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Culture and identity in South African education, 1880-1990.

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CHAPTER TEN

YOUTH, POLITICS AND IDENTITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION

> Clearly we must recognize the existence of a deep division of thought and outlook, reflected behaviour, between generations... Young people today have enough independence and affluence... to constitute an autonomous group with a cu. are of its own. They think differently from their elders about the structure of politics, organized religion, sexual relations, class assumptions, the values of career, ambition and many other things. (New Statesman, 7th July, 1967).

Introduction

Chapters Two and Six described how youth organizations were developed in order to promote Afrikaner nationalism among youth through an imagery based on Afrikaner political and social traditions and according to the foundations of Christian Nationalist philosophy. Youth and student organizations were formed to unite all Afrikaans youth, further 'white Christian civilization as a bulwark against communism', and resist all liberal and 'communist' influences in education, particularly in institutions of higher education. A variety of cultural initiatives were undertaken by youth organizations to achieve these objectives. An identity crisis within the Afrikaner establishment resulted in attempts to construct new identities amongst white Afrikaner youth. This chapter addresses the question of identity formation and images of identity amongst black youth. The theory developed in this chapter posits the following arguments: (1) the identities of black youth were constructed predominantly around *tsotsi* (street gang) cultural practices;[1] (2) with the expansion of the secondary school system, demographic pressures and

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[1] *Tsotsi* culture was a culture manufactured on the streets where black urban youths spent most of their leisure time because of the absence of other outlets into which their energies could be channelled.

the development of new forms of ideological and political socialization (e.g. Black Consciousness) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and in particular the Soweto uprising in 1976 and its consequences, the emerging street gang culture was increasingly brought into school grounds; (3) these became a **melting-pot** where school cultures inherited from past rural experience, street gang culture and new cultural forms were combined and processed to forge a wider, national youth identity expressed in youth politics, particularly in resistance culture; and (4) contradictions generated in the making of this culture and increasing state repression resulted in a profound identity crisis among black youth in the late 1980s (the symptoms were internal struggles, the phenomenon of the *comtsotsis*, the resurgence of gangsterism victimizing the comrades (freedom fighters) and schoolchildren, and the emergence of middle-class youth identities).[2]

The chapter involves four main levels of analysis. Firstly, it discusses the dialectic between youth culture and subcultures and the formation of youth identities with reference to the concepts put forward by revisionist theorists. Secondly, it periodizes the development of an urban youth culture in South Africa with emphasis on street gang or *tsotsi* subcultures. Thirdly, it deconstructs the images of Self and Other as articulated by the various youth identity groups. The chapter also explores policy implications for addressing problems experienced by youth, particularly the disempowered youth.[3] In line with the aims set for this dissertation in the introduction, the ultimate goal of this chapter is also to contribute a historical background and a framework that can possibly inform the debate on policy development in South Africa.

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[2] *Comtsotsis* is the term used to refer to ex-comrades, gangs who joined the resistance movement after the 1976 school crisis but were not able to assimilate its political discipline, or marginalized youth who have appropriated the status and the label of comrade to serve their opportunistic goals.

[3] This is the sector of youth population which has been known as 'the marginalised youth', 'the lost generation' and, as this paper suggests, the disempowered youth.

Youth, culture and identity: A conceptual framework

Literally, subcultures are "cultures within cultures".[4] Societies are internally differentiated into several identity sub-groups, each with its own way of thinking and doing things, that one can acquire only by participating in these sub-groups or by interacting with those who already share and embody, in their thinking and action, their culture patterns. Differences in these subgroups can involve style, modes of spending leisure time, politics, games, food, language and popular vocabulary, and dress.[5] In this sense, as Cohen puts it, there is "the subculture of a factory and of a shop within the factory; the subculture of a university and of a fraternity within the university; the subculture of a neighbourhood and of a family, clique or gang within the neighbourhood".[6] The images attached to the practices and values pertaining to each of these subcultures have a central role in the construction of youth identities. A typical example is the imagery surrounding 'deliquent subcultures' as portrayed by government officials: ignorance, bad habits and all kinds of negative behaviour. Cohen has the following interesting example about how parents respond to this imagery when dealing with their children:

> When Mrs. Jones says: "My Johnny is really a good boy but got to running around with the wrong bunch and got into trouble", she is making a set of assumptions which, when spelled out more explicitly, constitute the foundations of an important school of thought in the scientific study of juvenile deliquency. She is affirming that deliquency is neither an inborn disposition nor something the child has contrived by himself; that children learn to become deliquents by becoming members of groups in which delinquent conduct is already established and "the thing to do"; and that a child need not be "different" from other children, that he need not have any twists or defects of personality or intelligence in order to become deliquent ... She is saying that juvenile deliquency is a subculture. The concept of "culture" is familar enough to the modern layman. It refers to knowledge,

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[4] A K Cohen, Delinquent Boys - The Culture of the Gang (New York: The Free Press, 1971), p.12.

[5] See M Brake, The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p.12.

[6] Cohen, op cit, p.12.

> beliefs, values, codes, tastes and prejudices that are traditional in social groups and that are acquired by participation in such groups.[7]

An important fact for this study is that the imagery associated with a subculture can serve the purpose of attaching or detaching groups of people from particular identity groups. For example, while gang members construct their identity around characteristics such as courage, masculinity, adventurism, excitement and so forth, which are appealing to them, their opponents explore terrifying images of *tsotsi-ism* and hooliganism to discourage young people from joining gang groupings.

In an impressively argued article, Clarke et al develop a framework with reference to which subcultures, particularly youth subcultures, can be conceptualized. Their concern is to show the importance of **class** as a necessary analytical tool in the study of youth subcultures. Their major thesis rests on the assumption that in modern societies the most fundamental groups are the **social classes** and the major cultural configurations, in a fundamental though often mediated way, are **class cultures.**[8] Clarke et al suggest that subcultures should be regarded as forms within which 'imaginary' ways of resolving the real contradictions which groups face, but which they are unable to resolve practically, are posed, lived and rehearsed. They define subcultures as sub-sets and distinctive parts of major class cultural configurations (**parent** cultures), such as for example urban working-class cultures. The membership of a subculture necessarily involves membership of a parent culture. A subculture may be an extension of, or in opposition to, the parent culture. However, a subculture may even form its own sub-world. In functional terms, subcultures exist where there is some form of organized and recognized constellation of values, behaviour and action, which are responded to as different from the prevailing sets of norms and value systems. Thus, an understanding of youth subcultures is essential for an explanation of how youth groups construct their identities.

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[7] Ibid., p.11.

[8] J Clarke, S Hall, T Jefferson and B Roberts, 'Sub cultures, cultures and class', in T Bennet et al (eds.), Ideology and Social Process - A Reader (London: The Open University Press, 1986), p.55.

Clarke et al also suggest that subcultures must be analyzed in terms of their relation to the dominant culture, which they define as the overall disposition of cultural power in the society as a whole.[9] Working-class youth cultures and all other subordinate subcultures share the same position *vis-à-vis* the dominant hegemonic culture, the same fundamental and determining life-experiences, as the parent culture from which they derive. Further, there is no sub-cultural solution to the problems posed for them by their material and social class position and experience - youth unemployment, educational disadvantage, and low pay.[10] They conclude with the important theory that this **double articulation** of youth subcultures to their parent culture and to the dominant culture represents a necessary way of staging the analysis of youth culture.[11] This chapter suggests that to understand the nature of youth subcultures in South Africa, another dimension must be added to the **double articulation** of youth subcultures, the **mediation** played by **race** and **gender** in relation to the dominant culture.

The argument that in their articulation with the dominant culture and between them, subcultures reflect the layout of social subgroups in their hegemonic struggles makes a lot of sense. They are determined by the relationships of domination and subordination in which these social configurations stand and the processes of incorporation and resistance which define the cultural dialectic between them.[12]

However, to locate youth culture in this kind of analysis, it is important first to situate black youth in the context of the processes of national oppression, in which **race** has played a dominant role. Under apartheid, race located youth, at a formative stage of their

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9 Ibid, p.56.

10 Ibid, p.57.

11 The concept of subculture is used in this study as an indicator of variance in the configuration of youth culture, e.g. *mapantsula* street clubs (groups of youth who gather to dance the South African music called *mapantsula*), soccer clubs, music gangs and so forth.

12 Clarke et al (eds.), op cit, p.56.

development, in a particular material and cultural milieu, in distinctive relations and experiences. Through family, township and school, youth were socialized into a race identity which formed and framed their passage into a class.[13] Race also structured the young individuals' life-chances, determined the distribution of achievement and failure and produced 'realistic' expectations in black youth about future opportunities. The apartheid system, through race classification, marriage controls and other institutional means, enforced modes of conduct, rules and social barriers that prevented inter-racial mobility, which created among blacks particular ways of experiencing, interpreting and telling about the world and social life. This is not to imply that blacks were mere victims of the system, who simply internalized the principles and the rules impinged upon them. The socialized were always active in their own socialization; they acquired the ground rules of the apartheid system and responded to them in unpredictable coding procedures, very often predicated upon distinctive rules.[14] They developed images of themselves and constellations of interests, which united them and provided them with particular distinctiveness in their responses to historical, social or political situations.

Through the process of national oppression, young individuals were inserted into the culture of race before being framed into the culture of class. This explains why black middle class subcultures did not manifest as such by virtue of any form of participation in the dominant cultural order but mainly as a result of their hegemonic articulation with

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[13] In a recent paper I made the following comment: 'South Africa is clearly a limit case where the salience of racial and ethnic features cannot for a moment be denied. The process of race polarization and its concomitant cultural implications must not be ignored in analyzing culture in South Africa. Brake puts it nicely: "for black people their primary identity, the way in which they are reacted to, and the way in which they act upon the world is mediated by their colour, and the oppression that brings, structurally, politically, psychologically and economically"'. Without romanticizing it, it is race which defines them, which acts against them, and which unites them. Their class position subscribes their economic position, but race is the subjectivity in which their class position is lived, and shapes their relation to the world. (M Cross, 'Culture, power and schools', Institute for Advanced Study and Research in the African Humanities, Northwestern University, March 1993, p.20)

[14] For details on the dynamics of socialization in a process of cultural reproduction see Basil Bernstein, Class, Codes and Control - Towards a Theory of Educational Transmissions 2nd ed. (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), pp.1-33.

working class cultures. Their class position as middle-class could not protect them from the determining matrix of experiences and conditions imposed by race and national oppression. Race produced material dislocations which resulted in a displaced, dislocated and unsettled class condition and a disconnection in relation to the general layout of dominant middle-class culture(s). Black middle-class subcultures appeared disaffiliated by negation and their **dislocated** inception into the dominant culture. This is because in South Africa blacks were by definition a **subordinate** social and cultural formation within the social hierarchy.

Youth culture can thus be seen as a complex kaleidoscope of a variety of subcultures, of different age groups and different gender composition, yet distinctly related to the class and race position of those in them and their common historical experience of racial and national oppression under the apartheid system. Class, race, language, gender and generation all together generate specific focal concerns which generate youth cultural responses and identity consciousness. Complementing these broader categories are also the social meanings of township life, community, neighbourhood and 'gang territory'.

In functional terms, Baron describes youth culture as the values and actions that "young people develop to cope with shared experiences or shared social problems".[15] According to him, youth participate in subcultures in an attempt to minimize structural problems emanating from their social and economic condition.[16] For example, resisting the expectations of school and work under apartheid could create identities outside those ascribed by education and occupation. In this sense, youth subcultures whether manifested through physical appearance (style) or through expressions of protest (songs, demonstrations) are very often seen as 'symbolic violations of the social order' that are met

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[15] See SW Baron, "Resistance and its consequences...", op cit, p. 208; and S Frith, 'The sociology of youth', in Michael Haralabos (ed.), Sociology: New Directions (Ormskirk: Causeway, 1985), pp. 301-368.

[16] As has been pointed out, this paper holds that there is no sub-cultural solution to problems posed for youth by their material and social class position and experience.

with severe criticism from the dominant culture.[17]

Literature on Youth in South Africa[18]

Literature dealing with youth in SA falls within two main traditions : (1) literature within a consensus model (liberal or conservative) and (2) literature within a conflict model. The first concentrates almost exclusively on those aspects perceived by the state as of 'national interest' such as 'riots', 'terrorism' and 'black on black violence' or 'tribal clashes' and 'delinquency', to use conventional terminology. It tends to propagandize a variety of images which vilify and denigrate youth oppositional practices as decadent social behaviour. These are generally explained as: (1) aimless and gratuitous violence; (2) erosion of traditional authority, community and family control; (3) imitation of violent behavior transmitted by mass media; (4) social disorganization involving the breakdown of 'civilized' behavior; 5) communist onslaught; (6) influence of violent gangs in slum neighborhoods;[19] and (7) 'infiltration of undesirable elements' amongst youth or manipulation of youth by 'political agitators'.[20]

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[17] See G Mungham & G Pearson, Working Class Youth Cultures (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976); S Hall & T Jefferson (eds.), Resistance Through Rituals Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain (London: Hutchinson, 1976), p.10; M Brake, Comparative Youth Culture (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); J Muncie, Politics, Ideology and Popular Culture (Walton Hall: Open University Press, 1981); and S Cohen, Folk Devils and Moral Panics (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1980).

[18] For a detailed review of literature on youth culture in South Africa see M Cross, 'Youth culture and resistance: A theoretical review', Perspectives in Education, 12(2), 1991 and M Cross, 'A historical review of education in South Africa: Towards an assessment', Comparative Education, 22(3) 1986 or M Cross, Resistance and Transformation - Education, Culture and Reconstruction in South Africa (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1992), chs 1 and 3.

[19] Bob Hitchcock, Flashpoint South Africa (Cape Town: Don Nelson, 1977); A J Gilbert, A Socio-Psychological Study of the Unrest in African Schools (University of Zululand: 1982); A Gordon, School Performance in Soweto: A Study of Environmental Constraints and Academic Achievement (Johannesburg: CSIR/NIPR Report No. 361, 1983); and David Grinker, Inside Soweto (Johannesburg: Eastern Enterprises, 1986).

[20] See J van der Westhuizen (ed.), Crimes of Violence in South Africa (Pretoria: University of South Africa, Sigma Press, 1982); A Brooks & J Brickhill, Whirlwind before the Storm: The Origins and Development of the Uprising in Soweto and the Rest of South Africa from June to December 1976 (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1980).

Cultural roots are traced to explain the violent nature of all these forms of behaviour. Cloete for example argues that a culturally inspired view of violence still exists in modern black communities. He goes on to say that 'the idea that violent action is inadmissible, is not yet internalized, and many members of these communities still regard it as an acceptable form of behaviour'.[21] Without denying the empirical basis which supports allegations such as this, the problem is that they preclude any possibility of emancipatory practices, concealing the meaning, creativity and the counter-hegemonic nature of some youth subcultures. They cannot account for identities constructed in the context of the counter-hegemonic movement against the apartheid imagery.

'Conflict-model' literature considers class, race and gender as important analytical categories. Literature under this category stresses the need to recognize the power of children in determining or conditioning the course of state policy and social process in South Africa.[22] It calls for an analysis which recognizes: (1) the role of the political economy in the shaping of youth identities and oppositional practices; (2) the role played by the contradictions within the institutional structure of school; (3) the importance of the sociological categories such as **generational unit**,[23] race, class and gender in the analysis

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[21] MGT Cloete, 'Social bases and the prevention of crimes of violence', in J van der Westhuizen (ed.), op cit, p.57.

[22] See for example A Callinicos & J Rogers, Southern Africa after Soweto (London: Pluto Press, 1978); L Chisholm, 'From revolt to a search for alterna tives: Broadening the education base', Work in Progress, (42), May 1986, pp.14-19; F Molteno, 'Students take control: The 1980 boycott of Coloured education in the Cape Peninsula', British Journal of Sociology of Education, 8(1), 1987; F Molteno, 'The Schooling of black South Africans and the 1980 Cape Town students' boycott: A sociological interpretation', MSocSc thesis, University of Cape Town, 1983; F Molteno, 'The uprising of 16th June: A review of the literature in South Africa 1976', Social Dynamics, 5(1), 1979; J Hyslop, 'School student movements and state education policy: 1972-1987', seminar paper, University of the Witwatersrand, April 1987; J Hyslop, 'Food, authority and politics: Student riots in South African schools, 1945-1976', Africa Perspective, 4, 1987; R Levin, 'Conceptualising "the People" in People's Education: People's Education and democratic transformation in South Africa' , Education Department Research Seminar paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988; M Swilling & T Lodge, 'The year of the Amabutho', Africa Report, January-February 1986; and J Muller, 'People's Education for People's Power', South African Review 4, 1987.

[23] C Bundy, 'Street sociology and pavement politics: Aspects of youth and student resistance in Cape Town, 1985', Journal of Southern African Studies, 13(3), April 1987, pp.301-330; C Bundy, 'South Africa on the switchback' and 'Schools and revolution', New Society, 3 & 7, January 1986; Paul la Hausse, '

of youth culture. This set of literature can be subdivided into three categories according to the prevailing paradigmatic positions: (1) those who give primacy to the role of structures in shaping youth cultural forms; (2) those who give primacy to 'human agency'; and, most importantly, (3) those who seek a balance between the two schools of thought.[24] The last position re-asserts the role of contestation and resistance, though it recognizes the importance of the existing social and economic agencies in generating or reproducing particular subcultures, e.g. middle class youth subcultures.

Attempts to reconstruct the history and sociology of youth culture within this framework are found in the writings of Nkomo, Bonner, Glaser, Bundy and Seekings.[25] They developed important theoretical elements for an understanding of the evolution and the nature of youth culture in South Africa. These are: (1) Seekings' contention that the changing political economy has some bearing on the diverging forms of political action or identity; (2) Nkomo's assumption that the complex and contradictory dynamics in education have played a crucial role in the shaping of youth resistance culture; (3) Bonner's use of a class approach to understand the dialogue between black working class cultures and the dominant culture; and (4) Bundy's notion of a self-conscious generational unit with its own counter ideology, the demographic pressure determined by the large proportion of youth in the total population and an over-production of graduates with no or little opportunity of

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"Mayihlome!": Towards an understanding of Amalaita gangs in Durban, c.1900-1930', African Studies Seminar, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987; MO Nkomo, Student Culture and Activism in Black South African Universities (Westport: Greenwood, 1984); MO Nkomo, 'The contradictions of Bantu Education', Harvard Educational Review, 51(1), 1981; PL Bonner, 'Black urban cultures and the politics of black squatter movements on the rand, 1944-1955', unpublished paper, Univerity of the Witwatersrand, 1988; P L Bonner, 'Family, crime and political consciousness on the East Rand 1939-1955', Journal of Southern African Studies, 14(3), April 1988, pp.393-420 (for this chapter I used the 1987 unpublished version); and C Glaser, 'Students, *tsotsis* and the Congress Youth League: Youth organisation on the Rand in the 1940s and 1950s', Perspectives in Education, 10(2), 1988/9, pp.1-15; J Seekings, 'Why was Soweto different? Urban development, township politics, and the political economy of Soweto, 1977-1984' , African Studies Seminar paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988).

[24] For a detailed discussion of the concepts employed here, see M. Cross 'Education for national culture in South Africa: Problems and possibilities', in D Freer (ed.) Towards Open Schools: Possibilities and Realities for Non-racial Education in South Africa (Macmillan Boleswa: 1991).

[25] See footnote 24.

employment.

Against this background, one can speculate that increasing alienation from the prevailing economic, political and social structure has produced a wide variety of cultural responses amongst urban black South African youth. The expression of these responses ranges from disaffection from school work, classroom disobedience, school boycotts, 'stayaways' and absenteeism, to social crime and street-gang life, activities that oral and documentary evidence suggest have occurred with some continuity during the past two decades. All these activities constitute the basis of three main forms of black youth subcultures: (1) "lumpen" and unemployed youth delinquent and semi-delinquent subcultures; (2) middle-class cultural rebellion and reformist movements; and (3) working-class students and youth resistance culture, activism and political militancy.

This stratification appears sometimes blurred because of the dominant role played by race in mediating social relations. The three social groups have generally experienced similar living conditions in the townships. Black youths have been floating from one class or cultural category to another. Similarities are strong in their lifestyles, aesthetics and symbols - in the dress, dance, music, forms of interaction and the whole style of rhetoric. A strong sense of political identity built in opposition to apartheid education brought the three categories of youth together for a long period from the 1970s in spite of their contradictory and very often conflicting values and modes of behaviour. I shall now examine how these subcultures have developed in education and wider community life throughout South African history. An attempt will be made to highlight their interrelatedness at given points in time.

Youth, culture and identity in South Africa, 1888-1990: An historical perspective

The history of youth culture in South Africa can be divided into the following periods: (1)

1888-1939, the increasing disintegration of pre-colonial African cultures; (2) 1939-1955, the emergence of black urban working-class cultures; (3) 1955-1976, the emergence of urban youth working-class cultures; (4) 1976-1985, the development of youth resistance culture; and (5) 1985-1990, crisis of identity within youth resistance culture and the emergence of youth middle-class cultures.[26]

The disintegration of pre-colonial African cultures, 1884-1939

Under the South African industrial revolution profound changes began to take place on the periphery of the main industrial centres: the creation of reserves, the establishment of a migrant labour system, and the penetration of new economic and cultural forms within traditional societies, as a result of [illegible] the family division of labour and the impact of new values and patterns of [illegible]. Particular identities developed around a wide range of activities reserved [illegible] king care of cattle, guarding farms against birds and monkeys, and [illegible]. However, despite the relative distinctiveness of youth culture and the particular social identities of youth, no significant development of youth *tsotsi* behaviour and practices took place.

Wolpe's **dissolution/conservation** thesis offers a good theoretical framework for explaining this.[27] So long as pre-capitalist modes of production survived, they restricted the recomposition of social relationships and reabsorbed part of the labour force, including unemployed youth, thrown off by capital. They thus provided for the structural reintegration of unemployed youth into traditional relationships that prevented the proliferation of delinquent behaviour.[28] Structural reincorporation was consolidated by a

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[26] This periodization is based on major changes of the political economy of the working class.

[27] Harold Wolpe, 'Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: From segregation to apartheid', Economy and Society, November 1972, pp.425-456.

[28] C Hartjen, 'Delinquency, development and social integration in India', Social Problems, (29), 1982, pp.464-73.

wide range of cultural institutions such as *lobola*[29] and *boca*[30] and forms of socialization that accompanied everyday activities in the village (herding, chasing birds from the farms), which reintegrated them into communal relationships, exerted traditional controls that supported traditionally acceptable behaviour, and impeded alienation of youth and consequent development of anti-social subcultures. Therefore, embryonic anti-social youth subcultures were generally aborted or absorbed into parent/family cultures without being able to develop a distinctive and autonomous expression as happened with the increasing urbanization and integration of the peasant sector into the market economy.

The emergence of black urban cultures, 1939-1955

Depending on the nature of articulation, capitalist forces can undermine the domestic sector, driving peasants into urban slums as underemployed labourers and breeding working class and "lumpen" cultures. They can simultaneously give rise to small groups of elite with "petty bourgeois" or middle-class subcultures.[31] In South Africa, this process followed the development of the manufacturing industry from the 1920s onwards. Substantial numbers of African women and men made their way from the farms and the reserves to the urban areas. Their concentration in towns gave rise to a relatively stable urban proletariat and created sociological conditions for the advent of black urban cultures and the emergence of new social and political identities.

Bonner has traced the roots of early African urban cultures in South Africa, and his argument deserves special attention in this chapter. Bonner argues that a distinctive black

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[29] Acknowledgement to the parents of the bride paid in cattle or money.

[30] Tribute of about a pound paid to the chief in Southern Mozambique as an acknowledgement of the permission to go and work on South African mines or Rhodesian farms.

[31] See for example J Petras, 'Class and politics in the periphery and the transition to socialism', The Review of Radical Political Economics, 8, 1976; AQ Obregon, 'The marginal pole of the economy and the marginalised labour force', in H Wolpe (ed.), The Articulation of Modes of Production: Essays from Economy and Society (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp.254-88; and R del Omo, 'The Cuban revolution and the struggle against prostitution', Crime and Social Justice, 12, 1979, pp.34-40.

urban culture on the Rand has been forged out of a cultural exchange between a variety of elements involving the educated African elite, the Cape 'coloured' and the migrant and urban working class.[32] Influences from the neighbouring countries also played a significant role in the process.[33]

The emergence of urban black youth cultures, 1955-1976

Urban black cultures developed under several constraints. These included: (1) the instability of the black urban family; (2) the breakdown of family and social discipline; (3) the generalized poverty that permeated African life; (4) a stagnant employment market and the massive unemployment of urban juveniles; (5) the flood of immigrants and massive over-crowding; (6) inadequate housing and shortage of housing; and (7) malnutrition and disease. The migrant labour system spawned 'loose family unions', family disintegration, a high illegitimacy rate and the breakdown of family and community socialization and disciplinary agencies. On the one hand, parental control was sluggish or entirely lacking and, on the other, besides being insufficient in numbers, schools were confronted with a high-drop out rate and low attendance.[34] General frustration and strategies of survival, mainly social crime, dominated the lives of the urban black youth. Under these circumstances, men went to work in the factories, mines and businesses. Women spent their days washing and hawking or as maids in white areas. Children flooded the streets. In the streets, they developed methods of survival and compensation for their socially mutilated life and social insecurity. There they engaged in gang competitions and battles, gambling, soccer matches and various other games as well as burglary and crime. The streets became a focal point where a constellation of interests, new values, attitudes and identities began to crystallize.

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[32] Bonner, 'Black urban cultures ...', op cit, p.1.

[33] Ibid, pp.2-6.

[34] Ibid, p.1.

It appears that youth gang culture developed under the same constraints that conditioned the development of their parent cultures, urban black working-class cultures. Under these constraints, the consequence was the development of a youth culture associated with *tsotsis* because of its anti-social make-up.[35] Crime and violence began to terrorise the townships in increasing proportions. An important distinction should be made here. The black urban cultures that emerged in the 1920s and the 1930s were cultures of survival around the collective but politically passive institutions of the shebeen, *stokvel* (rotating credit associations) and *marabi* dance. By the early 1950s, the criminal element became dominant. *Tsotsi* or youth gang culture began to command township life and spread instability through the black locations. This harsh reality of township life was well captured in the words of Steve Biko: 'Township life alone makes it a miracle for anyone to live up to adulthood'.[36]

Gangs and resistance politics, 1950-1976

Can those initial forms of youth culture, i.e. *tsotsi* culture, be conceptualized in political terms? What political content (if any) did they have? There are no final answers to these questions. There are indications, however, that the actions of youth gangs very often assumed a political character.

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the late 1940s and the 1950s were characterized by increasing militancy in South African black politics. The foundation of the ANC Youth League in 1949 not only changed the course of African nationalism from a liberal and accommodationist approach to a militant and active challenge to the system of apartheid, but it also brought increasing numbers of youth into the liberation movement. What role did gangs or street gang culture play in this process? Evidence indicates that

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[35] Bonner, 'Family, crime ...', op cit; Bonner, 'Black urban cultures ...', op cit; Glaser, op cit; and Don Pinnock, The Brotherhoods: Street Gangs and State Control in Cape Town (Cape Town: David Philip, 1984).

[36] Steve Biko, I Write what I Like (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p.109.

in spite of their anti-social behaviour youth gangs were a potentially powerful resource 'in wider political struggles presenting both opportunities and constraints to political action'.[37] Politically they could easily identify themselves with the ideals and objectives of the liberation struggle, which promised them an alternative to harsh conditions of township and street life. In practice, they could hardly outgrow or relinquish the style and patterns of behaviour which dominated street life. Gangs took part in 'stayaways', boycotts and the Defiance Campaign, organized by the ANC in response to, *inter alia*, the coming of Bantu Education. In the process they brought with them some of the anarchy, self-assertion and spirit of defiance of the streets. As will be shown, this observation offers a background for understanding post-1976 youth practices and subcultures.

The development of a youth resistance movement, 1976-85

From the late 1960s a process began whereby initial forms of youth gang culture were increasingly integrated into the resistance movement. Three main factors played a central role in this process: (1) the psychological appeal that Black Consciousness had for youth by giving them the hope that they were capable of controlling their own destiny;[38] (2) the expansion of secondary education, which incorporated a considerable portion of the surplus youth from the street and absorbed its subcultures; and (3) the political mobilization of the 1976 Soweto uprising, which cut across the boundaries of the developing youth subcultures. To these factors one can also add the sense of **generational identity** produced by the demographic nature of South African society, with half of its population under the age of 21 and 45% per cent of the African population under the age of 15.[39] Of relative importance was the increasing rate of unemployment and the sense of social insecurity that

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[37] Bonner, 'Family, crime ...', op cit, p.13. For details about the intellectual history of this process see M Cross, 'The black intelligentsia, African politics and education in South Africa, 1884-1976', in M. Cross, Resistance and Transformation (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1992), pp.64-68.

[38] Of particular importance was the Black Community Programme founded by S Biko and B Khoapa and its network among youth.

[39] Bundy, 'Street sociology and pavement politics ...', op cit, p.310.

it inculcated in youth.

Black Consciousness inherited the youthful militancy of the ANC Youth League, which challenged the liberal nationalism and reformist approach adopted by the old ANC leadership. As spelt out by Biko, Black Consciousness represented the emergence of a group of militant youths who were beginning to 'grasp the notion of (their) peculiar uniqueness', the peculiarity of their problems, history and culture and, thus, to realize the need to evolve a political philosophy based on and directed by blacks towards their own emancipation outside white liberal tutelage.[40] Accordingly, the process of emancipation had to start with the individual person, particularly 'the mind of the oppressed', the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor. To put it differently, Black Consciousness involved psychological and cultural liberation, whereby black people would overcome the question of black dependency, the traditional inferior-superior and black-white complexes, and restore their inherent dignity to develop a national consciousness. It expressed group pride and the determination by blacks to rise and attain the envisaged Self. As a political culture, it was a unifying force which brought together the whole generation of youth (from the school grounds to the streets) to see with greater clarity the immensity of their responsibility in the process of their emancipation.

The expansion of secondary schooling had a double and contradictory effect. Firstly, it bridged the gap between street subcultures and student movements by bringing the 'mobs' and surplus children from the streets to the classrooms. Secondly, the tensions determined by the deterioration of the school environment (lack of staff, shortage of accommodation, packed classrooms, etc.) plus the rising political consciousness of black university students created objective and subjective conditions for the development of a nation-wide counter-hegemonic resistance culture. School children came to see the system of Bantu Education as a mechanism of socialization into the subordinate roles reserved for blacks within the apartheid society.

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[40] Steve Biko, 'White racism and Black Consciousness', in Biko, op cit, pp.66-67.

The 1976 Soweto uprising consolidated in practice the political identity and link between students and the youth outside the schools. What had started as a new student movement with SASO in 1969 came to assume the form of a wider national youth movement against the hostile economic, social, political and educational conditions imposed by the apartheid system. It became increasingly difficult to distinguish between students' concerns and the concerns of the wider youth groups. They both had similar expectations in their future: unemployment and the harsh conditions their parents had been forced to live in. Typical gang violence tended to be replaced by political violence in response to growing state repression. School grounds became not just a battle field against the symbols of oppression but also a **melting-pot** where a variety of youth subcultures (school cultures, student movements and street sub-cultures, etc.) combined to form a national youth resistance culture.

Another important factor was of a cultural nature. Street-gang life involves activities which require courage, adventurism, and a sense of masculinity and self-confidence.[41] To most Soweto youths, the 1976 uprising represented an unprecedented opportunity for asserting and testing these qualities. In the context of the rebellion, gangs could easily face hardship and undertake tasks that an average untrained youth could not successfully perform, e.g. attack a police car or set fire on what were perceived as symbols of oppression (council buildings, police stations etc.). Similariy, children from middle-class backgrounds were able to transcend their one time 'petty bourgeois' expectations and conformist attitudes. As will be illustrated, these expectations came to dominate youth in the late 1980s, in response to wider structural changes and disillusionment with the struggle.

The crisis of the youth resistance movement and the resurgence of urban street gangs, 1985-1990

The period 1985-1990 was characterized by an intensification of the contradictions that

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[41] Note that although limited female participation could be found, gangs were predominantly male.

emerged as the youth negotiated its various subcultural experiences (school, street, family, etc.), which resulted in a nation-wide youth resistance movement. The distinguishing features of this period include: (1) unprecedented state repression; (2) a leadership and organizational crisis in the youth resistance movement; (3) increasing marginalization of youth following the disruption of organizational structures; (4) the resurgence of the street gang subculture; (5) the emergence of middle-class subcultures; and (6) greater polarization in youth politics.

The 1985 crisis[42] and the consequent declaration of a state of emergency were accompanied by a profound change in the state's mode of repression: a shift from **total strategy** to what Haysom calls the counter-insurgency doctrine of **low intensity conflict** that had been used in El Salvador and the Philippines.[43] **Total strategy**, which entailed the mobilization of all social, economic, political and military resources to counter the threat of communism in South Africa, came to be seen as no longer effective. The theory of **low intensity conflict** stresses **total war** at the grassroots level against popul[illegible]ellions with **soft war** tactics or WHAM tactics (**winning the hearts and minds** [illegible] people) to destroy popular insurgency without appearing to be waging war directly on the masses. It eliminates revolutionary forces, particularly by isolating the leadership from its mass base, and neutralizing its structures, including homes, families and the entire grassroots organizational network. The new strategy was expected to minimize the crisis determined by the deteriorating economic and political climate in the early 1980s, the proliferation of political organizations and the rapid politicization of black communities manifested in nation-wide demonstrations, school boycotts, consumer boycotts and stay-aways,

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[42] The 1985 schools crisis led to a total boycott of black schools by schoolchildren under the banner 'Liberation Now, Education Later', which ended with the emergence of the People's Education Movement. School children agreed to return to schools under the condition that People's Education would be integrated into the school curriculum.

[43] Nicholas Haysom, 'Vigilantism and the policing of African townships: Manufacturing violent stability', in D Davis & M Slabbert (eds.), Crime and Power in South Africa (Johannesburg and Cape Town: David Philip, 1985), p.65.

phenomena that had assumed the dimension of **total resistance.**[44]

This shift also inaugurated the emergence of vigilante groups in South Africa, violent reactionary groupings operating in black communities to neutralize individuals or organizations opposed to the apartheid system. To mention just a few, vigilante groups that emerged in the course of 1985 and 1986 included the *Phakatis* in Thabong township of the Orange Free State, the *Amabutho* in Umlazi in Natal, the *Mbhokoto* in KwaNdebele/Uitenhage, the *Ama-Afrika* in KwaNobuhle in the Eastern Cape and the *Witdoeke* in Crossroads in the Cape Peninsula. The vigilantes penetrated the youth resistance movement, disorganizing its structures and eliminating its leadership.[45]

The climate of terror spread by vigilante groupings was exacerbated by the activity of the state killing machine or death squads.[46] The leadership began to show signs of weakness. Organizational structures became fragmented and ineffective under the pressure of the vigilantes and the disruptive effects of successive school closures. Informal methods of social control exercised over the youth by these structures, and by the older generation, parents, teachers, community leaders and working-class organizations, were gradually swept away. This caused a growing alienation and marginalization of youth, which increased the pace and scope of gang formation in the late 1980s.

However, these forces became effective only because of the generalized crisis in almost every sphere of youth life. Scharf identifies three converging sets of factors leading to this crisis: (1) the education crisis in the schools, the lack of alternative education, and

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[44] The term **total resistance** is suggested by Haysom, op cit, p.73.

[45] For more details on vigilante groups see N Haysom, Ruling with the Whip (Johannesburg: Centre for Applied Legal Studies, 1984); N Haysom, 'Mabangalala: The rise of the right wing vigilantes in South Africa', occasional paper ,10, Johannesburg: Centre for Applied Legal Studies, 1986; and N Gwala, 'Inkatha, political violence and the struggle for control in Pietermaritzburg' , unpublished paper, Centre for Adult Education, University of Natal Pietermaritzburg, 1988.

[46] For details see Nico Steytler, 'Policing political opponents: Death squads and cop culture', in Davis & Slabbert (eds.), op cit, pp.107-131.

thorough political conscientization in a context where youth had little hope of employment; (2) the politicization of sport; and (3) militaristic populism associated with the rise of youth soldiers or **Young Lions.**[47] The latter represents what Webster has labelled 'military voluntarism', characterized by uncontrolled and counterproductive military adventurism of a 'terrorist' kind:

> The state's coercive response to the rising levels of mobilization prevented the trade unions and the national political organizations from consolidating their structures. After the army occupied the townships, protest became increasingly militaristic as large members of youths began engaging the security forces in running street battles that claimed hundreds of lives. The militaristic voluntarism of the youth eclipsed the organizational concerns of the activists as the township became 'ungovernable'.[48]

In addition, youth organizations such as youth clubs and church-sponsored youth programmes as well a variety of street-based youth initiatives (music and dance gangs, soccer groups, etc.) had either become inoperative or were incapable of absorbing the increasing waves of children out of school. Evidence indicates that these factors played relatively the same role in several parts of the country. Gangs of youth spread terror over black townships, eliminating youth leaders, assaulting and raping school children and curtailing social mobility of residents and political mobilization. As a result, in Soweto many schools were temporarily closed.

Two aspects characterized the new wave of street gangs in the late 1980s. Firstly, some actions of youth gangs clearly assumed a political character. They targeted schoolchildren, mainly student and youth political leaders. Gangs, particularly those who re-emerged from the resistance movement - known as *comtsotsis* - became a potentially powerful resource

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[47] Wilfried Scharf, 'The Resurgence of urban street gangs and community responses in Cape Town during the late eighties', in D Davis & M Slabbert (eds.), op cit, p.237.

[48] Eddie Webster, 'The rise of social-movement unionism: The two faces of the black trade union movement in South Africa', in P Frankel, N Pines & M Swilling (eds.), State, Resistance and Change in South Africa (Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1988), p.191.

for state officialdom as tools against political 'agitators'.

Bonner argues that youth gang culture can be 'a vital resource in wider political struggles presenting both opportunities and constraints to political action'.[49] However, Pinnock presents a view which highlights more clearly the nature of the gangs in the 1980s. For him gang activities 'are obviously not a recipe for winning popular hegemony' and perhaps 'not even part of resistance'.[50] Gangs easily enter into agreements or partnership with the authorities in policing the townships and doing the dirty work of the police, and their presence can be disruptive for mass events held at weekends or at night. During a gang invasion of schools in Diepkloof in 1989, there were indications that some 'jackrollers'[51] - operating within the Mass Democratic Movement - were involved in a systematic elimination of activists. In this sense, the gangs are generally reactionary.[52] Secondly, unlike in the 1950s, the gangs of the 1980s were more educated (school-leavers or drop-outs) and more politically aware, which illustrates the contradictions generated by the nature of the South African educational system.

The resurgence of youth conformist and middle-class subculture, 1985-1990.

A recent but important development in youth culture is the emergence of a typically middle-class subculture in the 1980s dominated by elitism, tolerance of some aspects of dominant ideologies, concern with personal autonomy, selfishness and political indifference or apathy. Factors determining this cultural process range from (1) the values and new forms of behaviour brought to township life by those attending 'open' schools (South

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[49] Bonner, 'Family, crime ...', op cit, p.13.

[50] Pinnock, op cit, p.105.

[51] The most frightening group, very often involved in cases of rape of school girls, was known as 'the jackrollers'.

[52] Ibid, p.105.

African private multi-racial schools), and (2) the effects on youth perceptions of the structural changes undertaken by the state in the townships such as the promotion of exclusively high-income housing and townships, to (3) different family, employment and leisure experience.

The 'open' schools, as schools for the elite, generally provide highly personalizing forms of socialization stressing individuality rather than collectivity, personal autonomy rather than ascription, competition rather than co-operation, and other values which are seen by many black parents as negative within an African setting and which are not directly open to parental surveillance. Thus children attending these schools may acquire new lifestyles that are regarded as alienating them from their African traditions, values and customs.[53] They tend to display more docile, diligent and conscientious behaviour. They show preference for foreign and culturally exotic forms of practice, interests and leisure pursuits. They return to the neighbourhood with a clearly identifiable sense of cultural displace... and consequent lack of authenticity. Unable to negotiate successfully their school experience with their township counterparts, they tend to form a marginal but solid subcultural group.[54]

Material benefits, environment and the social status achieved by their parents also have profound effects on their perceptions, cons' usness and social practices. They tend to engage in symbolically narcissistic forms of practice which a low for personal satisfaction and outward prestige or, in Bernstein's words, 'a celebration of the present over the past,

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[53] See M Cross, 'Catholic 'open' schools in the Transvaal, 1976-1986: The road to non-racial education in South Africa', Education and Society, 5(1&2), 1987; M Gaganakis, 'HSRC investigation: Education in a multicultural society. Perspectives of black pupils in Johannesburg private schools', University of the Witwatersrand, 1988; J G Mativandela, 'School stayaways: Attitudes of pupils who attend township and city schools' (BA Hons Social Work, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987); P Christie & D Butler, 'Witness through schooling: An evaluation of the Catholic o.en schools in South Africa 1986', Report presented to the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, January 1988.

[54] These considerations are based on data obtained through a questionnaire administered to pupils at Sacred Heart College,Johannesburg.

the subjective over the objective, the personal over the positional'.[55] Luxurious cars, 'leather jackets', foreign music and nightclubs dominate their interests and hobbies. Their parents play a central role in this process of socialization.[56] Seekings says that in Soweto, for example, many people under this category are widely "accused of being 'snobs', who have changed their attitudes so drastically that they no longer seem part of the community ... 'they have lost all the warmth one never misses elsewhere in Soweto' ... 'they only know each other by the posh car they drive' ... though they see themselves as still swimming in the same waters with every other black".[57]

The size and social weight of this stratum is growing in response to the burgeoning modes of middle-class socialization: elitist schools, rich families, better townships, better employment opportunities. Although politics have blurred the boundaries between working-class and middle-class youth subcultures, in Soweto the contours of these class strata have increasingly crystallized and their different social worlds are more distinguishable. One can speculate that state initiative to rehabilitate black townships and introduce separate elite housing schemes in the 1980s is to a large extent a clear response to or an attempt to accelerate these trends in the social structure.[58] In Soweto this strategy had militated against the emergence of a strong sense of a (working-class) 'community' as in the case of poorer townships on the East Rand and in the Eastern Cape.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the processes and patterns of identity construction among South

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[55] B Bernstein quoted by Peter Aggleton in Rebels Without a Cause: Middle Class Youth and the Transition from School to Work (London, New York and Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1987), p.39.

[56] For details about the African middle class see SC Nolutshungu, Changing South Africa: Political Considerations (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982); and O Crankshaw, 'Theories of class and the African middle class in South Africa, 1969-1987', Africa Perspective, New Series, 1 & 2, 1986.

[57] Seekings, op cit, p.3.

[58] Ibid, p.3.

African black youth. It has highlighted both the structural and subjective factors which determined the development of particular social and political identities as well as the cultural terrain in which these identities gained expression, namely the family, the schools and the streets. It has shown that the interface of economic, social and political factors, particularly those inherent to the system of Bantu Education, resulted in the forging of a broader national identity, binding youths from different backgrounds and subcultural settings. The terrain in which this identity was forged was that of the resistance movement which dominated youth politics during the 1970s and 1980s. However, contradictions generated within this movement and political events since the late 1980s resulted in a profound identity crisis among black South African youth.

The question that emerges against the above background is whether social forces exist that have the potential to redirect youth into positive modes of social practice and reintegrate youth in more constructive ways of life, without perpetuating the existing oppressive status quo. The agenda is dramatically extensive. It is necessary: (1) to reduce and remove gangsterism in the townships; (2) to unite youth who have been fragmented by conflicting cultural experiences and political competition after the unbanning of political organizations, and build the sense of national identity lost in the 1980s; (3) to liberate youth from the legacy of ideological indoctrination, racism, white-black, superior-inferior complexes; (4) to empower youth with a sense of self-confidence, assertiveness and self-pride; and (5) to provide youth with the necessary skills, knowledge and critical thinking to cope with the challenge of reconstruction and so forth. This chapter does not address these specific issues. That must be an object of wider debate at the grassroots level as the process of national reconstruction unfolds. There are however important policy implications from the arguments developed in this chapter, which require immediate attention.

A structural functional view would suggest that since youth problems are caused by forces inherent in the social and economic structures, they can be prevented or controlled only by radically changing these structures. This view is still popular within South African educational circles disillusioned by the failure of the reform process to address fundamental

problems faced by South African society.

The problem with a structural functional view is that it overlooks the role of subjectivity and contradiction in the process of change. It disregards the role of ideology in reproducing and transforming social relations and the centrality of the imagery produced within youth subcultures in shaping and consolidating particular identities. These factors can either precipitate or inhibit the process of change. There are subjective factors embedded in culture and ideology that may curtail or inhibit structural changes in society. Furthermore, history has shown that revolutions do not automatically eradicate all cultural styles that come to be seen as undesirable, outdated or incompatible with the new social order, even if profound structural changes take place.[59]

The implication is that efforts towards changing the structures and social relations should be dialectically linked to active intervention at the level of youth culture to counter the degenerating cultural forms which are becoming increasingly endemic in society: social crime and violence, drugs and alcohol abuse, and so forth. This should also include efforts to re-evaluate and transform old-fashioned youth practices, particularly resistance practices.

The question of resistance culture has been discussed elsewhere,[60] but it is necessary to

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[59] Scharf, op cit, p.243.

[60] The following extract seems however important for clarification:

> Two important concepts are essential for an understanding of the process of struggles for a non-racial and democratic education in South Africa: (1) the concept of struggles of resistance and (2) the concept of struggles of transformation. The concept of struggles of resistance refers to oppositional practices that challenge control and power in school relations by focusing on immediate issues (such as democratic representative councils, free textbooks, better equipment and school conditions). The main strategy is dominated by immediatism or short-term fulfilment of the expressed demands or needs. The concept of struggles of transformation embody medium- and long term goals, which are directed in some way at the relations of production and reproduction imposed by the apartheid system in general and segregated schooling in particular. Political strategies in this case contain a new dimension. They transcend the purely destructive nature of the struggles of resistance to incorporate the

stress that the need to emphasize **struggles of transformation** rather than **struggles of resistance** stems from the very nature of the resistance culture. Commonsensical views of resistance culture unproblematically see culture as a positive transformative process. This is an oversimplification of the matter. Resistance may serve to reproduce rather than transform existing social identities.[61] As Aronowitz and Giroux put it, "not all oppositional behaviour has 'radical significance' nor is all oppositional behaviour a clear-cut response to domination"[62]. Oppositional behaviour may embody ideologies both underlying the structure of social domination and containing the logic necessary to overcome it. Aronowitz and Giroux put it as follows:

> Oppositional behaviour may not be simply a reaction to powerlessness, but might be an expression of power that is fueled by and reproduces the most powerful grammar of domination. Thus, on the one level, resistance may be the simple appropriation and display of power, and may manifest itself through the interests and discourse of the worst aspects of capitalist rationality. For example, students may violate school rules, but the logic that informs such behaviour may be rooted in forms of ideological hegemony such as racism and sexism. Moreover, the source of such hegemony often originates outside of the school. Under such circumstances, schools become social sites where opposition behavior is simply played out, emerging less as a critique of schooling than as an expression of dominant ideology.[63]

In this case, oppositional behaviour and related political identities are thus informed by a dominating rather than liberating logic. Aggleton uses the term **reproductive resistance** to refer to systematic intentioned resistance that work contradictorily by contributing to hegemonic rather than counter-hegemonic tendencies in contrast to **effective resistance**

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need for reconstruction, which is a fundamental factor towards emancipation. (M Cross, 'From a culture of resistance to a culture of reconstruction: A new perspective on educational struggles', in Resistance and Transformation, op cit, pp.158-159)

[61] See for example P Willis, Learning to Labour (Hampshire: Gower, 1979).

[62] S Aronowitz & HA Giroux, Education under Siege - The Conservative, Liberal and Radical Debate over Schooling (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p.99.

[63] Ibid, p.100.

which may contribute counter-hegemonically within power struggles.[64] It is necessary to understand the significance of 'resistance' as social practice, how it is worked out, and how it is articulated with other practices within society. As Bowles and Gintis have demonstrated, determinate effects arise as an outcome of complex and contradictory articulation between practices at different sites within social formations, which means that the effects of 'resistance' are unpredictable.[65] There are constraints imposed on the development of social practices within a particular site by virtue of that site's articulation with others, as well as the possibilities allowed for by the transportation of practices across sites, for example gang culture in resistance culture and vice versa.

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[64] Aggleton, op cit, p.125.

[65] See H Gintis & S Bowles, 'Contradiction and reproduction in education theory', in L Barton, R Meighan & S Walker (eds.), Schooling, Ideology and the Curriculum (Lewes: Falmer Press, 1981).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I shall highlight and summarize the major arguments developed in the thesis and draw major theoretical implications for the process of transition in South Africa with reference to educational change. Afrikaner politics emerged in South Africa with a distinctive nationalist discourse, which encouraged Afrikaners to think of themselves as a distinct *volk* with a common history, language, culture, identity and destiny, and as culturally different from the English-speaking groups, who were perceived as a threat to Afrikaner identity and cultural integrity and as representing British capital, imperialism and liberalism. Instrumental in promoting this discourse were Afrikaner intellectuals, including politicians, clergy and educationists, who undertook to describe and reinterpret Afrikaner value systems and to promote institutions which reflected Afrikaner aspirations. Between 1881 and 1901, the Afrikaner intelligentsia began to articulate concepts such as Afrikanerhood, Afrikanerdom, Afrikaner nation, and Afrikaner identity, to mobilize and unite Afrikaners in the struggle against British imperialism and subsequent British anglicization policies. One outcome was Christian National Education, which helped to provide an effective ideological and philosophical basis for Afrikaner nationalism.

The constitutive elements of Afrikaner nationalist discourse emanated from a variety of sources, including Calvinist ideas propagated by leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church, and literary and commemorative initiatives focusing on Afrikaner history and the status of Afrikaans as the language of the Afrikaners. Cultural organizations, free from party political disputes and capable of organizing people 'in terms of the idea of culture', came to be seen as effective mechanisms which, through their various cultural and recreational activities, would ultimately harmonize Afrikaners and minimize potential conflicting interests of a class, gender, religious or political

nature. Cultural organizations received the task of developing an Afrikaner historical consciousness designed to serve as a source of inspiration for Afrikaner nationalists.

As Afrikaner concerns with the survival of Afrikanerdom increased and the anti-British resistance intensified with the proliferation of CNE ideas, attempts were made, during the Milner period and in those periods when the parties of Louis Botha and Jan Smuts were in ascendancy, to build a national white identity by uniting Afrikaners and the English into a 'white *volk*' while marginalizing blacks from mainstream political, economic and social life. This, it was hoped, would ultimately reduce nationalist feelings amongst Afrikaners. Milner, in particular, tried to assert British dominance in an imagined white South African nation by privileging whites and marginalizing the disfranchised black majority in all spheres of life. Botha and Smuts showed commitment to a new and broader South Africanism, which would result in a broader white nation in South Africa, in which Afrikaners would increasingly become dominant. Thus, an image of a white *volk* in a united South Africa, dominated by whites and serviced by rightless blacks was promoted in different ways. However, while the main line of division remained that separating whites from other groups, the distinctiveness of Afrikaner and other white identity groups has prevailed until the present.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the need to reconcile the increasing secularization of Afrikaner society with the orthodox principles of Christian Nationalism resulted in a process of reformulation of the doctrine of Christian National Education. For the more conservative Afrikaners, who had always distrusted Smuts and his holism, the influences of humanism and liberalism and their secularizing aspects came to be seen as a threat to the image of the Calvinist Afrikaner. For this purpose, considerable intellectual and scientific resources were mobilized. Central to the process of reformulation were Calvinist notions of predestination, the concept of national calling and destiny, the idea that the authority of God should permeate all spheres of social life, and interdependence between the church, family, school and the state. Also relevant to the process of reformulation was the need to promote Afrikaner pre-eminence in the sphere of politics and the need to review the question of relations between white and black people in the light of CNE doctrine. Reformists resisted at all costs the process of economic and social integration, and

regarded assimilation of any form, whether between the English and Afrikaners or between whites and blacks, as a major threat to the social, cultural and national integrity of the *volk*.

The re-definition of the political frontiers between Afrikaners and other white groups, particularly the English, also received particular attention within the reformulation initiative, though on a completely different logic from that of Milner. The idea favoured by Afrikaner nationalists was of creating a new political frontier which divided South African society into two major groups, black and white, while safeguarding and consolidating Afrikaner hegemony within the ruling bloc. Despite the emphasis placed on differences between blacks and whites, two other factors were brought in to enhance loyalties and unity within the *volk*. First, the notion of *swartgevaar* (black danger) emphasised by Malan in 1948, whereby, if no effective measures were taken to protect the white race, whites would eventually be swamped by blacks, came to legitimate the increasing marginalization of blacks and the apartheid policies of the National Party. Afrikaner identity was gradually accepted as an antithesis to the threat that blacks allegedly represented to white and Afrikaner communities. Secondly, the image of 'black danger' was also associated with the perception of another threat, that of communism. The oppositional activities of the ANC, the PAC, the Indian Congress and other resistance movements, including sectors of the Liberal Party, were recreated within the apartheid discourse and painted as communist-inspired and anti-white. Ultimately, the view of Afrikaner and English as having different identities, within a wider white community, prevailed, particularly from the Verwoerdian era onwards.

On the question of 'race relations', the Afrikaners relied on segregationist policies developed during the reconstruction regime and on the discourses of culture developed by social anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s, which replaced the Victorian discourse of 'civilizing mission' and colonial traditions of racism as the basis for social segregation. They borrowed from anthropology the concept of 'Bantu culture', which, in their view, symbolized the material and spiritual expression of the social life of black people. With reference to this concept, they developed images of African people by highlighting and, very often, emphasizing the intellectual and cultural differences between whites and blacks, and the significance of those differences for

the future of a white race and white supremacy in South Africa. Thus the invention and re-invention of symbols and images, which emphasized difference and the need for separateness in cultural and educational institutions of whites and blacks, became a major characteristic of Afrikaner nationalists. Their formulations had profound implications for policy making in the area of African education. Thereafter, segregationist thought drew on either 'cultural idealism' - a particular form of racial segregation which emphasized national and cultural identity of each ethnic and racial group - or 'nationalism', or on a synthesis of both developed within the framework of Christian Nationalism.

As pointed out in Chapter Four, the Nationalists were able to carry this policy of segregation to a greater degree of refinement than in the education system which they inherited from their predecessors. They were able to draw on the legacy of racial segregation and Christian Nationalism and develop a nationalist solution to the question of education of black South Africans based on the CNE principle of separate schools for separate cultural and race groups. Such a system would eventually assert white supremacy and Afrikaner hegemony, preserve and promote cultural differences, enhance 'national' and 'racial' identities, shape an ethnic consciousness of minority groups such as 'coloureds' and Indians, and prevent interracial solidarity. With developments in ethnography, the all-embracing image of 'Bantu culture' was refined into particular images of ethnic and national cultures comprising the different black linguistic groups. The result was the introduction of notions of 'ethnic groups' as constitutive of 'Bantu' people, and 'ethnic cultures' - the peculiar way of life of an ethnic group - as constitutive of 'Bantu culture'. From the 1960s, South Africa was conceptualized not as a multi-racial society but as a multi-national one, in which blacks formed culturally and ethnically diverse social groups. Under the guardianship of a white nation, black ethnicities could progress in the homelands and eventually achieve full independence. The instruments to consolidate the development and preservation of the different nationalities were provided by the legislation which enforced segregated structures in education, the racialization of social amenities, the prohibition of cross-race sexual intercourse and or marriages, and the policy of bantustanization. These changes were in part a response to the realization by Afrikaner nationalists that the promotion of ethnic/national identities amongst blacks could best serve white and Afrikaner

hegemonic interests.

From the late 1960s, the "danger of communism", which began to dominate apartheid discourses, led once again to some political shifts with implications for the processes of construction of social identities: the co-option of moderate blacks and homeland leaders and the systematic repression and marginalization of radical, mostly urban blacks. As blacks were both moderate and radical and could be excluded or accommodated accordingly, the political black/white frontier became increasingly blurred. The inside/dominant block could no longer remain uncontaminated or purely white. It began to open some space to moderate blacks: homeland leaders from the 1950s and, from the 1980s, "coloureds" and Indians. It was hoped that by granting political representation to these groups, the support basis of the dominant block would be broadened and thus strengthened in the face of a revolutionary threat.

In addition to these measures of inclusion of new agents in the dominant block, the state reforms of the 1970s, particularly in the areas of education, labour and influx control, had the effect of splitting the black population into privileged urban insiders, recognized as permanent residents of 'white' South Africa, and the rural homeland outsiders. Among other factors, the weakening of the original black/white frontier and pressures from the social groups beyond this unstable frontier - extra-parliamentary groups, trade unions, youth movements and so forth - resulted in new antagonisms within the *volk*, which culminated in a generalized crisis of social and political identity within Afrikanerdom. The gradual 'deracialization' of the apartheid system and the opening up of the dominant block to other racial groups had the effect of reconstituting the *volk* to accommodate new privileged elements. These developments resulted in a profound crisis and a readjustment of the social identities of the dominant group by the late 1980s.

The notions of 'free enterprise' and 'economic growth', which dominated liberal discourses in the 1960s, gradually gained acceptance within the discourse of the ruling Nationalist Party from the 1970s. The conception of white identity increasingly became less and less important than the notion of a new system based on western democracy. The radicalization of the Afrikaner Right, who saw liberal discourse as a threat to white supremacy, should be seen within this context.

Tensions between the old and the new discourses in Afrikaner Nationalism from the 1970s, the decline of the influence of Christian National Education in determining education policy decisions, the forging of new identities amongst whites and between whites and blacks, must be seen against the background of the shifting political frontiers separating whites from blacks, and the need by the respective blocks to seek non-Afrikaner allies (for example, the formation of the Freedom Alliance, which included all those opposed to the decisions made during the multi-party negotiations in the 1990s and President de Klerk's mobilization of 'moderate' blacks into the National Party).

Related to this re-articulation of political identities, two positions about the future of Christian National Education emerged. First, there have been attempts to search for a reformed rationale and ideological basis for the old-style Afrikaner nationalism (based on the concepts of the fifties and the sixties) within orthodox and old-fashioned Christian Nationalist foundations. Second, there has been a movement towards seeking reformed foundations for Afrikaner nationalist and cultural identity within the broader concept of South Africanism, which accommodates both blacks and whites within a social and educational framework and affords recognition to the diversity of the religious cultures of the people of South Africa. As a consequence of this movement, the policy of white exclusivity and its Christian National Education foundations have been increasingly wearing away from the mainstream Afrikaner thinking and are being replaced by liberal principles. Once again cultural and political organizations, academics, businessmen, radio and television, have been mobilized to address the question of identity crisis within the *volk*.

Attempts made by liberals to split the dominant bloc and to disarticulate Christian Nationalist discourses culminated in the current dominance of liberal discourses in South African education. The efforts made by liberals in this regard began with severe criticisms of the most archaic aspects of racial segregation and their effects on the lives of black people. This was accompanied by the setting of institutions to promote co-operative relations between whites and blacks, shift the dividing lines between white and black identities, and build bridges to accommodate the growing numbers of assimilated or educated Africans. From the liberal point

of view, the shifting of frontiers that divided whites from blacks and socialization in a variety of institutions such as Joint Councils, particularly education, would create conditions for the accommodation or co-option of those Africans who passed the test of 'civilization' or education into the dominant block. The majority of 'unassimilated', uneducated and tribal Africans, towards whom liberal discourses adopted a differential approach, were however excluded.

Liberal discourses had considerable impact on South African politics from the 1950s. Of particular importance was the emphasis they placed on the conditions of economic stability and growth and commitment to deracialization and liberalization of the economy, which by implication de-emphasized the importance of white identity based on apartheid as an obstacle to free enterprise and western democracy in South Africa. By pursuing this line of thought, liberals succeeded in building a unique liberal identity in South Africa, the uniqueness of which lies not only on the pursuit of universally-valid liberal principles and values, but mainly on the development of discourses and practices which came to assume particular significance within the present South African context: the opposition to an exclusivist white identity, the rejection of racist discrimination, principles of difference and diversity in cultural and not racial terms.

However, by focusing on the economics of education and by emphasizing the role of skills shortage as the main cause of unemployment in South Africa, liberal discourses were met with increasing criticism by neo-Marxists from the early 1970s. Liberal theories and ideas were dismissed as irrelevant and incapable of accounting for the complexity of South African society. Instead, neo-Marxists suggested completely new perspectives and alternative frameworks based on Marxist theory for addressing social issues in South Africa. Their discourses challenged race and ethnicity as a basis for constructing a South African identity. In developing emancipatory discourses, radical/neo-Marxist agents emphasized the centrality of Marxist categories of 'class', and 'class struggle'; they also appropriated and integrated into those discourses popular signifiers such as 'people's education for people's power', 'people's history' and so forth. They privileged class and the role of the working class, particularly the black working class, in determining the future of South Africa. They challenged the concept of western or liberal democracy and

proposed a project of radical democracy, based on working-class identity, the frontiers of which are determined by class conflict or class struggle. However, as has been highlighted in recent post-modernist literature, the emphasis on a structurally-determined class identity led to the construction of new privileged historical subjects for the project of radical democracy.

Class interests and class struggle were seen as the basis of identity construction in a democratic struggle. In the class struggle, the working class would develop a proletarian consciousness and a working-class identity. However, participation in working-class struggles is not determined by forces strictly located within the confines of class. Further, the working class also participates in many other struggles which do not have any necessary relation with the struggles at the level of the class struggle. These struggles have also some bearing on the way the shifting boundaries of the identity of the working class are established. As has been stressed in Chapter Eight, the era of 'privileged subjects' in a historical sense has long been superseded. The role of emancipatory social forces in historical change is not structurally determined or pre-determined by any laws of social change but determined by the complex and unpredictable dynamics of political struggles. It is with reference to the hegemonic[1] articulation of these struggles that identity construction must be understood. Within the arena of politics, social agents are confronted with and choose between a wide range of possibilities. The outcome is by and large contingent and not structurally determined.

Against this background, the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid society must be thought about within a horizon of possibilities different from that suggested by the short-lived radical/neo-Marxist school in South African education. The radical/neo-Marxist tradition in its present state has certainly exhausted the possibilities of mastering the problems posed by the complexity of South African society and by current changes in the world history. There is an urgent need to re-think the options, strategies and methods posed by the discourses of the Left.

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[1] Hegemonic as it is used here refers, as Giroux puts it, "to elements of unconsciousness, common sense, and consciousness that are compatible with ideologies and social practices that perpetuate existing practices of domination and oppression", (S Aronowitz & HA Giroux, Education Under Siege (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p.111; For a discussion of this concept see HA Giroux, Theory & Resistance in Education (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983).

Some of these require a careful review and the Left has to retain initiative in the process. To paraphrase Norval, this rethinking is occurring within an interregnum in a fluid and unstable situation where much will depend on the capacity of these movements to retain the initiative in the process of transition.[2]

Both liberal and radical discourses had significant impact on the political and ideological outlook of the African elite. They were by and large areas of interface between dominant discourses and African oppositional discourses, and have influenced the processes of identity construction amongst Africans and impacted on their imagery of identity. However, identity construction amongst blacks is also related to the particular ways these responded to colonial and apartheid systems. The particular nature of South African racial capitalism, its harsh social and economic conditions, and the increasing alienation of blacks from the prevailing economic, political and social structure, generated a wide variety of cultural responses, modes of representation and discursive formations different from those prescribed by dominant discourses. The expression of these responses ranged from oppositional cultures manifested through participation in protest and resistance movements, liberation struggle, to *tsotsi-ism* with its different nuances, and middle-class social identities. Amongst youth, these responses included disaffection from school work, classroom disobedience, school boycotts, 'stay-aways' and absenteeism, social crime and street-gang life.

Through missionary education, Africans were socialized into Christian liberal values. As a consequence a large sector of the early African elite had a Christian liberal outlook and developed its identity around the set of values, ideals, interests and institutions promoted by white liberals. In response to the process of industrialization and increasing urbanization, African society became gradually integrated, socially, economically, politically and culturally. New alliances and solidarities, which cut across 'tribal' or ethnic divisions, began to crystallize. These changes and the intensification of political struggles at the beginning of the present

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[2] AJ Norval, 'Letter to Ernesto' in Ernesto Laclau, New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time (London, New York: Verso, 1990), p.156.

century gave birth to African nationalism in the 1910s and the increasing radicalization of the labour movement. Identities forged within the framework of Christian liberalism came under fire. Liberal accommodationist discourses which claimed rights within the existing social order were replaced by militant nationalism which advocated a rediscovery or the re-building of an African identity outside the oppressive segregationist political framework. The images and doctrine of 'negritude', and the Black Consciousness Movement were some of the manifestations of the efforts made to re-create an African identity and develop an imagery and modes of self-representation different from those prescribed by dominant discourses. A variety of cultural and educational initiatives were undertaken by youth organizations in the period followin the 1976 school crisis to achieve these objectives.

The attempts made by the apartheid state to curtail African nationalism by promoting separate ethnic identities and by co-opting sectors of the middle class into 'homeland' institutions did not produce the expected results. Instead, African nationalists rallying around a variety of legitimate demands such as demands for political participation, for racial equality, for access to education, for economic equality, for equal political rights, for control of working conditions, and so forth, combined with captivating images of a better future for black people, developed a national oppositional identity or, to use Laclau's words, a popular block opposed to the apartheid regime.[3] The system of differences and the symbolic universe of apartheid was increasingly challenged or disrupted by the imagery of a negated identity reconstituted by oppositional movements.

The arguments developed in this dissertation have important theoretical implications:

1) Dominant discourses in South Africa have tended to emphasize images of difference through which dominant groups identified themselves in relation to all other identity groups and portrayed the social and cultural life of subordinate groups. For example, the image of "people in heathen" was associated with differential or separate missionary

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[3] Laclau, New Reflections ..., op cit, p.166.

work for blacks and whites. The image of the 'educated kaffir' in the late 19th century Natal portrayed Africans as people who could not benefit from education. Smuts' image of *swartgevaar* as well as the idea of "total onslaught" played an important role in rallying whites around white supremacist policies. The images of African people linked to concepts such as the 'educated franchise', 'Bantu culture', 'Bantu Education', 'homeland', and so forth, had similar connotations.

2) Most importantly, dominant discourses tended to define identity frontiers in purely relational and non-conflictual terms, as a natural consequence of difference between social groups. The fact that some groups are not only different from others but in many cases constitute such difference on the basis of the exclusion and subordination of other groups was concealed. To put it differently, the differences were overemphasized while the relations of power which underpinned those differences were systematically ignored. While this feature seems common to many societies in the world, the distinctiveness of the situation of South Africa is in that differences between racial and ethnic groups were promoted, enforced and protected by the rule of law to preserve white supremacy.

3) With different focus and emphasis, both Nationalist and liberal discourses always justified their exclusivist policies by reference to universally-accepted principles.[4] For example the discourse of 'separate development' was repeatedly justified as a necessary political framework for full realization of political and economic aspirations of the various ethnic groups. Bantustans were justified as a translation of the universal principle and right for self-determination of each 'population group' in South Africa. The liberal 'free market' discourse, which embodies universally valid rationale, might have had the consequence of marginalising the black majority from the mainstream economic life, given the prevailing economic and social conditions.

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[4] Note that the thesis has argued that liberal concepts based on assimilationist approach were by implication exclusivist as they marginalised all those who had no access to education.

4) Changing identities throughout the history of South African education have highlighted the fact that new identities are constructed only with reference to old identities, i.e that there is an element of continuity and discontinuity in the process of identity construction. This has serious implications for the forging of new identities in the transition to a post-apartheid era. Thus the project of nation-building or the construction of a unitary national identity in South Africa entails the questioning and re-articulation of the political identities inherited from the apartheid legacy, such that no single identity can be kept pure and intact. The construction of a new identity, be it an ethnic identity or a wider national identity, always takes place with reference to the existing identities. The mere denial of old identities, as constructed by apartheid discourse, will be insufficient, for it leaves that terrain open and uncontested. To put it differently, the Other - contested identities - is constitutive of the Self - emerging identities. However, as Norval has indicated, to be able to affirm the opening up of the Self to the Other, of the identity to alterity, is "to be determined in the context in which the 'post' [in post-apartheid] is thought."[5] How the educational system may help us to open ourselves to other members of society or to other identities, is to be determined in the context in which the new school curriculum and practice is thought, negotiated and implemented.

The logic of difference which characterised dominant discourses was translated in politics of separation, differential treatment and segregation in education. As such, South Africa could be characterized as a limit case of multiculturalism, in which the curriculum emphasized the role of education in entrenching and reproducing ethnic and racial consciousness while obscuring the dominant relations of domination and subordination. The curriculum was based on a typically racist and oppressive value-system which stressed racism, sexism, tribalism, individualism and elitism. Therefore, it appears to me that a meaningful alternative educational policy should redress this legacy. Furthermore, such a policy should have enough flexibility to be able to reconcile emerging identities and minimize potential identity conflict, while contibuting to the

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[5] I would like to thank Norval for this theoretical insight. For details see Norval, "Letter to Ernesto", op cit, p.156.

re-structuring of the economic and social imbalances.

To minimize identity conflict, education should prepare people who can both master the skills of intellectual production and use them in engaging the forces of history in active critical self-consciousness, to filter and challenge the legacy of oppressive and discriminatory discourses and cultural practices. For this purpose, education should give particular attention to critical understanding of diverse cultural heritages and patterns of identity construction which reproduce racist and exclusivist imagery of identity. It should not only incorporate elements of diversity (ethnic, social or cultural), but also develop critical awareness of the nature of this diversity, that is, the nature of the unequal relationship which exists between different social groups and regions, and the racist and ethnic imagery which mediated in reproducing and legitimizing the unequal allocation of power and privilege. From this point of view, to learn about cultures and identities could be a radicalizing force in the development of a national sentiment within unitary, democratic, non-racist and non-sexist society. This requires the realization that cultural differences or identity between ethno-linguistic groups, are not more significant than the similarities. Common experiences and similarities are more profound and enriching than differences.

However, positive elements of difference (that is, those which do not legitimize the legacy of domination and oppression) can be accommodated to enrich and consolidate unity and national identity. By national unity I mean the process whereby the mutual acceptance, cohesion and harmony of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, economic and social differences concur to the project of nation-building, through the consciousness of common history, common values and common interests. As Booker T Washington pointed out, "in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as fingers, yet as one hand in all things essential to mutual progress."[6] It is a result of social interaction, social mobility and voluntary inculturation. As a historical process, it emerges and develops from below, as an inevitable response to social and political

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[6] Booker T Washington, quoted in W Eiselen, 'Gedagtes oor Apartheid', Tydskrif vir die Geestewetenskappe, 2, Jarrgang VI, April 1949, pp.5-6.

contradictions. As an ideal - moral ideal - national culture involves an active and conscious process, whereby, through human intervention and creativity and through convergence of customs, practices, beliefs and institutions, the frontiers between racially- and ethnically-conceived identities are opened to let the universal expression of humanity assert itself.

National identity implies a degree of intellectual and moral leadership committed to the ideal of a nation free of all oppression and exploitation. The building of a national culture thus means allowing a core of common cultural practices, beliefs and customs, to develop, a core that is derived from all the different social, regional and language groups. Further, the creation of a national identity is also a process of transformation, the processing of those cultural practices, beliefs and customs necessary for the construction of a new nation, including those that may hinder the development of a national sentiment.

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