subverted through the insertion of Zuma's exposed genitals, thus legitimising the phallic interpretation of the title. So, the passage of meaning is created through the inevitable phallic symbolism that can be attached to the spear as an object, and the combination of the name and Zuma's genitals seems to allude to the fact that the one represented in the painting is the only spear that Zuma knows how to use. Thus, in a way, the painting is a confutation of Zuma's struggle credentials with which we started.

Murray's painting created turmoil in South African civil society as some commentators and the whole ANC considered it racist and not respectful of the political role of Zuma. The criticisms gained some traction and cannot be dismissed easily. Indeed, the author is a white person, he was born in the 'whitest' area of the country and is clearly part of the privileged ruling class in the country. Moreover, black South Africans have developed an extremely profound awareness of the objectification of their bodies, both male and female ones, and their continuous use as signifiers for primitivity (as opposed to civilisation), and the unrestrained forces of nature, especially for what concerns «Black males' hypersexuality where a big penis indicates closeness to the animal and to the natural» (Buchbinder 2012: 128). If we take this into consideration, it is easy to see where the criticism comes from and why it cannot be dismissed without giving it some serious consideration. Nonetheless, the criticism does not take into account the fact that Jacob Zuma had made of his masculinity a card that he would play in order to gather consent and sympathies, which also made it a legitimate topic for criticism.

The life of the soviet poster continued in the South African context to get to another, our final, recontextualization that takes us back to the genre

of editorial cartoons. Indeed, Zapiro was inspired by Murray’s painting and decided to add his own meanings to it. The cartoonist’s re-interpretation can be seen in figure 6 below.

The editorial was published in May 2012, ten days after the opening of the exhibition in the thick of the debate, but before the defacement of the painting that took place at the art gallery on the morning of the 22nd of May.

The cartoon is in black and white, the traditional stylistic choice for Zapiro, but the intertextual reference to the painting is realised through the pose of the represented participant, Jacob Zuma. The reference is clearly to the painting and not directly to the poster as the author intervenes on the aspect that Murray had already changed by adding Zuma’s genitals, that in this second transfiguration are transformed into the (in)famous shower.

Meaning is created in the cartoon via the interaction between the visual and the verbal mode. In the upper right part, we find the following verbal message: «With apologies to Brett Murray – No apologies to President Zuma – Want respect? ... Earn it!». So, Zapiro provides an interpretation that justifies the subtitle I used for this section. The idea of nudity has to be interpreted in the same way as it is used in Hans Christian Andersen’s story *The Emperor’s new Clothes*, where it is the result of the leader’s detachment from reality as well as a signifier for his bad leadership. In this way the cartoon provides, together with an interpretation of Murray’s work, an explanation of his own shower metaphor, reached again through the interaction between the visual and the verbal mode. Indeed, the second shower seems to be open with words ‘dropping’ from it, just as water would do. The words that drop from the shower are: «Sex scandals – Corruption - Nepotism – Cronyism». This clarifies that the shower is no longer a specific reference to the rape case, but a more general one, related to the lack of credibility of the president, a message that resonates with what the author had previously stated in the interview quoted above.

Conclusions

The relationship between masculinities and power is particularly relevant for the South African context, as the country is one of those in which gender-based violence is rife.

The article connects the issue of hegemonic masculinities in the country with reflections on nationalism, state building and militarism by approaching its semiotic aspect through an analysis of meaningful multimodal texts. This helps to highlight general issues by taking as a point of departure one very specific case, i.e. the very peculiar staging of masculinity performed by South Africa's former president Jacob Zuma.

Contrasting hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses on masculinities in this specific case helped to shed a light both on the general issue that is of concern in most cultures, and on the peculiar articulation of the same problem in a post-colonial setting as that of South Africa, with its past of overt segregation and racism.



Fig. 1 - Jacob Zuma, Picture from his official biography (RSA, The Presidency n.d.).



Fig. 2 - Zapiro, *Aids Message*, ink on paper, ("Independent Newspapers", 2006, retrieved from www.zapiro.com)



Fig. 3 - Siwela, *Off you Go!*, ink on paper, ("The Citizen", 2015, retrieved from www.africartoons.com)



Fig. 4 - Brett Murray, *The Spear*, acrylic on canvas (Goodman Gallery, 2010).



Fig. 5 - Ivanov, Viktor Semenovich, *Lenin Lived. Lenin Lives. Lenin Will Live!*, (Poster 1975, retrieved from www.posterplakat.com)



Fig. 6 - Zapiro, *Painting of Jacob Zuma with His Genitals Exposed Creates an Uproar*, Ink on Paper ("Sunday Times", 2012, retrieved from www.zapiro.com)

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