

"My life in the new South Africa":



A youth perspective

Editors: Ted Leggett Valerie Møller Robin Richards

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Editors:
Ted Leggett
Valerie Møller
Robin Richards

HSRC
Pretoria
1997

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Dear ...
My Life in the New South Africa



Views Wanted 88

➤ The Quality of Life Unit, at the University of Natal, is co-ordinating a research project on young South Africans' viewpoints about life in South Africa today. We would like young people to write letters to their fellow South Africans about what it is like to live in South Africa.

➤ The findings of the project will be published together with some of the letters. Prizes will be awarded for the ten best letters. There will also be a lucky draw, so that everyone else stands a chance of winning a small prize.

In not more than 500-1000 words (1 to 2½ foolscap pages), we would like you to write a letter to a fellow South African. We are not necessarily looking for grammatically correct pieces of writing. We are looking for writing that tells us about your thoughts, your life and your worries as a young South African. Tell us about:

➤ Your expectations, your hopes and dreams, what you love and hate about South Africa today, and what you would change if you could. This is a golden opportunity to make your views felt and be part of the solution of the future.

➤ The Competition closes on March 31, 1996.

How to enter the competition

1. *Who qualifies to enter?* All young South Africans between the ages of 13 and 30 may enter.
2. Write your letter on the lines provided. Your letter may be less than a page but not longer than about 500-1000 words (approximately 2½ pages). If you don't have a letter-form use a piece of writing paper or make a photocopy of the form.
3. If you have already participated in this competition through another youth organisation to which you are affiliated, please do not write another letter.
4. This is not an examination so there are no right or wrong answers. You may write the letter in any official South African language.
5. When you have completed your letter, hand it back to the speaker/organiser in your class or the organisation to which you are attached.
6. The prizes for the 10 letters will be awarded as follows:

First prize:	R 400
Second prize:	R 350
Third prize:	R 250
Fourth prize to tenth prize:	R 140 each
7. Please write clearly. Remember to write in your name and address at the end of the letter so that we can contact you should you win a prize.
8. The competition closes on 31 March 1996.
9. The judges' decision as to the award of the prizes is final. No correspondence will be entered into in respect of this matter.

If you enter this competition through the newspapers or the radio, post your completed letter forms to "MY LIFE IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA" University of Natal, CSDS, Private Bag X10, Dalbride 4014, South Africa.

Preface

The young people of South Africa hold the future of society in their hands. They will become the new leaders who will make or break South Africa's fledgling democracy. Of course, it is impossible to know how society will fare in the millennium; but knowledge of where the youth think their lives and their country are heading will provide some clues to what the future holds.

The research for this book was inspired by the "Monitoring the future" project, a regular survey of young people's values and aspirations by the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan. Our research was informed by recent comprehensive inquiries on the youth conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Co-operative Research Programme on South African Youth and the research by the Joint Enrichment Programme and the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE). The present study also builds on more focused research on leisure, educational aspirations and quality of life conducted by researchers attached to the University of Natal's Quality of Life Research Unit. The evidence for the two large-scale inquiries and the quality of life studies was collected before South Africa's first open general elections. The material presented in this book is about young people who have experience of living under the new democracy.

This report may be among the first to inform the newly formed National Youth Commission of young people's needs and aspirations. Urgently needed for planning and policy formation is

a systematic programme of research into the evolving situation of South African youth under the new political dispensation. Until such time as the values and lifestyles of young people are monitored at regular intervals, ad hoc studies such as the one reported here may help to fill the gap. It is hoped that the views of young people expressed in this book will deepen our understanding of young people's expectations and aspirations for the future.

My life in the New South Africa provides a snapshot of society two years after the first open general elections as seen through the lenses of the youth. The book, which was written by the young people themselves, documents contemporary everyday life and hopes and fears for the future as envisaged by the youth.

The material was gathered through an innovative research project which aimed to learn how young people see themselves and their society two years into the new democracy. Over 900 of the youth gave descriptions of "my life in the New South Africa" in the first half of 1996 in response to a letter writing competition designed by the Quality of Life Research Unit at the University of Natal. The competition fits the currently fashionable genre of "participatory" research, in which subjects double as analysts of their life situation. Although a fairly recent addition to the South African research repertoire, the participatory method is not unfamiliar to quality of life researchers. For many years, students of quality of life have advocated that ordinary people and not the external experts are the best judges of what makes people's lives satisfactory or not. Working in this research tradition, the Quality of Life research team at the University of Natal took on the task of shaping a book around the issues addressed by the youth in their letters. The material produced by the letter writing competition was content-analysed by a team of experts and organised in a number of thematic chapters which cover many of the dominant concerns of

contemporary youth. Essentially, the youth wrote the script and the researchers did the editing.

The mood of the letters is overwhelmingly positive and inspiring for a new democracy intent on overcoming the shortcomings of the past. Energy, youthful optimism and good intentions radiate from the letters. There is no doubt that *My life in the New South Africa* will provide useful pointers for current policy formation. It is hoped that the contents of this book will also serve as benchmark information against which South African society will be able to measure itself in years to come.

The majority of the young people who entered the competition fervently believe, or at least wish to believe, that their hopes for an ideal society in which all South Africans live in harmony will be realised. Their idealism is as refreshing and touching in its naïveté as it is sobering. The youth who wrote to the Quality of Life research team, boldly outline the challenges that lie ahead for a new democracy. Time will tell if the hopes and fears of contemporary youth can be laid to rest and their dreams for the future fulfilled. South Africa owes it to the next generation that its young people not be disappointed.

Thanks

Like any research project, the "My life in the New South Africa" competition was a team effort. The competition was run by a small team of researchers from the Quality of Life Research Unit at the University of Natal. The project ran over two years and the composition of the research team changed over this period. In the last quarter of 1995 Robin Richards and David Duma undertook the preparatory work to launch the project. They were assisted by other members of the Quality of Life Research Unit, including Amanda Jackson, Ayanda Sotshongaye and Mandy Lamprecht, who carried

out various tasks while the competition ran in late 1995 and the first part of 1996. Robin Richards took charge of the day-to-day running of the project while the judging of the entries to the competition and data compilation took place during June and July 1996. Siyabonga Mngadi joined the project for eight months to assist with data compilation and analysis after May 1996. The role of project co-ordinator was handed over to a new member, Ted Leggett, who joined the research team in August 1996 to oversee the data analysis and reporting phase of the project, and became the chief editor of the book on the findings.

The Quality of Life team is grateful to the many individuals and organisations, too many to mention by name, who assisted them at various stages of research. Although the team express their gratitude to the following persons and organisations, the editors alone take responsibility for the outcome of the research project.

In the initial planning phase, the research team consulted with experts in different fields who kindly supplied their ideas on the design of the project and suggested themes which would be attractive to young people. Experts included Elana Bregin, a freelance writer; Michael Currin, South African Communication Services, Durban; Amanda Delilly, *Upbeat* magazine, Gauteng; Cristal de Saldanha, Southern African Association of Youth Clubs, Gauteng; Dudu Dlamini, National Institute for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of Young Offenders (Nicro), Durban; Crispin Hemson, School of Education, University of Natal; Karen MacGregor, *Indicator South Africa*, University of Natal; and Michael Mthembu, Culture and Recreation Department, Durban. Thanks also to the Community Service Training Programme and students at the University of Natal who volunteered to pilot-test the format of the competition form by writing sample letters according to given directions.

A large number of organisations assisted with the distribution of competition forms. The major access points for grassroots distribution in Natal included: a community-based organisation (CBO) based at the University of Natal, Durban; the University of Natal's Street Law Project; Career Information Centre, Durban; South African Communication Services, Durban; Inanda Development Forum, Durban; National Association of Childcare Workers, Durban; South African National Institute for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of Young Offenders (Nicro), Durban branch; and the National Youth Development Forum. In the Durban area, the South African Black Social Workers Association disseminated entry forms to Saturday School pupils from Chesterville, Inanda, KwaMashu and Umlazi.

The major access points for the grassroots distribution of competition forms to other provinces included the following organisations: Joint Enrichment Programme, Gauteng; Southern African Association of Youth Clubs, Free State; Johannesburg Youth Council, Gauteng; Streetwise Alliance, Gauteng; New Crossroads Youth Centre, Western Cape; and the Educational Resource and Information Project (ERIP), Western Cape. The Joint Enrichment Programme and the Southern African Association of Youth Clubs advertised the competition in their newsletters. The national youth magazine *Upbeat* and the *Sowetan* ran variations of the standard entry form adapted for their readership.

Elana Bregin and Sihawukele Ngubane refined the criteria for judging the merit of the letters entered in the competition and undertook the final judging.

Lindiwe January, Antoinette Louw and Thabane Mashipane translated the letters written in languages other than English for analysis purposes. Laura Milne, Kanagie Naidoo and Lucy Woodhouse prepared the typescript of the letters, which were mainly

handwritten. Quality of Life researcher, Amanda Jackson, assisted with the compilation of the background characteristics of the letter writers. Colleagues in the Centre for Social and Development Studies attended to other administrative and technical aspects of the project.

In the final phase of research, a number of colleagues at the University of Natal and further afield accepted our invitation to analyse batches of letters which addressed specific concerns and themes in their field of expertise and to write chapters for the book. Special thanks go to Elana Bregin, who contributed enthusiastically to the project in all phases of research, first with ideas for the competition, then as a judge, and finally as analyst of the creative writing skills of the participants in the competition.

Thanks for financial support and encouragement

The Quality of Life Research Unit acknowledges financial support for the letter writing competition from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). Without their generous support the project could not have gone ahead.

The researchers appreciate the encouragement and practical assistance received from members of the Quality of Life Research Unit's Steering Committee: Dr Pieter Kok (Chairman), HSRC; Cristal de Saldanha, Southern African Association of Youth Clubs; Howard Gabriels, Post, Telecommunications and Broadcast; Dr Vincent Maphai, HSRC; Perry Moodley, Finance Division, University of Natal; Roseline Ntshingila-Khosa, Improving Educational Quality Project; Professor Eleanor Preston-Whyte, Vice-Principal: Research, University of Natal; Professor Lawrence Schlemmer, South African Institute of Race Relations; Mrs Nicolette Wells (secretary) and Professor Paulus Zulu, Co-Vice-Principal, University of Natal.

Thanks to the youth

A final vote of thanks goes to all the young people who entered the competition and shared their thoughts with the Quality of Life researchers and the readers of this book. Without their help this book would not have been written.

Durban, February 1997

Valerie Møller, Ted Leggett and Robin Richards

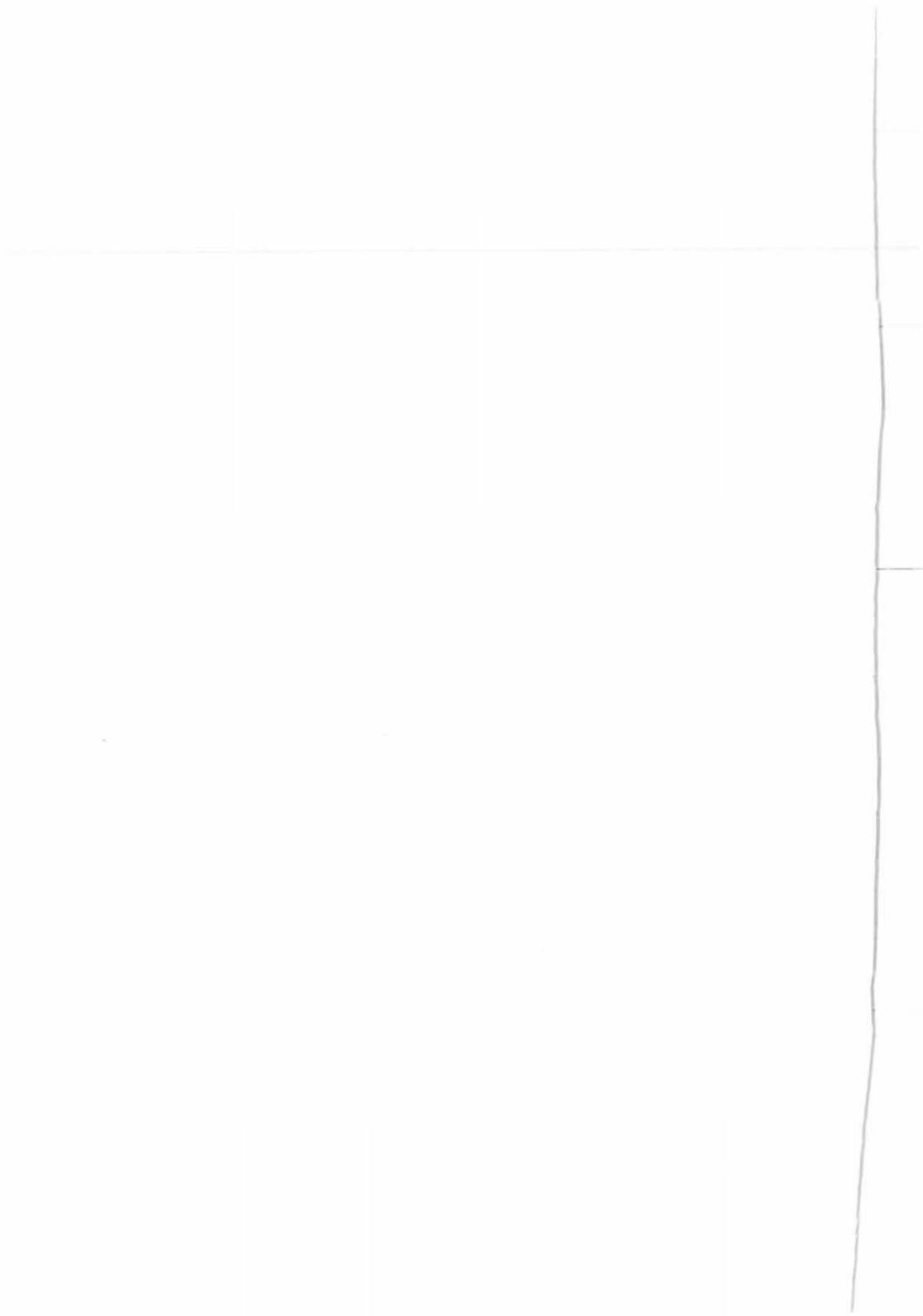


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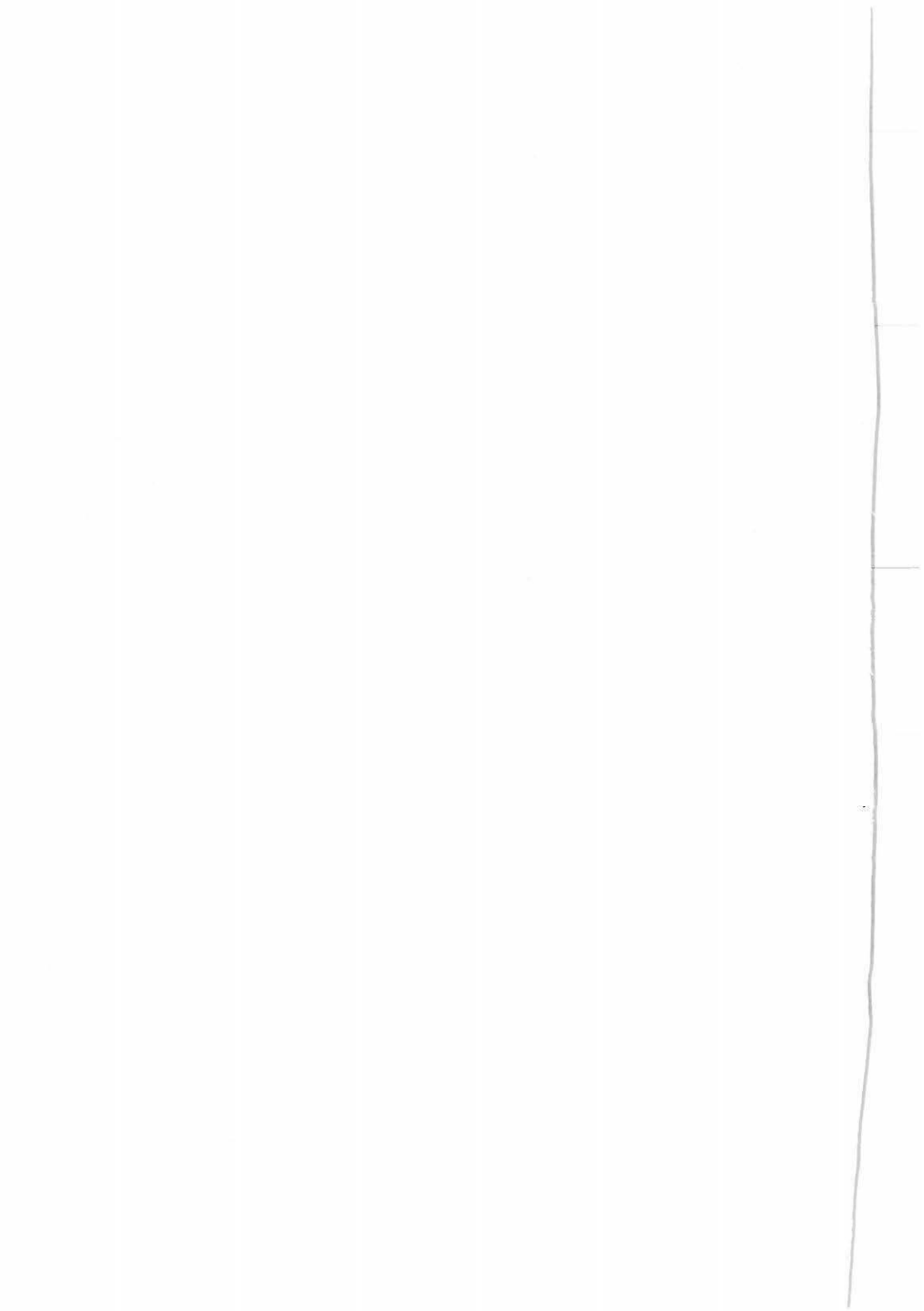
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Chapter 1

"My life in the new South Africa":

Introduction

Ted Leggett

Young South Africans are pioneers of a new age. The country in which they will grow up is very different from the one into which they were born, and they are well aware of the role that young people played in bringing about these changes. Propelled on a wave of triumph, courageously shouldering the baggage of the past, they face challenges that many more advantaged peoples would find daunting. And in overcoming these obstacles they must succeed — there are no alternatives.

At this pivotal time in the nation's history, what is on the minds of South Africa's young people? How do they see their lives and their futures? How do they see themselves?

The Quality of Life Research Unit was formed to investigate questions like these. Using innovative techniques to get at the more subjective aspects of social experience, the Unit has conducted a series of surveys and studies exploring the daily lives of young

South Africans. This book is an analysis of the latest of these studies — the Youth Letter Writing Competition.

In order to get at youth issues in greater depth, the Unit decided to try an unusual technique in its most recent youth study. A contest was created, in which a self-selecting group of young people were asked to present their views about their lives in a relatively unstructured way. Asked only the broadest of questions - in short, to describe their lives — the youth were allowed to create a statement in their own time, in their own fashion. It was hoped that this approach would produce sincere responses which reflect the personal concerns of youth at this point in history.

The results were fascinating. Young people from all over the country wrote in: shack dwellers and boarding school residents, prison inmates and suburban scholars. Letters came in Sesotho, Pedi, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, Shangaan, Tswana, and in English both fluent and broken. Young people sent poems, letters to God, pleas to the government, daily itineraries and personal confessions. The passion and diversity of the response was overwhelming. When the smoke cleared, there were 905 letters all told.

Of course, the letters do not represent an orthodox social science database. The contestants participated on their own initiative, and so it was impossible to ensure that they were fully representative of all categories of South African youth. Since the young people wrote directly from their homes and classrooms across the country, the conditions under which the contest was administered were not controlled and not recorded. The writers were motivated by a desire to win a prize, and their self-reporting may be somewhat biased as a result. It is therefore impossible to generalise in any *scientific* way about the state of youth in the new South Africa on the basis of this information. Nonetheless, these letters represent a valuable and

unique historical document, and yield a wealth of insights that could not have been gathered in any other way.

We learned from the letters that this “study” was more than an academic exercise. Time and again, the writers expressed gratitude for the opportunity to make a statement. Some of the letters came in groups from schools and youth organisations, and from these it is clear that lively debate on the issues of the day preceded the writing. For the young people that participated, the contest was a chance for self-reflection and personal assessment. They asked themselves: where is my life going? Am I happy with my prospects? What has changed since the coming of democracy?

Underlying all the letters is a tremendous sense of optimism and determination and great courage. The youth believe in the rainbow ideal, that the people of South Africa should live in unity while embracing diversity. They are willing to work hard to get what they want out of life, but they expect the support of the government in achieving their goals. Their greatest demand is for education, for the tools to make a better life for themselves. They are confident that their needs will be addressed by a president whom they adore and who has expressed his dedication to them in so many ways. And all this hope and goodwill is declared despite the frightening circumstances many report — a world filled with crime, unemployment, broken families and sexual abuse.

The letters are inspirational and more than a little frightening to read. Circumstances are often bleak and expectations are dizzyingly high. But one gets the sense that if hard work and tenacity are the secrets to success, then this is a generation bound for glory.

The intention of this book is to let the young people speak for themselves. The book is designed to feature as much of the letters themselves as possible. The commentary of the authors provides context and a digest of those many other letters which we did not

have space to include. The topics discussed were suggested by the contents of the letters themselves — these are the issues that concern young South Africa. We in the Quality of Life team hope the insights provided will be helpful to both professional and lay readers alike.

How this book is organised

The following chapter, "How the contest was run", is a chronological account of the mechanics of putting together a study of this nature. It is followed by the final introductory chapter, "And the answer is...", which gives an overview of the types of responses we received. The bulk of the book is organised by topic, divided into three sections entitled "Language and identity", "Daily life", and "Political issues".

The "Language and identity" section begins with a glance at the humorous and enlightening ways young people overcome their limited language skills, and gives the reader some idea of quality of the letters. This is followed by a discussion on the relationship between the religious convictions of the young people and the positive outlook on life so many of them display. The concept of the "rainbow nation" and its impact on the worldview of the youth is explored next, and the "Language and identity" section concludes with a look at the impact of the media, consumerism and sport on the way young South Africans see their lives.

"Daily life" begins with a discussion of the family, in the many forms it takes in modern times. Many of the writers give accounts of their daily activities, and their itineraries are considered in the following chapter. The issues surrounding youth sexuality are a large part of the day-to-day experience of the writers, and the section ends with a look at this topic.

“Political issues” covers a broad range of subjects, beginning with a walk through the writers’ views on the government, the Reconstruction and Development Programme, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and President Nelson Mandela. The impact on the youth of crime and the fear of crime is discussed next, followed by a chapter on the ways that race continues to be a factor in young people’s lives. The young people view education as a panacea for all manner of social and personal problems, and their views on this subject are explored next. The final chapter looks at the career aspirations of a generation somewhat dazzled by the possibilities.

The book closes with a concluding chapter which draws the findings of the study together and places the Youth Letter Writing Contest in its research context.



Chapter 2

How the contest was run

Robin Richards

The Quality of Life Research Unit of the Centre for Social and Development Studies at the University of Natal, Durban was founded to promote quality of life and social indicator studies in South Africa during the transition to democracy. The Unit has conducted a number of studies aimed at gathering both quantitative and qualitative data on the daily lives of South Africans. In the last quarter of 1995, the Quality of Life team initiated a youth letter writing competition as a vehicle for accessing young people's subjective impressions of the society in which they live.

The youth and people close to them were involved in the project right from the beginning. Work began in September 1995, as youth workers were asked for feedback on the draft project proposal. The draft proposal was also scrutinised by the university's legal expert to ensure that the competition did not contravene any laws, including those enshrined in South Africa's transitional constitution, and changes were made accordingly. For example, the draft proposal suggested that letters should be written in English, to facilitate judging. The legal advisor felt that this was inconsistent with the spirit of the constitution, so the rule was changed to allow submissions in any official South African language.

Synthesis of the solicited comments with the decisions reached in the Unit's brainstorming sessions generated the working methodology for the project. The Quality of Life team felt that the study should be participatory and developmental in approach. Subjects would participate in the study on a voluntary basis, and the competition would offer respondents some scope for personal development and growth. Access to respondents would be made via local community leaders and community-based organisations.

After much debate, the Unit arrived at a theme. Entrants would be asked to write a letter to a fellow South African expressing, from their perspective, what it is like to live in South Africa today. The "letter" concept was selected over an essay format, as it was felt that the term "essay" implied classroom formality. The aim was to elicit the unrestrained expressions of young people without their feeling the need to use textbook English or to be guarded in their statements.

For the purpose of competition rules, it was necessary to formulate an operational definition of a "young person". It was decided that young people between the ages of 13 and 30 years could enter the competition. The Western definition of "youth" includes young people up to the age of about 25 years. In the South African context, many writers agree that apartheid-legacy deprivation postpones the transition to adulthood, and that the cut-off point to define a young person should be extended to 30 years of age (Slabbert *et al.*, 1994; Everatt, 1994). This age cohort also spans two important developmental phases, adolescence and young adulthood, characterised by different needs and interests (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1975).

In addition to prizes awarded for merit, the Unit felt that an additional incentive was needed. It was decided that Lucky Draw prizes would be offered, which each participant had an equal chance

of winning. In this way, no participant would be discouraged in voicing their opinion by limited language skills or other considerations of relative merit.

The decision to run the competition between December 1995 and March 1996 was based on the amount of free time young people would have at their disposal during this period. December is the beginning of the school holidays, when the worry of school exams has subsided. During September and October the draft competition form was tested at the University of Natal on a group of first-year Sociology students, some CSTP (Community Services Training Programme) students, and casual acquaintances of the researchers.

Finding an audience

In order to promote openness and spontaneity in the reporting, the Quality of Life team decided that the youth participating should be self-selecting. No attempt was made to collect a statistically representative sample, since the research project was linked to a competition, and only young people who were interested in participating entered. Young people were also invited to enter through the print and electronic media, which further restricted the control the researchers had on any form of respondent selection process. Strict controls were sacrificed in the interest of giving access to the contest to youth nationwide.

Instead of running the project through official bureaucratic channels such as government education departments, it was decided to communicate with NGOs (non-governmental organisations), CBOs (community-based organisations) and other organisations with ties to the youth. This route gave the researchers more flexibility in the distribution of the forms. Smaller quantities were distributed to youth groups across the country, and specific target groups could be identified in this way. Youth groups dealing with rural youth,

shack and peri-urban youth, ordinary schoolgoing youth, tertiary students, urban youth and orphaned youth were contacted. A complete listing of the distribution sites is included in the preface to this book.

Further attention was gained through advertising the project in various national youth newsletters, including a young women's newsletter attached to the Joint Enrichment Project (JEP) and the Southern African Association of Youth Clubs (SAAYC). An advertisement was also placed in the February 1996 edition of a well-known youth magazine, *Upbeat*. The readership profile of this magazine and the SAAYC newsletter is multi-racial.

Radio advertisements were also placed on KwaZulu-Natal stations. East Coast Radio, Radio Zulu and Radio Lotus were used. These advertisements were broadcast in November and December 1995 and January 1996.

Competition advertising and distribution of entry forms continued into 1996. Short descriptive articles were placed in the *Sowetan* and the *Daily News Supplement* in April 1996. An article advertisement was also placed in a Bloemfontein-based newspaper, the *Express*. The closing date for the competition, initially set for 31 March 1996, was extended to accommodate additional responses from this second wave of advertising.

The South African Black Social Workers Association (Sabswa) disseminated entry forms to Saturday School pupils from Chesterville, Inanda, KwaMashu and Umlazi in the Durban metropolitan area.

The question

The official competition form, reproduced here, asked participants to write a letter to a fellow South African describing their life in the

new South Africa. The advertisements in the periodicals *Youth News* and *Upbeat* asked participants to write a letter telling the Unit "about yourself, your everyday life, what you do, where and how you live, work and play. Also say what you like and dislike about your life and what is important to you".

The advertisement in the *Sowetan* newspaper asked the entrants to respond to nine questions.

1. Tell the Unit about yourself.
2. What do you do in your everyday life?
3. Where do you live?
4. What school do you attend?
5. What do you like doing after school?
6. What work do you plan to do in future?
7. What do you like about your life?
8. What do you dislike?
9. Is there anything you feel strongly about?

In all these advertisements, the rules of the competition stated that

- the researchers were not looking for grammatically correct writings
- there were no wrong or right answers
- entrants could write in any official South African language.

The results

By the first week of June, the Quality of Life Research Unit had received the last letter entries. The majority of the letter writers chose to write in English, although the competition rules allowed for letters in any of the official South African languages. Forty letters were written in languages other than English, including

Afrikaans, Xhosa, Pedi, Sesotho, Shangaan, Tswana and Zulu. Three translators translated these letters into English and kept as close to the original meaning of the text as possible.

All of the letters received were ring-filed and numbered. A total of 905 letters were received, including letters generated during the pilot phase of the project. "Group submissions" (respondents who entered the competition through the institutions with which they were affiliated) which were returned to the Unit in batch form were usually filed and numbered together.

The lucky draw

Once all of the letters had been numbered and filed, the lucky draw was carried out. Every tenth letter was declared a winner. This method ensured that at least one person in group submissions was awarded a prize. Winners were mailed postal money orders via registered post at their contact addresses.

Judging the letters

There were two phases of judging for the merit prizes. Three main criteria were used in the judging of the letters:

- Topicality and clarity of thought
- Effort made, including the neatness of the presentation
- General interest value

Two members of the Quality of Life team, Robin Richards and Siyabonga Mngadi, read through all the letters and drew up a short-list. In the last week of June 1996, Elana Bregin and Sihawukele Ngubane were appointed as independent second-round judges, and the winners were determined. Elana Bregin is the author of a number of works of fiction for young adult audiences, and Sihawukele Ngubane is a lecturer in Zulu at the University of Natal, Durban.

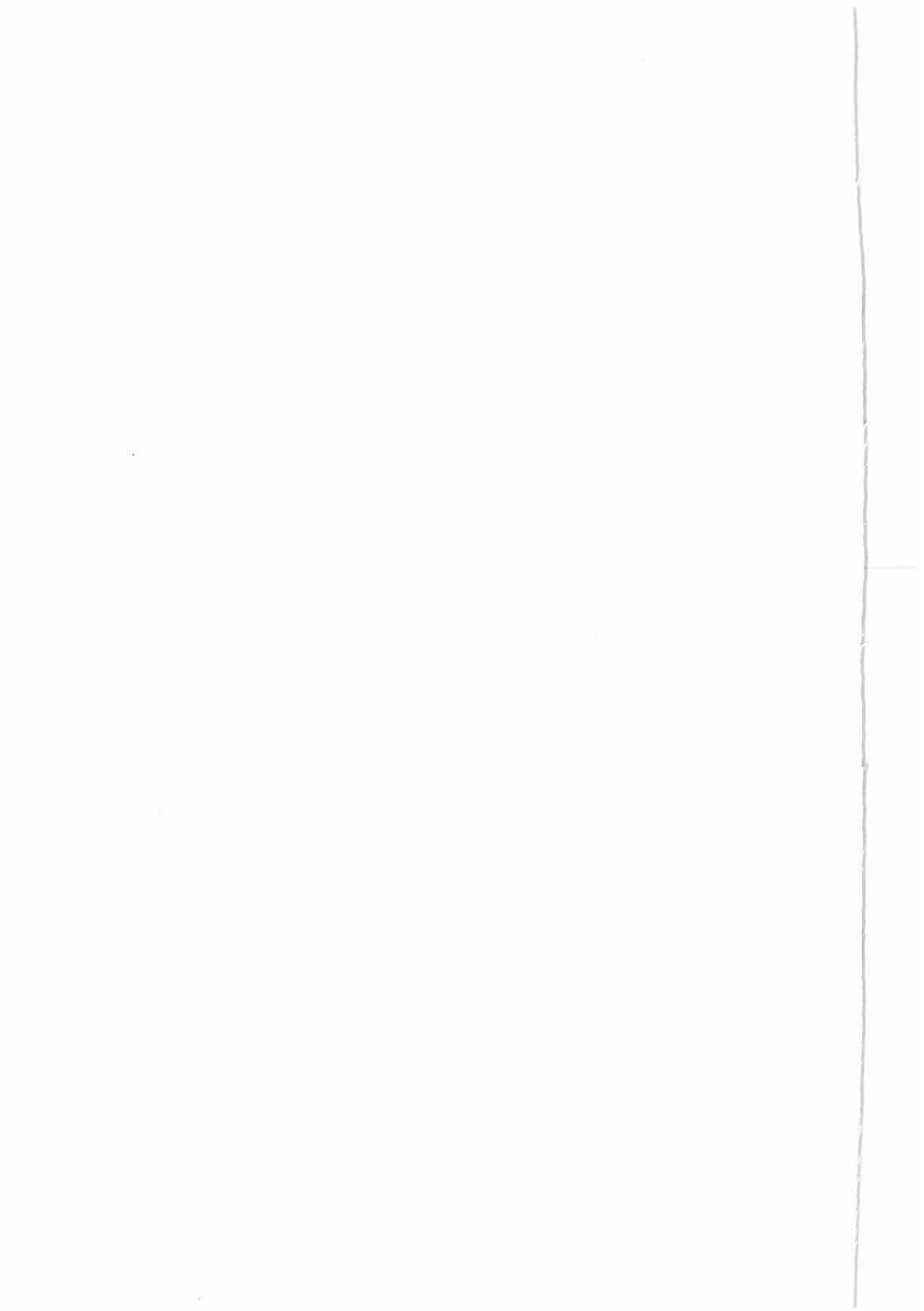
Special merit prizes were awarded to young letter writers who submitted entries that did not meet the normal criteria for a merit prize but whose efforts in the face of personal disabilities and or environmental constraints warranted some recognition.

Developmental benefits

For some respondents, having to think about critical questions in their lives, including personal goals and the like, may of itself have been a useful exercise in helping them define and crystallise their own goals in life. For other respondents, the chance to compete nationally to win a prize for a "best letter" was an opportunity for growth and fulfilment. This was reflected in their proud comments about their letters and the feeling that their contributions were worthy of winning a prize. Many of the participants appreciated the efforts of the Quality of Life Research Unit to "listen to their stories". For these respondents the competition had a healing, cathartic benefit as they spoke about their joy and pain of life in the new South Africa. These respondents thanked the Quality of Life team for organising the competition and the opportunity to be heard and noticed and to be part of the wider South African society. Clearly for them this was a sign that they were not marginalised in South African society.

Analysis

The letters were typed and transcribed to facilitate analysis of the letters. The letters were sorted by topic, both through subjective reading and keyword searches. Topical files were created and these were given specialists in a number of fields, including social work, sociology, education, geography, development studies, and psychology. Many provided comment and a few were persuaded to write the chapters contained in this book.



Chapter 3

And the answer is ...

Siyabonga Mngadi and Ted Leggett

The Quality of Life team received 905 letters from a broad spectrum of the nation's youth. Submissions came from all nine provinces, with about half originating in KwaZulu-Natal. Letters were received from writers of both genders in equal numbers. While the majority of the writers are black, all races and social classes are represented. There are letters from upper-class boarding schools, from shack areas and from prisons. The analysis was performed in such a way that less well-represented groups receive more than their proportional share of attention in the chapters that follow.

The format and subject matter of the letters reflect the diversity of the contestants. There are, however, identifiable similarities in style and content that can be traced back to the common origins of many of the letters. For example, the questions asked on the official entry form were less elaborate than those advertised in the mass media. The writers varied their style and subject matter to match the version of the question they were asked. These questions are described in detail in the preceding chapter.

We also received submissions in groups, primarily from the schools where forms were sent. These forms were apparently administered

in the classroom, and the observable similarities suggest that some discussion of the topic took place before writing. The topics that concerned these groups say a lot about how these differing classes of young people view life.

Individual submissions

Many of the individual submissions were proffered in response to the advertisements in the media. The writers of these entries organised their letters by directly answering each of the questions asked, as though they were filling out a questionnaire. The following letter from the former Venda is an example of this approach:

Honourable Sir

MY LIFE IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

First of all I like to thanks this letter which comes to the Sowetan readers. This competition letter I can put it like this way:

- 1. The Unit about myself:
I am the cool and collected boy of 22 years old. I am born on 26 April 1974.*
- 2. What am I do in my everyday life:
I spend most of time for study and gardening.*
- 3. Where am I live:
I live at the Lwamondo village at Venda,*
- 4. What school do I attend:
I attend school at technical college at Venda (Techniven).*
- 5. What do I like doing after school:
After school I like to be the electrical engineer.*
- 6. What work do I plan to do in the future:
My plan is that I want to be the best South African engineer person.*

7. *What do I like about my life:*
About my life is that I like other South African to reason for themselves future.
8. *What do I dislike:*
I dislike people whom they are useless.
9. *Anything I feel strongly about:*
Put education the first for my life.
10. *What I think and feel in my letter:*
I feel very happy and thanks to the author of this letter and let South Africa shine for the people who care about education. — Letter 271

A number of the letters provide a simple listing of biographic details and hobbies, although these letters were likewise tailored to the questions asked.

Dear Sir/Madam

MY LIFE IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

My name is Zodwa ... I am 13 years old. I live at Mpumalanga. Everyday I come to school at 7.30 am in the morning. In my family I have two sisters, me my mother and my father. I attend Hillcrest High School. After school I get home. I take off my uniform. I put my home clothes on and I wash my shirt and my socks. And I also go to play and do my homework. I go to sleep after watching TV programmes at 8.30 pm.

In my future I want to be a Social Worker or Doctor. What I like about my life is to play netball and go to movies and discos. I feel stronger when I play athletics. Things that I dislike are drinking beer, smoking because will damage my lungs, having many boyfriends, killing other people. And I like to be honest to other people I also like to be kind to people, and I like to help other people. — Letter 432

Other letters focus on a particular topic, reflecting the concerns of the young people. Topics chosen range from complex political discussions to more mundane matters, like the importance of school uniforms. This letter from Charity in Umlazi was apparently copied from another source, but is typical of the writers who took an expository approach (the last line, at least, appears to be hers):

My Life in The New South Africa

The wearing of school uniforms in South Africa is very good. Even though some students in secondary schools object to wearing school uniforms, there are many reasons why they should be kept. A uniform establishes something in common between all who wear it. It encourages students of the same school to regard themselves as a part of a community and to co-operate with one another. Of course, some people would say that this hinders the development of individuality among young people.

Without a uniform there maybe confusion as to who attends the school and who does not. The school may be blamed for the behaviour of boys and girls who do not belong to it. On the other hand, if all the students of a particular schools wear shorts, shirts or dresses of a distinctive colour, they cannot be mistaken even in a crowd.

Of course, students often complain that their are dull and unfashionable. Nevertheless, uniforms are generally preferable to the variety of trendy extremes such as high heeled shoes and backless dresses. Among the girls, or over-tight long trousers amongst the boys, that student might choose for school wear. The majority of uniforms are sensibly designed for working in and present a neat and tidy appearance, especially when the school is seen as whole. In them the students are usually better dressed for work than they would be if they chose their own attire.

Uniforms also helps to cover up another kind of extravagance in dress. Without them, some of the wealthier students might be tempted to display their fine clothes and make the poorer students envious or inferior. Uniforms make everyone seem equal and prevent tactless showing off. On the one hand and possible unhappiness on the other. This last is perhaps the strongest single reason for retaining uniform.

What I like is all South Africans must wear it. — Letter 683

The writers were instructed to address their letters to a “fellow South African”. A wide range of intended recipients are named, including God, President Mandela, ministers of parliament, literary figures, local friends, emigrant friends and imaginary friends. Letters take the form of poems, pep talks, anecdotes and sermonettes. The creativity of the young people is evident throughout.

Group submissions

Letters were received both from individuals responding singly to the advertisements and in *groups* from the institutions and clubs to which contest forms were sent. Each *group* of entries has a distinctive flavour, which may be attributed to a number of factors. The home environments and regional concerns of each group certainly made an impact on the content of the letters, and the type of institution involved was probably significant as well. We received group entries from a number of public schools, a school for students with special educational needs, a Jewish religious school, an orphanage and Catholic school, and two youth groups. The average age varies considerably between the groups, and the interests and concerns of the writers vary accordingly. It is likely that unrecorded cues given when the contest forms were administered also influenced the topics discussed. The teachers and youth organisers were probably instrumental in defining the relevant topics for the writers.

This table gives a description of the major group submissions received, listed in order of the mean age of the participants:

The following is a breakdown of the subject matter dealt with in each of the group submissions.

Organisation	Province	Mean ages	En-tries	Letter numbers
Woodlands Primary School	KwaZulu-Natal	13	79	388 - 426 517 - 555
Hillcrest High School	KwaZulu-Natal	13.5	14	427 - 440
Glenwood High School	KwaZulu-Natal	15.8	12	556 - 567
Gresswold Senior School	Gauteng	16	24	451 - 474
St Philomena's Home	KwaZulu-Natal	16.5	4	827 - 830
Yeshiva College JHB	Gauteng	—	21	475 - 482 580 - 592
New West Secondary School	KwaZulu-Natal	17.3	18	496 - 513
Sabswa Saturday School	KwaZulu-Natal	17.5	168	637 - 743 834 - 894
Mamelodi Youth Resource Centre	Gauteng	20	11	568 - 578
			351	

Younger writers

Woodlands Primary School

Woodlands is a middle-class suburb in Durban. Entrants are mixed in race, with white pupils predominating. The following recurring themes were noted.

- *School environment*: including school subjects, teachers, sports and other extra-curricular activities.
- *Life in the neighbourhood*: life in Woodlands for the residents; contrast to home life for some black children living outside the area.
- *Career ambitions*: over 60% of these writers list their desired careers.
- *Social concerns*: including crime, environmental management and care for animals.

Hillcrest High School

Hillcrest High School serves mostly black pupils and is situated in a middle-class area. Students attending the school are both from the neighbourhood and from nearby Mpumulanga township. The writers discuss the following topics.

- *After-school activities*: mainly domestic activities and duties.
- *Biographical details*: ages and family backgrounds.
- *Career ambitions*: every student from Hillcrest includes preferred careers.
- *Social issues*: drinking, smoking and having sexual relationships are condemned; sport, honesty and church attendance are supported.

The groups of letters from Woodlands and Hillcrest represent some of the youngest writers in the contest — their average age is just over 13. The content and concerns voiced in these letters differ

considerably from those of the older and less educationally advantaged writers.

Older writers

Glenwood Boys High School

Entries from this formerly white Durban school are mainly from black male children with ages from 13 to 16. Although most of the entrants from this school are from townships, some of them have moved to the previously white suburbs where the school is situated. All are presently doing Standard 6. The writers discuss their attitudes toward the new South Africa, their interest in sports, and the problem of crime and violence in their areas of residence.

Gresswold Senior School

Gresswold caters to students with special educational needs, especially those classed as "slow learners", by providing a vocational training programme in addition to basic education. Discussions in these letters concentrate on biographical details, appreciation of the Gresswold programme, favourite hobbies, and messages to and about President Mandela. As might be expected from children in a vocationally-oriented school, there is considerable discussion of future career ambitions by this group. About 63 % of these writers discuss their occupational choices.

St Philomena's

Four letters were received from the orphaned residents and other students of this school, situated in the coloured suburb of Sydenham in Durban.

Yeshiva College

Yeshiva is a Jewish school located in Johannesburg. Students here express a strong desire for racial tolerance and a great fear of crime.

They uniformly describe their neighbourhood as fortress-like and actively debate the relative merits of emigrating or remaining in South Africa.

New West Secondary School

These entries are from a Standard 9 class of a previously Indian school which is now open to children of all races. The students generally speak highly of their school and of their integrated learning experience. Much of the focus is on school life: relationships with teachers, positive impressions of the school building and the school environment, and individual performance at school. Also striking is the positive way the writers describe their places of residence. Black and Indian students alike are happy with their home neighbourhoods.

Sabswa

Few of the letters received from the Sabswa Saturday School students discuss the writers' biographical details. Their letters are quite different from others in that the focus is more political and less concerned with the lives of the entrants as individuals. Political issues are discussed, such as education, violence and expectations of the government. Most of these writers express their desire to see peace in their country, and see their lives as very dependent on the government.

Mamelodi Youth Resource Centre

Mamelodi is a township outside Pretoria, and the Youth Resource Centre offers a variety of activities and clubs to youth from the area. Among the topics they explore in their letters are the following.

- *Wishes and hopes* for the new South Africa.
- *Political changes*: both positive and negative aspects of the new government.

- *The role of the youth* in their communities.
- *Religion*: relationship with God and faith in Christianity.
- *Solutions* to the many social problems facing South Africa.

These writers aim at producing well-structured essays while trying to cover as many topical issues as possible. These include teenage pregnancy, AIDS, implementing the Reconstruction and Development Programme, education, women's rights and economic growth. The format of these submissions is closer to a formal essay than to a letter.

Comparison

The most obvious distinctions between the group submissions run along race and class lines. The black students are generally concerned with their careers and the future of the country. They are optimistic about their prospects, despite often difficult circumstances. The one exception to this rule are the letters from the township youth of KwaZulu-Natal Saturday schools, where the writers emphasise political and development issues and spend little time talking about their personal lives. Non-black students tend to be more cynical, and express dismay at increasing crime and decreasing opportunity.

The most reassuring contrast is found between age groups. The young learners attending integrated schools do not show such strong differences in racial perspectives. They are generally less politicised and more concerned with the details of their daily lives. The English language usage does not differ appreciably between black and white pupils. In fact, many of the youngest black students show greater proficiency in English than do the writers in their twenties. Hobbies and ambitions are likewise very similar between the races in the integrated primary and junior secondary schools.

Chapter 4

"Innovation is the cornerstone of my work": Creative use of language

Elana Bregin

Judging the letters

As a judge coming to this letter writing project, I was prepared for the fact that I would be faced with varying degrees of language competency. I knew that a large percentage of letters received were from second-language English writers and that there would obviously be a vast disparity between their expressive skills and that of first-language English speakers. I felt strongly that in order for the judging to be fair, it needed to focus on content rather than context, with more value given to what was being expressed than to literary perfection.

I was prepared to have to overlook a certain amount of quirky and unconventional word usage. What did take me by surprise, however, was the rich and highly original flavour of much of the material, the innovative and resourceful way the letter writers managed to transcend the constraints of their imperfect grammar and limited vocabulary to give their letters a stamp that was uniquely their own.

The letters bubbled with personality, with individual and idiosyncratic voice. The large majority had something of value to impart. Even those writers whose grasp of English bordered on the barely competent managed to infuse their letters with some noteworthy insight or unexpectedly sophisticated verbal initiative.

The impression received was of lively minds hungry for self-improvement, and of a spirited enthusiasm for the task in hand that was in no way dampened by the level of actual language proficiency.

A typical example is this letter from David of Tsakane on the East Rand:

I am 22 years of age and looking for employment. I studies B. Com (CM) at University of Venda but due to financial problem I have not finish. But I am looking forward to further it pending the future. I am dedicated to devoting my entire life to studies. Everyday I necessarily listen to the beat reflecting the sound from the builders ...

I am living at East Rand from the location called Tsakane. I am not attending school but often feel get the mood to go to school. After school I like to work properly encouraging others, especially the youngsters, to search the way from humiliation. And modestly I want to economically build our country by opening up opportunities in the form of small business development. — Letter 328

David's letter is very characteristic of the trend towards linguistic risk-taking that many of the writers display. Technical difficulties are inventively circumvented to allow for the articulation of thought. There also seems to be a decided preference for the adoption of sophisticated word usage, enthusiastically inserted, regardless of appropriateness. This tendency towards verbal ambitiousness can, as David's letter demonstrates, be taken to extremes!

Currently I have no specific job to secure for the future as it is like concentrating to the economic fluctuation. But I am looking forward to rise together within others and sing NKOSI SIKELELA I'AFRIKA. I like breathing clean fresh air from the west. And almost I am amidst the infrastructural frame in the rainbow nation. I am tolerant and transparent and like to promote the attitude towards them. I dislike emotions which result to anger, violence, theft, murder and rape. United is what I feel strongly about and neither one from us nor the end of our life will take it away.

Creative phraseology in openings and endings

The somewhat bohemian flair that characterises many of the letters is apparent right from their openings. A number of them have adopted an amusingly idiosyncratic approach to the traditional greeting forms, subverting the standard conventions, to charming effect.

"Greetings haven't the end," is the way M.G. from Rustenburg (Letter 363) opens her letter.

"Its such a great jubilee to get this opportunity to write this letter to you," enthuses Cebile (Letter 692).

"I would appreciate if you would handle this letter with your favourable hands," requests Vincent from Treasure Beach in Natal (Letter 98).

"May God bless me on what I was saying," hopes Reginald of Potgietersrus (Letter 313).

"God will kiss your soul," promises Meshack of Diepkloof (Letter 9), who signs his letter, *"Yours, Maiden boy"*.

Thirteen-year-old Siyanda, from Woodlands, signs his, *"The dear wan"* (Letter 389).

This entertaining penchant for the unorthodox also extends to the way some of the letter writers describe themselves:

"I'm a tall and well-built boy in Std 8 with a friendly, square face and a pressed-in smudge of a nose. I'm an eager-minded person," — Letter 64 of Theophilus of Springfontein tells us.

"I am a sort of person who has the manner of the future intellectual, asserts Irene of Soweto" (Letter 370).

"I am sober. I don't believe in ghosts and witches. I hate bad attitudes., states 20-year-old V.A." (Letter 329).

"I live a simple life, I seldom smile, I reads too much, I am a great observer and looks quiet the deeds of men. I think too much, such men as I are dangerous," says Peter of Vuwani, with Shakespearean portentousness" (Letter 182).

Sometimes, their depictions of themselves are disconcertingly frank:

"I have a dark-skinned monkey appearance," confides Norman of Rustenberg (Letter 86).

"I do have a high hope that God will also give me strength to demolish evil upon my facial appearance," writes Vincent intriguingly (Letter 98).

Creative use of idiomatic language

One of the more notable features of the letters is their strong propensity for idiomatic and aphoristic language. They have adopted with particular enthusiasm the popular slogans of our time. Phrases such as *Rainbow nation*, *Simunye* and *Education is the key* make their appearance in a large proportion of the letters, as does praise poet Mzwakhe Mbuli's injunction *"Each one teach one."*

Other popular quoted sayings are:

Tswana proverb ... Deer's Wisdom Comes From its Sibling. — Letter 17

Do not complain that the rosebush has thorns. Rather rejoice that the thornbush has roses. — Letter 158

One can be knowledgeable with other men's knowledge; but we cannot be wise with other men's wisdom. — Letter 28.

Cowardice die many times before his death but the valiant man taste death but once. — Letter 178

Some of the figures of speech were reproduced in their standard and conventional form. But many underwent an interesting metamorphosis. Gleaned from a variety of sources — popular songs, TV talk shows, a hotchpotch of texts and half-remembered literary references — they were transmuted by the letter writer's own unique style to form an intriguing melting-pot of enriched word power:

Sport and writing are the things that comfort me in this cat-eat-dog world. They are the sides on which my bread is buttered. — Letter 86 from Norman of Mabeskraal

Comrades, lend me your ears; crime doesn't pay. Its results is prosecution which may come either way. It is known that for one to live like a king he or she will have to work like a slave. We all know that the pen is mightier than the sword. — Letter 39, from M.L. of Naboomspruit

As a student currently, I must make it abundantly clear that I must live a life where people have equal rights before the law and where people are not discriminated against. — Letter 228 from Rubio of Mapela

Innovation is the cornerstone of my work. — Letter 156 from Lola of Tzaneen

To enjoy a money-making year my enhanced business instinct and sterling endeavours will enable me to accumulate enough funds to make my life comfortable and secure. — Letter 308 from Reginald of Vryburg

Even though one might be a wolf in a sheep skin, in my presence he may feel ashamed to act contrary to my attitudes. — Letter 114 from Mbedzi

Everyone has to stand up now and fasten the belt around your figure and get on and do it! — Letter 346 from G.T. of Kwa-Thema

Now it is time to play important role. Many chances we have to use it. Game is over to be lazy men. — Letter 152 from William

Some of the letter writers exhibit a particular knack for the apt or inventive turn of phrase. Siphwe from White River, speaking of the high crime rate, coins the phrase, “*the thuggery train*” (Letter 373). “*I don’t know my tomorrows,*” says Edgar of Daveyton, “*maybe I’ll be a victim of crime* (Letter 216).

Describing his workday, 19-year-old Ronald of Pretoria puts it thus:

When we start to drive the economy, [there is] less talking but when tea-time comes we discuss the weekend sports (Letter 178).

The new South Africa has rushed to me like a boiling pot. — Letter 118 from Thomas of Ga-Kgapane

I likes my future being bright like a light of an electricity and to help the nation in my village. — Letter 281 from ‘Extras’ of Seshego

Pearl from Umlazi does not view limited English as a barrier to creative wordplay:

Peace means “uxolo” P for precious nation, E for everlasting nation, A for not argument any more C for care nation and E for entrance to a wonderful happy nation, my last point is South Africa is almost a

peace land of white birds, which means a land/country of 'PEACE'.

— Letter 774

At times, this flair for idiosyncratic self-expression creates unintentionally comical results, particularly when married to an earnestly moralistic viewpoint:

When a man has been found raping, then his private parts must be cutted immidietely. — Letter 326 from Mandoli of Bethal

I [do not like visiting the] bottle store or where-ever lusts is practised. - Letter 205 from Hezekiel, a strong Christian

What are they going to talk [about] ? Only sex beer witches etc. They'd never talk about important topics such as prayers education etc. — Letter 151 from 16-year-old 'Thwinky' of Pietersburg, on the subject of older high-school students fraternising with younger ones

Philosophies on life

One of the things that was particularly striking in these letters, was the wisdom and perceptiveness that many of them radiated. They were full of intelligent insights, reflective of those who have thought deeply about life and its significance, who are keenly aware of their role as the nation's keepers of tomorrow.

Even the younger writers often displayed an impressive maturity of outlook. A recurring theme was the importance of ensuring that youth was not squandered, the perception that it is a time of potential that must be used wisely to lay good foundations for future life:

Be the builder of your own future so it can be brighter to shine for those who can't see the fruits of education. You need to be proud of your own work. One day you would say I struggled to get a brighter

education, and here I'm being somebody important. — Letter 36 from 14-year-old Elizabeth of Vergenoeg

I feel strongly about golden opportunities which his excellency President Nelson Mandela gave us for free education. I wish we must not disappoint him. This is the kind of Manna which was given free during the Israelites on their journey to Canaan. — Letter 377 from 13-year-old Blonde

Many of the letter writers expressed their gratitude to the competition organisers for giving them a voice. The idea that their opinions counted was important to them, as was the chance to make their views heard. There was a strong feeling that what they had to say had relevance for other youth, a repeatedly expressed wish that their advice be published for the benefit of others:

The ame to write this letter is not to win. Is just I want to be heard, I want somebody out there to hear me what I say. — Letter 359 from Rose of Soshanguve

I feel highly honoured to find this opportunity to express my feelings about my life in the new South Africa. — Letter 24 from Phineus of Pietersburg

I feel so romantic about my letter and I think my letter will touch your feeling also as there's lots of focus on it. — Letter 122 from Jackie of Thembisa

G.T. of KwaThema puts it more effusively:

I've been given a chance to express my views on these special sheet. Its like opening a door to a New South Africa. The most honourable golden palace for those who knows great life. Oh what a precious moment of my life! — Letter 346

The contest uncovered not a few budding philosophers, who had much to say on the subject of life and living. Many had some highly original and profound thoughts to share.

Anashree of Reservoir Hills tells us:

I firmly believe that we are 100% responsible for our actions, and above all, I believe that life is what you make of it ... I am what I am and nobody can change that, my tastes and preferences stem from a deeprooted rarity of which I am proud of. Within each of us, there burns an untamed spirit, a desire to be free. — Letter 54

Says George of Middelburg, speaking of what it's like to be living in our new democracy:

Climatology in new SA [is] mervoulous as never before. SA is a beautiful land. Weather is always fine. In other words, my life is summer. — Letter 219

Johannes of Sebokeng leaves no stone unturned in his quest for borrowed popularisms.

I think that now is the time to forgive but not forget the past. We should educate ourselves now in order to defeat them. Life is bad today. Younger and old, let's come together as one and solve our problems that our country has faced. Together we unite. Education is the key to success. Let's use education as our weapon beautiful flower of Africa. Each one teach one. Spread this message to the others. Victory is certain. — Letter 187

Ms P.N. of Steve Biko Street, Duduza, couches her views in people's poet's style:

I am the pupil and I will act now. Only action determines my value in my life. To multiply my value I will multiply my action. I am the pupil and I will walk where the failer fears to walk. I will walk where the failer seeks rest. I will talk until the failer remains silent. I will say

it is done before the failer said it is too late. I will act now for tomorrow is the day deserves by the lazy. I will act now! — Letter 166

Some of the letters were particularly moving accounts of personal hardship, courageously faced and overcome.

Mzamo of Jouberton is a 23-year-old boy whose parents died when he was 19. As the elder child, it was left to him to hold the family of five children together. Here is his moving account of their “*difficult days of poverty, sufferings and helplessness,*” which nearly resulted in them becoming street children, and the lessons he won through his suffering:

We are five children and I'm the elder child. For the long time I've been struggled for the better life for the five of us in order to survive. Relatives, friends have turned their back against us since we lose our parents. Since 1991 I knew what life is. I knew what life can bring for the people and realised that life is the challenge I was suppose to meet. And I learn a lesson that life can exist in different ways. We suffered a little bit for about 5 years after the death of our parents. But I didn't give up to let life move us away. I knew that life can be tragedy, traffic, opportunity, game or puzzle. I knew what I supposed to do if this happens. I knew that I must face it if it is a tragedy, control it, accept it, play it or to solve it. Now this year is 1996 and I have solved those difficulties. We are now back to happy days. — Letter 161

Fifteen-year-old Felicia of St Boniface High School, who is herself from a severely economically disadvantaged background, submitted this stirring poem about abandonment:

Why did you leave me?
I didn't ask to be born
But here I am
Running from street to street

Park to park

Dustbin to dustbin

Looking for something to eat

I don't have any clothes

Only that old rags on my naked body

And when the wind come

And the rains falls

Where do I go?

I have no home

I just have to find a place

That's warmth enough

To make me survive

But why do I have to survive anyway?

My parents just left me

To suffer like this

And live a life with no warmth

No love, no laughter

And no one to guide me

Through this dangerous world

This world with no warmth

No love, no laughter, nor even friends

To give me hope

But why mom? Why dad?

Why did you leave me

to live in this world?

Why didn't you take me with you?

Didn't you want to struggle in the world

With a child at your side?

Why did you bring me into this world

To suffer like this?"

— Letter 138.

Emotive content

The idealism and passion expressed in some of the above examples is typical of many of the letters received. Opinions tend to be strongly felt, and often strongly moral, with feelings about their country running deep. There is a refreshing lack of rhetoric in the way concerns are voiced, however. What is also striking is the widespread desire to be part of the solution, the genuine personal commitment towards alleviating the social ills that plague the country. Many writers express the wish of being positive role models to other teenagers, of becoming a success in their own lives in order to use that success to uplift the community. There is a definite sense that they see themselves in the light of a "brother's keeper":

I am such a sensitive citizen of South Africa who's more concerned about the type of life my fellow South Africans are leading. The type of life where one expects to eat, if not stealing, from one's pocket. Fellow comrades, I'm highly opposed to such type of life because it is just tantamount to the life of a soldier who just gets into the battlefield unarmed. Don't you think that such a soldier will be defenetely defeated? Yes of course he will. How can you expect to reap where you didn't sow. It is ridiculous and against the morality of the society. — Letter 39 from 21-year-old M.L. of Naboomspruit

Many letter writers had some impressively astute observations to make on current political and social conditions, with much sound advice for the country's decision-makers:

All problems of our new South Africa must be finished at the table using a ballpoint and mouth not by a gun. — Letter 257 from Ishmael of Benoni

"I hate guns as hell," he goes on to add.

We walked for a long time to freedom. And those that threaten it should be dealt with harshly. — Letter 211 from Gilbert of Harrismith

Our youth must NOT be involved in crime, so we will shine and lead the world. We cried about freedom. God gave us. So we now inviting a Doom against us. — Letter 181 from Kgolane of Daveyton

I don't like politics because it is a process of killing each other, negotiations, then history. — Letter 202 from 18-year-old Abegail

This kind of extravagantly ardent style becomes particularly poignant in the hands of the less semantically-skilled writer, especially when underscored by extreme feeling.

Kenneth of Kwazekhele is an ex-detainee, born on a farm in the Northern Cape, presently living in a Kwazekhele squatter camp he calls "Soweto-on-Sea." He was detained during the 1976 school boycotts. He spent five years "in captivity in filthy jails of apartheid". His letter is an outpouring of soul, strangely overlaid in places with quaint stock phrases and literary clichés, incongruously grafted onto the traumatic details of his life story. This is how he describes his release:

On the morning of Thursday July 1982 I was released from filthy devil prisoner of Treunicht, there were no delegations to meet me, no reporters, no relatives because my parents were dead long ago because of anger. Only myself, I had to be a typical black train driver covered by coal dust face in my late twenties. My grey crimp uniform suit was obviously government issue, and the collar of white shirt was absurdly large for me. I were to start from the roots in the semi-jail apartheid state of africa with nothing in my pockets. I fell sick infected by pneumonia. Now I am alone and jobbing for peanuts to pay for my daily life.

... But I am staying here in Soweto-on-Sea suffering, stranded homeless but with golden hopes after finishing my diploma. I wish I'm gonna be a

lawyer or a prosecutor. I like to be lonely and my companion is literature. I dislike hating other for nothing because hate breed hatred among natural beings.

The only thing I feel stronger for is that we are your friends and you have tortured and kill us. But here is the wonder, we are still your friends. We come to die at your bullets to forgive you. It is easy to love those who are kind to you. It is a terrible but necessary thing to love those who have betrayed you. Our fellow South Africans we are not threatening and tolerate you. We are simply stating a fact. Please act in a law-abiding way. We are generous! So be generous!

Out of the mouths of babes

One particularly amusing batch of letters was that received from the Senior Primary classes of 12- and 13-year-olds. This age group has a way of saying things that is all their own. There is a touching naïveté and frankness to their disclosures, with a tendency to confide revelatory personal details in the most casually offhand way. Their habit of inappropriate juxtaposition sometimes makes for unintentionally comic effect:

I don't like being treated like a piece of rubbish and I don't like avocado very much. — Letter 525 from Eileen

I like music with a beat, my favourite singer is Michael Jackson. I don't like school but you have to go to school to get a job. I have just lost a very nice uncle and a cousin. I have a nice teacher named Mrs Watkin. I live in a residential area. — Letter 400 from Jonathan

I am single-parented. — Letter 413 from Zamaswazi

I have a double bed but my curtains don't match. My mom said that I am a brainbox but I don't believe her. — Letter 407 from Melissa

I have a sister, I would rather have a brother because you can't do anything with her. I also don't like that my father cares more about

Nandos, his job, than he cares about me. — Letter 537 from Graeme

Some of the letters are disarmingly candid:

I am writing this letter because I would like to win some money for myself to put it in the bank. — Letter 408 from Themba

Being a boy I have better things to do but I have really enjoyed writing this letter. — Letter 399 from Darryn

The only thing I don't really like is getting up at the break of dawn but if you want to get a good education you have to. — Letter 405 from Tyrone

When I've finished my studies I would like to be a social work but my parents want me to (be) a doctor and I tell (them) that I don't want to be a doctor. You have to look at dead people and having operations and looking at the blood. I just can't stand it! It disgusting.
— Letter 412 from Favourite

Like any girl my age I suffer a lot of pure [peer] pressure. When all my freinds check out the boys I think they are sick so I dont pay attention to them, my freinds think Im nuts. — Letter 425 from Elizabeth

The letters also reveal some intriguing if baffling outlooks:

In the future I want to be an obedient child. — Letter 429 from Mbalenhle

What I like about my life is I don't have parents. — Letter 426 from Justin

When I am older I would like to be a pharmacist and live in a small house with a small car and a big gun to protect myself. — Letter 410 from Paige

Rachel is very admiring of cleanliness:

If [Woodlands] is a very quiet place, but some of them make a noise that you can't believe but when you tell them they say fine they don't argue with you they just [don't] make it anymore. Some of them got dirty yards but most of them got clean yards. The school that I attend is Woodlands Primary School [WPS]. It is very clean. We have clean teachers. The principal's name is Mr QS James. They all have beautiful cars. — Letter 417

The letters as a body are an interesting revelation of the value systems of this age group. There seems to be a widespread adoration of animals, a strong distress at their ill-treatment and desire to work with them as choice of life career:

*My dream is to become a vet because I love all animals even snakes.
— Letter 407 from Melissa*

I hate how in japan they eat cats, when ever I think of it it makes me go cold. — Letter 398 from Shelly

Also exhibited is a touching concern for social issues, often naïvely expressed but sincerely felt. The world is seen in youthfully simplistic terms, from an often sternly moralistic viewpoint:

One of the issues I feel strongly about is all the wars and violence, hasn't history taught us that wars don't help people it must make thousands if not millions of people suffer, and what about all this money the "defence ministry spends, could [it] maybe [be used] to feed the homeless?

Another point I feel strongly about is whatever happened to free schooling? The reason I brought this up is because instead of being free, it's gone up how come? — Letter 393 from Sebastian

There are lots of things that irritate me in life but most of all child abuse. I can't understand why a big guy or woman go against little kids. They should get a life sentence. The other one is letting all the prison people go. I mean people are now stealing, killing and

kidnapping and being let out of prison, so now the crime rate is sky high. It isn't fair on us citizens. They should be locked up. — Letter 405 from Tyrone

Some see the world from a less altruistic, more jaundiced viewpoint:

What I don't like is getting so little pocket money because our maid wants more money every month. — Letter 422 from Karl

If you ask me there is a high crime rate in my area for there is at least one or two houses getting robbed or someone getting thier bicycles stolen every month. — Letter 401 from Dickie

South Africa is a bad country. The town is dirty, people are killing each other there is no peace in this country. If King Shoka was still [here] it would [not] going to be like it is now. They would not kill each other, they would kill other countries. — Letter 522 from Lynne

I do not like the way that the goverment is governd. It is governd by convices. The contitnent [continent] is going to go down. — Letter 553 from Jarrod

The final word

To conclude, let the final word belong to 17-year-old Kwazikwenkosi. With his passionate and touching lament, he perfectly epitomises the general courageous spirit of the entries, offering incontrovertible evidence that imperfect command of a language need not in any way inhibit the creative flow of the truly inspired soul. "I am so pleased for the document you sent me last Saturday," he opens in his letter to another South African, and continues:

My hopes are still flying like pigeons in the blue sky ... The New South Africa hatches my life roughly. Dearest friend do talk to me every spur [spare] time you get, just come to me and allow me to arm [myself] with powerful weapons which are horribly incredible.

My life is so scornful of bumps. Joy happiness and sorrow, are the factors which reflect pride to my life. Expecting you shall help, I do try to recover [from] my sickness. And I suggest that I am a victim of pride. No more hope are to put in doldrums. I thank my new life for the good it sprays on me, that strikes my body like big drops of a showering rain. I have gone long afar and no signs of solution.

My new life in the New South Africa understands, my dearest friend, that all problems are defeated by patience. — Letter 685

Chapter 5

Faith and the culture of optimism

Ted Leggett

For the outsider, one of the most striking facets of South African culture is the moral conservatism of both black and white South Africans. Despite presently having one of the most progressive political climates on the planet, South Africa's recent past kept the nation isolated from many of the social changes that are now taken for granted in the rest of the western world. It is only now that political necessity is creating the sort of "permissive society" found in Europe and the United States.

This conservative social orientation is due in part to the power of organised religion in South Africa. The church was an important force for both sides in the political struggles of the apartheid era, and religious participation for all races is very high. Young people are not exceptions to this rule. Everatt and Orkin, in their 1993 youth survey, found weekly church attendance to be as high as 56% for young women. The social impact of this high level of religiosity is difficult to assess, but the letters received suggest that the church has had a very profound effect on the minds of young South Africans.

This is particularly true in the black community. The vastly influential African Independent Churches (AIC) enforce a strict

behavioural code among their adherents, prohibiting both smoking and drinking. The AIC also foster a strong work ethic. The Churches take an active role in promoting entrepreneurial ventures and in helping young migrant members adjust to urban life (Cross, Oosthuizen & Clark, 1993). Black churches took on increasing importance during the apartheid era, during which they were one of the few tolerated points of black assembly, and do not seem to have diminished in their popularity today.

It is not then surprising that approximately 20% of the letters make mention of God or religion in some form. While there are Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Traditional African adherents among the writers, nearly all the letters discussing religion are Christian, and so most of the following comments focus on that faith.

Uses of religion

Not every writer gives an in-depth discussion of personal faith. Many of the letters simply make passing reference to church attendance as one of a list of weekly activities, or show a passive view of religious participation:

I attend a Catholic church called 'Saint James'. So that makes me a Catholic. — Letter 247 from a 15-year-old female in Diepkloof

And I also like to go to church every Sunday even though I am not a Christian, but I just believe that one of the good days I will accept Jesus as my saviour... I just pray every now and then maybe God may hear my prayer and give me what I want. — Letter 265 from a Standard 9 student in Turffontein

Some of the letters reflect a rather mercenary view of God:

IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST WHO DIES US ON THE CROSS. I WISH I WILL BE THE WINNER.

THANKS! — Closing to Letter 151 from a 16-year-old female in Pietersburg

There is evidence of some syncretism at work:

I wake up in the morning and kneel down and pray to thank God for saving me from the night evil spirit. ... I always praying for my talent so that God should blessed me to reach the goal. — Letter 222 from a student in Phalaborwa

And good old-fashioned self-interest makes a showing:

... I think that God will love with me and I wish myself all of the best, because you can do whatever you want but don't forget God, because he is the only way to achieve your dreams. — Letter 62 from a girl in Ermelo

I like to see myself one day living a very wealthy life, I always say 'may god help me to achieve all this so that wealthiness can be associated with me.' People who are wealthy enjoy life, they never find any problem to their lives. — Letter 180

Many of the letters look to God for relief from personal or political crises. Teenagers draw on their faith to help them through the trials of adolescence. Dipalesa is a 15-year-old girl from Pimville describes herself as "tall and a little bit fat". She has obviously suffered from the westernisation of the popular body image.

I like the things I do about my life. You know you have to love and be loved because if you don't do so, God will never forgive for that. I really like my body that way it is, even if my friend will say I have to get my body in good shape. I can take care of the things I do about my life. — Letter 355

Often personal problems are rooted in larger social issues. Lack of funds for education is one of the most frequently encountered areas

of concern for youth throughout the letters. Agnes from Tembisa looks to God for both spiritual and material aid:

Even though I didn't have money to further my studies, but I have that hope that I am going to get money because I pray to God day and night, I am sure that one day he will answer my prayers because I believe and trust in him because he is a living God and I won't lose hope. — Letter 27

God is sought to heal the wounds of the past and to resolve present instability. Goodness from Tsakane seems torn between Christian forgiveness and a desire for divine retribution:

I am willing to forgive but I can't forget. All I'm going to do is to try to forget about the past and look at the future. I can't punish them for what they did our forefather the only person can do that is our Lord our almighty. We have to love each other that's all. — Letter 330

Manoko is a 23-year-old man from Rethabile. He expresses a drive to contribute to the transformation of the new South Africa, and recognises the importance of spirituality in the healing process:

My new slogan in new South Africa is "Africa for Jesus". My inspiration and supplication is to encourage young generation to be aware of the coming of the son of man. The young people will be physically and spiritually strong for that reason. Because the scripture says "I am the way the truth and the life". The young generation would be knowing the good channel to follow, the unchangeable true and life beyond the grave. I foresee this as the measure of restoring peace and justice to the broken hearts and homes ... My crying is to intercede with African to God, particularly the black to forget about the afflictions they have suffered during apartheid error. — Letter 568

Yvonne from Schoemansdal, who is 23, calls on God to intercede directly on a spiritual level to bring an end to violence:

I think there is only one way to stop it. We have to turn to God as Saviour of our life. Because he is the one who knows about the beginning and the end of our life. He is the one who can operate our minds, who can bring peace in our mind. He is the one man in the world who can make us feel hungry for peace. — Letter 12 from Shongwe Mission

Even without divine intervention, the moral lessons of the Bible are a vehicle towards peace. For Amos, a 24-year-old Pretorian, racial equality is self-evident from scriptural teaching:

Remember one thing you know when you read in the Bible about the creation of the earth. The Bible does not tell us God was white, black, Indian, coloured or whatever. When I see an Indian I see the image of God when I see a white man I see the image of God. We are the images of God the only thing that is keeping us apart is apartheid. — Letter 573

M.R. wrote in Tsonga from Vengani about the importance of Christian faith in achieving peace. He likens the present state of South Africa to an Israel that has fallen away from the Lord:

Something that I feel strong about is being a Christian, I feel that it is a very powerful thing which is not embarrassing. If the whole of South Africa held on to it we would succeed in everything. Even the bloodshed that is in Kwazulu Natal would be over for good.

...the violence which is in Kwazulu Natal is considered as being normal, people who live in Kwazulu do not worry anymore about other people, however what was supposed to be done is to go back to the Bible where God says if we humble ourselves in front of him he will heal our country ... Chronicles II chapter 7 verse 14 — Letter 636

Religious metaphor and meaning

Religious metaphors are used to explain political events and personalities. South African youth, having been raised in such pivotal times, have a tremendous sense of history. By placing current events in a recognised context, sense is made of an otherwise chaotic world.

Frans, a 27-year-old man from Kempton Park, opposes the Truth and Reconciliation Commission because it is "only provoking the emotions of the past". He suggests we rather rejoice in the new order and work together towards the future:

Why can't we be same and sing with one voice that Satan was buried in the Old South Africa and Messiah is dawning in the New South Africa. We all know about Manna and why was provided to the Israelites but the issue of Manna is no longer bearing its importance even in Israel today. — Letter 165

A man in Benoni named Ishmael has his own slant on liberation theology:

Since money is the evil thing which lead to the death of Jesus Christ, wages and salaries of people must be checked by the Government because we have got three quarters of people who are underpaid. This why International Labour Organisation was formed soon after the end of world war. Even the working 10 hours must be checked. If we do all the above things our new South Africa will know exploiters, will be wonderful. — Letter 257

President Mandela is often seen to inspire religious metaphors. The most common parallel drawn likens Mandela to Moses — a wise man who leads his people out of slavery. As 15-year-old Geraldine puts it:

Walking up in streets of South Africa a democratic country, sure feels excellent. Knowing that a Black male is a president who many outsiders regard him as one of God's angels ...we think that he repeats bible history based on Moses.— Letter 364 from Ga-Rankuwa

And in this letter from 15-year-old Siphso:

When I grow up I want to be the president of South Africa. I want to be like Mandela and be known in all far away countries because God has sent Mandela like he sent Moses in Egypt, to free the children of Israel, God sent Mandela to free us from the slavery imposed by the white people. — Letter 577 from Mamelodi West

Thirteen-year-old Blond again evokes the imagery of freely given manna:

I feel strongly about golden opportunities which his excellence, President Nelson Mandela gave us for free education ... we must not disappoint him. This is the kind of Manna which was given free during the Israelites on their journey to Canaan. — Letter 377 from Soulsport

And Mandela himself is seen as a gift of God to his people:

The person I like to thank is the Almighty God for giving our president the power to survive all the things we have encountered in life and look now where he is, he's the first black president in South Africa. — Letter 569 from a 16-year-old female in Pretoria

Let us all changed our attitude, lifestyle for a New Government of South Africa with a new leader that was called by God the provider, known as MH Mandela. — Letter 340 from a 27-year-old man in Soshanguve

Bongani from Gresswold goes so far as to deify the President. His letter took the form of an extended supplication to Mandela, almost like a prayer:

I know Mr Mandela is a good president for us but people need more. But God is there for you Mr Mandela to help you and us to get house and jobs. We need you Mr Mandela you are the father and God for us.

...I love you Mr. Mandela. — Letter 451

Religion and values

Some of the writers have integrated their religious faith into their broader worldview. Ivy from Kimberley is only 14, but shows great maturity in her application of Christian values:

I believe in myself as a Christian. My values play an important role in improving my personality. As a young girl of 14 years old, it is a must to have a healthy personality if I want to cope with life better and I should respect my culture and other peoples cultures as well as I respect mine.

I spent most of my time observing the environment and the beauty of nature and all this that is created by God. Communication is needed in most of our times, because the more we communicate the more we are united, trust each other and know the languages more better. I do not like to discourage people, to disrespect other, tease others, because we are made of one material. — Letter 49

Mary from Driekop expounds on the consolation of faith and efficacy of prayer:

When I pray, I feel strongly because I can hear that God is always present and I have faith on that. If I have a problem or if something is hurting me, I always console myself and I will never give up. I know what is hurting me is nothing compared to what happened to Jesus.

And I also thank my parents because they taught me how to pray and they told me that prayer is a unit between God and his or her child. — Letter 79

Thembi from Vosloorus describes the difficulty her parents have in paying school fees. She draws strength from a well-developed faith and feels the moral imperative to pass on this strength.

Despite all these things happening in my life, deep down I know that God loves me. He is concerned with me as a person. I am a very important consideration in the kingdom of God. I trust in the Lord God Almighty. I know that he has the answer for my prayers. What a wonderful God I have. He is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The source of every mercy and the one who so wonderfully comforts and strengthens me in my hardships and trials. Any why does he do this? So that when others are troubled, needing my sympathy and encouragement, I can pass onto them. This same help and comfort which God has given me. — Letter 341

Dovi, a Jewish student from a religious school, has taken his lessons to heart. He gives his insight into the power of prayer and the social role of religion:

Prayer is a combination of God and fellow friend. When you pray, it is as if a force enable you to have a relationship with God straight away. When I pray, it makes me feel that I am God's friend.

In our law, we love our fellow man. God is worshipped in different ways by the different religions in South Africa. Religion is also interesting because in religion there are different laws. Without it, there would be chaos. It brings order in our lives.

Thank God that in our country people of different cultures are allowed to practice their own religions. Each community has the power of life. — Letter 481

Matters of life and death

While religion can generate tolerance, the generally conservative tone of South African Christianity has its political implications. Like the religious right in the US, South African youth have some rather Old Testament ideas about human rights. They are very much in favour of life for the unborn, and very much in favour of death for violent criminals. Youth opinion on the issues of the death penalty and abortion is fully discussed in this book in the chapters on crime and sexuality respectively. It is only important to note here that the youth position on both of these issues is informed by a policy of zero-tolerance for human "evil".

Many of the young people think that people commit crime because they are not sufficiently afraid of the consequences. Bat-Amin from Johannesburg is typical of the youth who believe in using fire to fight fire:

Innocent people are being victims of murder, robbery, rape and hijackings each day. For this to stop, the death penalty must be brought back, because this is the only way in which to instigate fear within the people. The only way to stop danger is through danger. — Letter 447

A similar perspective is expressed with regard to abortion. The young people feel that toleration of abortion leads to sexual immorality. They conclude that if young women were afraid of the consequences, illicit sex would come to a halt:

... the girl at high school are doing anything because their hopes is abortion. — Letter 815

What is bad is that our president said all under 14 pregnant girls can go to their next clinics and asked for abortion. This days even 10 year old girl is becoming pregnant because she knows that she will go to a clinic and abort. — Letter 778

Thwinky from Pietersburg thinks that immorality among young people is due to a lack of control:

The only thing I hate of "Adolescent". I hate it even if it is a natural thing. This stage brought many changes to many youngsters, really it made them to become mad. Many of the youngsters became pregnant unexpectedly because of it. Some became prostitutes, some became intoxicated because of it. I wonder why? It is just because they get relax and left it controlling their lives. If they can just control it there is no problem that they are going to experience. — Letter 151

J.L from Komatiepoort feels that the policies of the new government are promoting this lax attitude:

Women have already opened such some business by selling their body ... their worker pictures on the Hustlers and newspaper advertising the place where you can get them. And you can get their naked men playing their film together ... Mr Nelson Mandela has this sort of rubbish here in South Africa. — Letter 309

Tolerance of abortion and abolition of the death penalty are often mentioned in conjunction with one another as failings of the present government:

... I like that when women who want to abortion must be punished. What I don't like is that when person kills another, when he goes to the police must be forgive. I don't like that, a person must get his punishment. — Letter 649

It seems there is a lag between the progressive policies of the government and the moral conservatism of the youth.

Christianity and social behaviour

One of the most important aspects of religious participation for many young people is the acquisition of a code of conduct that offers an alternative to self-destructive youth behaviours. Jimmy

from Pietersburg wants to be a social worker. He believes that success begins with a clean lifestyle:

I am South African citizen. I want peace in this world when I come across with the people who do wrong things I try my level best to tell them it is not good to do wrong things. I want to struggle in order I can have a better life. My daily life I enjoy myself reading educational books as well as watching television watching educational programmes. And at last I read Bible, Church lessons in order I can know the good way to eternal life ... I am not drinking and smoking I am a Christian ...

What I like about myself is daily life that I do good things. I am not drinking and smoking. Because alcohol is hazardous as Nicotine in fact if one consider the number of alcohol related deaths that occur daily. Alcohol and nicotine are both poisonous to the body and those who wish to live healthier lives should abstain from taking this substance. I like good things. The things which I like about myself is that I don't fail in that thing, attractiveness things. What I dislike is to do wrong things to kill one another, to commit crimes, sexually immorality to oppress one another.

I feel strongly by means of believing in Jesus Christ because God is my strength. I hope with Jesus Christ I will reach my goals in future.
— Letter 191

This perspective — that alcohol, tobacco, drugs, sexual permissiveness and violence are inseparable elements of a negativistic and non-Christian lifestyle - is repeated many times throughout the letters. Thirteen-year-old Thulile is typical of the many young people who actively avoid temptation by keeping themselves off the streets:

Here in rural areas girls of my age like going to church every Sunday's to keep ourselves busy, so that we are not involved in drug

practise that is the most bad thing practised by everyone in my location. — Letter 41

And in this letter from a student in Grahamstown, it is unclear whether the writer is referring to spatial or spiritual distance:

I like my life because I am a new being in Christ Jesus and I am always far away from doing evil things, things like smoking Dagga and drinking liquor. — Letter 288

Petros lives in a rural area near the border of Swaziland. His pastoral Christian lifestyle has, in his view, protected him from the sinfulness of urban life:

In my life love the style of my living because I do not undergo corruption. I do not like violence. In my life I love my religion because I'm a Christian. The thing that I hate is to treat other people like animals. I also don't like to see myself smoking cigarettes or drinking liquor. I also don't like to play with God's name or his creatures. — Letter 336

Makhadi wrote in Venda about the strength of his positive outlook and determination. He, too, sees his faith as a shield against the evils of the world:

I am a young man ascribes to the Christian Religion greatly. I see my Christian belief building me up a lot in my journey to being a parent. My life is founded on my Christian faith. Being Christian like this, I feel proud because it protects me against a lot of things that are stealing a lot of youth's futures. Things such as smoking stimulants/drugs like dagga and others. And things such as drinking alcohol. Many young people (Youths) are in prison as a result of such things. The future of many youth has ended prematurely due to "glues" and others have their lives terminated at a young age. — Letter 634

December works part-time as a plumber's assistant. He wants to be a policeman, and has clearly undergone some sort of conversion experience:

I like to go to church, if it happens that I don't go to church I feel like I've made a sin. I like also to sing in the church choir. I am a secretary in church not because I am clever but because of my good deeds. I don't like drinking alcohol or even to smoke, these things God helped me to part with them. Not to say that I hate the people who engage in them is just that I don't like them. When you drink you end up not having a family because people spend a lot of money on alcohol. I hate smoking because it damages the lungs and blackens your teeth and it makes your breath smell badly. — Letter 623

Poopedi is 19 and in Standard 10, from a rural village called Perskebult. It is unclear from his letter whether he is a convert or just speaks like one:

I like to be a Christian the whole of my life. Now am a non-smoker and I hate liquor. I can say I am a good person. I hate violences. This letter is based on how to stop violence. And to make youth to be aware of danger caused by cigarettes and liquor. — Letter 312

Jennifer is a 17-year-old girl from Rustenburg who goes to gym daily because "I don't want to be a stout girl". She apparently considers her body a temple of God, and treats it accordingly:

I am not going to drink an alcohol and smoke. I just tell myself that I am the child of God so why can I do the things which God doesn't allow me to do. — Letter 63

Alpheus from Duiwelskloof has a clear sense of right and wrong, and combines several behavioural tenets into a single worldview:

I am studying. So you must study too. I don't like crime at all. Crime is a thing, therefore it should be uprooted. I don't like dagga, beer and drugs. I would like to see libraries in the rural areas. I read Bible a lot

after my school work. I enjoy what I read. To the Rainbow people out there you should not fight. You must live in peace. I love peace. I hate war. My rural people love me very much and I do. My hobbies are going to church and listening to radio as well as watching television. I don't smoke at all. — Letter 253

Agnes lives near Pretoria, and plans to study hard so she can follow in her brother's footsteps and go to university. At the age of 15, she looks forward to having a family someday, but does not have a boyfriend at present:

In South Africa the teenage pregnancy is one of the problem here which needs people who are serious about helping teenagers about growing up, people who can tell them how they must behave or if one have a boyfriend they must know that they must not have sex because it is wrong before God. I as a teenager I have seen some of my friends who are pregnant and they are at the age of 13, 14, 15, 16 and this thing really worries me, because as a Christian my life is in Jesus hand, so I know that this thing is wrong, I myself I have got that pain that I must tell them that true love waits. If it will be or if I will have a chance this year to tell teenagers about growing up and I think I will have to tell the standard 4 or 5 before they go to the high school that they should know that true love waits and there is no problem in being a virgin.

One day I met some of the girls who are in standard five and we sat down together and talk about growing up, they have asked me many questions and I have seen that some of them were free to ask and they are already at the stage of puberty, some of them I have seen that they are afraid to ask their parent, to their parent do no have time to talk to them about growing up. So sometime I told them that they must leave boys alone and they must keep themselves busy, like they must go to the youth clubs, or library where they can get help and keep themselves safe from all the sickness which is all over our country. I

mean Aids, so some understand and they have gain something that day. I am always praying that God help us teenagers to know ourselves and try to do good things, that they can help us to have a better future especially us girls because if something happens we are the ones who are going to in trouble and we must take care of everything. — Letter 572

Lombard metaphorically refers to the youth of the nation as a flower, thirsty for the water of life. He says this flower is made beautiful through hard work and clean living:

... the lord is still keeping me alive to lead the nation with freedom. What I'm referring to is prevention of crime especially car theft in Gauteng. It's my life I wont commit myself to use of drugs and alcohol. At the moment a lot of young people they are using drugs and this lowers our dignity as the black nation. — Letter 602

The writers set themselves apart from their peers who engage in substance abuse, sexual activity and crime. They assert a belief in the value of hard work, education and maintaining a focus on the future:

There is only one thing that we must know as we are young is that "education first and therefore all shall follow". Even the spirit of Jesus Christ is recommended. But we must know that even God help those who help themselves. I am cock shore of that if you armed with education and God your life is going to be new in New South Africa that mean your life is change. — Letter 28 from a man in Standerton

Optimism: A new faith?

These young people look to the church to provide them with a positive and hopeful perspective on life. There are many writers, however, who display a similar optimism and determination

Secondly, education is viewed as a panacea for all of the social and personal ills confronting young South Africans. Education is the golden key that was denied to young blacks over the years; once it is acquired, the writers suppose, all will have access to the wealth previously held by the few. This viewpoint is expressed with great fervour in most of the letters from black youth, and is not surprising when considered in historical context.

A third tenet hinted at in Jacqueline's letter is the belief that a positive outlook is essential to success. This conviction goes beyond an understanding of the need to maintain a high morale. The writers seem to believe that the facts of their lives are somehow controlled by their state of mind: as Jacqueline says, "*If you think it is going to rain, it will*".

A similar philosophy is articulated in the teachings of Norman Vincent Peale, an American minister popular in the 1950s, who attempted to fuse his brand of popular psychology with Christianity. His best-selling book, *The power of positive thinking*, lays out a method for achieving goals by mental techniques. Peale teaches that the real world is manipulated, by some mysterious force, to conform to our mental expectations, and suggests that positive thinking will produce positive results. Among the techniques he recommends is the process of reciting "affirmations" — asserting desired qualities or aspirations as though the goal were already met. To quote Dr Peale (1956:70):

While dressing or shaving or getting breakfast, say aloud a few such remarks as the following, 'I believe this is going to be a wonderful day. I believe I can successfully handle all the problems that will arise today. I feel good physically, mentally, emotionally ...'

A number of the writers apparently subscribe to a similar system, although the origin of their ideas is unclear. Perhaps it is rooted in a

without reference to religion. These youth appear to have assumed a coherent system of values and life skills, but it is unclear where this worldview originates.

The ambitious and socially-responsible perspective reflected in the letters generally is in keeping with that found by Braungart and Braungart (1995) in their survey of university students in 1994. It is even more remarkable in the present case, given the youth and economic status of the majority of the respondents.

The fact that younger South Africans are more optimistic about life in the post-election period than their relatives over the age of thirty has been documented before by researchers (Møller, 1996). This youth "culture of optimism is manifested both in the general tenor of the submissions and in the repetition of a series of "slogans". A typically positive worldview is found in the letter of Jacqueline, a young woman from Dobsonville who won first prize in the contest:

Education plays an imperative role in our life ... Education is more than a luxury, it is a responsibility that society owes to itself ... I don't believe in pessimism. If something does not come up the way you thought, forge ahead. If you think it is going to rain, it will. In my opinion to fit in the new democratic South Africa one has to be prepared for the changes that are bestowed upon us. If we run away from the problems facing us who is going to solve them? There's no secret about success. Did you ever know a successful man who didn't tell you about it? — Letter 132

This letter introduces several concepts that recur throughout the sample and appear to constitute postulates in a paradigm popular among black youth. Firstly, the letter focuses on success, and success is defined in rather Western terms. Success generally means getting an education, pursuing a high-profile career, and perhaps even becoming an internationally recognised figure.

Christian conception of faith as willed belief, as Lola from Tzaneen illustrates:

I feel strongly about believing that God is there whenever you need His help and He will help if you just give yourself in whole heartedly and not having even a shadow of a doubt that He will help you. — Letter 156

In spite of apparently insuperable obstacles, these young people are determined to make their lives “successful”. Part of this battle is maintaining an optimistic viewpoint. Mapesela from Deneysville seems to be reciting his personal “affirmations” in Letter 117:

Most successful people are successful because they believe in themselves and have a positive attitude towards life. I have realized by now that I too can be successful. All it takes is hard work, enthusiasm and a strong belief in myself. This will unlock the power to do many things that may seem impossible to me right now. To be really good at something I need to practice really hard at it, and refuse to give up when the going gets tough. I go to school not only to learn, I go there to make friends, to learn how to get along with different people.

I am preparing myself for the future. Introducing democracy into the working environment demands that young thinking people must grasp every available opportunities to study and train intensively. Exciting career opportunities are being created daily but are only directed at people prepared to invest time and effort in their education.

‘The greatest tragedy in life is not death, but a life that never realized it’s full potential’.

And a young woman from Duduza takes a similarly assertive tone:

I am a simple and friendly person of SA. I am also addicted to life, love and what is right ... My life in the new SA is as someone who is born again. I say this because I have already forget about the past

and look to the future. I like we as the youth to take up the challenge, that is to go back to where we belong. We belong right inside the desk. It is either we take up the challenge or we allow the misery to rule our lives forever.

We must work hard in this SA because there is nothing that is free except the air that we breath. South Africans depends to the life of the youth. If we are doing bad things like using drugs who will represent SA? I for one I say I am the pupil and I will act now. Only action determines my value in my life. To multiply my value I will multiply my action. I am the pupil and I will walk where the failure fears to walk. I will walk where the failure seeks rest. I will talk until the failure remains silent. I will say it is done before the failure said it is too late. I will act now for tomorrow is the day deserves by the lazy. I will act now! — Letter 166

Samuel from Heilbron has finished high school but, like so many of the writers, does not have the funding to continue his education. He spends much of his time reading in the library, which he extols as a "drug-free stress reliever. He maintains his high spirits in the face of unemployment with a spirit of independence and self-determination. He employs a series of metaphors that he has clearly been taught at some point:

People generally fall into one of three groups: the few who make things happen, the many who watch things happen and the overwhelming majority who have no notion of what happens. Every person is either a creator of fact or a creature of circumstance. He either puts colour into his environment or, like a chameleon, he takes colour from his environment. Or to put it another way: Some people are thermometers. They conform completely to their environment. Their behaviour is determined from without. Other people are thermostats. Instead of allowing their environment to control them, they determine the environment. To further motivate people around

me I say, they should remember that each one of us is special, unique original and significant. we all possess a genetic combination that codes us as distinct individuals whose fingerprints cannot be duplicated. There is no one like u now, not will there ever be another. Each of us was conceived by destiny, produced by purpose and packaged with potential to live a meaningful, fulfilling life. Deep within us lies a seed of greatness waiting to be germinated. We also need to understand that we are an origin and we won't die a copy. Philosophers says we should "discover" ourselves. Psychologist say we should "believe" in ourselves. But God, our Creator says we should "be" ourselves. We must all have purpose for our lives because our fulfilment in life depends on our becoming and doing what we were born to be and do. Too many of us have pursued our goals and met them, but we have no fulfilment in life and continually ask why? The truth is, accomplishments without a sense of purpose is meaningless and life without an understanding of life's purpose leads to disillusionment and emptiness. For life without purpose has no heart and is also an experiment. Any many of us after being frustrated by our failure to release the ability God bestowed on us at birth, transfer the blame to our historical circumstances, social status and lack of formal education while some of us shift the blame to our less than ideal opportunities. Yes, we're entitled to blame the past and the future is yet unlive, but the present offers us with vast opportunities to live life to its fullest. — Letter 204

Though she does not like school, 16-year-old Cynthia from Vosloorus has no intention of quitting. She describes herself as very ambitious and says she wants to be a role model for others. Success, in her view, is dependent upon maintaining a positive mental state:

I don't like people who give up easily in life. For instance when you start a project on something and you want to be a great success, then you come across someone who looks down on you. This person then

starts by discouraging you and take you as if you're not worth anything, you don't have power, you lack the ability and mostly feels that you're nothing. Then you begin to think that this person is right! You are definitely wrong yourself if you think that he/she is right. Nobody has the right to judge anybody without knowing their potential. Even if they do, you can start by proving them wrong and tell them to mind their own business. People who look down on you, are the ones that are afraid to lose. They are responsible for other people's misery. If you have the confidence in you, you can achieve any goal you want in life. — Letter 374

“ ... that's my motto ”

A number of slogans are repeated nearly verbatim by geographically and culturally diverse youth. The phrase “**Education is the key (or the door) to my future (or my life)**” is found in over thirty of the letters received, and the words “bright future” occur over sixty times. The following is a sampling of some of the repeated phrases from the first group of letters:

Another thing which I like is to give the people of new South Africa a message. This message is that Education is the key of our lives. — Letter 18 from a 21-year-old female in Masemola

The important thing in my life is education; remember education is the key to success. It opens many doors for us. — Letter 69 from a 17-year-old female in Kimberley

I like studying because in the new South Africa most of us black people are given opportunities to study because education is the key to a better future. — Letter 75 from a 15-year-old male in Kimberley

I am addicted to education as is the only key to open up the doors of my future. — Letter 113 from a 19-year-old male in Alexandra

I like education than everything in the world. "Education is the key to everyone's future and should be taken seriously" really I like education with education, you will have the brightest future. — Letter 151 from a 15-year-old female in Pietersburg

"In order to live like a king tomorrow you must work like a slave today"

I feel strongly about my future plans in New SA and I'm confident that I'm going to get it, "To live like a king is to work like a slave is what I believe in and that's my motto. — Letter 26 from a 20-year-old Sowetan woman

... for one to live like a king he or she will have to work like a slave. — Letter 39 from a 21-year-old male living in Naboomspruit

I pray day and night to ask god to help us. But I don't worry "mitswana o hi are o se bone nong gorakalala godima goya tlase ke ga yona" Ka ba ka gopola mafoko a morutabana vogme are "if you want to live like a king now live like a slave tomorrow, and if you want to live like a slave now live like king tomorrow." — Letter 138 from a 15-year-old female attending St Boniface High School

I have to wait for eight and a half hours before school-out without food. I usually say to myself that "work as a slave and live as a king" at school I gain a lot [more] than a person who comes with money. — Letter 147 from a 15-year-old male residing in Kimberley

"Lost opportunity (or time) is never regained"

Remember lost opportunities never return so make use of those opportunities you get in life don't wait till the water runs dry, you'll make the biggest mistake of your life. — Letter 36 from a 14-year-old female in Kimberley

I'm going to work hard and struggle through all hard things and become what I want to become in life. Most children in life must use

the chance they have to be educated cause when they don't use it that chance will never return. Once men said that remember that lost opportunity never returns. — Letter 50 from another 14-year-old girl in Kimberley

"TIME WASTED IS NEVER REGAINED". Tell yourself that during your 10 year old, you must be in primary level during your 16 year you must be finishing secondary education, during 20 years you must be finishing tertiary level. If you plan so, you would never experience terrible problems of life. — Letter 151 from a 15-year-old female in Pietersburg

I go to school everyday. I don't want to remain idle. I always want to do things which will help me in the future. I agree with person who says time is money and time wasted never regain. — Letter 168 from a student in Giyane

I have done a big mistake by staying at home for a year by not going to school not realising that time wasted will never regain. — Letter 212 from a 20-year-old male in Potgietersrus

"It is better to try and fail than to fail to try"

I love entering competitions and trying to be a winner. As they say 'It's better to try and fail than to fail to try' — Letter 65 from a 14-year-old Indian student in Durban.

I am kind of a person who takes life very seriously who tries to fail not fail to try. — Letter 117 from a 23-year-old male in Deneysville

What I like about myself is that I always try and fail. I never fail to try because I believe that anything a man can do I can do it better. — Letter 173 from a man in Gazankulu, Northern Province

Optimism and career choice

This optimism is also reflected in the lofty career aspirations of the young people. Although career goals were not explicitly solicited, the majority of the writers listed some intended profession. Over 70 of the letters reflected an interest in the medical field; most of these said the author intended to become a doctor, dentist, veterinarian, pharmacist or nurse. This field was followed in popularity by the number of aspiring attorneys, teachers, social workers, accountants and engineers among the entrants. Many also indicated an interest in becoming journalists, personnel or marketing managers, police officers and pilots.

The expression of these goals is often assertive in tone, as if desired career could be obtained by force of will alone. Mary, whose letter on prayer was quoted above, wants to be a nurse. Her commitment to this vocational goal borders on the mystic:

I really like this job and it is my talent. I can feel it ... I always pray to God so that he can strengthen me. I did not plan to do this work because my friend is a Nurse, so I want to be like her or him, no! ... but I have got a feeling or a power that I can make it for ever.
— Letter 79

Favourite attends the multiracial Woodlands Primary School in Durban. She wants to be a social worker and will admit no obstacles in her path to success:

In fact I like sharing my problems and solve them out and that person will also share with you and that is your best friend or your parents. That's why I like to be social worker and that is a fact and nothing can stop me. — Letter 412

Positive thinking applied

As would be expected, the writers applied this positive thinking technique to the present letter writing contest. A striking number of the letters close with an assertion concerning the writer's chances of winning the contest, or the relative value of the letter itself. This may be due in part to a misunderstanding of one of the questions posed in the Sowetan advertisement, as the following examples illustrate (emphasis added):

Tell us about what you think and feel in your letter

I feel great because this is the real things that I do in my everyday life. I think that I can win this letter competition for helping myself.

— Letter 2 from a student in Mabopane

About what I'm thinking and feeling in my letter

... I feel that my letter could be the first and the best letter than other letters. — Letter 60 from a 23-year-old man in Harrismith

I think the letter contains all what is being required and I could feel that I've top others in this competition. — Letter 209 from a Standard 10 girl in Seloscsha

In this letter I think and also feel that I am going to be the first prize winner. — Letter 378 from a varsity student in Venda

With this letter I feel/think if it taken into consideration I could be the winner of first prize. I know the winner and the loser is a friendship but the winner is part of the answer. The loser is always part of the problem. The winner always has a program. The loser always has an excuse. The winner sees green near every sandtrap. The loser sees two sand traps near every green. The winner says it may be difficult but it is possible. The loser says it may be possible but it is difficult. So always be a winner — Letter 319 from an 18-year-old male from Ladanna

While the question in the Sowetan ("tell us what you think and feel in your letter") was meant to draw out generalised thoughts and feelings, most of the submissions discuss the *quality of the submission itself* under this heading. Perhaps this is all due to a simple confusion of the prepositions "in" and "about", but the writers took full advantage of the chance to promote themselves. Again, it appears the youth believe that a positive mental outlook (or at least a good front) will bring positive returns.

The lost province?

The one group of letters in which the spirit of optimism does not prevail is the sample from KwaZulu-Natal. The letters received from this area focus far more than the other letters on political and social issues. Unlike the rest of the young people, the KwaZulu-Natal youth are sceptical of the promises of the new democracy and speak little about their hobbies, aspirations and day-to-day life. This apparent negativism may be due to the nature of the group through which many of these letters were solicited; the KwaZulu-Natal submissions were largely received from the Sabswa Saturday School for disadvantaged township youth, rather than in spontaneous response to advertisements.

Promise is typical of the embittered writers from this area. At the age of 18, she has little hope that the cycle of violence will change and harbours a great resentment towards her own people:

I would love to tell you about my life in the New South Africa.

My life have not change it is still same because I don't see any change in this world. My problem is that crime is not going anywhere even the New President would not stop it.

I still haven't got the money to go to the university. When they were wanting votes from us they promise that they give anything to us,

but they are breaking that promise why? it is because we are not going to take them from their seats.

All of them they are just sitting with their families in big houses what about us we are living in small houses where we all sleep in a same bed, same room when someone in that room is sick of some disease we can all got it because we are polluted.

Look what is happening outside they are just fighting to one another. Killing each other why? It is because they don't use their minds. For example: look at the ANC and IFP. They are the big topics in this world and they are black. Black people they will end up killing another because they will always be stupid. — Letter 672

Fifteen-year-old Nonhlanhla from KwaMashu does not share the adulation many of the writers feel for the President. She has little faith in the promises of the new government:

I write this letter to tell you about my life. My life in this New South Africa has not been change. It's the same as last year.

I said that because the President Mandela has change nothing. He said he makes people stay together white and black. But now there is still war people kill one another.

Mandela said come vote for ANC you can get peace there is no peace in this world for example: at KwaMashu there is still a war between people who live in L section. One person of hostels who saw a person who walk in his area they kill him/her. On January 26 I visit my brother at Nongoma. There is still war on that Country.

The RDP said they make road and build houses for people who have got no home to stay, all that thing they never ever gonna happen.

In Ethiopia people die Mandela not visit that people instead of that he goes to the hotel and eat nice food with his family. There many things

that he must do. I don't have many word that why I said my life is not change in the New South Africa. — Letter 848

Nobule, apparently a classmate of Nonhlanhla's, matches her cynicism:

I write this letter to tell you about my life in The New South Africa.

My life in the New South Africa is not change because there were promises that we told, but there's no change. They said they are going to build houses for us till now the houses are not built. I live in an out room.

They said we are not going to pay school fees but till now we pay school fees. They said they are going to build schools and creche but there's children who study under trees.

And this South Africa become so bad. They said they are going to build road but till now the road are not built. They said they are going to give us electricity and water but there's no change. The place where I live there's no high schools. If I wanted to go to school I go to another section and I found to that school there s no windows, doors toilet and water and asberstors. If it is raining we do not go to school.

In other schools there's no teacher there are few teachers. I don't see the use of vote because they give us many promises but they don't finished all. They said they are going to finished violence but till now people are die everyday and they said they are going to give work but till now there's no work.

My new South Africa is so bad. — Letter 849

While there is plenty of pessimism among the KwaZulu-Natal students, there are also a number of positive letters, which have a different slant on the facts of township life, like this letter from 17-year-old Nkosinathi in Umlazi:

I write this letter to inform you about my life in the New South Africa. I hope you will enjoy this letter my friend.

Thobile, now I'm very proud of being a South African, because there is no violence in our country. Although we have some problems in our province (Kwazulu Natal). The disappearance of violence (make) in other provinces give me hope that our province is going to be in a normal state, like all other provinces.

I think the role of which we have played to change our country is very important. Although our leaders have been fighting for changing the situation, but we as grass root people played a crucial role. The only problem we have is that we are not respecting each other. We respect brothers of different languages and skin.

A change in our country attracted investors from other countries to come and invest in South Africa. Many people are starting to get jobs, because at a change in our country. The economy of our country is promising compared to other African countries since we changed the situation in our country (South Africa).

It makes me happy to see that most of the people in age are at school. The encouragement to learn is coming from the government of the New South Africa. It is now unlike the 80's where you found that many people are not schooling especially (blacks).

In fact New South Africa my friend, I would say it is a challenge to everyone adults, adolescents and children, because it require a person who is educated. A better life in the New South Africa lies in our hand, but if we are educated.

The disappearance of a discrimination in the New South Africa, make me to be proud of being a South African, because now I'm like every body irrespective of colour or language you speak. The New South Africa made a progress politically, economically, educationally and socially.

Thobile I wish you the best in the New South Africa, but note this: a key to success is education. — Letter 715

This division between positive and negative outlooks may be due in part to the divided political loyalties of the KwaZulu-Natal youth, but the letters make clear that the misery extends beyond party lines. Phumlani clearly has ANC leanings, and believes that the new government should be given a fair chance. Nonetheless, there is a tone of great weariness in his letter, disturbing from a boy of 17:

The National Party has pulled out of the GNU so that more problems are there. The NP pulled out because they have got enough of what they wanted. This was just a planned thing. They want to let the ANC down, but let's wait we shall see. Anyway they don't wish us any good.

But we will see the true colours of the ANC.

Life is rough in the ghetto

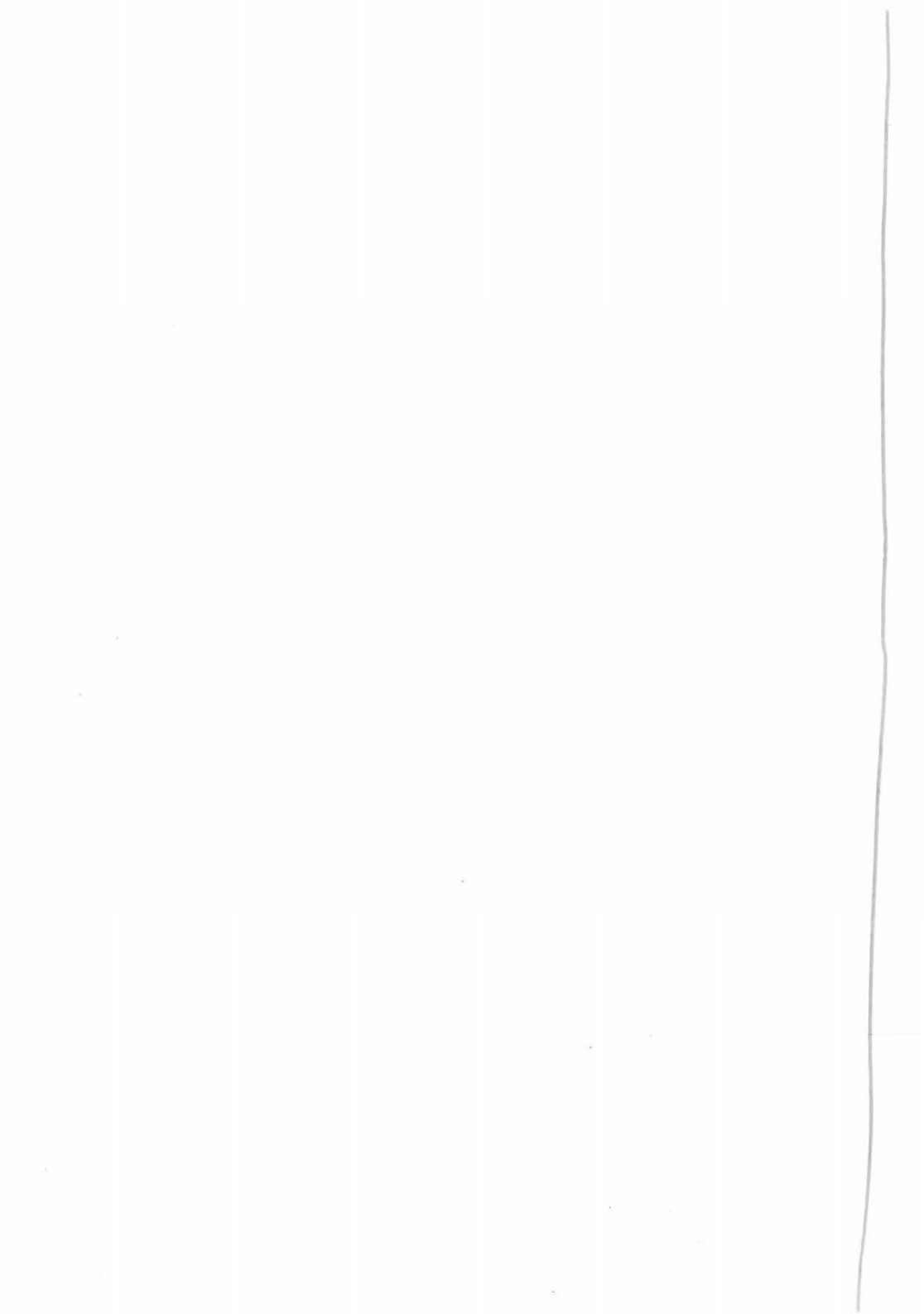
Everyday my neighborhood runs like Soweto

All the evil I experience because I am in Kwazulu Natal.

— Letter 664

A hopeful nation

Clearly, the sample is limited to those young people motivated and educated enough to put pen to paper and enter a contest of this nature. It is also true that the writers are conscious of competing in a contest, and may well feel that a positive letter will be better received than a negative one. Nonetheless, the optimistic tone of the vast majority of the letters cannot be ignored. The letters were solicited from a variety of sources and were received from a broad geographic area. Despite the diversity represented, there is a uniformity of positive outlook that has somehow spread among the youth of the country.



Chapter 6

"Yours in the rainbow nation":

Young South Africans and the rainbow

Helga Dickow

Since the National Thanksgiving Service on 8 May 1994, use of the term "the rainbow people" to describe all South Africans has become ubiquitous. This service in Soweto was held to celebrate the peaceful elections and the birth of a new South Africa. It was organised by church leaders across the whole spectrum of South Africa's Christian churches, as well as by politicians representing the old and the new orders. Thousands of people from very different religious and political backgrounds joined in solemn confession, mutual forgiveness and common reconciliation.

It was Archbishop Desmond Tutu who found the right symbol to represent South Africa's plural society and the unity of all South Africans, not only as a celebration of the victory over apartheid but also as an invocation of a new nation. He addressed the crowd as he had the first time at the funeral of Chris Hani: "We are the rainbow people of God. We are free — all of us, black and white together." He chose a symbol that expresses the covenant between God and man and all living creatures: the rainbow, the biblical symbol of

reconciliation, which God had used as affirmation of his covenant with Noah after the Flood. Tutu spoke not of a covenant with a Chosen People, but of a covenant with all South Africans, irrespective of origin, religion or colour. He replaced the Afrikaners' covenant with God with a covenant of all South Africans, with which everybody who wished to could identify. At his inauguration on 10 May 1994, Nelson Mandela picked up this symbol. Since that time, there passes no day without a reference to the "rainbow people in a newspaper, on television or in political speeches.

It is not an exaggeration to speak of symbolic engineering in describing the way "the rainbow people" is used; it exemplifies the conscious and determined use of symbols. This use of symbols is part of a broader concept, namely the creation and development of a new syncretistic civil religion (Dickow, 1996). Contrary to the Afrikaner civil religion (which only served the exclusion of other peoples) and to the anti-apartheid civil religion (with the aim of demolishing apartheid), this new civil religion embraces all South Africans. Following a pattern typical of any civil religion, it is developing a character of its own, with reference to certain biblical quotes, to rituals (including the celebration of martyrs) and most importantly to symbols which represent the new unified South Africa.

And most South Africans respond positively to this new symbolism. In a survey conducted nationwide within two months of the elections, an item was added specifically to examine the current and potential acceptance of this symbolic engineering.¹

The following question was asked of survey participants:

These weeks, a lot has been said by religious and political leaders about the rainbow, symbol of peace, and about a new covenant with God as a sign for the future of South Africa. People differ in what they think about this. Which of the following opinions is closest to

yours? For me, the covenant is a religious matter only and should not be used in politics.

For me, it has no meaning at all.

I believe, that God has offered to all South Africans, black and white, a new covenant for a peaceful life in a common nation.

Almost two-thirds (65%) of the interviewees accepted the view that, in the sign of the rainbow, God has offered to all South Africans, black and white, a new covenant for a peaceful life in a common nation. One-quarter (24%) disliked the political use of the symbol, because they felt it was a religious matter only. Only slightly over one-tenth (11%) of the respondents stated that the symbol had no meaning at all for them. Like the new flag and the eleven official languages, the rainbow has become one of the unifying symbols of the new South Africa.

In the age group between 18 and 34 years, the acceptance of this symbolism is a bit less than average, with about 62% approval. Almost a quarter of these young people (24%) consider it to be a religious symbol only, and for the rest it has no meaning at all (14%).

In the present competition, there were some 37 writers who referred to the rainbow in the course of their letters, and most of these references were in the use of the term "rainbow nation". As there were no cues that could reasonably be assumed to have prompted this phrase, its usage is probably indicative of its currency in common parlance.

Fifteen of these 37 letters (40%) which refer to the rainbow refer equally to God or to the church, while only 20% of the writers who do not mention the rainbow make religious references. It is apparent that the rainbow, a religious symbol promoted by one of the most famous and popular religious leaders of the country, appeals first and foremost to young people with religious convictions.

The context in which the rainbow concept is mentioned is also relevant. About 24% of the writers mention it while expressing some scepticism. About 38% link it directly to special youth topics like education (24%), sports (13%) and music (3%). A few of the writers were inspired to the point of writing poetry using this image. A plurality of 43% quote Desmond Tutu's slogan, "we are the rainbow nation".

Main themes of the rainbow authors

About one-quarter of the writers who mention the rainbow express doubts about the ideal of the rainbow nation becoming a reality. Two dominant themes, education and sports, are associated with the rainbow concept. Two individual writers were moved to poetry by the rainbow image.

Scepticism

The "sceptical" quarter of respondents is not sceptical about the concept of the rainbow nation as such, but about its implementation at present.

A 26-year-old man from the Northern Province, for example, feels there has been an insufficient response to all the issues which ought to be addressed:

There are but few things which I feel very strongly about in the New South Africa. We are well aware that we are moving from the old order into the new dispensation. We refer to ourselves as the rainbow nation but there are still some of the things that need to be worked out with a very hot iron. We are talking of new concepts such as reconstruction and development program. The truth commission, Affirmative action, reconciliation and many more even though they may not be new as such. There are certain quarters of life which

remain untouched by this changes or which does not gain from the changes. — Letter 67

A 16-year-old male from Kimberley is concerned that apartheid has not come to an end yet in the new South Africa.

I don't like the way which we South Africans behave towards each other. we hate each other just because of our skin, colour and culture. we still call ourselves the "Rainbow Nation" but still have that apartheid. — Letter 184

Besides apartheid, his other main concerns are sexual harassment, rape and teenage pregnancies.

Four other authors are worried about the level of violence and the crime rate, which they see as contradicting the concept of the rainbow nation. The two men are almost pleading for an end to the violence:

To the Rainbow people out there you should not fight. You must live in peace. I love peace. I hate war. — Letter 253

Every minute of the day, the life of one member of the community is wasted in the trap of crime. Ma Africa what's happening in this country of rainbow nation? Let every member of the community be the enemy of crime. Let's condemn the perpetrators by reporting each and every incident where life of a human being in trouble. One thing which the government of national unity can do to stop or end crime is not to allow bail to criminals life murderers, rapist, thieves and all human life abusers. — Letter 319

A 14-year-old girl not only compares South Africa to a war zone but also comes "to the conclusion that it will never be a safe place to live in":

There is one thing I think about lot, is South Africa ever going to be safe? It's like we are living in a war zone, where each political party

are fighting each other. The parties claim that they are working together to form peace and one rainbow nation but they doing the complete opposite. Do they stop to think of the innocent lives that being lost? The destruction they are causing? There are so many questions but little answers. — Letter 192

A far more optimistic impression is given by a youth from Grahamstown:

I strongly feel that in new South Africa people can live in peace and harmony where the racist can be totally abolished among the Rainbow nation so that everybody can have a say in the new South Africa. — Letter 288

Another girl, who describes herself as relatively deprived, doubts that the rainbow nation concept will be realised, especially as she does not consider South Africa to be a democratic country:

Time will only tell if it's possible to accommodate a "rainbow nation" in South Africa, our dearest home, where my parents fought to make a place for me. — Letter 503

Some of the writers are concerned about too many resources being spent on representative duties of the government. A 20-year-old man from Pretoria describes his worries as follows:

In the past months the new people who were elected in the officer have done a few things, approx nothing to be precisely, the government is too much generous if you understand what I mean in the sense that they want to be headlines for the past months every week there is a meeting held in this country and who pays for everything/services, almost every organisations in the world you will find in the rainbow nation yes we have good economy compared to other African countries but it's running our because we are hosting too much events; why can't we be part not to be the leader. We need to be part of the constructive events which benefit our country mostly. — Letter 578

Two other writers are concerned about the rate of divorce and about women's rights. Only two authors focus on the "lack of delivery" in the new South Africa. For them personally nothing has changed yet - on the contrary. The 21-year-old man from Daveyton, who had to give up his education because of a lack of finance, sounds quite resigned:

... well that is part of the packages offered by this new world called 'rainbow nation'. — Letter 344

The other one, six years younger and full of expectations about his future career, is sure that he will meet his dreams:

I want to be somebody when I grow up actually I'd like to be a better person with a wonderful life exciting career. I want people to look up to me. My life hasn't exactly changed since we are a Rainbow nation but we are getting there. — Letter 454

All respondents but two labelled as "sceptical" are concerned about the future of the country and the volume of problems to be solved. Their scepticism does not result from the fact that their private expectations have not yet been fulfilled, but from their unfulfilled expectations of what the rainbow nation ought to be. In this the young South Africans prove to be quite mature.

Education

Education is emphasised throughout the letters as essential to a unified and harmonious South Africa. It is not surprising that the writers associate education with the symbol of the rainbow.

These young people are sure that only a good education can provide them with opportunities which could improve their living conditions in the future. This knowledge is linked with the will to work hard in order to achieve the desired success.

An unemployed 21-year-old young man from Mkhuhlu in the Northern Province understands that a good education is a privilege. He even appeals to the those who did not have the opportunity to be educated to support the younger generation in its attempt:

To those who are illiterate due to different reasons I say to them please give support to those who are having that chance of learning because prosperity is all about this and I feel this is it s main part. It is now high time that we must all be educated. For the next coming years education is the topic to this New Rainbow Nation generally unlike before because it was mainly for the chosen Christ's people. — Letter 89

A 20-year-old young man from Mamelodi is far more pragmatic. He is not only learning while performing his job, but more importantly he is also learning about the different cultures of the new South Africa.

During Saturdays and Sundays it is my pleasure to work at Holiday Inn Garden Court as a waiter. I enjoy working at that place because I learn how other races live, eat and cultures. This is of importance to the New South African citizens to learn how other nations live and start a new culture for the rainbow nation. It's not only that I'ved learned different languages like French, German, Chinese and Italian. — Letter 17

A 16-year-old girl from KwaMashu calls for equality in education:

Also the education to be one and they must be no Bantu Education but one education for all. — Letter 703

A Standard 10 pupil who is also from the Northern Province is in favour of free education for all South Africans:

I stand for free education system in the Rainbow Nation. I would like to see Black population able to read and write. I am studying. So you must study too. — Letter 253

A 27-year-old man from Soshanguve hopes for a bursary for himself and is willing to work hard in order to be successful.

To me a New South Africa my life I prepared to do more things, success, prosperity and fighting towards life. Then the Rainbow will differentiate the true way of happiness ... Education will be my bone of my flesh, success is where we need. — Letter 340

For a 16-year-old girl, education comes at the end of a list of things which make life easier, but she understands its importance:

We as a youth of the new South Africa have to stand together and fight for peace and goodwill because this is our country and we belong in this rainbow nation not somewhere else and I expect that we gonna have telephones, swimming pools, pre-school, roads, post offices and education. Education is very important in the youth because if you looking for a job the employer will want to see your certificate and if you don't have it you can't get a job and that how the crime start but if we going to school we can stop if once and for all that why education is important to us as a youth. — Letter 235

An 18-year-old male Standard 8 student decided to become a doctor, because there are not enough of them in South Africa:

... so I realised to be a doctor after completing my studies. In our rainbow country the doctors are scarce, and most of them are the outcomer/foreigners. — Letter 319

Another youth is ambitious in a different field and would like to serve the country through music:

... after the completion of my matric and I would like to do music at any university in the New South Africa and after I finish my career in music and I would be singer which will travel all over singing for the people in shows, church audiences and all over the world. I am planning to build myself a better future and I will be working in the

music industry, writing and producing music for the Rainbow nation. — Letter 288

Finally, a 16-year-old student from KwaNdengezi is simply pleased and satisfied with the high standard of education in the country:

Since they have new government in South Africa, we see many changes and improvement, and we have high standard in education because we all know that success is ABC that means success is Ability, brakes and courage, and I'm proud of our Rainbow Nation.
— Letter 768

Sport

The appeal to write the letters appeared in the press just after South Africa had won the African Cup of Nations and the Rugby World Cup. The four writers who mentioned sport in connection with the rainbow understand what sport can do to unite and integrate a nation and thus serve the process of nation-building. They would like to transfer the unity and team spirit they saw on the sports grounds to the country as a whole.

A 17-year-old worker from Durban puts it quite bluntly:

I think that everything can happen so that we end up trusting each other like we have seen during soccer games. Trust is the only solution in Africa that's why I say 'keep the rainbow flag up'. — Letter 625

Others are a bit more elaborate:

What makes my life happy is the way the new South African people live together in peace and harmony they go to schools, churches, sports fields together in peace. They work together with enthusiastic and achieving their objectives together. The best example is world rugby cup, African cup of nations. These two have brought South Africa to be a rainbow nation. All this were won by the new South

Africa people for the people of the new South Africa and President Mandela and his blessings. — Letter 333

We create many types of sports, athletics and other that I fail to mentioned. It was the huge pleasure to honour those who work very hard to promote our fellow country, we want to all must go further by using their talent get up and I like ask God be with them, in the all coming years and moment. We have the South African team that was called the "Bafana Bafana" the warrior and the rainbow nations. I like words rainbow because think of the colours that appear there that means we are the rainbow because we are different colour but one big rainbow nations. See now we are different colour but one nation because of the new life in the South Africa. That show us that God gives us freely from the slavery from the old South Africa. I was still in the warrior, we had many soccer star we that team but all of them they are different from traditions, colours even in education, but they agreed that it is possible to come together to build a strong nation or team. — Letter 92

Sport not only helps to integrate the country but also gains international recognition for South Africa:

The new South Africa consists of "The Rainbow Nation". We have finally been allowed to take part in world-wide sports and events, and have been winning many of these events. After the world cup rugby, the entire South African nation united in their victory. — Letter 583

This recognition leads to competition with other countries, as a 17-year-old youth from KwaMashu puts it:

Now we are able to compete with other countries in sports, communications and economically. We are now the rainbow nation. — Letter 785

It seems that one can learn a lot from winning teams and that the youth have done so.

Inspiration through the rainbow

For some youth the rainbow serves as a source of inspiration. This inspiration ranges from using it as the title for the letter, as in that written by a 19 year old young man from Pretoria:

MY LIFE IN THE NEW RAINBOW NATION — Letter 178

or as a closing formula as in the letter written by a young man from Jamela village in the Northern Province:

Yours in the Rainbow Nation — Letter 253

Two girls were so inspired that they wrote poems about the rainbow. One 16-year-old student from Johannesburg uses the colours of the rainbow as a structure for her literary attempt. This piece won a runner-up prize in the contest, and is appended to the end of this chapter.

The 15-year-old girl sees the rainbow in an almost biblical sense, as a sign of hope after the storm:

Sitting by my window, and watching the rain fall constantly, all hope seems to be lost. Heavy clouds gather by and seem to grow bigger, angrier, and more violent. ... Thunder lashes, causing total despair, thinking that peace is only a heavenly word.

... It has stopped raining, and through the threatening clouds, a ray of light appears. A ray of hope and love, that will bring our country closer together. It will take time, but one day it will happen, because where there's a will there's a way, and where there's life there's hope. Through the glittering sun, a rainbow now appears. All its colours are united and spark off light to the world. We have not won yet, because as William Blake said, "But the real and lasting victories are those of peace and not of war". We need to encourage, educate and love the children of Africa, because South Africa's future lies in their hands. If they fail, it is us to blame, not them. — Letter 447

Different but one

The new South African leadership puts a lot of effort into stressing the pluralistic character of South Africa. Yet at the same time it focuses on how much the country's diverse peoples and cultures have in common and share in everyday life highlighting the aspects that bridge differences and forge a nation. The slogan used is "different but one". The youth accept this slogan and take it up:

What I like is that we must all live together in this New Rainbow Nation, no one must be granted her/his special settlement regarding their race together in their language. We are all important and many so we can't be able to part this beautiful country 'one nation but different people'. — Letter 89

The 16-year-old from Kimberley includes in the image people who are infected with AIDS and homosexuals and thus transcends colour in his vision of the rainbow.

Please South Africans care for each other. Our children, animals, Aids people and gay people and let us obey each and everyone's right because by so doing we will be united like a rainbow with it's different colours! Peace, Peace, Peace!!! — Letter 184

A 20-year-old young man includes all the colours in the "rainbow family" and also places responsibility on the shoulders of the youth as the "leaders of tomorrow":

I feel it is about time we all members of this rainbow family black, blue, yellow and whatever your colour, creed, religion, culture may be. Let us focus ourselves in developing, transforming, reconstructing, planning for the future of young ones of this country for they are the leaders of tomorrow. — Letter 276

In letter 703, an 18-year-old girl from KwaMashu refers to our parliament as "a parliament of rainbow nation".

We are the rainbow people

As mentioned earlier, Desmond Tutu's slogan advocating a new South Africa for all is: "We are the rainbow people". Some writers in the competition simply repeat this slogan, others take its meaning up and change the wording slightly. The first two are apparently classmates at St Boniface High in Kimberley:

We, the rainbow people of South Africa are on our way to a brighter, happier and more prosperous South Africa. — Letter 354

We the rainbow people of South Africa are well on our way to a brighter, happier and more prosperous South African. — Letter 75

Fellow South African let us build our country together. Do not lower our selves by making things that can break our heart. We must love one another there's no time for apartheid now. We are rainbow nation. — Letter 741

I like the way we are living in South Africa as a rainbow nation. — Letter 461

Now we work together with the others because its look like the rainbow nation. There are many things I can do now because its New south Africa. — Letter 825

The rainbow I'm very happy to tell you about my life. ... What a wonderful life!! Hello South Africa !! — Letter 595

Others vary from pride in being part of the rainbow nation to earnest love for it and its people:

I also feel great in the new SA because we are a rainbow nation. To show that we are a rainbow nation, most of us our views were being heard in the S African Constitution. This serves as a serious example to other different countries. — Letter 166

My life in the new South Africa is good. I enjoy it and I'm proud to live in this rainbow national. — Letter 235

I really enjoy in our New South Africa because there is no bad things like corruption and also that we live together in peace in our rainbow country. — Letter 319

But I am looking forward to rise together within others and sing NKOSI SIKELELA I'AFRIKA. I like breathing clean fresh air from the west. And almost I am amidst the infrastructural frame in the rainbow nation. — Letter 328

I love all the Rainbow Nation people with my whole heart. — Letter 329

I love this New Rainbow Nation. — Letter 575

And if the rainbow nation is not yet a reality, it must become one:

I think the people of South Africa as a whole should not look at the colour differences. We must live together happily and make the Rainbow Nation a reality. — Letter 188

I feel it is about time we all members of this rainbow family black, blue, yellow and whatever your colour, creed, religion, culture may be. — Letter 276

From the content of the letters referring to the rainbow, it is clear that there is widespread acceptance of the concept "we are the rainbow nation". This demonstrates that the attempt at symbolic engineering has worked with the young generation.

The closing remark should be left to a 16-year-old girl from Inchanga. These extracts from her letter strongly represent the will of the young people to make the rainbow nation happen:

Dear President

My life in the new South Africa is good. I enjoy it and I'm proud to live in this rainbow national. And I don't there is somebody don't like

to live in this country. This is a good country. When it comes to my expectations in South Africa today, I don't expecting that we are going to fight one another. I'm expecting we are going to stand together as one and bring peace in this country. We as a youth of the new South Africa have to stand together and fight for peace and goodwill because this is our country and we belong in this rainbow nation not somewhere else and I expect that we gonna have telephones, swimming pools, pre-school, roads, post offices and education. Education is very important in the youth because if you looking for a job the employer will want to see your certificate and if you don't have it you can't get a job and that how the crime start but if we going to school we can stop if once and for all that why education is important to us as a youth. So please let join the hands together as a youth of this country. I'm telling you we gonna make it. We gonna make this rainbow nation possible if we can stand together as one. Let leave the colour of our skin behind and do what best for us, please. — Letter 235

Apparently, the concept of the rainbow nation is widely accepted. The sceptical minority do not reject the value of the concept itself, but only decry the stage of its realisation. The rainbow concept is utilised in the context of activities and institutions the youth deem important, particularly education and sport. Given that the "rainbow nation" was not provided as a theme, its usage demonstrates the idea's general acceptance:

The Rainbow Poem

My Life in the New South Africa

The howling of a nation in pain

The howling of the wind to alert all

Trees sway furiously, crying out hurting

Roars of thunder crush out the screams

Dark skies, a flash of light

War

Rain, tears of the suffering

Struggle

Power, tension, fear

The destruction of one storm of conflict

Yet the rain subsides

and the tears dry

and the black sky starts to fade

and becomes grey

The endless vault of heaven

regains her colour

slowly

A gradual transition

And then she appears

a Kaleidoscope of colour

arching her body through there clouds

She is vibrant

multi-coloured

picturesque

She stretches herself compassionately

as she awakes

delivering a message

of hope

renewal and

restoration,

She is an unusual beauty

Possessing seven distinct shades of brilliance.

She dresses herself, with care

as she tells her life story

Her primal shade is revealed

RED

The anger of the militant youth

Blameless, yet
blamed
The blood shed in all her wars
as so many lives were lost
The fire,
of the youth whose only wish is to rectify
Past mistakes
She expresses the love, friendship and
passion
of a nation striving for reunification
This shade is her warmth,
her strength ...
and the sky continues to clear
as she displays her second coat
The setting of the previous policy
The setting of the previous sun
A shade of uncertainty
Confusion
Not red,
Yet not quite yellow
This outfit provides the blending
It is unsure of direction
Autumn comes imitating this shade
as its ORANGE leaves fall
Yet some do remain
A contract
But once the sun sets on something old
it rises on something new
Her pigment
A new day, a new beginning
Dawn
Opportunity

*Birth of a new country
a changed country
One of hope, freedom and equality
A colour of light
YELLOW
Spring, the blooming and flourishing of life
Brightness accompanied by happiness
Wander aimlessly
finally freed ...
and the soft white tufts of cloud
begin to disintegrate
allowing the pure sky to unveil further
Her tale continues
Her next layer is shown
Envy
of the inferior towards the superior
Jealousy
of the suppressed and the oppressed
GREEN
The nature of a country
The nature of a nation
Yearning yet performing
Simultaneously
Towards health, freshness and recovery
From what was, is and will be ...
and then a connection
a similarity
The calm Blue sky,
her next shade
expressing tranquillity
purity
A tinge, of hope*

Serenity

like an endless, timeless ocean

All the same colour ...

The powerful BLUE prevails

in all its glory ...

Her sixth colour is displayed

The ink had dried

The writing is on the wall

INDIGO

A new set of laws

A new constitution

A renewed code for

A renewed government

declaring

improvement, progression

Her final VIOLET shade has two tones

Frustration,

of the young people

craving freedom

Yet an obstacle

intervenes

crime

and Royalty

finally the majority reign supreme

And there she stands

One rainbow

one vision

of beauty

of promise

of hope

Her story

is told

One nation

Made up of a multitude of colour

A blending of shades and tones

A mixture of ideas and opinions

A contrast of conflict and peace ...

A formation of harmony

"Every cloud has a SILVER lining

So too we will weather our storm

till we reach the end of the rainbow's

magnificent arch

To the pot,

the pot

of GOLD

Shinning, Sparkling, Shimmering

Triumph, victory, courage

A golden ring binding the love

of a people

Together

The pot of gold

an abundance of riches

Wealth

and prosperity

A nation, rich

in determination

Together

Together as one colour

One people,

we walk towards the fold

We can dream

We can hope

We can pray

I too can dream

*I too can hope
and I too can pray that my rainbow,
my dream
is a blending of the colours
a blending of the cultures
and just like the rainbow
I too will walk ...
towards the gold
— Letter 34*

- 1 The survey was conducted by Valerie Møller and Theodor Hanf on behalf of the European Union after the April 1994 elections. It was administered by MarkData of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), Pretoria. The sample was representative of all socio-economic strata in urban and rural society in all nine provinces of the country. The author is grateful for permission to use the data.

Chapter 7

"South Africa is beautiful as seen on television":

Media, culture, consumerism and sport

Ted Leggett

South Africa is a country in search of an identity. The rules that defined the nature of South African society for nearly fifty years have been discarded, and the nation is left to piece together its many fragmented subcultures into a single functioning whole. There is a tentative political consensus in place and operating, but a social consensus is far more difficult to manufacture. To add to a difficult situation, South Africa's rise to democracy and its emergence from economic and informational quarantine occurred simultaneously. Suddenly, the country must cope with both the demands of political transition and the strains of entering the world market place. To create a sense of national unity and purpose, the media must be recruited.

South Africans are great mass media consumers. The city of Durban has only two major booksellers but supports a fairly large number of regional newspapers. Newspapers are relatively inexpensive and

accessible, and provide grist for a very active mill of political dialogue. A strong local musical tradition teamed with an active youth culture has made the radio a ubiquitous feature in South African social life. And television turns up in the most unlikely places.

With a free market comes free access to foreign popular culture and, parasitically, foreign values. The most virulent of the media colonists are the Americans, the masters of the form. Eager for the "sophistication" and "success" that American culture represents, some South African youth are ready to embrace the marauding hordes. It is a pattern that has been repeated many times in emerging nations around the world.

South Africans do have a popular culture of their own, or rather several. They are sports enthusiasts, and the years of exclusion from international competition were arguably among the more effective tools for destroying the morale of the apartheid government. The launch of the new South Africa has been accompanied by a number of major spectacles, but none so effective as the Rugby World Cup and the African Cup of Nations victories. No public relations firm or advertising agency could have concocted such a wildly successful device. And with the exception of the lucky few in the stands, most South Africans experienced these momentous occasions via the mass media.

Keeping informed

Nearly every writer who discussed a daily routine or listed hobbies mentioned exposure to some form of mass media. Television, the press and radio are cited again and again as sources of information and entertainment by all the youth, but seemed to take on special importance among the black writers. A highly politicised group, the

black youth place high value on being "informed" about the events of the world and their country:

The New South Africa change my life. When my life is changing I have to listen to the news radio or news TV. Every day I don't want to miss any news because I want to know anything that it happening outside. If I missing the news I first to go to buy newspaper to know that its happening in the country. — Letter 198

Newspapers are listed as sources of information no fewer than 85 times in the letters, and a remarkable percentage of the young people list reading the paper as part of their daily routine:

I am interested in reading newspapers especially Sowetan. I am a person who always want to know about what has happened in the past and what is going to happen in the future. — Letter 311

Of course, this reported popularity of print media may have something to do with the fact that the contest was advertised in the newspapers. In the *Mail and Guardian* for the last week of January 1997, media director Lyndall Campher attributed the success of several growing newspapers in part to their frequent inclusion of competitions.

The writers agree:

I thank God for giving [me the] opportunity for writing this letter. I thank you also because you encourage us to read book as well as Newspapers when you records things like this. — Letter 168

Some writers describe consuming their daily newspaper as if it were some sort of vitamin tonic, essential for personal development in the new South Africa:

In my everyday life I wake up in the morning, do some exercises in order to activate my body. I also like to read newspapers and different

stories from different books, as I want to be part of the transformation not to hear from others. — Letter 122

In my everyday life I spend most of my time reading books, magazines and newspapers. Everyday I wake up early in the morning exercise my body in order to keep it healthy and strong. — Letter 831

... every morning when I wake up I rush to the playground to go and exercise. Afterwards as I am unable to an opportunity to further my education, I make sure that I read the newspaper every day to increase my knowledge. — Letter 593

Each and every day I read piece of writing. I need to gain something in my life, e.g., knowing something of the past, present and of the future. Particularly political news I tried by all means to read newspapers whatever the case may be. News is my cordial important. Each and everyday I need to improve my knowledge. Infact I use to comment with my elder brother at home about world politics, especially of South Africa. — Letter 32

And the English news is of obvious benefit to those trying to master a second language:

I really keep myself busy by reading newspapers and other English books, and I do this in order to improve my international language that I could use to communicate with other people. — Letter 146

Newspapers are apparently helpful in other academic endeavours as well:

In my life I never part with a newspaper that is why I used to win in the debates organized. I liked doing English. I used to read the Politics sections in the Newspapers. — Letter 623

Ironically, it seems the newspapers have taught our writers not to believe everything one reads in print:

Before election of 1994 many parties were advertise themselves in ... newspapers. As a daily song the[y] ... said we are going to build for people house and great more jobs and better life to all people and many things. But in those things there are few things that pass and many fails. — Letter 876

As is the case internationally, radio is also popular with the young people. Again, the young people stressed the educational (or at least non-intrusive) nature of the medium:

I like listening to a radio especially Radio Metro eg I enjoy the program ie Sowetan Talk back Show presented by Lawrence Dube. I enjoy the program because there's a lot of education and by listening to it I also improve (increase) my knowledge and tenses from different VIPs or celebrities. — Letter 122

I can listen to the radio while doing my tasks like writing assignments, hence I do not spare time for listening to music on the radio. I prefer listening to African music and African gospel music. — Letter 194

The radio also comes in a variety of ethnic flavours:

I spend a lot of time listening to the radio, Radio Swazi because I like the programme they broadcast. — Letter 623

One of the major attractions of Newlands West is the studios of the Indian-based radio station (Radio Phoenix) based at our shopping complex. — Letter 503

I listen to the different radio stations, I sometimes listen Sesotho Stereo, Radio Zulu, Radio Metro and Radio South Africa especial in the morning. — Letter 60

Television

Although other forms of mass media are popular, nothing can compare with the power of television. Television viewing was listed as a “hobby” alongside such socially commendable behaviours as church attendance:

My hobbies are watching television, visiting friends, reading and many more. I am a church goer. — Letter 1

My hobbies include going to church, reading, watching television and sports. — Letter 251

My hobbies are going to church and listening to radio as well as watching television. I don't smoke at all. — Letter 253

For some, the link is even closer:

In my everyday life:

... Sunday I wake up early in the morning.

I watch TV because I like Gospel Gold.

After that I clean the house and all that.

At 10h00 an I depart straight to the church.

I praise God our Creator ...

About my life what I like:

Watching TV.

Go to church.

Reading any newspapers.

Stay at home

— Letter 387

Television watching is apparently viewed as a laudable activity in parts of the black community, thus its inclusion in activity lists in letters designed to impress. Vinglehempt, a young Sotho man, further exemplifies this attitude:

I intend to become a social worker if I happen to go to university. I love peace most. I would like to see people smiling together. Every Sunday I always go to church. I also want to watch television every day. I feel ashamed of innocent people being killed for nothing. I feel embarrassed about the way the elderly people are ill-treated by the youth. I think this senseless killings should end completely if the community and the police could work together. — Letter 306 (emphasis added)

Even families that live without electricity appear to have access to battery-operated television. Portia from Tsakane and Mafolo from Mashashane inadvertently reveal the importance of television in their lives:

My family is very poor we never had home my parents were tenants [and paid] a lot of money [to live] in the back yard where we have no privacy. There was only one bedroom for my parents and younger children. The other room was a kitchen, bedroom, dining-room and bathroom it served for many purposes. To me it was an embarrassing situation. We could not stay with our parents particularly at night when they had visitors we could not watch television. I welcomed the new government thinking that better houses will be built. — Letter 358 from Portia (emphasis added)

I lived in a rural area of Pietersburg, where we found lives very frustrating everyday. My life situation is growing harder and harder time after time, because no electricity, if you want to study you find that there are no candles... I study my books and after that I could perhaps watch television or go for soccer practice to refresh my mind. — Letter 180 from Mafolo (emphasis added)

The young people often cite the informative role television plays in their lives, or its educational value:

I am keen reader of newspapers, autobiographical novels and watching current affairs on television. — Letter 373 from 29-year-old Siphwiwe in White River

First of all when am at home I switch on the television and look for news (6h30) SABC 1. After news I change it to SABC 2 where I look different programs ... I like to be a Christian the whole of my life. — Letter 312 from a 19-year-old male in Seshego

My daily life I enjoy myself reading educational books as well as watching television watching educational programmes. And at last I read Bible, Church lessons in order I can know the good way to eternal life. — Letter 191 from Pietersburg

I changed my uniform and eat and after eating I clean the house and I read the newspapers and look the television the programmes like Teleschool and Mr Smith with his study like maths and biology. — Letter 305 from Lebo, who is in Standard 10

The power of television is also applied to promote political stability:

Everything changed it's colour to a new brighter colour; and this word "NEW SOUTH AFRICA" while we don't see in our areas; we see it in the televisions. — Letter 127 from Selby in Shatale

For example, TV1's slogan "Simunye — We Are One" seems to have become quite a popular catchphrase among the youth:

In my community we are on 'Simunye'. — Letter 149

Now we are one "Simunye" I liked that name we are no longer the slaves, we are part of South Africans. — Letter 191

I would pray that all my hopes of South Africa can come true. All the things can not change they must stay the same like it is. We are 'Simunye'. — Letter 704

Meera from Newlands West is sceptical of this bit of nation-building propaganda:

Another thing that I dislike is the fact that "they" says we are one. Are we? Then why do we Indians appear so infrequently on television?— Letter 503

Promoting unity is not the only positive function of The Box. Television can create career aspirations and provide role models for young people. Take Lola from Tzaneen, for example:

The work I will like to do in future is to see myself being on a screen and reading television news in English and having my own show like Felicia Mabuzza show or Jennifer Dereraux show in Days of our Lives "The talk show".

My first priority is being on television. What I like about my life is that cute smile I put everyday when I wake up on my face.— Letter 156

Lola's tastes are typical; both soap operas and Felicia were mentioned repeatedly as favourites:

My school day ends at ten past two and then I go home to a waiting mother, from three o'clock to half past four is my study time and at twenty two four I watch my favourite soapie "Days of our Lives". I watch TV and then I go to sleep.— Letter 502

I make sure that at 4.35 I'm already at home, so that I'm able to watch my favourite soapies which I love a lot which are Days of Our Lives and The Bold and The beautiful.— Letter 596

I also watch the tv programmes, but more I used to watch the newslines and the programme which is present by Felicia Mabuzza.— Letter 90

I really appreciate Felicia Mabusa-Suttle for her show which learn or teaches us many things that had been hiding.— Letter 369

Of course, no one short of Madiba is universally beloved. Grant from Durban, one of our first-prize winners, does not share his compatriots' enthusiasm for talk shows:

As far as I'm concerned South Africa has only two serious problems: crime and the Felicia Mabuza Suttle show. Crime is the slightly larger of the two. ...I am the founder, Chairman and honory President of F.F.L.O.S.A.T.V.V.F.T.F.M.S.S.A. — the front for liberation of SATV viewers from the Felicia Mabuzo Suttle show! Amandla! At the present we have only one member but we have already made submissions to the constitutional assembly to have Ms Suttle declared unconstitutional. I'll keep you posted. — Letter 70

In general, a positive attitude toward television is not to be found among the writers who have had long-term access to the medium:

I live in a socially dead district where the population of television sets actually out number the people... — Letter 352 from Denise of Shallcross

There is total trash on TV and there is no point in having a television. — Letter 581 from Yael of Johannesburg

As Grant demonstrates, the more media-savvy recognise the insidious power of the tube:

The two most powerful forces in the NSA are most certainly Nelson Mandela and the KTV kids. — Letter 70

But as Lucas from Tsholofelo puts it:

South Africa is beautiful as seen on television. — Letter 356

Consumerism and America

Aside from the SABC's rather unsuccessful programme of hawking licenses, South African television acquires its revenue by promoting consumption of products. In America, where much of South African

programming finds its origin, television has been honed into the consummate marketing tool. It sells not only products but also the lifestyles and values to go with them. It sells consumerism.

And some young South Africans are buying:

About my life I wish to be married by the rich man and I wish that we can give birth to two children (a boy and a girl) then I wish to have two cars, namely BMW (new model) and a Venture. I wish to build a big house with four (4) bedrooms, 3 (three) bathroom two (2) toilets two (2) garages one (1) kitchen, dining room and sitting room. — Letter 111

It is clear that I will reap the rich the decade to come. I will drive my dreaming car, and build a dreaming house. — Letter 574

I like to see myself one day living a very wealthy life, I always say "may god help me to achieve all this so that wealthiness can be associated with me." People who are wealthy enjoy life, they never find any problem to their lives. — Letter 180

After having been deluged in the hype, it is understandable that South Africa should look to the US for guidance in becoming a world market player and a capitalist democracy:

I'm sure that is better there in America, here in South Africa things are too bad maybe when we are old we are going to make this situation better ... — Letter 876

I wish South Africa could be the same as USA (United States of America). — Letter 1

I have a dream that our mother land South Africa will be a developed country like other countries in America. — Letter 771

South Africa does not have freedom of speech like New York. — Letter 560

The adulation of all things American seems to be particularly strong in the black community, which may be because America has one of the most visible and successful black communities in the world. American black music dominates the airwaves across the planet, and black American sports stars and fashions are recognised worldwide. There were at least a dozen references to basketball, a sport dominated by black Americans, which is currently being marketed in South Africa:

Our government or our president has build us some play ground like football grounds, tennis courts and also basketball court which is my favourite sport. I think he has helped me a lot in building basketball court because this is the sport of my dreams and you know what I always wish to be, 'the world best basketball player'. — Letter 872

Non-black students were less impressed with the American media onslaught. As Denise from Shallcross says:

It is essential for us to become aware of the political transformation that our country is undergoing as our lives are not governed by Michael Jackson or even by M-Net but by politics. — Letter 352

For Taryn from Johannesburg, resisting the invasion is a matter of national pride:

I spent my entire Saturday looking for the perfect gift, but all I could find were garments printed with the American flag, American slogans and American heroes. Even the South African labels were covered in Americanisms. I can't understand why we are so obsessed with the United States of America, when we are a thrilling, new country. Shouldn't we be taking a pride in that which is our own?

This is the New South Africa — where everyone wears baseball caps, even though baseball is not a national sport; where American bandannas hang from rear-view mirrors of cars and where people just accept that what America does, says or produces is the best ...

I worry about our lack of confidence and insecurities about our country and why we look to places like America as superior. I don't deny the fact that we can learn many important lessons from them, but I do believe the World can learn from us too! Afterall, we do have biltong, braaiivleis and Jonty Rhodes! — Letter 297

Sport and national unity

In South African culture, there endures biltong, braaiivleis and Jonty Rhodes. But the greatest of these is Jonty Rhodes. Nothing did more for the pride of the fledgling new South Africa than the victory of her sports teams during the time these letters were being written. And sporting victories have a special impact on the imaginations of young people:

I feel very proud when our National soccer and rugby team manage to won both trophies or manage to be the best in this world. It is quietly on the ground that our country is the best all over the planets. — Letter 168

Yael addresses her letter to a friend who lives in the United States, who has apparently invited Yael to immigrate. Yael declines this offer, explaining that she was prepared to accept until she witnessed the unity of the new South Africa at a soccer game:

Thank you so much for inviting me to come and live with you in the USA. I unfortunately cannot accept, for I could never leave my country, South Africa.

At first I was incredibly excited to live in a new country, meet new friends and of course, to stay with such a wonderful friend as you. But I have a bond to South Africa, that I could never detach myself from.

I was almost ready to accept your offer but I changed my mind after experiencing this.

You should have heard the screaming and seen the great excitement at our soccer. Thousands of fans came to cheer and encourage our team. All around were black people, white people, coloured people and every possible religion. But we were united, we were one. We were the South Africans.

As I saw black and white people sharing smiles, talking screaming together, I saw a South Africa I had never seen before. I saw a South Africa with no discrimination against colour. I saw a new South Africa. One that I was part of and could never leave. — Letter 584

Dorothy is apparently a classmate of Yael. She demonstrates that the impact of sporting unity is not diminished when experienced via television:

Today is a special historical day for us. Today was so exciting — for the whole of South Africa. Every[one] didn't have anything more important to do than be glued to the TV. It was so excellent to see how supportive everyone was of the "bokke" our springbok rugby team. It was great to see everyone from all different backgrounds cheering for one team and one victory. — Letter 590

Some of the writers were perceptive enough to recognise the political importance of these wins:

To make South Africa an entirely democratic South Africa, we must encourage sporting events which have brought many together recently. — Letter 48

The power of sport to transcend race barriers was emphasised again and again:

Reconciliation and prosperity is practical there and goodness reveals itself. In sporting activities it is also the same as we all know that SA is the number one sport in the world. Sporting is free there rather than the previous one whereby us people were concerned about race and background. — Letter 89

I love South Africa when I see it united with the other countries, even in sports people of South Africa are united in sports, it's like a miracle to see white people in the stadium. Nobody can believe that they come to watch soccer, soccer was the sport of black people they had that philosophy. And black people watching rugby, cricket, tennis and all those stuff. I have to say I love South Africa. — Letter 817

Even this young black writer has learned to enjoy the “Boere sport”:

In this New South Africa, sport is very important to me, soccer and rugby is my favourite sport in this New South Africa. — Letter 95

The unity of the sports teams is seen as a metaphor for national unity:

we had many soccer star on that team ... they are different from traditions, colours even in education, but they agreed that it is possible to come together to build a strong nation or team. That is not obstacle to them to do so. When we a proud with Bafana Bafana my agony of the old South Africa can disappear rapidly, because I am always full of cement. Lets get the AMABOKOBOKO that follow the path of freedom like the honourable soccer team. — Letter 92

Participation in sport is a way young people of different races can mix and interact without cultural or language barriers:

Now there is peace in the school, when I talk about peace. I talk about that blacks and white play together at school and thing like sport. Now South Africa can play every sport ... like World Cup soccer, World Cup rugby and I love Mr Mandela. — Letter 462

Sporting competition is also a way of keeping the young people out of trouble:

All my heart I prefer that education and soccer is very important because when we enjoy all game I think fights will be recovered we will be build our nation by course of game not education and form one nation consist strength and trust. People will forget about any bad

mind sometimes to kill someone or to steal money and cars. — Letter 121

The more business-minded see the economic opportunities available in ball games:

... the rugby world cup and the Africa Cup of Nation brought more tourists in this country and more investors, and it brought exposure of our economy. — Letter 453

Nelson Mandela is seen as responsible for the success of the nation, even on the playing field:

South Africa is part of the world in sport like soccer, rugby, cricket etc. We were not part of the world in the past. The new president have make SA the best in rugby, soccer and cricket. — Letter 556

For our writers, Bafana Bafana and Amabokoboko were nothing less than heralds of divine approval for the democratic path South Africa has chosen:

Sometime I think god was keep[ing] this for us and he was waiting for African president. The time they was a Boer president we didn't know that they will organize for us the world cup or even to enter a world competition. In past year it seems that we are in prison but now we are free. — Letter 767

I was very happy when the freedom and unity of the South Africans enables them "Amabokoboko" to won rugby world cup and the Buccaneers to won the African champions cup and super Cup. I think is our miracles at our first attempt. — Letter 47

Resisting the invasion

South Africa has re-emerged onto the international stage, for better or worse. If the country does as well as its sports teams, young South Africans have nothing to fear. But a nation cannot base its

future on the roll of a ball. In a multimedia world, South Africa cannot afford to ignore the power of mass communication.

Americans have learned that the key to success is hype. It is public opinion that determines market reality. As a result, young Americans are weaned on the notion that most of what they are told is manipulative nonsense. The cynicism of American youth is in sharp contrast to the idealism of their South African counterparts, who have recently won a genuine ideological victory over the forces of evil.

Having experienced some degree of cultural and market isolation, young black South Africans lack the informational antibodies to resist the consumerist virus being imported into their country via the media. The ramifications of this epidemic are frightening. In a country where the vast majority of the young people are decades (or perhaps generations) away from success in Western consumerist terms, to accept these values is to guarantee discontent. Expectations are rising far too quickly for the economy to follow. There is a very real danger that South Africa will follow in the path of the US, and compound material deprivation with a sense of profound failure and shame among the youth.

The years of isolation and strong local cultures have given South Africa a unique opportunity to take a different path, to maintain the values that saw her through years of turmoil. But unless the media are affirmatively employed to celebrate those things that make South Africa special, the country and its young people may flounder on the scrapheap of American wannabes.

Chapter 8

My loving parents, caring brother and fantastic dog: Youth and the family

Siyabonga Mngadi and Colin A.J. van Rooyen

A considerable number of contestants in the letter writing competition described their relationships with their family. For many of these young people, their definition of family is at variance with the traditional “nuclear” model. Most of the youth have hope that the new South Africa will bring about positive changes in their domestic situations, although they are divided on the extent to which the new dispensation has been effective to date. As the writer of Letter 283 noted: “my life is just the same. The so-called new South Africa hasn’t brought any great changes for me and my family or even my society.”

The socio-political history of South Africa has had an impact on family and family life. For many South Africans, the impact of apartheid on their families was extreme. Forced removals dismantled many extended families. The migrant labour system strongly impacted the family structure; many parents had to leave their families for employment in the cities. Political violence further divided families, as radical youth came into conflict with their more

traditional elders. The African National Congress (1994: 52), in its policy statement on the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), noted the particularly harsh impact of apartheid on family life in South Africa and stated that "apartheid contributed to the destruction of family and community life in various ways".

It is within this context, and with this legacy, that the young letter writers have commented on family life in the new South Africa. This chapter will focus on the feelings and opinions about family expressed by the youth. Their words provide some insight into the role of family in contemporary South Africa, and also provide visions for family in the future.

Descriptions of family

Families are defined and described in a wide variety of ways. Family size, parents' occupations, parenting styles and marital relationships are all used as points of reference in the writers' descriptions of their families. One young writer for example, describes her family in terms of her parent's occupations:

My mother is a staff nurse ... My father is (a) foreman mechanic and works at Springfield. — Letter 526

Other participants describe their family in terms of its size, or in terms of the writer's experience of membership and interaction:

My family ... consists of father, mother, sister and my brother. Our family is not quite a big family. — Letter 428

My family life is average as well. A mother, a father, a younger brother and sister and an adorable baby brother. I am the eldest so it's basically hell. — Letter 218

Sara, who is 16 and was born in Pietersburg, focuses on the parenting style of her parents:

I live with my parents and my two brothers and I come from a very strict family. — Letter 141

One young letter writer goes beyond the “normal” definition of family and includes a pet as a member of the family:

What I like about my life is the family God blessed me with; my loving parents, caring brother and fantastic dog. — Letter 37

Although the role of the extended family has been negatively impacted upon by apartheid, data from the letters indicates that living within an extended family context is still a norm for some. This was of particular note among letter writers who are members of urban African communities. One young letter writer describes a difficult life in an extended family:

I live in a five roomed home. I live with my mother, great-grandmother, grandmother and my uncles. We sometimes sleep without food. Well I accept everything as it comes. I sometimes go to school without any money. I have to wait for eight and a half hours before school-out with no food. — Letter 147

Gender differences in family relationships

In the black community, there is a striking difference between male and female writers responding to family issues. Surprisingly, few black male writers mention anything about their families. Male writers, when making reference to their families, seem to focus more on the hardships encountered by their families:

My parents were both unemployed. Most recently I used to depend on my grandmother's pension fund. My granny has raised me very hard. I hope God will protect her until the end of her life. I would never forget her for that she has done for me. Today I know to read and write. — Letter 98

These writers often refer to their families in the context of discussing their responsibility to provide support. Young black male writers of deceased fathers often assume their father's role in the family after his death. Twekozani, a Pretoria Technikon student, rejects drugs and alcohol owing to his family responsibilities:

I always pray to my lord to keep me away from the above mentioned things; because I want to protect my poor family, my mother, two brothers and my sister with my son. This is family with a lost father so the future is totally dependent to me. — Letter 130

Compared to their male counterparts, the young girls seem more likely to express the need for parental care. Their letters have more to say on their family relationships. It is the care and love they receive from their parents and other family members which they appreciate the most and which they feel is important in their lives:

Life is very much pleasant at our home. My parents are so caring and responsible (toward) my sister and I. They always want to know what we did in school everyday. This (is) how they show their interest in our scholastic achievements. Such type of an unmeasurable interests are from parents. — Letter 252 from a 20-year-old female of Thohoyandou

It is really hard not having most privileges that other girls my age have. I do not know what it feels like to have a mother to talk to. My mother is hardly every around when I need her but I'm grateful to have a bigger sister. — Letter 383 from Joelene, a 17-year-old female of Phoenix

In the chapter in this volume on time use, Møller indicates that family gender roles for children in the black community remain highly traditional. Male socialisation in these communities encourages independence and strength in the face of suffering (Giddens, 1989). Contrastingly, female children are well-nurtured by

their parents, and it is hoped that this care will be continued by a husband in the future.

Descriptions of parents

The impact of parents upon their children needs little elaboration, being a topic that is, for most, profoundly obvious. Regardless of the nature of the relationship between parent and child, some form of bond and influence will exist (Laird, 1979). A number of letter writers make specific reference to their parents, and in doing so often comment on the nature of their relationship with their parents. It is interesting to note that the comments often refer to the role of their fathers within the family.

Parents are described in various ways, including "wise", "strict", "intelligent", "realistic", and "caring". Strictness is an issue mentioned on a number of occasions. For one writer, her father's strict manner is potentially problematic in that the control he exercises limits her social activities:

My dad is quite strict so I hard attend any activities ... I go out with my parents during the weekend. — Letter 501

Two other writers present different views of their fathers:

My father is a very wise and intelligent man. He is a fountain of knowledge and so positive. — Letter 905

My father is a polite man. — Letter 428

One of the letter writers already quoted above also makes very positive reference to her mother. For the letter writer, her mother is as follows:

Very realistic and able to speak her mind freely. She is my strength. — Letter 905

Living without parents

Some of the participants describe their lives without parents. The absence of parents is attributed to a number of reasons, including death, migrant labour, family structure, divorce and economic issues.

For one of the young participants, the absence of parents is listed as an issue that is among the most negative in her life:

And the things that I dislike in my life is the life without your parents... — Letter 8

The absence of parents has created a number of problematic situations for the young participants, some of whom shared their problems with us. The following two extracts are examples:

I was in need to further my studies, to do [a] career in nursing in university, but I was not having money [to] go there. Because my father who was responsible to pay my studies was dead at work in [a] fire accident... — Letter 174

For the following participant, there was something of a positive force that allowed the loss of a parent to become a challenge:

Since 1991 I knew what life is... We suffered a little bit for about 5 years after the death of our parents. But I didn't give up... I knew that I must face it, it is a tragedy... Now this year is 1996 and I have solved those difficulties. — Letter 161

Respect in the family

“Ubuntu” (being humane) has long been known to be part of a traditional African way of living. Respect is a central component of this concept. Flowing from this was the norm that children would respect any person older than themselves, even strangers. Often in our contemporary society, however, suggestions are made that the youth no longer incorporate the concept of “ubuntu” into their way

of life. In addition, in some of the patriarchal African societies, the notion of total respect for any older individual has been seen as being in conflict with some of the inherent rights of children, including the right to protect themselves from harm or abuse. In this section of the chapter, an attempt will be made to show how the responses of the letter writers relate to these issues.

The youth of South Africa appear to be concerned about respect or the apparent deterioration of this among their peers. Or at least this appears to be so from the letters submitted. A young writer from Inchanga puts it strongly.

I hate to see the young people loosing a respect we have to respect our country, our family and all the people that are older than us. — Letter 236

For some of the participants, democracy (or rather the lack of understanding of democracy) could have caused a decline in standards of respect:

Do people really understand the meaning of the word democracy? Teenagers are so fond of saying it is their democratic right to be absent from school to be lazy and to ignore teachers. At home they exercise their democratic right to contradict their parents. — Letter 514

Inevitably, race surfaced as an issue with regard to respect. Some participants felt that racial integration within schools had a negative impact on respect. Concerns such as the following, expressed by a 14-year-old female from Umlazi, are typical of a number of letters:

What I wish to happen in the New South Africa is to bring back respect, especially in us the black nation. You find the youth inside buses and the children from multiracial schools, they don't value the adults, they don't give adults (seats) inside buses. You find the child pretending as one who is asleep because he does not want to give an

adult a seat. They make noise in buses. If you tell them to be quiet, they ignore you because they know that you don't belong to their family. What I'm realising is that we as black Africans we are spoiled by our parents. Children now are going to town schools are not taught respect. A Black person is busy throwing his culture away because he want to show not that he wants to give his child a better education. — Letter 492

Children of single parents

Life in a single-parent family can be difficult for both the parent and the children involved (Hyndley, 1988). Literature suggests that children of single parents find themselves in roles that are often quite different from children who live in families where both parents are part of the family unit (Nash, 1992; Rubensztein, 1992).

In situations where only one parent is present, children tend to take on a role that includes a sense of responsibility (to varying degrees) for that parent and perhaps for the other members of the family. This can result in unnecessary strain for the child (Nash, 1992).

One participant who still expresses a strong sense of loyalty to her absent parent hints at the strain experienced in her situation. Her concern for her future obviously places pressure on her:

I'm always thinking about my future because my mom is not working and father was disappeared years ago and I know that he is still alive and he is working at ... I always love him because he is my father whatever he done to me and my mother I care about him ... My mom is struggling very hard. — Letter 698

Another participant, a 17-year-old female from KwaMashu who lives with a grandmother, also expresses her feelings about the added stress and responsibilities that she has had to assume as the child of an absent parent, who in this case is her mother. Her sad

wish at the end of the extract rings true for many children who have absent parents — the belief that things would be better if the absent parent were to return somehow:

I have no mother and my father is a drunkard. I spent not more than 11/2 year living with him when my mother was upset. I live a bad life because I live ... as a house wife. I wake up early in the morning cleaning a six room house, make a washing, cook for ... school children and for the supper. I do not get a time of playing or visiting my friends, because grandmother always shout at me, tell me to do this and that ... I wish my mother was still with me. I know that everything would [be] going all right and successfully if I was still with her. — Letter 129

Another young writer further confirms the notion of added strain and enhanced responsibility. For him, the responsibility relates to taking up his father's position as the provider of income for his family. This premature responsibility almost certainly places extreme stresses on any young person in such a position:

Ever since my father died last year (1995) I have always felt the need to get myself a good job so that I can support my family. That's why I'm here in Gauteng. I've come here to seek gold for myself, my family: my mother, my sisters and brother. — Letter 290

A very similar situation was experienced and expressed by another writer who took on the responsibility of providing for the family and ensuring that they would not suffer:

In my family we are six kids and my father, my mother passed away in 1985 when I was doing standard five. Right now I am the only one with a job. What I wish for in my life is to see the young ones succeed in their studies and pass well their matric, and don't struggle like me. I don't want them to go through the pain I went through when my mother passed away. — Letter 622

Many of the youth live in single-parent families as a result of divorce. Divorce, however, may not result in single-parented families as the family may reconstitute itself with the introduction of a "new" (step-)parent. Comments related to life in a family that has experienced divorce will be addressed in the following section, as participants made specific mention of this situation.

Children of divorced parents

For many people the family is possibly the most "stable and consistent" group that they belong to (Hyndley, 1988: 16). When divorce occurs, however, this usually constitutes something of a disruption to the consistency of the family as a unit and represents a crisis for the members of the family system. And divorce is becoming more and more commonplace (Hyndley, 1988; Simpkins & Dlamini, 1992; Thackeray, Farley & Skidmore, 1994).

Regardless of the cause of divorce, and the outcome, it is a difficult process for everyone involved. Children often become "pawns" in the process and may end up blaming themselves for the divorce, however improbable that blame may be (Thackeray *et. al.*, 1994).

Our young letter writers express with clarity the difficulties experienced as a result of divorce. The following extract from a letter refers to the "rough life" that was experienced and the length of time that it is taking to adjust to the situation:

My parents have been divorced for 3 years, so I've had a little bit of a rough life. I live with my mother and her husband, it's taking a long time for me to get used to him, they got married last year November 4. My dad is not married but has a girlfriend. — Letter 544

For another participant, the divorce resulted in changes in living arrangements that present obvious difficulties:

I live in Brentpark with my father's parents. I am the second oldest of my mother's children. There are just three girls in our family. My parents were divorced many years ago. One thing I can say about my mother is that she is a very loving person. I love her very much even though she and my father are separated, but I will never give her up ... things at home are a little difficult because my grandfather and grandmother are pensioners. — Letter 630

A divorce may have far-reaching consequences for a child and for how that child may engage in his or her own relationships. Other than an obvious sadness, the following extract from a letter written by a 17-year-old female from Alexandra Township suggests that the divorce she experienced has had an impact on how she currently views her future relationships and roles:

I don't want to be married ... My parents are divorced and I feel very sad about what happened. So in future I want to depend on myself, work hard and be successful in life. I like being an educated lady, socialising with people and travelling. — Letter 469

Closely related to divorce is the issue of life with step-parents and stepfamily. Young participants alluded to this in their letters as well.

Life with stepparents

Experiences of life as a stepchild were shared by the letter writers. These experiences range from the negative to the very positive. For a letter writer from Pietersburg, the relationship with her stepfather is extremely problematic, with elements of jealousy from the stepfather:

At home my [step] father is a drunkard. He use[d] to through vulgar words on ours saying that he will be happy if I can be killed because my mother is very proud of me. That really worries me because I helped him in taking all the responsibilities at home like building a

five roomed house and taking all my younger sisters and brothers to school. — Letter 133

For another young writer, who became pregnant at the age of 17, her stepfather also exerted a negative force on her situation:

I was also a stepchild in my family ... The worst thing that happened to me as a stepchild was, when I fell pregnant at the tender age of 17 ... My family was unsupportive especially my stepfather who even decided that I should be chased away from home. And it did happen, I was chased away by my stepfather. Imagine the trauma I faced at just 17 years old. — Letter 55

For other young people, life with a step-parent has not been an unhappy experience. Some writers share positive experiences of step-parents. Petronella (female, 14) shares her story with us:

There are six members in our house. I live with my parents which is my mother and stepfather. I don't know my real father so well but now I live with my stepfather who takes care of me. I have two brothers and one sister ... — Letter 10

Another young writer, aged 17, describes the complexities and rewards of being a stepchild in her own particular situation:

Due to the fact that my step father being white I had the opportunity of meeting people of that race group. He treated me like a human being even though the minority did alienate me with their scrutinizing eyes. That's when my mother explained that our family was different and that I should ignore comments as long as I knew that they both loved me. — Letter 126

Changing roles in a changing society

In this changing political and social order, it is families, as primary social institutions, which are faced with a critical challenge of adaptation. It is the family which has to produce individuals who are

fit enough to withstand the challenges of change. Today's democratic society will demand children who know their rights, roles and status. In such circumstances, as Campbell (1994) argues, "the family becomes a microcosm of the conflict between what people perceive to be the 'old order' or 'tradition' ... and the 'new social order' which may place a different set of demands on members of the younger generations".

The social problems of our emerging democracy require a redefinition of intergenerational roles. Today's children require guidance as they grapple with issues of crime and sexual freedom. Portia of Tsakane discusses these changes:

Our parents could not guide us about sexual abuse because long ago it was not rife it only happened on isolated areas. Adults responsibility was to work hard for their families to pay rent, buy food and clothes for the children whilst they were earning less salary or wage but having many responsibilities. — Letter 358

Timeless intergenerational conflicts, as 15-year-old Lindiwe and 15-year-old Wilson illustrate, are further exacerbated by social changes:

My opinion is that other parents do not understand the world we are living in — now-er days. I wish my mother would understand me and allow me to have a boyfriend and that is of the things I do not like about my life. — Letter 11 (from Lindiwe)

What is important to me is that my/our parents, should give me/us the freedom to do what I want to. They should think of what I want in future not what they want for me in future. — Letter 93 (from Wilson)

Looking back — looking ahead ...

The young letter writers who have allowed us a glance into their family lives have been brave and honest. They have shared with us

some of the intimate experiences of what is often referred to as the primary unit of society. As is the case throughout the letters, the enduring feeling of these writers is one of hope. The youth who have contributed here show a strong sense of loyalty to their families and hope for the existence of the family as an important part of life in our country. Hardships are very evident: separation, divorce, death and other experiences all make life within family situations difficult for young people to understand and endure. These difficulties impact on the writers' perceptions of themselves, their histories, their communities and society. Their visions for the future are also influenced. Yet despite the hardships, the joys prevail, turned into challenges, accepted with courage and determination.

At times, brave attempts were made to make sense of sadness and confusion that resulted from chaos and conflict in the family. This is typified in a letter from a 28-year-old man named Ishmael who lives in Bothaville. His letter (reproduced almost in its entirety below) reflects on his experiences of life seen through the "window" of his family. He affords us the privilege of a very candid look through this "window". His letter allows us to think about what family means to each one of us and makes us think about the position and attention we afford family as we move into the future:

MY HOME WAS A BATTLEFIELD

From the age of 5, my dreams were filled with people screaming and fighting, calling each other horrendous names and pounding on each other's back. When I awoke I was, in a sense, still in this bad dream. My parents were fighters and I could only watch and listen. Sometimes they would be the happiest people in the world, but most of the time they talked to each other as if they were distant relatives. When they fought, they fought like two pit bulls in a ring.

When I was younger they would hurl slippers across the living room at each other. I was the ball boy who would fetch the slippers and try to match them back into a pair. I tried to tell myself that they were like children or best friends who got on each others nerves sometimes.

My father could be the nicest man. Yet when my mother called him terrible names and accused him of horrible things, he lunged at her like a squirrel with rabies. On several occasions I watched my mother try to hit my father with a scalding pot. I would scream and scream and cry until my lungs were deflated. Stop hurting mommy or "stop hurting Daddy!"

The first time my father told me they were having problems was when I was 5 or 6. In the car he asked me who I loved more. When I said "both" he sighed and told me I could only pick one. My mother too also asked me the same question on the same day on another car ride, only to end up telling me that I should love her more because Daddy was a very selfish person.

I asked myself a hundred times a day why I couldn't have a mom and dad who loved each other. In the early years my father would call the police. The policeman always took a walk with my dad down the block, and when they came back things seemed OK again. "Your OK?" the policeman asked me. I always cried because I thought he would use his sturdy handcuffs and take one of my parents away forever.

I heard the words "separation" and "divorce" often. I had no idea what they meant until I entered junior high and learned that many of my friends had stepdads and stepmoms. They told me that their dads sent child supports every month and that they got to visit their dads every so often.

I tried to imagine a day without my mom and dad and I grew very sad. Divorce became a scary term. I read on a newspapers and

magazines that children of divorce often turn out to have more problems like alcoholism and eating disorders. I once told my mom out of anger that if she and my dad ever got divorced I would never speak to either one of them again ...

Chapter 9

"My daily routine":

Time use in the New South Africa

Valerie Møller

The letter writing contest was designed to elicit information about the lives and concerns of young South Africans at this pivotal point in the nation's history, and a large percentage of the letters received contain detailed accounts of the daily lives of our young writers. Since the questions which might evoke a description of time use were rather open-ended, the responses vary considerably in format. Some are remarkably structured, giving an hour-by-hour breakdown of the day's activities. Others are far more generalised, describing broad categories of activity. For the most part, the responses create a picture similar to that found in earlier time-use studies, but there are some interesting new developments.

Cues

When trying to assess the degree to which the activity diary was chosen spontaneously as the preferred letter format, it is important to bear in mind the cues supplied to the youth entering the competition. In general, descriptions of time use occurred in

response to the following cues found in the contest form, in the *Sowetan*, and in the other contest descriptions:

- What do you do after school?
- What do you like about your life?
- Tell us about your life/the story of your life.
- Tell us about your everyday life/what do you do in your everyday life

The last cue on “everyday life” appeared to exert the strongest directive to produce time-use information.

The *Sowetan* put eight questions to the contestants; some of the writers faithfully answered all eight questions, while others chose only to answer a select few. In both cases the questions were often used as subheadings in the letters. The *Sowetan* cues referred specifically to schoolgoing youth and had the unfortunate effect of eliciting from out-of-school youth their descriptions of schooldays in the past rather than descriptions of present-day activities.

Time-use formats

The letters featured three distinctive types of time-use formats: activity lists, daily activity routines and diaries. A brief description of the three formats is given below.

Activity lists

Activities are the building-blocks of time-use studies. Some letter writers listed their favourite activities and hobbies interspersed with other information pertaining to themselves and their social environment. Activity lists accounted for the largest number of time-use entries.

A 20-year-old Standard 10 student in Daveyton, who describes herself as an "African woman, dark and lovely", writes:

I like cooking and reading. I'd rather stay at home than roaming the streets. Relaxing at the park or at home with a lovely book are my favourites. Visiting and going to church are also included. Then I finish my day by watching television. (After a description of her school). ... Netball and jogging are included in my daily routine. — Letter 64

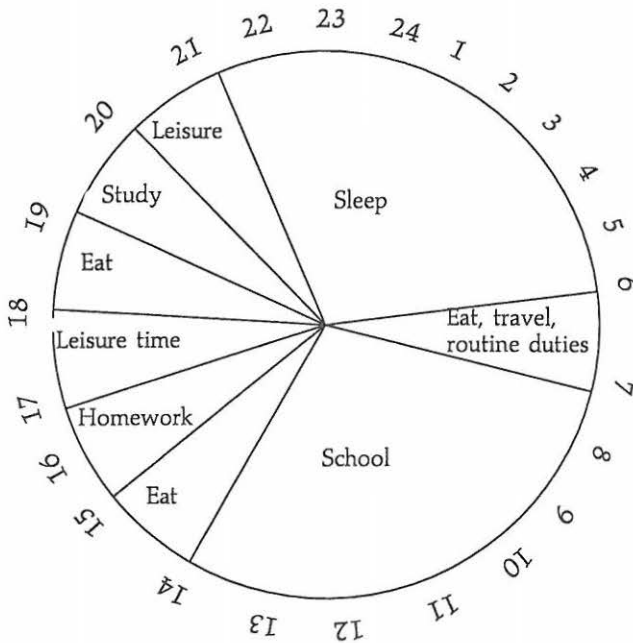
Daily activity routines

A substantial number of writers give a description of typical daily activities or their daily round of activities. Many writers spontaneously make a clear distinction between weekdays and the weekend. This division was introduced artificially in earlier formal studies of time use among township youth and unemployed youth (Møller, 1992;1993).

In my everyday life I am always busy doing many kinds of works (the works are always present so I cannot just relax). On Monday to Thursday, I am doing my school work. And it is only after school time but ... not immediately after school. I do my school work from half past three to 5 o'clock till Thursday. ... On Friday, I clean the yard and on Saturday I go for shopping if possible. But I sometimes visit my friends or relatives. Then on Sunday I go to church and when I come back I just relax. But at night time I sometimes read my school books. — Letter 79 from a schoolgirl writing from Driekop

We received the following clever diagram from the writer of Letter 75, a 15-year-old boy from Kimberley named Neville:

This is a diagram to illustrate my weekly programme, that is from Monday to Friday.



Time-use diaries

A few competitors wrote an account of their daily activities along the lines of a free-flow diary, starting from the time of waking until they went to bed in the evenings:

My life in the new rainbow nation

Mamelodi is a safest place to be compared to other townships. Monday morning, 6am the sun penetrates through the windows of my room which I share with my brother. I bath and prepare myself for the start of the day. I do not have breakfast as we are given it at work — nice thing. Leaving my room at 6.50, walk to Dennebom Station, I board a 7.15 train to Hercules where I walk about seven minutes arriving on time, passing by a caravan where I buy "Isi-special", a quarter bread with polony and artchaar [chutney].

When we start to drive the economy, there's less talking but when tea time comes we discuss the weekend sports. Come lunch time we flock to the caravan where I take on a/c [account] a plate [of food] for R6.50 where when Friday comes one must be cleared [account paid]. 4.45pm I remove my overall and run to catch [the] 5.10 train back to Mams [Mamelodi township]. After alighting I run to the Old Beerhall which has been turned into a gym. My other mates have started. I include myself until 6.30 when we have to vacate the room for the aerobics session. I walk with my mates and detour to my room and try to find Bra Bizza on the confusing changing of stations [presumably reference to a disc jockey on the radio].

My eyes still concentrating on the story, I make supper and dig into it. Wash can be washable and get water from the outside pump, heat it and bath in my room which measures approx 4m² which acts as a bedroom, bathroom, lounge, classroom and my private room. After this I take my diary and write what I have done for the whole day in the New South Africa. I watch the TV until maybe after 11 pm, switch off, turn on the radio and play local cassette that puts me in a dream world until the next day. — Letter 178 from a 19-year-old male writing of a Pretoria postal address. Mamelodi is a township near Pretoria.

More common were "after-school" diaries written mainly in response to the Sowetan cues to describe after-school activities.

What I like most after school is to listen to music but due to extraordinary work I do not have time. My after-school starts at 14h30, then at 15h00 I assist the elderly people who are illiterate and [I'm] teaching from Grade One until Standard Two. I use most of my time teaching them but we drop at 16h30. Then at 17h30 I write my school work then I go to the bathroom, then after washing myself I go for supper. At about 18h00 I watch television for an hour, then I go

to sleep. — Letter 244 from a male matric student of Mpumalanga

New West Secondary School letters

The letters submitted through institutions were less varied in style and content than those entered individually. In the case of entries from a group of high school students at a Durban school, the letters afford insights into the life of students who are enrolled in one of the racially integrated schools created by the new educational dispensation. The letters sent in by pupils of all ages from New West Secondary School in the greater Durban metropolitan area are formatted in similar manner, featuring both a time-use section and a highly personalised description of the school and residential setting. The writers come from different residential areas which are still racially segregated.

Nicholas lives in Lindelani, a shack area. Despite the difference in his background, he seems to have adjusted well to his new school. Like many of the black writers, he describes his home in terms of the relative level of violence in his area:

I am a student of Standard Nine at the New West Secondary School... I live in Lindelani Township. In Lindelani there is no violence, it is a nice area. There is a night club that could enjoy your weekend. Some of the people in Lindelani like to play soccer. There is a lot of transport but we do not have houses. ... New West Secondary is a beautiful building. The pupils of that school are respectful. The trees are there to sit [under] if get the sun and rest in the shade. At school I like to play soccer... After school I like to do work of art and other time I like to play soccer. At home I work about two hours and after I finish, I go to play. At the weekend I go to the Kingspark Stadium to watch the NLS teams and I sell the beers to get money. — Letter 508

Jane-Rose also lives in an informal settlement, though the home life she describes seems to differ little from that of her more affluent schoolmates:

I live in Richmond Farm. In Richmond Farm I feel excitement because it is very nice to be there. Because there is no violence in our place. We live with peace and together. ... The name of my school which I attend is New West Secondary School. I like my school very much. I like my teachers and my classmates. In my school there is no apartheid that [is] why I like my school. The teacher[s] are teaching us very well and I like my school because we have sport ... At home I like playing with my friends but [only] if I finish all my work. During the weekend I wake up early and I do all my work and I keep my house clean and after I finish, I like to cook breakfast for my parents. That is why my parents love me because during the weekend I clean the house. If I have money to go to town or if my mother gives, I have a right to see the movie with my friends. — Letter 496

Marion lives in a formal township, and her daily life gives refreshingly few clues about her ethnicity:

I am living at Ntuzuma F section. In Ntuzuma live the blacks only. I like to stay in Ntuzuma because it is a quiet place. Most people [who] stay [in] Ntuzuma are educated, that's why there is not too much crime in Ntuzuma ... The name of my school is New West Secondary School at Newlands West ... In New West we have a good relationship and communication. Teachers respect the children and the children respect the teachers. There are many children, maybe 1265 and we have fifty teachers ... From Monday to Friday I am going to school. After school I go to practise music, drama and visit my friends. After that I do my study, I am watching TV programmes. I like to cook food maybe two times a week or three times a week. On Saturdays I visit town to watching the films, specially music films or Kung Fu films ... Two times a week I like to help my father when he

*is doing something like painting the house or service his car —
Letter 507*

Sanjala is an Indian pupil, and describes Newlands West in terms of its proximity to conveniences, rather than its level of violence.

I am a student at the Newland West Secondary School. My everyday life is spent by going to school for five days in the week. When I arrive home I attend to my homework and watch certain programmes on television ... I like doing fun things during the weekends like going out with my family. I also indulge myself by watching television for a few hours but I have time set aside for being up to date with my homework. My mother also expects me to have a little bit of time to help her out with the household chores. ... The area I live in is Newlands West. It is a big area intersected by many roads. My road is Grosdale Close. The shopping centres are not very close. The area is quiet and most people are independent therefore it is a lovely area to live in ... — Letter 500

Dhanum's daily life sounds idyllic!

I am currently in Standard Nine. I am a member of the Indian community. My day begins every morning at approximately six o'clock. I am ready for school at half past seven. I look forward to taking the long walk to school and I welcome the sun and the cool wintry breeze that wheezes away quietly sending shivers down my spine. School begins at eight o'clock and throughout the day we go through numerous lessons aiming to make us better people. My school day ends at ten past two and then I go home to a waiting mother. From three o'clock to half past four is my study time and at twenty to four I watch my favourite soapie "Days of our Lives." At half past four I light our lamp and by this time my father is usually at home. At half past seven we have supper. I watch TV and then I go to sleep ... I live in the friendly suburb of Newlands West which is situated in Durban. My suburb is a lively one, with the population

growing more and more every day. Newlands is a vast area with a large amount of Indians... Newlands is a neat, beautiful place... There is a lot of development taking place at the moment and I hope that when it is complete it will become a major suburb on our map... I attend a school called New West Secondary which is about fifteen minutes away from my home. I attend a multi-racial school which comprises of mainly Indians and Blacks. There is usually a very friendly atmosphere at our school... — Letter 502

New trends in time use

A number of studies of time use have been conducted among South African youth living in townships (Møller, 1992;1993;1994a;1996a) and peri-urban and shack areas (Richards, 1994). These studies have focused on black youth and on specific themes and contexts such as leisure behaviour, unemployment and educational behaviours in a multi-generational household setting. Some of these studies have used standardised time-use modules, while others have merely included items to elicit daily and weekly behaviour patterns.

Superficially seen, the types of daily activities described by schoolgoing youth in the contest compared closely to those obtained in these earlier time-use studies which took the more standardised approach (Møller, 1991:16-17; Richards, 1994). The higher incidence of the rarer activities, such as cinema and outings, can be attributed to activity listings rather than chronologies of events:

I enjoy the following sporting activities: Soccer, fishing, swimming, dancing and wrestling. I am also fond of going to cinemas, zoos, museums and theatres to see plays performed. I relax by doing crossword puzzles to enrich my vocabulary and playing games of cards with some of my friends. During Sundays I discuss church

matters with my cronies. — Letter 182 from a 29-year-old male teacher of Vuwani in Venda

In the context of a competition where writers wish to find favour, embellishments to routines and more frequent mention of socially desirable helping and learning activities may have been exaggerated to a certain degree:

I pray, read my books because I am presently doing matric. I also play netball, debating, attending seminars and workshops, joining youth clubs concerning child abuse, doing poems, etc. ... I like cleaning my home, doing my school work, watching TV, reading newspapers or discussing with friend. — Letter 166 from a schoolgirl in Duduza township

There are several things I do in my everyday life. First and foremost, I help in performing house chores. And besides this, I am working hand in hand with my two friends to establish a literacy project. — Letter 256 from a 28-year-old Itsoteng youth who cannot continue his education owing to lack of finance

Sports

Generally, the results suggest that daily routines have undergone little change since apartheid days. The large number of sporting activities in the daily after-school routine, especially among girls and young women, might be an exception.

Jennifer is a 17-year-old Standard 10 schoolgirl who speaks Tswana at home and wants to become a medical doctor to “help the people in South Africa who suffer from diseases like Aids”:

Every day after school I use to go to the gym because I don't want to be a stout girl. ... I get only chance for cooking during the weekends but anyway I enjoy it. At about 12 o'clock I go to swim or play tennis with my friends. — Letter 63

There are a number of explanations for the higher incidence of physical exercise and sports activities among the writers. The letter writing competition might have attracted the more affluent youth who engage in a wider variety of after-school sports and recreational activities which cost money. Another possibility is that South Africa's re-entry into national sports as well as increased promotion of township sports have created greater interest and opportunities to engage in physical exercise in the new South Africa.

The opening of former whites-only schools to other race groups might also play a role. It is also possible that the time-use study conducted among township youth in the late 1980s underestimated active leisure because the study did not ask for details of activities which occurred during school time. For this reason respondents may have failed to report extracurricular events such as before- and after-school sporting activities, including gym and road training.

I like to exercise when I wake up in the morning before I go to school. I like soccer and I feel very proud when our national soccer and rugby team manage to win both trophies or manage to be the best in the world. — Letter 168 from a male high school student of Giyani who hates school but feels very strongly about soccer

My life in the New South Africa ... I am a soccer player. I wake up at 4h30 daily doing road running for 10 kilos [kilometres]. When I come back I bath and have breakfast, then off to school which is about one and a half kilos ...

After school I go back home and have a rest for thirty minutes. As a first child at home I help my parents by cleaning the house and doing the garden.

At 16h30 I go to the soccer field where I am going to do light training. Thereafter we get to the field and make ball practice [until] 6

o'clock. — Letter 221 from a 20-year-old youth in matric writing from a township in Mpumalanga province

Housework

It was observed that young male contestants included housework in their daily routines:

After school hours from 14:15-16:00 I stay at school to study. Usually after school I go to Room 13 to study some different subject. When I am through I go to my room to clean, cook, wash dishes and play for some few hours. After playing I revise the work that I have done at school. — Letter 38 from 16-year-old Cornelius

I attend our school for a one kilometres... When I am back from school, I like helping my sister to clean and washing dishes. Thereafter I will take a thirty minutes break, therefore go to study. — Letter 225 from 16-year-old Terrence

Earlier studies similarly showed that both young women and men engaged in housework (Møller, 1991, 1992). However, there was an apparent gender division of labour which assigned indoor chores to women and outdoor chores to men. Earlier studies showed that on average young women spent significantly more time on housework than young men. Gender equality is written into the new South African constitution. It is possible that the division of labour in the home is becoming more relaxed among the younger generations of new South Africans. Although housework (cooking, washing up and laundry) was an unusual activity for a young man in earlier studies, it was observed that unemployed youth might do housework to indicate goodwill, and in return for bus fare to look for work (Møller, 1993). Systematic time-use research is required to explore changes in male and female behaviour patterns.

Employment

Earlier research found that the daily activity schedules varied among the different categories of youth. This study showed similar results. As the sample was a self-selected one, it did not yield information on the distribution of youth over occupational categories. School-going youth were in the majority among the writers and were more likely than others to provide time-use information in their letters. Being in school or in a job is a desirable state: noteworthy is that out-of-school youth expected the election promises of free education and more jobs to apply to them and were disappointed that educational reform and economic growth had not been realised by 1996:

Like most other post-matriculants who are unable to attend tertiary education, I spend most of my everyday life searching for employment. I also spend my time thinking about what the future holds for me ... — Letter 91 from a 22-year-old unemployed youth of Katlehong, Gauteng province

Lucky is a 23-year-old matriculant who wishes to study nursing. Her father died in an accident at work, and she has no money to continue her education. Because she earned too little (R600 per month) in her first job in an office, she decided to become self-employed:

My name is Lucky. My surname is Mohlala. I am 23 years old. I passed my matric in 1994 ... I started a small business. I have to buy some fruit and sweets from the cheaper market and sell it at the nearest school. In midday I was spending my time at school and selling that fruits. Afternoon if fruits have left, I go house to house to finish it. Evening after I finished seeing TV, I started reading different magazines so that I must not forget about books. — Letter 174

Contextual data

The value of the accounts of time use supplied in the letters is that they contain far more detail than the standardised time budgets. The letters are rich in detail and thus give deep insights into daily life in the new South Africa. Standardised time budgets usually capture social settings (Harvey, 1993) but seldom cover the motivational aspects of daily activities (cf. Glorieux, 1993; Shaw, 1985; Møller, 1996a). The letter writers in this study not only describe social settings in which activities occur from a youth perspective, but they also provide insights into the motivations underlying daily activity schedules. The meaning of activities is given in asides. For example, the young people comment in passing whether they like engaging in a particular activity and how the activity promotes their ambitions in life. In some instances motivational information is contained in other parts of the letter.

Nokuthula is a 17-year-old young woman of KwaMashu (near Durban) who lives with her father, whom she describes as a drunkard:

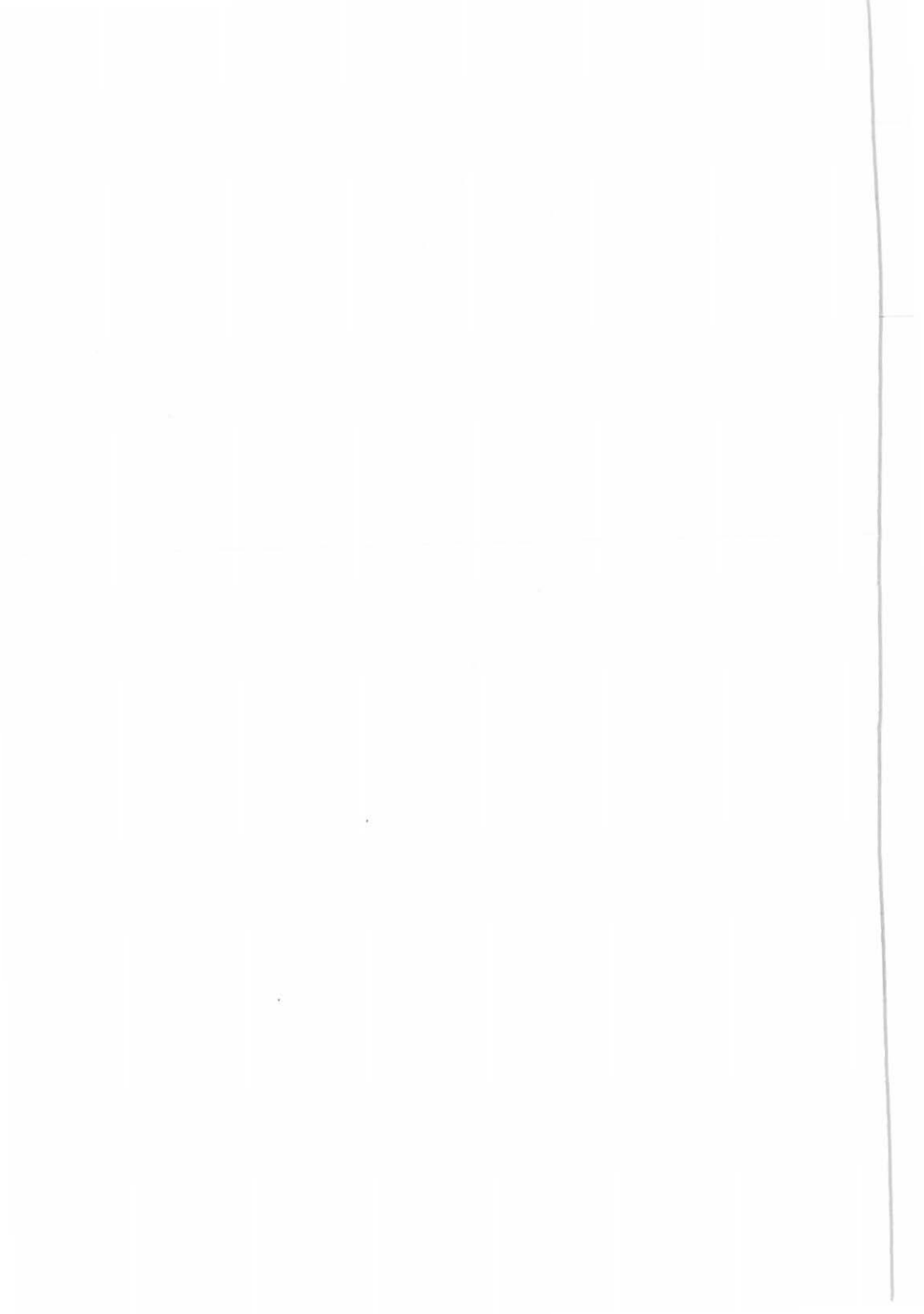
I live a bad life because I live same as a housewife. I wake up early in the morning cleaning a six room house, making a washing, cook for school children and for the supper. I do not get time of playing or visiting my friends, because grandmother always shout at me, tell me to do this and that. — Letter 129

Without this contextual information, her time-use data would reflect a lifestyle similar to many housewives, and would misrepresent the core issues in her life.

Comparison

South Africa has yet to conduct a nationwide time-use survey. Earlier studies of time use among youth have been highly

specialised and have focused mainly on black youth. In all these studies of time use the format of reporting was prescribed. The 1996 competition reported here produced a serendipity finding which suggests that time budgeting may "come naturally" to South African youth. Letter writers who participated in the study itemised daily events along the lines of the free-flow time-use diary. The youthful letter writers spontaneously used the time-use method to "open a window" on their daily lives (Moss & Lawton, 1982). Time budgets were the preferred method of reporting daily life among a cross-section of South African youth in the non-formal research situation of this competition. The experts have always maintained that the time-use diary is an excellent tool to gain insight into daily life (Altergott, 1988; Moss & Lawton, 1982). The popular application of time budgets in the letter writing contest bodes well for future time-use studies to capture the lifestyles of the rainbow nation.



Chapter 10

"It's a fact that we as the youth ... are in a hurry":

Youth, sex and sexuality in the New South Africa

Colin A.J. van Rooyen

Sex, to state the obvious, is "a perfectly normal human function, but the part that it plays in our lives is often the subject of fierce debate" (Saunders, 1987: 4). Some of these debates are raised in the letters of the young South Africans who shared their opinions on issues related to sex, sexuality, pregnancy, abortion, HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). This chapter will explore some responses of the youth to these issues.

The context: Youth and sexual activity

In a recent survey conducted among high school students in the Grahamstown area, findings suggested that almost 49% of the participants reported that they had engaged in some form of sexual activity. The study coordinators have suggested that this was a somewhat conservative figure given that the data were collected

through self-reports in the school environment. Consequently it may be suggested that the actual level of sexual activity among the study participants was indeed much higher (Coughlan, Coughlan & Jameson, 1996).

Regardless of actual statistics, however, it is a fact that young people are becoming sexually active relatively early in their lives. Evidence of this phenomenon has emerged clearly from HIV prevalence statistics. The age group in which HIV is most prevalent is the 15 to 35 year age range (Van Rooyen & Engelbrecht, 1995). Given that most young people may undergo HIV testing only in the early symptomatic stages or when they suspect that they may be pregnant and make contact with a clinic or hospital, one may suggest that sexual activity begins even prior to the 15 year age category, as symptoms may not become evident for some time after infection, and pregnancy may not result from the first sexual encounter.

Preston-Whyte and Zondi (1992: 228) have provided further evidence of very youthful sexual activity, which suggests that young African females "are often sexually active by the time they are twelve years old".

Interestingly, few of the young people who addressed the issue of youth sexuality in their letters made direct comments related to their own sexual behaviour. They chose, rather, to reflect on the sexual behaviour of their peers and communities, and to comment on broader issues related to sex and contemporary South African life. Understandably this may be due to the nature of the exercise. Names, addresses and other personal details had to be made available if they were to stand a chance of winning a prize in the competition. Self-reporting, too, has its own obvious methodological limitations.

This chapter will review the debates that South African youth are engaged in that relate to sex, sexuality and associated issues that emerged from the letters. The chapter will be structured according to the most common themes that emerged from a group of 50 letters that dealt with sexuality in some depth. These include sexual activity, pregnancy, abortion and HIV/AIDS.

Sex before marriage - it "can destroy your life ..."

Despite a considerable volume of very reliable evidence that young people do engage in sexual activity before marriage (Coughlan, Coughlan & Jameson, 1996; Preston-Whyte & Allen, 1992; Preston-Whyte & Zondi, 1992), many letter writers have strong negative feelings about sexual activity among their peers. Indeed, none overtly condones sexual activity among youth who are not married.

Ithumelang (19 years, female) for example, appeals to her peers not to engage in sexual activity until they are married:

As a teenager I would like to ask others who are in the same age as myself to take control of their own lives, because life is what you make of it. The sooner we can all practice this SOON!! No sex before marriage the better things will be. — Letter 596

As with Ithumelang, Catherine, a teenager who does not provide her exact age, has strong beliefs about premarital sex and takes it upon herself to tell her friends not to engage in sexual activity while still young. Her success, though, by her own admission, has been limited. She writes:

I tried to tell my friend about it, going out with big boys sleeping with them, and I tried to advise her, she didn't want to listen now she's pregnant which is wrong. — Letter 102

Lebo, a female in her final year at high school (no age provided), takes an even stronger stance. She warns that premarital sex could

lead to a host of complications, including the fact that young men (whom she sees as responsible for forcing young women into sexual interaction) "can destroy your life" as a result of the sexual interaction.

These opinions reflect the general stance of the letter writers with regard to engaging in sexual interaction while still young. The letters were interesting in that they tended to be contrary to earlier findings by Preston-Whyte and Zondi (1992: 235-236). They found that peers often encouraged sexual interaction between unmarried youth, and at times sexual activity (with particular reference to the possibility of a resultant pregnancy) was "secretly (and even overtly)" seen by a parent as something pleasing. Preston-Whyte and Zondi write that the "pressure is therefore towards, rather than away from, teenage sexual involvement before marriage".

Perhaps, as suggested previously, the very nature of the data collection process in this instance militated against self-disclosure at a level this intimate and personal.

Sex education — "please talk to your children..."

A few of the young letter writers alluded to issues related to education about sex. Ntombenhle (19, female) makes a plea for mothers in particular to talk to their children about sex:

*Mothers of South Africa black or white please talk to your children.
Tell them all truth about what is life.* — Letter 780

Ntombenhle warns that failure to do so could result in what she sees as tragic consequences, including abortion.

Ntombenhle's plea takes place in a context where, generally, it would appear that in particular South African communities sex and sex education are taboo issues which are often closely linked to culture (Bernstein & Van Rooyen, 1994). Preston-Whyte and Zondi

(1992) have also suggested that parents were not the first choice of young people when it came to obtaining information about sex. In this context, then, Ntombenhle's lone plea is a powerful request to parents to examine their feelings and attitudes about discussing with their children issues related to sex and perhaps to explore avenues to deal with possible cultural constraints which may prevent the free exchange of information about sex between children and parents.

Lebo (female, final year of high school), in contrast to Ntombenhle, found herself in a situation where she could spend some of her free time in constructive discussion with her mother. In response to the question "what do you do in your everyday life?", Lebo places discussion of sexuality among her other daily activities:

I read my books and do my homework and clean the house and I spend times with my mother [to] ask her about the secrets of girls and ask her about [how] to become the woman. — Letter 243

Perhaps Lebo's situation is ideal. The ideal, however, can also serve as a pointer. It points out the direction in which parents and children should be moving — towards a state where sexuality as an issue is "perfectly normal" (Saunders, 1987:4) and is treated in such a way that its normality relates to more than just sexual intercourse, and where there is open communication on the subject across generations, to the ultimate benefit of all involved.

Our young letter writers have suggested that the alternatives (a number of which they have identified in the letters) constitute crises in the lives of many people. Some situations that arise as a result of sex, most of which the letter writers represented in a negative light, will be discussed in the sections which follow.

Pregnancy - "the worst thing that happened to me ...

The issue of pregnancy raised some strong feelings. Ithumelang (female, 19) suggests that teen pregnancy is commonplace in her community:

I feel strongly about the high rate of pregnancy amongst teenagers these days. It is no longer surprising to see a 13 year old girl pregnant. — Letter 596

Malusi (male, 18) expresses obvious disappointment and concern over teen pregnancy and views the problems of teenage pregnancy in terms of its future impact on South Africa:

Another issue that disappoint me is the issue of teenage pregnancy. The rate is growing each and every year. If you can imagine 10 years to come South Africa will be over populated country. — Letter 756

Malusi's suggested solution to what he sees as a worrisome situation relates to the earlier discussion about sex education and the impact of this education:

I suggest that young people should be educated about sex and the way they should live. — Letter 756

His suggestion seems tentatively to imply that sex education, if it is to have any impact, should move away from just talking about sex to include broader issues so that it becomes, essentially, education about life. This idea is not new and has been, in some contexts, a growing trend (Saunders, 1987).

Petros (male, 22) sees teenage pregnancy as an issue that has widespread and direct implications for the pregnant teenager, her future relationships, the broader community and the current government. As with Malusi (above), Petros sees the issue as one

of national significance — something that would impact not just on the “new South Africa” but also on the future South Africa.

For Petros teen pregnancy is ...

... one of the problems faced by our government. I wonder what the youth of today hope to achieve by having babies and dropping out of school. Who do they think would marry them, because their boyfriends dump them immediately when they hear that they are pregnant. The issue of teenage pregnancy leads to a number of young girls dropping out of school, and going to live with their boyfriends in the squatter camps. This leads to an increase in a number of squatter camps, which leads to land invasion. This leads to the government being accused of failing to build houses. — Letter 91

Petros’s concerns in relation to teen pregnancy are interesting and suggest some depth of thought, even if possibly beyond the boundaries of what most people may see as the obvious implications of teen pregnancy. One wonders if teen pregnancy perhaps just a social scapegoat here.

Gugulethu (18, female) presents her version of a solution of sorts to teen pregnancy. Again, like a few of the writers already quoted above, she calls for somewhat harsh government intervention:

If you are a scholar, you leave schools because you are pregnant the government [should] keep the rule says no return in school when you have a child because many of scholars gets the 2 or four children, and back to school they never mind if they complete, at school with their first borns. — Letter 813

Gugulethu’s comments are interesting when read in relation to the comments of Zandile below. Young women who have actually been in the situation where they have had to disrupt their education because of a pregnancy obviously feel quite different to Gugulethu

on the issue. In their letters they reflect a great deal of optimism and determination despite obvious difficulties.

A few of the letter writers explored the impact of teen pregnancy on their daily lives. Zandile, a 21-year-old female, explains:

The worst thing that happened to me as a stepchild was when I fell pregnant at the tender age of 17 and the guy who made me pregnant did not want to accept that he made me pregnant. My family was unsupportive especially my stepfather who even decided that I should be chased away from home. And it did happen, I was chased away by my stepfather. Imagine the trauma I faced at just 17 years old. — Letter 55

Her story ended positively, though, and she gave birth to a daughter and subsequently returned to school. Her motivation she explains thus:

I knew that the only way I could achieve my dream is by getting education because [it] made [me] tough, independent, to fight [to] the bitter end and remove undue obstacles. — Letter 55

Tshepo (20, female) was in her final year of high school when she wrote her letter. She had a young child and found that having a child while still young and at school had a major impact on her life:

In my everyday life I have to wake up wash my baby and do my homework. After that I have to wash nappies and I also have to feed my baby girl. Doing this work every day disturbed my studies. — Letter 242

For Tshepo, the impact was not just on her daily activities but also on her plans:

Before I got pregnant I thought of completing my matric first and then proceeding to university or college ... Being pregnant and still a

teenager means you have to accept it and live with it because life cannot be irreversible. — Letter 242

Patricia (23, female) was another single parent who shared images of her daily life with a young child. Patricia had a male child when she was 20 years old. Patricia, like Zandile (above), survived her pregnancy and the experiences of early parenthood through a strong sense of determination — a feeling of strong optimism, despite some obvious obstacles:

I am a single parent of a 3 year old boy. I had to think of him and forget about his father because he wants to rule my life. I am still young with lots of dreams and I don't need someone with no future to rule my life. When I am finished this course I will look for a post then work and I will be happy if I can get work around Pretoria because I want to be near my baby. I wish my dreams can come true and I know I will do it. I need my own house where I can live with my baby, and my own car. In that way I know I will be happy in this new South Africa. God will be my light on all the way I go, and he will help me. — Letter 576

Abortion — "Mr Mandela was supposed to make a tablet for abortion..."

Abortion is always a controversial issue, and even more so at the time that the letters were written. Abortion is perhaps one of the areas of most contentious social debate at the time of writing this chapter. Regular demonstrations are being held nationwide by both pro-life and pro-choice movements. The Termination of Pregnancy Bill is being debated at parliamentary level as this chapter is being written. (*Editor's Note: The 'Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Law' took effect in February 1997.*) The issue is evoking strong emotional responses across the country as South Africa awaits the decision of its law-making body on this social and highly controversial issue.

Not surprisingly, then, some letter writers found themselves responding to the current debate around abortion. A number of young writers raised the issue of abortion. Their responses were varied and ranged from praise for moves to legalise termination of pregnancy to absolute rejection of the notion. It is important to point out that the author of this chapter has intentionally attempted to avoid more politically correct "pro-life/pro-choice" terminology here as it is not always clear whether the young writers have thought of the issue on that level.

A male perspective

It was interesting to note that a number of males raised the issue of abortion in their letters when they had little to say about youth pregnancy in general. Interestingly, and perhaps for some not surprisingly, most of the male writers who commented on abortion tended to take an anti-abortion stance.

One of the male letter writers was Marks, a final-year high school pupil who did not provide his age. Marks is opposed to abortion, and sees it as a problem and process that has implications for South Africa's future. The concern over the future impact of current sexually-related activities is something that occurred occasionally in the letters. Marks makes his point:

I dislike the problem that is really happening, Abortion. I wonder why this girls and sisters are killing the leaders of tomorrow's generation. — Letter 15

Mduduzi (18, male) feels that if abortion were to become legal it would have broad implications for South Africa's future and what he terms the "nationality of our people".

Givenson (19, male), whose letter suggests somewhat sexist motives, is also concerned about abortion and lays blame on the government:

In abortion I criticize the government to make abortion be permanent. I think they doing a big mistake of doing that, because the girl at high school are doing anything because their hopes is abortion. — Letter 815

Morgan (21, male) feels that women could resolve what he sees as a problem. It appears that in terms of his understanding, the primary reason for abortion is the mother's perceived inability to feed the child:

I am pleading with girls who become pregnant unprepared because they cannot face the trauma of feeding a baby and then end up bleeding to death after they try to abort. — Letter 29

Ronnie (27, male) seems to suggest that he speaks for a number of people (whom he does not identify) when he raises the issue of abortion. Again, the government is implicated:

There is one thing when I think the government made [a] mistake is to allow abortion to any female who don't wish to have a child. This made things to be more easier to those ladies who seems to be not care about life of kids. Well some welcome this law [-] as you know we don't think in the same manner. — Letter 814

The women's point of view

Having thus noted a strong resistance to abortion from among male letter writers, some evidence of similar feelings came from female writers. The theme of punishment for abortion becomes quite clear in the examples of letters below.

Princess (19, female), for example, favours free access to clinics and free medical care, but rejects abortion and takes a punitive stance to those who might see abortion as an option:

What I like is that when a woman who is pregnant must go to clinic or to the hospital must go free of charges, secondly I like that when women who want abortion must be punished. — Letter 649

Sindisiwe (17, female) also suggests punishment for those involved in abortion:

... people doing abortion they want to be punished about that bad thing that she doing about her life and her children that why I m saying that is a bad thing that people will be doing. — Letter 677

Gugulethu (18, female) places the responsibility to deal with the punishment of people involved in abortion with the government:

I would suggest that the government must be strict in the law, like abortion. I don't like [to live] in the country where [people are] permitted by the law to abortion. — Letter 813

Nombeko (17, female) places direct blame for abortion on the State President. Taking a somewhat simplistic view on why people find themselves in need of an abortion Nombeko said:

What is bad is that our president said all under 14 pregnant girls can go to their next clinics and asked for abortion. This day even 10 year old girl is becoming pregnant because she knows that she will go to a clinic and abort. — Letter 778

Having heard from people who were opposed to abortion, exploring the opinions of those who supported abortion is interesting. These were, however, in the minority with only two letters indicating obvious support for abortion.

Hlengiwe (18, female) places the responsibility for abortion on the State President. This was not the first time that this had occurred in

the letters. However, Hlengiwe supports what she sees as the State President's ability to respond to abortion:

Mr Mandela was suppose to make [a] tablet for abortion because the children they don't know how to have a sex, that why Mr Mandela was suppose to do this. As far as I'm understanding is concern everything is right. — Letter 793

Thesepe (20, female), who had a child as a teenager, also expresses her support for the legalisation of abortion. She sees it as something of a solution to the problems of teenage pregnancy and to the economic problems faced by South Africa:

... my suggestion on teenage pregnancy is to make abortion legal to the new SA as one of women rights. This sure will stop population but not only will it do this but will also increase the economy of SA. — Letter 242

The abortion debate will no doubt continue. It will continue beyond the letters of these young people, and beyond whatever decision parliament decides to take on the issue. It is encouraging to note that the debate on abortion does exist among the youth of South Africa, who feel the need to express their opinions despite what may be at times somewhat limited understanding of the issues. Nevertheless, these letters can serve as pointers for both pro-life and pro-choice lobbyists and for those engaged in sex and life-skills education targeted at youth.

AIDS and HIV - "I want to conquer the beast ..."

As has already been noted in the introduction to this chapter, AIDS has had, and continues to have, a major impact on the young people of South Africa. HIV prevalence statistics have for a number of years shown that the age groups most vulnerable to HIV and

therefore AIDS in South Africa include the broad category often referred to as "youth" (Van Rooyen & Engelbrecht, 1995).

It is thus interesting that only a small minority of the young letter writers address issues related to HIV and AIDS. Most of these are male, with only one female writer directly referring to HIV/AIDS in her letter.

Naturally, some speculation as to the origins of HIV/AIDS was expected to arise. This is often the case in discussion about HIV and AIDS. Gilbert (22, male) launches into this debate and believes that the disease has direct racial and political links and implications. This too is not unusual given South Africa's history of state-manipulated racial tension and blame. Gilbert makes an unusual case for the continued existence of apartheid in his comments:

I can think that if we were under National Party's apartheid rule it would be better. Nowadays there are many diseases which kill people for example Aids ... We get these because apartheid is not there during the time of apartheid blacks were unable to marry white people. These diseases came in our country with the whites. These whites are the people who used to go overseas mostly. Aids... came from overseas. — Letter 220

Moving away from origins and causes, the other letter writers tend to focus on responses to the challenge.

Anele (23, male) lists AIDS as one of the three most important "challenges" for himself and the new South Africa. He also has ideas about how to prevent the further spread of the disease:

The most killing and serious problems that seems to grow day by day are the problems of drugs and Aids. Drugs are not things to play with, stay away from drugs for you to stay alive young fellows. I cannot run away to the point that I and other young people, we engage ourselves to unplanned and unprotected sex lives, so I would

like to see us protecting ourselves by not having sex at all or use condoms. I am not promoting sex by saying we must use condoms but it's a fact that we as the youth we are in a hurry so it's easier to protect than to cure. — Letter 224

Johannes (male in final year at high school) has planned his entire future in response to the challenge presented by HIV/AIDS. In a firm statement of commitment Johannes says:

About my future, I would like to be a Doctor, I want to conquer the beast that has finish off the lord's nation, which is the virus named AIDS. — Letter 633

Agnes (15, female) and Sydney (20, male) both see youth clubs as part of the solution to HIV/AIDS. For Agnes the solution includes advice to young people:

they must go to the youth clubs, or library where they can get help and keep themselves safe from all the sickness which is all over our country. I mean AIDS, so some understand and they have gain something that day. — Letter 572

Sydney, a founding member of a youth club, reflects on how the youth club responded to HIV/AIDS and the value of this process to young people and to himself:

I and our executive we used to teach young people about AIDS. There are many young people who don't know what is AIDS and how can a person be affected by AIDS. We also ask doctors to come and give lessons about AIDS etc. We called them in [on] a special day, for instance, youth day. We also tell young people that if one of their colleague has AIDS, let them forsake him not, because he/she needs their help. I contribute very much and also I learn and gain a lot. — Letter 571

Philip (18, male) suggests that abstinence from sex is possibly the best response to AIDS. He is, however, not averse to safer sex:

And to those who believe in sex, let's please practice safe sex to keep New South Africa clean without those AIDS and HIV. I wish we were having more virgins around South Africa like me. I don't care what people may say about me, been shy or fool it doesn't matter to me, as well as I know that I am not what they call me ... — Letter 110

It is of some concern that so few letter writers mentioned HIV/AIDS. While this might suggest some level of indifference to the situation, it may also reflect a possible lack of exposure to effective HIV/AIDS education. This is certainly an area that requires much more attention by those delivering services to young people, given current HIV/AIDS statistics in South Africa.

Teen prostitution and sexual abuse — "girls of our ages taking our fathers as their lovers ..."

Some young letter writers raised concern regarding what they saw as an increasing industry related to the sale of sex.

An unnamed 16-year-old male notes:

Women have already opened such some business by selling their body ... advertising the place where you can get them. — Letter 309

He suggests that this would be of concern to Mr Mandela, the State President, who didn't want "rubbish" of this sort in South Africa.

Particular concern was noted with regard to youth being involved in the sale of sex. Two of the letter writers commented on this and registered their concerns.

Agnes (15, female) notes concern about

... teenagers who are at the streets busy selling their bodies to big guys and get some money, it is one of the serious problem in our country that we must face. — Letter 572

Agnes calls for a national response against this situation.

Madlanele (no age or gender provided) expresses concern that this form of sexual activity is too demanding and complex for young people:

Relationship is demanding, girls of our age taking our fathers as their lovers because are working, making relation worth money more than anything else is what I hate the most. — Letter 190

Moving on from prostitution, a few of the letter writers addressed issues related to rape, child abuse and harassment. However, comments on these issues did not occur regularly.

Thokozani (16, female), feels that there has been an increase in the incidence of rape and child abuse in the new South Africa and is concerned about what she believes to be the implications of this:

What I hate in this New South Africa is the increase of the rapist I hate the rapist because sometimes when he has rape a girl she can get pregnant and then who will be the father of that child? Nobody that is what increase the street children and when you have rape a boy that boy will lose his mind and he wont know whether his a boy or a girl and it will be difficult to him to have a wife. He can grow being a stupid boy. I hate that. The child abuse is the most what I hate, it increases the street children. — Letter 734

Adelaide (16, female) also expresses strong feelings and calls on the government to take rather extreme action:

What I really feel strongly about is sexual abuse and harassment of youngsters and women. I really think that the Government should take this into consideration. I feel that people who are abusing others should be strictly punished by the law rather than be given bail. I feel and think that if these people could be punished by the death penalty, either one of them would repeat the same crime. — Letter 261

Bethwell, a final-year high school pupil, also calls for forceful punishment and suggests that rape and abuse have national implications:

I hate the growing power of people who rape young teenagers. So such people must badly punished, because they are not more building the nation but destroying it. — Letter 261

A woman's role in the New South Africa — "I have a right ..."

Several letter writers made brief but powerful comments about the role of women in the new South Africa and the relationship between women and men.

Mary, who comes from the small village of Vuwani, has embraced the new rights of women while still clinging to her idea of the feminine as essentially maternal:

I am staying in a rural area, where our senior citizens and some stoics do not accept that a women can be a leader, for her is to fetch water, cook and look after the children.

I spend most of my time organising other young women of my age, trying to show the fortunes that are ahead them. I try to show them that all genders are equal before the eyes of law, I want them to be productive mothers. — Letter 299

Hellen from Driekop has an extended view of apartheid, and looks to feminine solidarity for solace:

In the future I like to be a social worker. I want to solve the problems of different people. For example, the most men still have apartheid against their wives. I want to guide women how or what they must do so that their husbands will not have power to oppress them. In my life I just wants to be educated, because education is the key of success and again I want to see myself driving a motor car. I dislike people

who did not want to see the gates of the school. Such people confuse me. In fact I hate to be in the noisy place.

Yes, strongly I feel to be near the person whom I really love especially a lady. Someone who can guide me when I have the problems. A friend whom we will share ideas. — Letter 300

Wendy from Chesterville also has a clear vision of her rights under the new dispensation:

I am a female but in the olden days females were not allowed to pose their feelings or their thoughts but now life in South Africa is really improving because of only one man although I'm not a real politician or elite female but I understand what a meaning of life in the New South Africa means. — Letter 881

Nineteen-year-old Patricia feels that men have no place in her life or in the life of any young female for that matter. Her strong statement is:

I have nothing to do with men, I regard them as obstacles to liberation. I also advise you to stay away from them. — Letter 251

Tinstsewalo from Giyani delivers a similar piece of advice in her native Shangaan:

And to all sisters out there don't be fooled by boys. — Letter 632

Patricia (23) reflects more on her rights as a woman:

As a woman I have a right like a man. I can do whatever I want at any time I want. I don't need anybody to rule my life. Old days are over, now is the time to rule ourselves ... This old slogan [that] says the woman's place is in the kitchen is over. Time to show our true colours has begin. Old days are over and I will wake up and make it happen for myself. — Letter 576

Looking at the bigger picture

It is encouraging to see that the youth do think, debate and argue about issues related to sex. Teenage sexuality and teen pregnancy is obviously an issue that is of very real concern to the young people who sent letters. It is of some concern that HIV/AIDS were not seen as a major issue by most of the writers. At the same time it is encouraging to see that those who did raise HIV/AIDS as an issue had already begun to work on finding responses to the challenge among themselves.

Sexism raised its head both overtly and covertly on many occasions. Young men made some harsh decisions about and judgements of young women. However, this issue was not left without a response. It is encouraging to see the emergence, even if raised by only a few of the writers, of some feminist sentiment — the realisation that women have rights in their own “right”, and that they do not see obstacles (which may be men generically or of another form) as absolute or insurmountable.

The letter writers often alluded to the role of the state (and at times the State President himself). The youth are making strong demands on the government. They are asking the government to listen to them. Government must attempt to listen and to respond.

It is perhaps the strong message of hope, of perseverance despite difficult conditions and often marginalised and traumatised pasts that comes through strongest in these letters. Often the messages of hope were not directly related to sex and sexuality, so were not necessarily reflected in the excerpts of letters presented in the chapter, but nevertheless these messages were there and were strong. A young generation with hope can only mean well for South Africa. A generation who are willing to discuss sex and sexuality openly, often despite strong socio-cultural taboos, are a

generation able and willing to discuss other issues openly. To enter into debate. To begin to feel free to talk about things that are important and close to them. This is hope in its most exciting form, typified by Zandile, a 21-year-old young woman:

I have a positive vision about life and am optimistic because after all the things I went through I didn't look back or loose hope. — Letter

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Chapter 11

Looking at the new democracy: Perceptions of politics

Robin Richards

This chapter explores the way young South Africans feel about the politics of the new South Africa some one-and-a-half years into the country's first democratically elected government. Entrants to the letter writing competition were asked to write a letter on the subject of "My life in the New South Africa", and some took this to be an opening for them to write about the wider socio-political context of their lives. In all, 137 letters which discussed politics were selected for discussion in this chapter. The majority of letters (some 90%) from which these findings are drawn were written by young black South Africans.

The young people's views on the following themes are explored:

- the Bill of Rights in the new Constitution;
- the new democratic order in South Africa;
- the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP);
- the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC);

- Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first black president.

Evident in young people's letters was a strong undercurrent of optimism about the new opportunities which South Africa's first democratic government had brought. The letter writers who participated in the study showed remarkable understanding of and insight into the immense challenges which South Africans face if democracy is to be strengthened and economic development sustained.

Admiration for South Africa's first black president was overwhelming. Mandela was perceived to be an important role model for the younger generation and many writers felt that with Mandela at the helm their lives would improve materially.

The writers also expressed concern over several aspects of their political lives. Some were worried that the Constitution would never be finalised and that South Africans were not respecting and protecting their new democracy. There were fears about what would happen in South Africa when Mandela retired from formal politics. Racism remains a concern for the young people, as they come to realise that apartheid will take at least a generation to disappear. A number of writers also expressed their unhappiness with the slow progress of the RDP.

The letters in this chapter reflect a snapshot of the political times in South Africa's new democratic order and highlight the political issues of the day, brought about by the radical socio-political change in the 1990s. Owing to the timing of the contest, the writers frequently expressed their views on the local government elections in 1996, the drafting of the new Constitution, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Awareness of the Bill of Rights

Many of the letter writers had a superficial understanding and awareness of the new Constitution and Bill of Rights. The writers had a vague notion that the newly legislated rights will promote equality, but were less clear about what rights are involved and what sort of equality they will promote. There is clearly a need for constitutional awareness programmes.

This finding from the contest is mirrored in the results of a national survey by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) undertaken in 1995, which found that a high number of respondents (some 27%) in the 18-34 year age group could not list one thing that should be included in the new Constitution as a "right". "Don't know" was the most frequent response given when the young people were asked to name a right.

The letter writers most frequently associated the new Constitution with "freedom of speech" and "equal rights" for all. Similarly, the Idasa findings also showed that respondents listed these two rights most frequently. The comment by Ntombi below is a typical example of what young letter writers said about equal rights and freedom of speech:

The introduction of the Bill of Rights in the new South African Constitution makes sure that the democratic right of any individual to be heard shall never make my person to be placed under the control of another. I have this optimism that my life will certainly improve compared to the pre-1994 era. — Letter 183

Entrants listed a range of other specific rights which they felt should be part of the new Constitution. The writers cited basic human rights, the right to education, the right to vote, freedom of religion, children's rights, women's rights and academic freedom as items they would like to see included.

Richard from Pretoria describes himself as a “strong patriot” with a “positive attitude”. His definition of human rights is quite broad in his letter, addressed to Justice Minister Dullah Omar:

I feel strongly about human rights. Every individual has a right to education, a right to clean water, job opportunity and a right to all basic human rights. I also feel strongly about “justified form of justice”, not the present one that allows amnesty to corrupters. I feel strongly about the death penalty. Nobody has a right to kill we all may say — so please Mr Omar stop the process of amnesty now. — Letter 276

Maphosa had hopes that the new government would bring an end to crime. Despite his disappointment, he is very optimistic about the future “New South non racial and sexist democratic South Africa”. He sees inclusion of all in the political franchise as the pivotal issue.

In 1994 South Africa entered a new era of democracy which means that every adult citizen was granted the right to vote and choose who they wanted in Government. — Letter 143

Judy lives in Durban and attends Standard 9. Her letter reads like a pamphlet on the new Constitution:

I really like the new South Africa especially the New Constitution and the Bill of Rights. I am going to explain a few details of the New Constitution and all the rights we as the New South African citizens have gained. Exactly what has changed? The New Constitution has set out the human rights and freedoms that all citizens have as human beings, such as the right to equality, freedom of expression and the right to life. Integration at all levels has occurred in school and communities. We as South African citizens now have the rights to life, freedom and security, freedom of expression and association, political rights, citizenship, freedom of movement and residence and economic activity. We also have a much more co-operative police

force. As a citizen in the New South Africa we have so many new rights, rights that we, as black people were deprived of. We not have the rights to health, food, water and social security.

What my heart is really overjoyed for is all the rights children have gained. Up to the age of eighteen, children have the following rights which include the right to a name and to be a South African citizen, not to be abused, treated badly or neglected, not to be forced to work or given work which is not suitable for a child, and if a child is detained it must be for the shortest possible time. A detained child has all the rights of any other detained person, plus the right to be kept separate from adults and to be treated as a child. They also have the right to family care or care paid for by the Government if the child is removed from family. — Letter 484

Women's and children's rights were also important to many of the writers. Zakhele has a comprehensive programme of reforms she would like to see in place, not the least of which is the entrenchment of women's rights:

Sexual harassment in employment fields and promotions to executive or senior portfolios must come to an end fundamental human right such as those of women rights must be put into a good order. Furthermore there shall be no sexual discrimination such as the underestimation of women racial prejudice and injustice must be eradicated abolished. To conclude seeds of apartheid African children by implementing equal opportunities of all racial cultures in South African constitution. — Letter 234

Jacob, an 18-year-old young man from Umlazi, supports his sisters in liberation:

I like the right for women which are present in constitution because it empowers women more than ever before. — Letter 818

Mzamo has been raising his four younger siblings since his parents died when he was 19. The hardships and solidarity he has experienced with his family in the past four years have made him sensitive to the needs of those children who have no one to look after them:

I'm heartbroken to see very young children who have nowhere to go for help. The previous government didn't care for children's rights ... Those children need education, need shelter, need clothes and parents to guide them. — Letter 161

The need for educational programmes for young people to make them more aware of the new Constitution was a further point raised. Sibusiso believes that young people need to be educated about their rights:

In the constitution laws must be taught, so that children will be prevented from being abused, used in crimes and neglected. — Letter 818

All of the entrants, with the exception of one individual, wrote positively about the new Constitution. They talked about their happiness with the Constitution and the perceived improvements which the new Constitution has made to their lives. Penelope of Lamontville, KwaZulu-Natal, compares life under the interim Constitution to the summertime.

Now we have new constitution (set of law). Then South Africa was back to normal. It was same like Summer season. The children were playing freely. The dams were full of water the crops were growing in the fields. The sky was blue and the birds were flying around. — Letter 887

For Xolani from the Transkei, the difference between the old South Africa and the new democratic order is the Constitution, which protects people's rights and gives him faith in the future:

As we all know that the New South Africa created many changes in life. Now I am going to brief about my life in the New South Africa. During the past years the government suppressed everything . For in instance there was no freedom of speech and freedom of movement. Nobody was allowed to oppose law or against that law. And this New South Africa make me feel confident. — Letter 51

Thobeka highlights the differences between life under apartheid and the improving relations between black and white people in South Africa today. He believes that life in South Africa is far from perfect, and points to violence and a lack of adequate housing as two key areas of concern:

The new South Africa is now when different races sharing one life. I am excited and lucky because if the new Constitution did not start there will still be apartheid. These Constitution started when Mandela was elected in April 27, 1994 ...

Many people are living in shacks. There is still some violence in other places like KwaMashu in the hostel and the new government is still in the process of ... building houses for those who live in shack and to give places for the street children and bring sewerages. What I do love is that in the past 50 + years no blacks were allowed in the first classes and nowadays everybody have equal. Now blacks can go to any beach they like to. The only thing that I really love is that blacks and white are sharing one life. The things that I hate are first of and apartheid and violence. — Letter 561

Some entrants chose to comment on the actual drafting process of the new Constitution by noting that the process was inclusive of all South Africans. The fact that there had been some disagreements and conflict between the main political parties over the drafting of the Constitution was also mentioned by entrants. David highlights the conflicts over the drafting of the new Constitution:

My life in the New South Africa is so confused because if you look to the constitution there are lot of conflicts by the constitution there are lot of conflicts by the different parties. There are many parties who do not agree to the constitution but I am looking forward to the government of national unity to continue with the reconstruction and development program. — Letter 731

Some of the writers are not so confident in the ability of politicians to resolve their disputes. One young writer from Tokoza expresses doubts that the new Constitution will ever be completed:

The way I see things is that the New South Africa doesn't seem to satisfy the people and me myself I'm not satisfied the way the country is being governed. That is why I want to be the leader, when I'm sitting down thinking what they are doing is wrong even their new constitution I don't think it will be drafted even if it drafted they won't keep what they've promised in writing. — Letter 603

Democracy

Many positive views were expressed about South Africa's new democracy. Entrants perceived new opportunities for personal development and some were clearly still euphoric with the new South Africa:

I think South Africa is my best home and is the best country in the whole world. South Africa is a democratic country like other countries and in South Africa we live in peace and I love people who like peace and democracy. That is what I want in the new South Africa. — Letter 449

The contestants were writing near the time of the local government elections in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape:

Very soon both Western Cape and KwaZulu Natal have to go to local government electioneering and we expect those poles to run

smoothly, fairly and violent free. South Africa needs and deserves a national peace in its young colourful democracy so as to grow and fly to the greatest heights. — Letter 270

Mapesela from Deneysville believes democracy will bring new opportunities which youth must grab:

I am preparing myself for the future. Introducing democracy into the working environment demands that young thinking people must grasp every available opportunities to study and train intensively. Exciting career opportunities are being created daily but are only directed at people prepared to invest time and effort in their education. — Letter 117

Mitchelle and Mduduzi feel the torch has been passed to their generation and that it is now up to the young people to make democracy work:

The future is actually on the hands of us as the new generations. we must always think of what happened to our president and his counterparts, they were suffering in the hands of the racist in our land. Now our fathers only look this future with one eye. I could say they had put on the (oog-klap) [blinkers] (Afrikaans word). — Letter 369 (from Mitchellle)

I'm jobless and unemployed after matric but what's important is I would like to take this opportunity to give thanks to all our freedom fighters and to some of us as supporters. Now because liberty is in our hands everything regarding SA's government is possible internationally and nationally. We will all recall that during that segregation period (era) internationally we were isolated but now the gates are opened regardless of race and gender. — Letter 89 (from Mduduzi)

Some entrants were clearly worried that democratic freedoms and opportunities were being misused by young South Africans, as the following opinions suggest:

Do people really understand the meaning of the word democracy? Teenagers are so fond of saying it is their democratic right to be absent from school to be lazy and to ignore teachers. At home they exercise their democratic right to contradict their parents. I think people should study the meaning of the word from a dictionary or encyclopaedia and understand what they're talking about. President Mandela is doing his best to build democracy and implement democracy while some people try to demolish and ridicule the work of the RDP. — Letter 514

My dream as youth is to be educated, to uplift the standard of living in South Africa. Before changes ... we fight to change the apartheid era. Now we have to uplift the technological standard. To develop SA economy. We are leaders of the future. I hate what happening today. We people don't understand the word democracy means. We mis-use it. Also the way criminals handled. You found a person out of jail but he/she is an criminal. — Letter 155

What I really like about myself is respecting not abusing democracy and practicing my culture. What I also dislike is criticizing and democracy abusing as a main repeated point & what I again feeling strong of is peace and justice that should prevail a month the Africans. Let Africans not forget that unity is power ... — Letter 145

However my annoyance comes from the fact that there's still those old elements who still do irritating things claiming to be exercising their Bill of Rights contained in the constitution. — Letter 165

Remnants of apartheid

Many entrants were realistic about the prospects for South Africa. They felt that the dawn of the new era did not mean that the ideal society had been achieved yet. The writers conceded that after 40-odd years of apartheid rule, apartheid still exists in the minds of many South Africans. Attitudes will still need to change.

The White people they don't want to share our views with the black people. Many white people think that the black President is now in power there is no more Apartheid. I personally believe that apartheid will take a long time end. The people who will not have apartheid will be the next generation in our country. — Letter 744

I am living a primitive life and it became worse since the new South Africa because my mother lost her work just because of the "Black President" who came into being our first electoral president. Which show us that apartheid is still there ...

I don't like the way which we South Africans behave towards each other. we hate each other just because of our skin, colour and culture. we still call ourselves the "Rainbow Nation" but still have that apartheid. — Letter 184

My worries about South Africa are people who still practice racism. racism is an obstacle in the way of democracy and reconciliation. — Letter 293

Discontentments

For some young South Africans, the honeymoon period of South Africa's new democracy is clearly over. Their frustration levels are rising as the government is slow on the delivery of various election promises made in 1994. Entrants feel that failure to deliver on such promises, ongoing crime and violence, and government corruption are threatening the new, fragile democracy.

There are even those who consider taking a step back:

And what I dislike is that my friends and relatives they say that by the next coming elections they want to return back to the old government because the present one is too slow to act, this makes me feel worried more than enough because by saying this they call back

segregation system which is unwanted because of it's division between South Africans. — Letter 89

There are threats that voters will withdraw their support unless social change is forthcoming:

I feel that the government we have voted for is cheating us. Where are all the jobs that were promised us during the general elections campaign? Where is the free and compulsory education that we were promised? I, as the youth of this country feel that the government should deliver the expected goods, or face the anger and frustrations of the youth of this country, otherwise they would kiss the parliament good-bye. — Letter 91

Violence, unemployment and continuing poverty are listed repeatedly as political problems, with an expectation of governmental solutions.

A lot of different people expected lots of things to be changed from the (by) from the new government. I also have expectations. Living in Kwazulu Natal province I must say that not everything has changed. There is still too much violence. Many people still have no houses, others have no jobs and other go to sleep hungry everyday. I ask myself this question : when is the government going to change all of these problems? when will all this violence stop?— Letter 743

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)

A central pillar of the election platform on which the ANC-led government came to power was its vision for the social and economic transformation of the country. Sboniso from KwaMashu is one who believes that this vision is being realised:

In South Africa so many things have changed and we are living a better life. In South Africa our schools are really beautiful and we

have new roads and clinics. We are going to vote for the local elections and that is going to make the place where we live in become beautiful than before. Our road had been rebuilt and cars and buses are going freely. They made new clinics and they are near to our homes. We are really living a better life in South Africa. What I was wanting was that white teachers to come and teach at black school if possible. They have changed KwaMashu station into a city with many different supermarkets and stores and OK Bazaars. — Letter 836

The government made ambitious promises concerning the RDP during the 1994 election, and expectations for delivery on these promises is still high. The following letters suggest that young people are aware of the problems and the immense challenges which need to be met if national social and economic goals are to be achieved. Entrants were aware that these goals could not be achieved overnight.

Erica sketches some of South Africa's developmental problems but remains upbeat:

After the 27 April 1994 history, I am expecting some, if not all of the South African problems to minimise, problems such as — political intolerance, race discrimination, equal education, employment, crime, housing to name by a few. My expectations around these issues are very huge and undying. I had hoped when casting my vote that the newly elected government regardless of its political following will deal with these problems and finally remedy the majors. I should note that the government of national unity which is a fact that they inherited such problems from the apartheid government is trying and winning to reshape and redistribute the wealth and fundamental right which have been so long hidden. The political intolerance has been won, race discrimination is vanishing, unemployment is minimised, education is being tried to be made one, both the former and the latter

requirements will in future make the housing issue easier since people will be working and educated meaning better salaries will be able to but houses of their choice. I hope democracy will prevail. — Letter 203

One young writer is also hopeful that the RDP will improve the lives of poor people but believes that for the RDP to work, commitment and dedication is needed:

Those in urban areas have been living a depressing life in the locations. Many people have lived their whole lives in shacks. These have brought about over-crowding and squatter. Squatter has brought about health conditions which in turn have brought about a high infant mortality rate. I have lived in a location and I have experienced this life with poor sanitation. With the RDP put in place there is hope for a better life for all. — Letter 183

A writer from Tokoza is more sceptical:

I don't see our leaders governing our country the way they are supposed to because in this New South Africa they talk about building roads, houses and changing the laws. But I don't see any changes especially about the laws. That is why I say that if I finish my studies and follow my plans of being a leader of the New South Africa I can make a change. — Letter 603

Some entrants were disillusioned with the lack of progress with the RDP:

Since we have a new President I really do not see what is happening. People are still unemployed, many people live in shacks along main roads, we have a tremendous amount of homeless people and what is being done, absolutely nothing. I attend a youth club, where we try very hard by having meals given to homeless people, especially the kids, we sometimes cannot go on giving food parcels out because we don't have any financial support from any sponsors. Most of us take

our allowance and contribute it to the kids, but that's not part of what they really need. I really wish something could be done. — Letter 108

Others remind that it will take time to reduce the backlog in development:

Although we have a new president which we were willing to have a black president to rule our country, but we not expect that he will/can satisfy our needs in 3 to 4 years he also have to make certain changes and rules in the country. Some people are expecting all the needs to be satisfied that can be impossible for our president to do. In our country it might take some five years to be a developed country because of some problems which are facing all south African people especially violence in South Africa. — Letter 771

There are now expectations that with the newly-elected local government officials, selected by and accountable to the communities which they serve, RDP projects will be tailored to meet the needs of local communities:

I am very glad to see that everybody has the right to stand up and say what he/she sees which is wrong or what he/she wanted to be done his/her area. Our brothers and sisters have the right to attend schools which they like and be educated. So what I want to say is that our councilors and mayors that have been voted for must work and do as the community want the areas which they live in more prettier than ever. There are lot of work to be done in our locations. I did not vote for mahala (nothing) I want to my location in good condition. — Letter 334

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

The TRC was established in the latter part of 1995 to deal with investigations into gross human rights violations during the

apartheid era. The purpose of the commission is "to reveal the truth, heal wounds and set us on the road to salvation" (TRC, quoted in *Business Day*, 4 December 1995). Since the commission began its work, South Africans have expressed a range of opinion about the commission. Some feel that it will help with the process of healing, while others feel that it will dig up old animosities and will cause further conflict (Market Research Africa survey, 1996).

Entrants in the contest, which was conducted just as the work of the commission was beginning, mirror the feelings expressed by South Africans in general. A range of mixed opinion on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was expressed by the letter writers. In the opinion of some young people, the commission is divisive and does not promote unity in South Africa. It was also described as a waste of taxpayers' money, which could otherwise have been spent on the RDP. Other entrants felt that the TRC would have quite the reverse effect - that is, it would build unity in South Africa, healing old wounds through talking about the past:

I strongly feel that in new South Africa people can live in peace and harmony where the racist can be totally abolished among the Rainbow nation so that everybody can have a say in the new South Africa. Even if Nelson Mandela has lost the next election so that the one who is take his place can treat people in the same alike. Now the Truth and Reconciliation is busy healing the past among the people so that people can let bygones be bygones. We must start fresh and co-operation must exist among every individual in our society. — Letter 288

Thulisile understands the psychological benefits the truth process can have for victims:

The thing that I like is truth commission, and what I like about it is this they are dealing with the past things because other people still wondered about what happen to their beloved ones. Then they found

out about it and see that person who do that thing, and they don't hold grudges to each other, ... if someone do bad thing then you hold it, it make (you) a lot of pain than talk about it. — Letter 803

Wiseman sees the commission as part of the development process.

The truth and reconciliation commission have been the great symbol of building and developing the "New South Africa" nowadays, because in the past people had been killed without any arrests, any trials for the perpetrators who hurt the victims' friends and families, I wish it would heal our wounds. — Letter 776

Some of the writers, however, were less than positive about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Frans feels the past should be forgotten and that the money would be better spent on something else:

I also feel strongly about the so-called Truth and Reconciliation Commission. To my point of view this Commission is only provoking the emotions of the past to most black majorities and escalate the previous perpetrators. I wonder how can President Mandela appoint such commission whereas himself preach daily about forgetting the past so as to socialise with the a new. Should those who suffer the findings of the Commission seek support from their dirty colleague, I fear that peace will ever be a loss since every party in power will have to do with the dirty tricks of the previous one ... If Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu is earning R276 000,00 per annum, then five of his staff members will earn more that R750 000.00 per annum. I think that more than a R1 million is deadly needed to boost the RDP. More lightly is the fact that no one will be suffering unemployment since Tutu is enjoying his special chair in front of Congregation. The same to his colleagues who were recruited from their professionals. — Letter 165

Petros from Katlehong also cites the expense, but also feels that the perpetrators of past crimes should be punished:

The other thing that I feel strong about, is the way in which the government waste tax-payer's money by establishing the truth commission. I don't see the use of the truth commission if the perpetrators would not be brought to book and sentenced. The money used in this commission could be used for something that would benefit the suffering people of this country. - Letter 91

Choene feels the commission is an impediment to reconciliation:

Let us try to forgive those who have wronged us in the past in one way or another and this should be done irrespective of colour, creed or race. There is this thing called the truth commission headed by famous cape Bishop. What surprises me a lot is that we the African we want to use this commission as a tool for apartheid in reverse. When one take a look at the people appearing before the commission it comes not as a surprise to see whites in majority. Please brothers and sisters let us stop or get off this train until it take us too far. Let us forgive even though we cannot forget. In the case of the African to appeal before the commission, one will say that he/she did what she has done because of the struggle. Well much can be said but the truth remains within the persons innerself. — Letter 67

Sibongile also believes that painful memories are best forgotten:

There is this thing of truth commission which takes place here in South Africa. For me I see no need for it because that can bring back wounds which were healed long ago. You find people crying because their memories have been re-freshed about what happened to their loved ones. — Letter 794

Perceptions of Mandela

Most of the writers in this sample of letters had something to say about Nelson Mandela, and the comments were overwhelmingly positive. Young people perceived Mandela as their main role model, as a father-figure and as a hero. He is seen as the one person in South Africa who does the most to improve their lives materially. Some of the entrants expressed fear about what will happen to South Africa when Mandela finally retires from the centre stage of politics. It is clear that for many South Africans, Mandela is perceived as the glue which holds South African society and the new democracy together.

For many entrants, Mandela was omnipresent in their daily lives and helped to give young people confidence in their futures. They clearly saw Mandela as a father-figure. Young writers reported that Mandela gave them encouragement, guided them daily, and advised and supported them:

We see the President is the best leader of the New South Africa together of his deputy and Ministries. They lead us in a new system which is also different to all countries. My life is also encouraged and motivated by the new President in the new South Africa. He tries to meet the aspiration of his people irrespective of colour, religion, sex equally, etc. He encourages us to go back to school, because the majority of South African are illiterates. He encouraged my life through his action like providing free health services to children of under the age of six and women who are expecting. There is also stability in labour and business activities which also impressed my life. It invest us that there is now future in the new South Africa. — Letter 333

Mandela is seen as omnipresent in the new South Africa:

Thanks to God for what He did to our President. We dearly feel our President's presence in our daily life. — Letter 369

Bongani addresses his letter to the president in worshipful tones:

*Dear Sir/Madam I am happy to that you make us free.
Mr Mandela I am proud about you today we a free about you and
people they look at you as a bad president but we love you so much.
Mr Mandela people they want house and jobs and hospitals.
I know Mr Mandela is a good president for us but people need more.
But God is there for you Mr Mandela to help you and us to get
house and jobs.
We need you Mr Mandela you are the father and God for us.
If SA can come together we can make this world a better place and I
know Mr Mandela
he can make this new SA to be a better place.
To we in white schools about you Mr Mandela.
I know you love people of SA and they love you too.
I love you Mr Mandela.
— Letter 451*

Mandela is seen as the special patron of children:

*Dear President To the president Dr Mandela I would like to say
thank you for the support and advice he gives the youth on television
thanks for encouraging us to go back to school and to study hard
since he is aware that the future of our country lies in our hand.
What I like about our president is that he does not discriminate
amongst people. For instance he celebrated his birthday for street kids
to show how he loves with as part of South Africa. I also
congratulate the president for establishing the children fund in South
Africa for kids who are not having parents. — Letter 456*

The president is much admired by young people, and the comments made by entrants show how young people hold him in awe.

Mandela's incarceration and the leadership role he played in the liberation struggle were the main reasons for the hero-worshipping evident in the letters below:

You do not have to depend on others like some people who says what [is] the President doing for us? He had sacrificed all his time for education and suffered to obtain freedom for the black people. He deserve more than thank you to me. He is the great hero for us. — Letter 98

The twenty seventh of April 1994 witnessed the first democratic elections in South Africa. The African National Congress wins a landslide victory and Nelson Mandela becomes our president. He is an old black man. He has fought for thirty years, facing a twenty seven year prison sentence and other atrocities. These do not stop him from realising his potential and he is now a much loved and honoured man. In one year our flag changed, our anthem became "Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika" and our rulers became mainly black dominated. — Letter 446

The person I admire the most in my country excluding my parents is Mr Nelson Mandela. I admire his courage and determination and because of him I feel our country is moving towards excellency. I feel that as the days are going by we are all becoming united and because of this unity our country will soon be one of the best places in the eyes of everyone. This man did what no man has done before. He should be highly rewarded and respected by every individual. I am one of the people who truly respect him for what he has done for us. — Letter 65

Apartheid left most Africans in a dark alteration due to lack of schools and education facilities. Our dark prospect is due to this policy of segregation. As far as history is concerned, I feel happy and strong because this newly born South Africa is in the hands of a new leader who preaches reconciliation amongst different race in this country.

*His leadership are of pride and honour
His leadership are of glory and harmony His leadership are of truth
and justice His leadership is of nature His leadership make my soul
feel free So this means that the future of the country is in our
hands. — Letter 118*

With Mandela as the president, the young writers feel confident that their material interests will be protected. Mandela is seen as the champion of the poor and disadvantaged in South African society. Many entrants feel that Mandela is personally responsible for the provision of schools, clinics, police stations, free education and the like:

I write this letter to tell you about my life in The New South Africa. In my life during 1980's South Africa was ruled by autocratic rules those were Afrikaners. The world was dry and it seems as there were no children. It was lonely. The dams were dry (no water). The plants were not growing up (The) on me it was like Autumn season. Where the road was a scarce. No water to drink no clothes to wear. The animals were dying like insects. I even thought that South Africa will never be free. The important political parties were burned. Our parents were not allowed to go to town without passes. There was no freedom of speech and press. There were place where the blacks were not allowed to enter. The children (black) were not allowed to school in whites schools. There was no patriotism. It was the first time in this world an African become President that was Madiba. He then spread the ideas of nationalism and liberty to all Africans. And there were many changes made by him. The jobs were provided, schools, clinics, Police Stations etc. The black students were allowed to go to Indian, white, coloured school. There was freedom of speech and press. Everyone is now allowed to have a say at the government. Mandela Wansuelo Nsimbi Kayigobi Iyogoba E dayimane Madiba yem yemu.

Translated as: Mandela is like steel which you can't break, he can break you. He is a diamond, Mandela Hoorah!— Letter 887

I really enjoy in our New South Africa because there is no bad things like corruption and also that we live together in peace in our rainbow country. I often like to thanks our state President, for better life, hospitals, schools, clinics, that he supplies to us, and I often thanks him to give pupils opportunity to get free attention in clinics, hospitals and also at pre-schools. Keep up the good work!— Letter 319

My Life in the New South Africa

President Nelson Mandela should be given credit for the things he achieved. For example, he re-established the link between South Africa and other countries when he had banned apartheid.— Letter 48

Myself in my everyday life I love the president of South Africa because he bring peace in our land. And I like the president because he is the first black person to be a President of South Africa and he help people who are suffering to become rich.— Letter 100

Glen from Durban brings to the fore the way many South Africans feel about the eventual retirement of Mandela from active politics. Mandela is still regarded as the linchpin to the success of South Africa's political transition:

... I certainly fear the day our own beloved Madiba (touch wood) goes to the great cattle kraal in the sky, for the man holds South Africa together! I tell you John, the thing I fear most , besides that great green monster which sometimes lurks in my cupboard, is the day the NSA gets a new President. Then we may have real problems. Alas we must cross that bridge when we come to it. I hope we don't descend into a civil war, that would just ruin my day, I would hate to have to declare my garden an independent homeland one day.— Letter 70

Not all entrants were completely satisfied with Mandela's performance as head of the country. Wayne joins other writers who were disappointed that certain electoral promises were not fulfilled, particularly the provision of free basic education:

When Mandela was released he made promises but did not fulfil these promises. Otherwise there are many changes after the election. — Letter 162

Despite the euphoria over South Africa's first democratic, non-racial government and the confidence which many young South Africans show in the ability of Nelson Mandela to improve the quality of life for the majority of South Africans, the fear that under the new government things will get worse was expressed by some entrants:

In government they introduce the black people as Minister. For the first in the world there was a black president, which I'm proud of my country. In some other cases we found people treating black pupil bad for their black president e.g. when a black person is kick of the job because he is not satisfied of the treatment they say to him "go and tell your black president". I'm worry by the time I grow older, everything will be mess like us in Zulu Natal. The Minister don't want to participate in building our future. people are killing other people because he is ANC or he is IFP. I am very worried about this problem if they don't solve it early it will be too late. Many people will die without being guilt. The society will in mess time. Some people don't want to vote in following election of councils. — Letter 787

The future of democracy

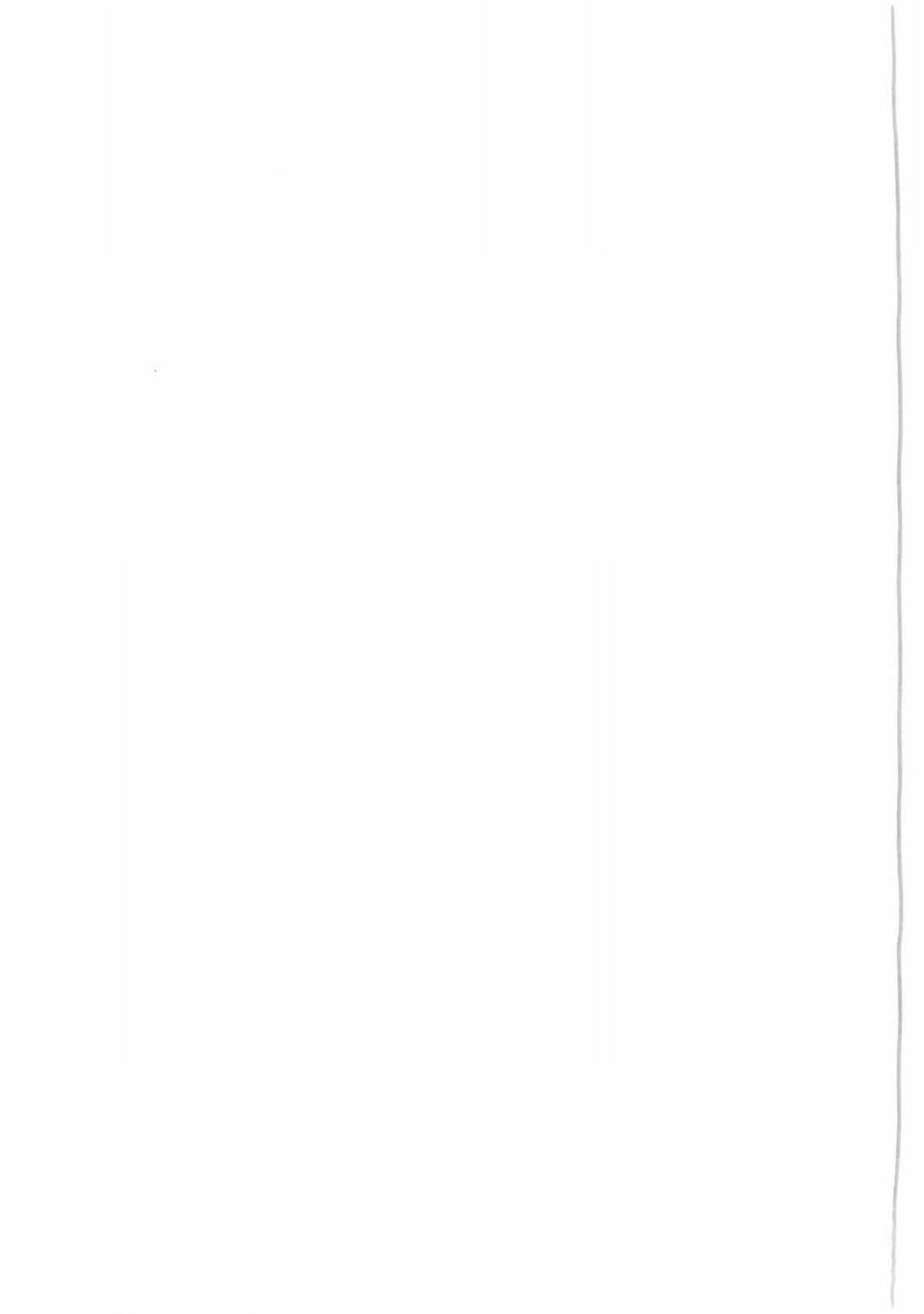
Young letter writers who participated in this competition showed a great awareness and knowledge of the politics of the new South Africa. Entrants typically expressed strong opinions about the political issues of the day, which included the new Constitution, the

Reconstruction and Development Programme, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. These themes reflect the political-historical context of the study and help to define the first term of government in South Africa's new democracy.

In general, the young people who entered the competition were optimistic about the new South Africa and perceived increased opportunities for their personal development and the development of their own residential areas and communities.

Nelson Mandela was seen as a crucial element in the political transition, both as a role model to young people and as a father-figure who protects and looks after the interests of young South Africans.

Finally, the main worries which young entrants expressed about life in South Africa today included: crime, unemployment, political intolerance, the accumulative impact of apartheid (including continuing racism) and government corruption. The way we deal with these problems might well have the final say as to whether our new democracy will flourish or wither away.



Chapter 12

End of the innocence: Crime in the New South Africa

Antoinette Louw

Most South Africans now believe that crime is the single biggest problem facing the country, and that the government's control of the situation is slipping. Although victimisation surveys which gauge these public opinions target people over eighteen years of age, very similar views have emerged in the contest letters.

For many of the youth, the prospects of growing up in the new South Africa are bleak. Crime, and violent crime especially, is an urgent social concern. Most believe that the problem is increasing despite the political changes in the country. Several young people expressed a fear of crime, which restricts their daily lifestyle and threatens their future. Numerous letters identify the youth themselves as the perpetrators of crime, attributing the situation largely to unemployment. Other contributing factors regularly mentioned are the lack of effective justice, ineffective policing, and inadequate education and entertainment for young people. Many letters are nevertheless hopeful. Several respondents believe the situation can be improved through increased government intervention, community involvement and a better criminal justice system.

Of the 905 letters received in response to the Quality of Life Research Unit's letter writing project, the word "crime" was mentioned in over 300. Seventy-six of these letters, which discussed crime issues in more depth, were selected for this chapter. The content of these letters has been considered in an attempt to understand the extent to which crime affects the quality of life of the youth, the types of crime with which they are most concerned, and their ideas about causes and solutions. Some parallels will be drawn between these perceptions and those canvassed by other surveys of South Africans more generally.

Violence remains a central concern

Those young people who commented on the crime situation in South Africa were equally divided on the issue of whether the situation had stayed the same or grown worse since the general elections. In only two letters did entrants state that the situation had improved. And while several writers acknowledged and praised the achievements of the new government for at last attaining democracy, their letters nevertheless reflect disillusionment with the continuing violence.

Robert from Thohoyandou writes that all South Africans are now affected by high crime levels, which he believes threaten the country's future:

In 1994 South Africa entered a new era of democracy which means that every adult citizen was granted the right to vote and choose who they wanted in Government ... It was thought that this would be the end of crime in South Africa. But now it proves wrong. — Letter 143

From Chatsworth in Durban, 14-year-old Elaine similarly notes:

All the other things I am happy about like now there is a new President Nelson Mandela, there isn't apartheid anymore and now things between blacks and whites are equal but there are certain things that hasn't changed like violence. — Letter 351

Nokuphina, a 21-year-old woman from Durban, describes the threat of violence for the country as a "formidable monster":

Despite the fact that we South Africans are enjoying free enterprise, democracy which has led us to this new dispensation, free from apartheid, but socially the crime rate, car hijacking and theft, arm robbery, murder exclusively of political parties, child abuse and rape rates are so high as if there are no laws in the government controlling such evils. — Letter 285

Muziwandile from KwaMashu recognises the enormity of the task facing the new government, declaring that people who commit violence are largely responsible for frustrating government's efforts:

In this new South [Africa] there are many changes, but it is not enough. In South Africa we need a lot of changes. Our government is trying to satisfy peoples need, but the problem is people in our country who is killing another people. I think if the people leave to kill another, our national government can do everything better. — Letter 661

In general, those young people who mention crime in their letters express grave concern. Victimisation surveys conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council in 1992 and 1996, along with results from the Nedcor Project's survey in 1995, reveal similar sentiments among South Africans over the age of eighteen years. Forty-five per cent of those surveyed in 1995 by the Nedcor Project said they thought crime had increased during the past year in their neighbourhoods. Fifty per cent had expressed a similar opinion in 1992.

Crime could not be ranked relative to other concerns of youth in the letter writing project. The centrality of crime is, however, confirmed by victimisation survey findings that crime rather than socio-economic issues now dominates people's concerns, and that fear of crime is increasing along with feelings of helplessness. In 1992, 52% of those surveyed throughout the country rated unemployment as the most pressing social problem facing the country. Housing shortages and crime, which were the next most important concerns, were each mentioned in only 11% of cases (Glanz, 1994). In 1995 by comparison, nearly half of all respondents identified crime as the most serious current problem, with unemployment being mentioned in only 18 percent of cases.

Significantly, crime was identified by all race groups in the 1995 survey as the major concern. In earlier opinion surveys (although not as early as the 1992 survey) whites tended to identify crime as important, while other race groups mentioned socio-economic factors (Nedcor Project, 1996). A pilot study of people's views on development in KwaZulu-Natal in 1995 confirms that crime has become the biggest threat for people in that province. Political violence and crime were identified as the most pressing problems over unemployment and housing (Møller, 1996b).

Fear of crime

The effects of the fear of crime on society — as opposed to its actual incidence — are important. In Britain, the United States and Europe the fear of crime has become as serious as crime itself (Heidensohn, 1989). This anxiety is not simply a fear of specific dangers, but should be seen as part of people's wider concept of quality of life (Williams & Dickinson, 1993).

In South Africa, victimisation surveys found that half of all respondents in 1992 and in 1995 thought it was likely that they

would become victims of crime in the near future. While the fear of crime does not appear to have increased between 1992 and 1995, perceptions of safety and of the state's control over the crime problem have by contrast changed dramatically over time. Surveyed just after the 1994 elections, 73% of people considered themselves safe and 67% believed the government had the crime situation under control. By July 1996, these proportions had dropped markedly to 44% and 28% respectively (HSRC media release, 1996).

These widespread fears are reflected in the letters. But of the letters mentioning crime, those young people who most clearly describe a fear of crime and its consequences are largely white pupils from suburban Johannesburg. Black youth tend rather to describe the crimes affecting their lives as well as the causes. Many black entrants also offer solutions. It is improbable that black youth themselves are less likely to be victims of crime. The experience of crime for the household, however (which may be important for shaping the worldview of young people), may indeed be different. In the past, the various race and income groups in South Africa have not been uniformly affected by crime.

Racial segregation had until the late 1980s and early 1990s largely insulated white people from the crime rates which have been high for years in neighbouring black townships. As apartheid's spatial boundaries collapsed, crime could more easily spread into the wealthier suburbs where it is also more likely to be recorded. This probably accounts for the real increases in crime levels after the political transition began in 1990, but also for the perception — which leads to a heightened fear of crime — that crime has suddenly and dramatically increased in areas which had previously been relatively safe.

Several young people relate how they feel unsafe in their own neighbourhoods, and how crime restricts their movements. Living in

Johannesburg, Clinton's words reflect the views of several fellow teenagers:

I am afraid. I'm afraid to walk home from school, afraid to ride my bicycle in the streets. There is a fear in me that something terrible is going to happen. I hate living in a country filled with fear. How do I know that I will not be next? — Letter 480

Fifteen-year-old Ruthie from Glenhazel in Johannesburg listened one night as a friend's car was stolen at gunpoint and shots fired outside her house:

Terror is what is leading our daily lives ... I do not walk down the road in fear of my possessions or God forbid my life. — Letter 589

The fear of crime in everyday activities is equally clear for Malka, a 16-year-old who is also from Johannesburg:

I do not feel safe walking my dog. I do not feel secure in my own home. — Letter 443

The letter of 19-year-old Linda from Durban is one of the few submissions by a black youth which clearly reveals a fear of crime:

So we vote for free democratic South Africa. We want to stay comfortable like all other people. Because South Africa is the most country which is very high number of death people. People hate one another with no reason. Our life is very bad. We live like the chickens because we afraid. — Letter 711

A concern expressed in several letters relates to these heightened feelings of insecurity. Nine young people describe how security measures restrict their lifestyles and have turned their homes into "prisons". This is a clear expression of how fears associated with crime can change people's lifestyles, causing them to withdraw, restricting the extent to which they socialise and travel, and entrenching a form of social distance when people respond by

barricading themselves behind high walls, or within walled suburban complexes (Shaw, 1996; Glanz, 1994). This is how Malka describes South Africans' reaction to the fear of crime:

Meticulously locked doors, forbidding burglar bars, security alarms ... we live in deadly prisons ... Painstaking measures and precautions invade our lives ... Our country has undergone a metamorphosis, a disastrous transformation, filled with bleak atmosphere, grim 'prisons', ominous bars and menacing high walls. — Letter 443

The prison metaphor is also mentioned by 16-year-old Kerryn:

The fear we live in and the bars behind which we imprison ourselves is all people know of our country ... — Letter 446

The same metaphor is also used by Yael, who acknowledges nevertheless that a country going through changes like those in South Africa will always be faced with positive and negative developments:

With the increasing crime rate, I feel my freedom has been barred and my fear unlocked. Long are the days gone where I could be as carefree as in my childhood, not having to look over my shoulder every time I turn a corner. — Letter 591

Another youth from Johannesburg, also named Yael, describes restrictions which he believes have made people neurotic and which form a part of the constant vigilance which dominates life:

People are so worried about burglaries, which occur very frequently, that they have barred up their houses. A person feels so claustrophobic in these cage-like houses. One feels so restricted, like a giant lion in a tiny, restrictive cage. — Letter 581

Types of crime

Political trends have changed the types of people affected by crime in South Africa, but social and economic patterns also influence the types of crime which are experienced. In general, as socio-economic patterns change, so the experience of crime changes accordingly. In South Africa, victimisation surveys reflect the patterns of wealth and ownership in the country: according to the 1992 study, whites were victimised to the greatest extent, 80% of which was for property crimes (Glanz, 1994). A similar trend applied to Indians. By contrast, only 62% of the crimes committed against blacks and 61% against coloureds were property crimes, which confirms that these groups experienced far more violent crime than whites and Indians. This is corroborated by Marks and Andersson's (1990) review of the annual reports of the Medical Health Officer which showed that Africans were twenty times more at risk from a homicidal death than whites. Butchart et al.'s (1991) hospital-based study of victims of interpersonal violence in Johannesburg and Soweto also showed similar findings.

Despite these differences outlined above, as well as the fact that in 1992 one in five households reported being the victim of property crime, while nearly one in ten experienced violent crime, the letters written by young people reveal a pervasive concern with violent crime in particular. The fear of crime described above and the associated feelings of insecurity are related to attempts to ward off property crimes, but violent crimes — some of which involve theft of property — dominate the crime narratives received from the youth.

The propensity for violence in South Africa is perhaps the most disturbing feature of the country's crime picture. This is graphically illustrated by figures which suggest that the average international murder rate is 5,5 per 100 000 people, while South Africa's rate is

45 per 100 000 (Nedcor Project, 1996: 7). It is unsurprising then that murder was the crime mentioned most often by respondents in the letter writing competition. This was followed by political violence and the term "violence" used in a general context. Rape, car hijacking and robbery were referred to equally often, followed in frequency by drug-related crimes and child abuse.

Some young people mentioned crime generally, like Robert from Thohoyandou:

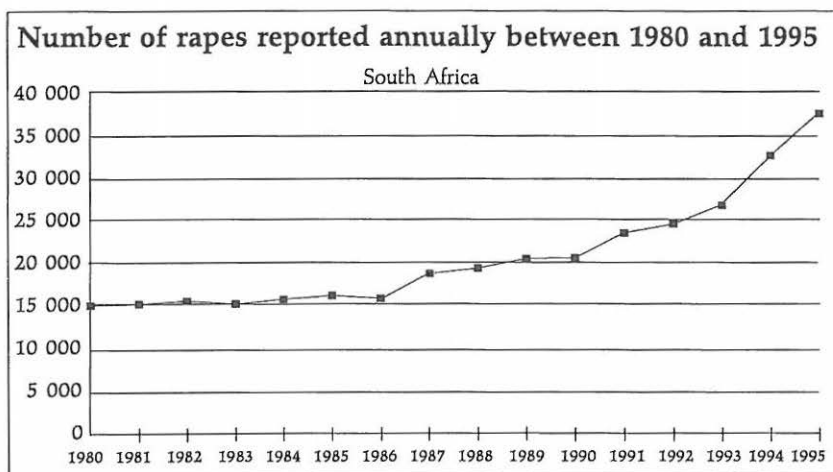
The most thing I dislike is the crime, violence, apartheid, and car hijacking and rape. — Letter 143

Others were clearly concerned about specific crimes. Matseleng, a young woman, writes:

I dislike people or parents who abuse children. I also dislike people who commit murder... I think the community must play an important role in children abuse, and woman abuse and murder. — Letter 238

The concern among South African youth about rape and child abuse reflects a disturbing reality. The number of reported rapes has escalated dramatically since 1990, due probably to increased reporting by women, although the consistent nature of the increase suggests that rape itself is escalating (Figure 1). Rape statistics are particularly susceptible to under-reporting, and Rape Crisis estimates that only one in every 35 cases are reported to the police (Steenkamp, 1996). According to comparisons based on Interpol figures for 1994, South Africa has the highest rape rate in the world (Crime Information Management Centre Quarterly Report, 1996).

The following figure shows the number of rapes reported to police in South Africa annually from 1980 to 1995



A young woman living in Daveyton, 26-year-old Kgolane, refers briefly reference to these crimes in a way that starkly illuminates the statistics:

Child abuse and raping is our daily bread. — Letter 181

Fear of violent attack is reported as affecting every aspect of a woman's life:

Just imagine, your mother or your sisters raped and killed and also dumped in bushes. On God! Please help us! We have the right to walk down the streets. We have the right to look for a job. We have the right to wear what we wish. — Letter 238

One alarming aspect of the rape discussed is the age of the victims:

I always ask myself that if a 30 year old man rape 5 year old child what does he think he is doing? How can we trust our fathers and brothers if they keep on doing this. It hurts me so much. — Letter 221

And apparently the elderly are not immune:

Even little babies are being raped and what did they do to deserve this because they are innocent they don't know what's right or wrong. Older people are being raped too to show how disgusting it is, they destroy the happiness of those who brought their parents into this world. — Letter 124

Ntombenhle seems to suggest that incest also features in the cycle of abuse:

If you look outside in the South Africa fathers raped their childrens I don't know why. How can you sleep with you child no matter is your real child or not but you have to respect yourself first so that any person can respect you. — Letter 780

Thokozani includes young boys in the roll of victims, and points out the broader social implications of this sort of abuse:

What I hate in this New South Africa is the increase of the rapist I hate the rapist because sometimes when he has rape a girl she can get pregnant and then who will be the father of that child? Nobody that is what increase the street children and when you have rape a boy that boy will lose his mind and he wont know whether his a boy or a girl and it will be difficult to him to have a wife. He can grow being a stupid boy. I hate that. The child abuse is the most what I hate, it increases the street children. — Letter 734

One writer from KwaMashu writes so poignantly that she seems to be speaking from personal experience:

I hate person who is a rapist because when you've been raped you even like to die because that person kills your future your everything. — Letter 740

Tom is an eighteen-year-old male from Durban, but his insight into this problem belies his age:

It is not that I'm concerned for my own safety, but for a man to take a life implies he has no respect for life; if one man rapes and another beats his wife it is because they don't value those women as equals. Stricter laws will not rid society of these crimes, only a change in attitudes and values. — Letter 291

One reason for the obvious concern with violent crimes among the youth who submitted letters might simply be that they fall victim to these crimes more frequently than do adults. In 1995, robbery was the most common crime reported among adults — at 19% of all crime types. Of the crimes reported against children under 18 years, by contrast, alarmingly 59% percent were rape incidents, 15% assault, and 10% violence/intimidation (Nedcor Project, 1996). According to this survey, children and teenagers are two-and-a-half times more likely to be the victims of rape than adults. And since it is well known that sexual assaults generally, and against children specifically, are less likely to be reported, the findings suggest that “there is nothing less than a reign of sexual terror against children in South Africa today” (Nedcor Project, 1996: 8).

Political violence was referred to in sixteen letters, most of which were sent from KwaZulu-Natal where levels were consistently high for nearly a decade. Although political violence has largely subsided since the national election in 1994, the conflict contributed substantially to the country's high murder figures, and many communities are still grappling with the effects of years of intimidation and fear, as well as with the losses associated with destruction of life and property. Estimates are that nearly 13 000 people have lost their lives in the clashes since 1985 in KwaZulu-Natal. The number of youth who mention this violence suggests that even though levels were significantly lower in 1996 than in previous years, the legacy — and in many communities the reality — of the political conflict continues.

After describing at length the causes for violence in the country and what the government could do to improve the situation, 20-year-old Gabisilo's final statement on the subject is blunt:

What I do not like the most is this violence between two political parties ANC & IFP. — Letter 729

The perceived depth of the intolerance referred to in several of the letters mentioning political violence is illustrated by 19-year-old Busisiwe from KwaMashu in Durban:

There is a problem of ANC and IFP they do not like to see others free they always try to kill others like ANC they don't like to see the IFP in their places and IFP do the same thing and there will be no peace if they goes like that. There is apartheid between these two IFP and ANC. — Letter 663

Similarly S'bongile, a 15-year-old from Umlazi, wrote these few lines — which constitute the extent of the reference to crime:

The President here in New South Africa is Nelson Madiba Holihlahla Mandela. And now we are voting for our local government but the IFP said if we are voting for any person they would kill us all. — Letter 859

Political competition and elections are also mentioned by 16-year-old Bonga from Marianhill:

The rate of killing of the political leaders are increasing because of wanting the high votes of people. They are shooting each other one who says the Inkatha is killing member of ANC and the ANC is killing members of the Inkatha. That create hate to people and hate of the political leaders. — Letter 638

Others like Mondli, a 19-year-old male from Inanda in Durban, offered few explanations for political violence, simply expressing concern for its impact:

What I hate is the rate of crime and political intolerance ... politically the two main parties is ANC and IFP are quarrelling for unknown reason and they will bring the country in disaster. — Letter 485

Causes of crime

Unemployment and problems with policing, notably inefficiency and corruption, were the most common reasons for the crime problem given by young people in their letters. This corresponds with survey findings among South Africans generally. In 1992, 60% of survey respondents stated that the economic recession and unemployment were the most important cause of the increase in crime, while nearly 20% believed that the police's neglect to attend urgently to the problem was the most important cause (Glanz, 1994: 12). More recent surveys confirm that these are still the dominant perceptions.

For 16-year-old Myrna from Newlands East in Durban, employment would end the idleness which leads to crime:

The solution I would come to is making sure that everyone has jobs, therefore with jobs there will be less chance of these people getting to trouble and hurting innocent people in the process due to their idolism. — Letter 483

Muziwandile from KwaMashu, by contrast, believes that it is the deprivation associated with unemployment that leads to crime:

I think that is the government open the opportunity for jobs crime can decrease, because that's why people kill another, because they are hungry. — Letter 661

This is also the reason given by Gabisilo, who is 20 years old and lives in Umlazi in Durban:

... if many people are not working there are going to be too much violence and people are going to kill one another so that they can get

something to eat eg if someone is driving a car and he or she is a doctor his salary at the end of the month is very high and those who are not working they are going to look for that particular person so that they can kill him and take his money and car and sell it. Not because they are killer but due to the shortage of jobs some people end up doing bad things so that they can survive with their families. — Letter 729

Other arguments were more developed, such as that of 21-year-old Nokuphina from Durban, who states more than once that inequality is the country's main concern:

The only problem SA is having is with the implementation of her resources or the controlling of her wealth per se which is a far-reaching problem because it extends over to the unemployment problems. This unemployment problem has increased in such a way that it has gone about making violence which has killed thousands and thousands of people and it still has to, if not curbed. — Letter 285

The performance and service provided by the police is highlighted in several letters, but perhaps most clearly by Goldius, a 20-year-old man from Benoni:

Sometimes people may think that there is no Police force in South Africa, just because of its policing system which is very bad. Victims are always complaining about the service they get from the SAPS. — Letter 210

Goldius's comments about corruption were not restricted to police officers but also directed at government authorities:

Bribery is also one of the things I hate existing in this country ... Nowadays death certificate are made for bail; a docket is made for sale, traffic cop and policeman are being bribed by offenders. — Letter 210

Collusion between the police and criminals was also mentioned in several letters. As Thembe writes:

Today I think the Police are the ones who cause confusion in South Africa ... at the end of the day the Police find ... thieves but because they know him or her then they say if you can pay R200 we shall release you ... when this thieves released she or he will continue to do bad things because he know that he shall pay money and [be] released fast. — Letter 807

The following writers express similar sentiments:

What I expect from our government together with KwaZulu Natal government [is that] they must penalize Polices who are committing crime together with criminals. The criminals would never ignore their crime because they are working [with] that Polices. — Letter 686

One of the things I feel strongly about in our so called New South Africa, is the corruption within our government and our Police Force. Our Police are involved in many criminal activities, such as car theft and taxi violence. We don't know who to trust anymore, because some of the Police have become the enemies of the society. — Letter 91

Some Police are involved in crime because most of the people who did this are the friends of the Police. — Letter 684

Despite the many references in the letters to the poor standard of policing, it is encouraging that no letters mentioned a concern about police brutality or violence against ordinary citizens — long a characteristic of policing style in this country. Other factors which were mentioned more than once as causes of crime were an ineffective justice system, intolerance (with reference to political violence), alcohol, and the identification by township youth with *tsotsis* or criminals, who are looked up to as role models. Goldius

from Benoni describes these *tsotsis* whom he says terrorise communities:

Criminals are being given names of heroes wrongly. These people must to be discourage about crime. Life's of criminals are too short and fast. Today they wear expensive jewellery and luxurious cloths and drives fancy cars. Nevertheless tomorrow they are dead.— Letter 210

The absence of role models for the youth is also mentioned by Thamsanga, an 18-year-old living in Sebokeng:

The main problem in the Ghetto is that there are not enough good role models to show the youth the right path to take ... The youth from the Gettho have a double problem, because on top of that, they have a problem of bad role models in their real lives. They are surrounded by a bunch of unemployed relatives and neighbours. Around them there are role models who finds pleasure in spinning stolen cars and being outlaws.— Letter 153

He elaborates on the peer pressure to emulate the criminal lifestyle in order to belong:

The problem has even went to an extent of the youth seeing people who like education and other good things as trying to be white or punks who act like they do not. If a young person does not drink, smoke or do any other bad things it is seen as a 'mama's baby' who acts like a little white girl. So they end up doing bad than good things, because they want to keep their imagery. Being good makes life hard for them.— Letter 153

The incompatibility of education and "image" (as associated with the criminal lifestyle) is also touched on by 25-year-old Ntsikelelo, who writes from Alexander:

...I hate to see criminals hijacking cars and go away unpunished. They are driving stolen cars without fear of being arrested. Now you

can see young boys neglecting schools to follow this bad example because as far as they are concerned they think to be clever in township you must be a 'tsotsi'.— Letter 331

Solutions

Many young people offered ideas about possible solutions to the escalating crime problem. The majority believe that it is the government's responsibility to take action against crime. Only six letters called for increased community involvement in reducing crime levels. Unsurprisingly then, the most common strategies mentioned were criminal justice ones, namely improved policing and the reinstatement of the death penalty. Other remedies referred to in more than one letter included, in order of frequency, job creation, education, and reducing inequality in society. Some writers felt there was no viable response to the problem and that they would therefore be forced to emigrate.

Improving policing was also identified as the most common solution suggested by 33,4% of South Africans surveyed in 1995 for the Nedcor Project (1996: 10). Only 9% of people in the Nedcor study, however, thought the death sentence would make a difference. Job creation was given a higher priority, with 17,8% of people suggesting this as a solution. As in the case of the youths' letters, only 5,9% of surveyed respondents thought community action could make a difference to the crime rate. The young people who submitted letters to the competition are clearly more in favour of the death penalty than those adults surveyed by the Nedcor Project.

Some, like Bonga from Marianhill near Durban, call for the death penalty and other drastic solutions to violent crimes:

The killing of people is increasing because people they know that death sentence was taking away and crime is increasing. If death

*sentence was still on today people would not kill others in that way ...
A person who abused a child his penis it must be taken off. — Letter
638*

This solution to rapists was expressed by other young people also, like Mandoli from Bethal:

*My view to that is, when the man has been found raping, then his
private part must be cut immediately. — Letter 326*

For 18-year-old Smongele from Umlazi, the death penalty is a retributive solution:

*... if you kill people you must die but now if you kill people you go to
jail where you will be for about 5 years ... there must be a balance ...
If you kill a person you must be killed too, that is my decision. —
Letter 648*

Shaun, a 13-year-old from Boksburg-North, writes about the deterrence aspect:

*The ruthless slaughter and bloody killings of all South Africans old
and young. The death penalty was the only frighten thing that kept
people at ease (jailing doesn't help). — Letter 163*

Not all letters called for such radical solutions. Matseleng from Lebowakgomo makes a positive call for greater participation by the community in combating child abuse, rape and murder:

*... we must be brave enough. We must not be afraid to stand in this
witness box. If a see a man raping his child or another child, I must
not delay. I must just go straight to the police station and report this
matter. The next person must also do the same. We must be brave
enough. — Letter 238*

Aubrey from Ivory Park similarly calls on people to work together with the police:

I agree that the government should be blamed for this situation. But we also as a South African citizens should be blame ourselves. We are weak. We allow these people to use us the way they like. We are not united. So my point of view I say! If we as a South Africans unite and work hand in hand with the [police] to bring peace and rebuild South Africa. — Letter 33

Siphiwe from White River (aged 29) believes improved policing and community participation are key:

Firstly the government must pay the police a living wage to protect them being bribed by crooks. Secondly the community must stop protecting criminals in their midst. They must stop buying stolen goods from criminals and supplying the police with information of known criminals. The police who don't want to change and blocking it must be shown the door. — Letter 373

The end of crime?

Crime and in particular violent crime, is a major concern in the lives of the young people who mentioned the issue in their letters. They generally feel just as unsafe or more unsafe than before, and believe that the government and notably the police could be doing far more to remedy the situation. It is nevertheless encouraging that only a few letters expressed a belief that life in the new South Africa might never improve.

One such letter, that of 18-year-old Promise from Chesterville in Durban, suggests that she believes there is no way out:

Look what is happening outside they are just fighting to one another. Killing each other why? It is because the don't use their minds ... Black people they will end up killing another because they will always be stupid ... My word is that this South Africa would not change. What I am saying is because 1st they are stupid 2nd crazy 3rd they don't

use their mind they are just killing like the child who is 2 years of age. — Letter 672

Shantal, from Merebank in Durban, is more final about her lack of safety:

I live in Merebank, a place that is never safe. The is one thing I think about a lot, is South Africa ever going to be safe. It s like we are living in a war zone ... NB: I have come to the conclusion that South Africa will never be a safe place to live in. — Letter 192

Brenda wrote this short letter from Umlazi, Durban:

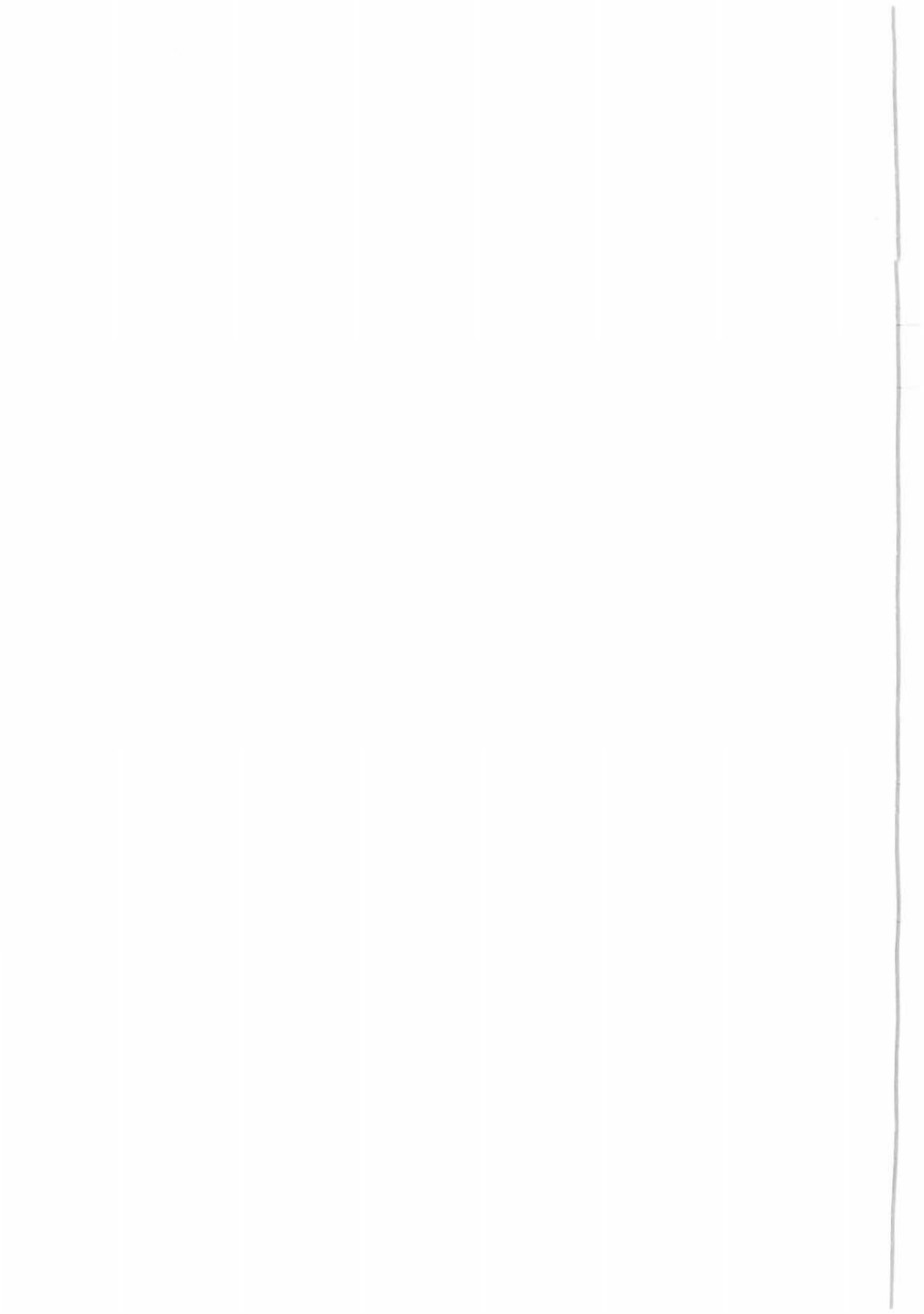
In the new South Africa I am a school pupil. I've just come in this school and I enjoy it. I live in a dangerous place where people like fighting. They like doing ugly and nasty things. I am not very happy where I live. — Letter 390

Despite the frustration and fear with continuing crime and violence which has been expressed in these letters, several youngsters are nevertheless hopeful. Elaine from Chatsworth, for example, writes:

Violence is the thing that is spoiling our country but I know there will come a day when violence is over. When our country South Africa will be a peaceful country and that is the only time I will be happy. — Letter 351

Although in the minority, views such as those of 16-year-old Kerryn from Johannesburg — one of the country's most violent cities — reflect the hope that the transformation process, which can be linked to increasing crime levels, will eventually bring improvements:

... although I am often terrified about the crime, I know that this country can be corrected. Just as so much has changed in the past two years, things will continue to change and hopefully crime will be one of these problems which will change for the better. — Letter 446



Chapter 13

"A more wholesome equality": Race relations

Ted Leggett

Race as a social issue was not resolved with the creation of the Government of National Unity. In the post-apartheid era, race remains a matter very much on the minds of young South Africans. Youth of all ethnic groups wrote in with their concerns about how race continues to be an important factor in their lives. On the whole, their letters are hopeful about the prospects of racial harmony and equality in the future, but very cognisant of the differences that remain.

Many of the black youth continue to see the face of "apartheid", which they define broadly as any attitude that promotes separation between the races. While most of the lingering differences are the result of social and economic inequities, a minority of the writers complain of overt and systematic discrimination.

Racism – methodic and situational

One well-publicised incident of institutional racism was the exclusion of black students from a small private school in Potgietersrus at the time the letters were being written. This

discrimination had a very personal effect on 14-year-old Maureen, who lives nearby.

We have voted for democracy in our country but to my surprise apartheid is still ruling. In some areas like Ellisrus whites are still oppressing the blacks. Several days ago, we heard something very bad in Potgietersrus, that whites dislike blacks. They do not allow blacks in their school and this is what I dislike. — Letter 213

In the opinion of Michael, an 18-year-old pupil attending Standard 9 in Thlabane, the struggle for liberation goes on.

My future plan is to be a politician because if I'm watching to television I see the whites oppressing the blacks. That was not fair in front of my eyes and I feel so very angry concerning that scene. After completing my studies, I going to study at University of Oxford in England. At the year 2004 the blacks will get high wages like the whites. We are still in apartheid but in New South Africa. — Letter 76

Siyabonga (aged 16) from Umlazi sees ongoing discrimination in economic terms. Like the majority of the writers, he considers the continuing poverty (and resultant crime) in the black community to be the greatest reminder of past injustice and continuing disparities:

The way of black people live is not good some of black people live in the shacks. The government is not facing their difficulties.

For example your can't get Afrikaner and white people living in the shacks many of white people are in high than black people. By this I mean the percentage of whites in high position is more than the ones of black people. Sometimes we find that a black worker and a white worker are doing one and same job but payment is not the same the white worker gets more money even the bonus is not equal.

Apartheid was main thing that changes the life of black man to behave a wild animal. — Letter 489

Ayanda from Umlazi does not believe that simply because the government has changed "apartheid" is over. Like Siyabonga, she sees poverty and past oppression as the source of the present problems in black communities:

Even though things have changed, they haven't changed completely because black people are the most unemployed out of all the people in the country. We are the most under educated. We do not receive the necessary health care and other things which will take a long time to recover. We should not blame the present government and say that they are taking too long to improve things because they were not the cause of the problems in the first place and we should also take into consideration that the previous government want to destroy black people. — Letter 742

Gilbert from Harrismith takes this point of view even further. He feels that public admission of the role of apartheid in creating the present crime situation is essential to salvage the black self-image:

Crime is vivid expression of neglect and oppression to which the white government, the white private sector and the white community have subjected black people. Its black perpetrators were condemned to want and darkness by the apartheid system which caused hunger, homelessness and lack of opportunities.

Marketing and advertising strategies should show society that it was white policy makers who caused the darkness, created the discrimination, built up the slums and perpetrated ignorance, unemployment and poverty which led to crime.

In televisions and radios there should be announced the message saying that crime now is running rampant in Gauteng which is born of the greater crime of white community through its democratically elected apartheid parliament, violated human dignity and deprived

black people of opportunities to learn respect for human relations, people and property. — Letter 211

The vast differences between white and black standards of living make racial forgetfulness an impossibility. Mpho, like so many of the black writers, had to leave Benoni Technical College because he did not have the money for tuition. He now wishes to write "motivating speeches" for parliament and private industry:

Before I forget let me tell you about the township I'm from, it is called Daveyton which falls under the metrop of Benoni. This small township consist of largely 4 rooms houses. It offers the opportunity of choosing what one wants to be in life in terms of having good and young Black motivating professionals. Although life doesn't appetise anymore, but who you can blame for that. This township has a population of about 1.1 million and it is surrounded by squatter camps which truly reflect the plight of the Black people. I know that true my sayings/writing I might sound as a racist, but if to state your true feelings entails that, then let me be called one. — Letter 344

There is resistance to change, even within the disadvantaged communities. Tiisetso from Pietersburg has encountered the difficulties of riding the social vanguard:

Problems such as inequality and racism occur in our everyday lives. I remember on 21 March "Human Rights" day , were debating and having a mock that at one of the universities here in the Northern Province. People started saying that we, the black students in "white" schools, think we are white and that we are racist. I never understood that, as those people especially adults did not know the meaning of Human Rights day. We [were?] booed when we received our trophy as winners. — Letter 368

Non-black in the new South Africa

The white students in our sample also see continuing discrimination. Estie from Johannesburg recognises the potential conflict between liberality and commercial prudence:

As you look around you, you will see Indian, Black, Coloured and White races interacting with increasing frequency. Nevertheless our society is still held captive by prejudice as we often observe hesitancy before hiring a black manager or engineer, the uncertainty of their abilities. — Letter 442

Some of the white writers are insightful enough to recognise their own culpability. Harael, also from Johannesburg, explains the cycle of violence, fear, and hate:

Hate does not exist without fear. We hate what we fear. So where hate is, fear is always lurking. Crime is a part of life in South Africa. It is not just the crime that I hate but the fear that automatically goes with it. Hearing day upon day about murder, rape, and hijacks, I feel hatred and fear, and often this fear surfaces as hatred towards blacks.

From this fear and hatred stems racism. It is only through awareness and education that we learn that every person is an individual and that we should not stereotype. There are so many people to whom I am close that I have a terrible fear of finding out that something tragic has happened to someone I know. If we can isolate the element of hate in what we hear, we may be able to cease from hating. — Letter 475

James from Durban is thirteen and has already learned to be ashamed of Western capitalist expansionism:

I feel strongly about racism... Why should there be racism, blacks were here before whites, so why don't we go back to Europe and Asia and America? — Letter 545

The transition to democracy can give perspective to the past. Josie is a student in Johannesburg who chose to address her letter on the new South Africa to her family's former domestic worker:

Dear Sophie,

It has been a week since you left us to take care of your children in Umtata. It is peculiar how I never thought of you as being a mother to anyone else but me. You always cared for me as if I were your own child. I find it difficult to imagine you loving and nurturing children who really are your own.

I wonder if, while listening wordlessly to my juvenile temper tantrums, you thought of your own well-behaved children. Perhaps you were wondering who was wiping their tears. I never realised how much you missed your family. Each afternoon, kindly and full of concern, you would ask me how school had been that day. I cannot remember asking you if you had a good day.

You often spoke of your dreams for a "new South Africa", yet after the elections, I neglected to ask you if your vote had brought you more of the pride and dignity that was always a part of you. I often question whether or not "having the vote" puts food on the table or a school uniform on a child's back.

I hope that you will visit us soon. You will be surprised at how well we are managing. Sometimes, while I make my own bed, I think of all your hopes for this country. Sometimes, when I cook supper, I wonder if this is my destiny in the "new South Africa".— Letter 479

Fear of a black nation

But many of the white students fear a reversal of prejudice and are not optimistic about their place in the new order. Judy is a special

education student in Johannesburg who dislikes living in a country where "it often scares me to even leave my door in the morning".

The racism in this country is also a big problem. Just because there is a black government, doesn't mean that the whites can be kicked out of their jobs so that blacks can take over. We need the money just as badly as everyone else does. People should be treated fairly. I think everyone could agree with me. — Letter 466

Marieke from Durban describes herself as a girl "with a bad case of adolescence". She is "definitely not a racist" but fears the contest organisers will write me off as a poor girl with a social disease".

I'm a young, bright (hopefully), inspired (almost) person with a great future ahead, or so I used to think. But ... guess what?

I'm white.

And all I can do now is wave "toodleloos" to my high expectations. Well, maybe not, but if I really want to get somewhere in life today, I'll really have to lift my "butt" and work hard. No use blaming all this on my everso foolish forefathers who created "apartheid", because they'll only lose me time, and I have to do something, if I want to keep feeding my face, which is so compelled by nature to eat. — Letter 176

One 18-year-old black young lady wishes to reassure white people that they have nothing to fear under the new dispensation. Nonhlanhla says life under apartheid was hell but that blacks in the new South Africa are "having a times":

... we love the country ruled by the black government but that doesn't mean that we are going to treat white bad. No. Now we are looking forward. we are not going to pay revenge to the white. But we want thing to change we want the improvement in our country. Now in the time that we are one we can see the different between the year that

was ruled by the white government and the year which is ruled by the black government.

The government is trying so hard to take that disease which was called apartheid away from the whites. — Letter 799

Affirmative action is feared by many as a lingering reminder that race differences do not disappear over night. Estie, who recognised continuing prejudice in an earlier quote, draws the line when it comes to affirmative action:

... affirmative action will in no way solve our problems. One race must not be favoured more than others. We crave for equality. When it is achieved it will create a more wholesome equality. — Letter 442

The whites are not alone in their opposition to affirmative action, as this letter from a black student indicates. Earlier in his letter, Johannes from Pretoria relates his apprehensions about waste and graft in the newly elected government, and it is in this arena that he feels affirmative action is most dangerous:

Affirmative action is an illegal act of replacing qualified people and replacing them unprofessionally under-qualified.

Instead is supposed to a way in which we may balance portfolios. Unfortunately it is the way of replacing whites by putting blacks which is very wrong. We don't expect people who committed treason murder etc under the name that they were fighting for liberation. We don't expect this people to be our kids' idols. As they attained their present port folios through wrong doings. — Letter 578

Merrise from Durban is a coloured student who was brought up with a white stepfather. Race has played a prominent role in her life, as she struggled to adjust to white neighbourhoods and mixed schools. She also opposes affirmative action:

One thing though bothers me, is the affirmative action fair? Are we not once again racial? Yes, I agree blacks do deserve the best, but that is like changing the table around. Is it not fair to give a man a job that he rightfully deserves? — Letter 126

One of the groups most threatened by the new dispensation are the coloured students, who find themselves outsiders to black empowerment. The language barrier adds to this feeling of separation, as Diane from Eldorado Park explains. She is a firm believer in "Simunye" (unity) and would like to see an end to racial distinctions:

Dislikes is when people discriminate each other. When they do not respect each other. I also don't like it when I must be an outsider and not be able to speak Tswana or Zulu. At a hospital named Leratong many people die because they cannot speak African languages like Zulu, Tswana and Xhosa that is wrong.

Where I live people have different opinions on the new South Africa well I would rather say they don't know what it means. Where I live blacks still want to be the "boss" they go on as if they never heard of unity. That is why SA has not gotten to be a better place yet.

... There might as well not be any "apartheid" there sure is racism amongst people. The way people kill each other it seems they do not have respect for each other. — Letter 268

Helen is a coloured girl who moved from the black township of Lamontville to the predominantly coloured suburb of Sydenham in Durban. Her "role model" is Nelson Mandela, and she believes people must be patient in waiting for transformation to occur. Although she feels she has experienced discrimination, her attitude towards race relations has changed since the elections:

Most people still bear that hatred for the whites and most of my classmates who are black don't really like me just because I am coloured.

When I lived in Lamontville I experienced a lot of racism even though this was supposed to be the "New S.A." It hit me really hard. I was living there for years and refused to learn Zulu, I felt that Zulu was not for coloured, only blacks. Since there has been a change in government I have also had a change in heart. — Letter 828

Promise is a coloured 18-year-old who lives in an orphanage in Sydenham. She is quite pessimistic about her future prospects and believes that race relations are still strained. Although she has hope for the South Africa of the future, she too feels sidelined due to her ethnicity and language problems.

My life in the New South Africa has become worst! You can't walk freely in the street without being mugged or shot or stabbed or even raped if you are female. You can't trust the person you sit next to in the bus. Talking about freedom! In this country it looks like you aren't free to talk the language you feel comfortable with. To some people, if you look black you will just have to talk "the Language" I've come across that on a number of times where sometimes I've even asked myself: aren't these people satisfied that they got? what they've always dreamed of? Then why compromise others who wish to be free to talk and say what they wish? — Letter 829

Some Indian students also feel that they've fallen between cracks, once again. Dharmisa reflects on the past and the present from the perspective of an in betweener:

We were not black nor white. Those in betweeners, those that you place in the middle of life's riot... We learnt to live in a community of separate race, separate culture and separate background oblivious to others...

Suddenly, the doors are flung open and we are overwhelmed by tempting opportunities... Are we good enough? Should I be embarrassed of my background and culture?

Just as these insecurities settle in, other issues arrive. My prime concern now is the affirmative action. Are you of black birth? If so, it's your lucky year, you have found an automatic seat in any university course you wish. If not, sorry we'll have to put you on a waiting list. If in between, you'll have to try another time dear, the shop's closing. — Letter 296

Abhilasha from Chatsworth is also apprehensive about her future in this country as an Indian young woman:

I hope by the time I reach university, I will be one lucky Indians to be accepted into the institution. In the new South Africa it seems that as Indians we still do not have a place as South African citizens. In the past privileges and positions were reserved for whites only and now with affirmative action we have reverse racism, however I am for this, provided it is based on ones abilities. I hope as Indians we are now not left out in the cold.

An integrated education

Despite these concerns, the integration of schools has gone a long way toward fostering understanding between the races. This is particularly evident among the younger students. In addition to their colour-blind attitudes, the differences in English language usage between the races virtually disappear among those young learners educated in multiracial schools.

Tracy from Johannesburg gives a touching account of a first contact situation:

About a month ago a new classmate walked in the door. He was shy and frightened. I was also shy when I went to school on the first day. But it was not just a new classmate. He was our first black pupil.

I experienced a number of emotions, I became jealous and outraged because suddenly I was not the centre of attention anymore. Although

I do not think I would have wanted everyone staring at me, like they were staring at him. The teacher did not even bother to try and teach us anything, she knew no one was listening.

I began to talk to him and slowly, slowly we became friends. Now I don't even notice the difference in the colour of our skins. We're interested in the same things, we have the same fears, emotions, feelings, desires and needs.

Even though I'm not a racist I've never had black friends before. That is why this friendship is so important to me. I hope everybody feels the same way and I feel sorry for people who can only see the world superficially. They are missing out on really good friends.

I know you're scared and frightened of all the violence and I am too. I'm scared for today and tonight but I know that someday I won't have to be. Siyabonga promised me that one day I won't have to hide anymore and I believe him. — Letter 592

Louyse (aged 13) from Durban makes it all seem so simple:

People say there are too many black people in the schools. But they are no different they are just another colour. I feel that they should not carry guns around. I think they should stop fighting and realise what they are doing. Everytime someone is shot that is a family broken up. In fact one of my friends said to me Louyse you love every one. I said life is too short to fight. — Letter 555

Gugulethu is 17 and lives in KwaMashu. She has a vision for racial harmony based on integration. In the future, she would like to see white students commuting to school in black areas as well.

I wish my life in New South Africa to be so peace and friendly. For reason like to have white friends visiting each other in homes. Be in same place like in stadiums watching football. And our parents to allow us to have white boyfriends sharing our cultures and future planning. — Letter 809

Bandile lives in Umlazi. Like many of the young boys, he sees sports as a vehicle for integration, and has benefited from outreach programmes in this area:

I wouldn't be here if this was still a old South Africa. I wouldn't be in whites schools. My life in the new South Africa is great things have changed now. I can communicate with white people although my grammar is not that good but I try and that puts me in a better position. I have struggled to learn how to speak English and to communicate with white people. But only one language I would like to know how to speak Afrikaans but I just don't know how speak but I try but I know some words but I don't speak it fluently. What I like about the new South Africa is that people have changed and they got to be friendly to each other. And little things have changed like in the township like they made our grounds a little bit better instead of dusty grounds and new halls. But we don't have tennis court and basketball court. Some white people from the United Cricket Board once came to Umlazi to teach us how to play cricket and it was for free even girls were there but some of us had already known how to play cricket because we learnt from whites school. We were also chosen as a team the 15 of us. We also got a team by my house too.

My future has changed and people are allowed to do what they weren't allowed to do like go to white schools. But now we allowed like go to the whites schools and they weren't allowed to go in a same bus as whites I am in whites schools I got lots of whites friends. — Letter 558

An education in a mixed-race school seems to represent a quality education for many of the black students. Thembi was a bit apprehensive in her first year at a new school, but the quality of English demonstrates how well she has adjusted:

I started going to a model "c" school in 1992. My first year was a very difficult year. Firstly I wasn't fluent in English nor was I used to

mixing with white people. In my young age I thought they were the richest, cleverest people in the world, people I only saw when I went to town or on television. — Letter 341

Pearl moved to the white suburb of Woodlands from Umlazi and is very grateful for the change:

I thank my parents for giving us a chance to live, and bringing us to this well organised area. And most of all being in a white school where I know I will get the best education and make something of my life in the near future.

I am very pleased about the new South Africa and that we can finally be like other countries. We are really a new South Africa at last. I would also like to thank all the white children in Woodlands school for being so kind to us blacks. — Letter 519

Celiwe and Thabisile are both young women from the Durban area who are keen on the integration of schools:

When I was in standard 3 I was not allowed to read the same books at school as whites, but now I can read the same books. And what is even more interesting is how the whites are treating us. It's like they know that we are liberated and can not be oppressed again. They are much nicer and want to be friends with blacks. — Letter 798 (from Celiwe)

Education is very crucial in this country because now we allowed to the white school, Indian and coloured school but we paid a lot of money. Everything here need a lot of money, but black schools don't need a lot of money. But I don t want to learn in black school. If you are in white school you speak english well than the black school, then you go to the tertiary institution the first thing in tertiary you make a interview if you don't speak english well they don't care about you because you came from black school they do not help you.

When you are a black teenager there is many custom. Don't do this and that because of certain reason but if you're white you do things as you like. — Letter 760 (from Thabisile)

Cultural integration — the next step?

While integration of institutions is generally applauded, cultural integration is another matter entirely. The issue of interracial marriage is mentioned only by black students in the sample. Gilbert, who wrote letter 211 quoted above, also wrote a second letter in which he takes an extremely dim view of marriages across the colour lines:

I can think that if we were under National Party's apartheid rule it would be better. Nowadays there are many diseases which kill people for example Aids and Abola. We get these because apartheid is not there during the time of apartheid blacks were unable to marry white people. These diseases came in our country with the whites. These whites are the people who used to go overseas mostly. Aids and Abola came from overseas. — Letter 220

Some of the other black writers, however, see the success of interracial unions as a part of the new South Africa. Manana is 13 and lives in Durban. He recalls a time when white policemen would leave black victims of car accidents to die. Despite this past, he is happy to report the successes of integration:

I am enjoying my life in the new South Africa because blacks are allowed to go to whites schools like Glenwood High School and Durban Boys High. Some black live in white places and some whites get married to blacks and they are making a good relationship. — Letter 560

Andile, also from Durban, apparently views mixed marriage as a necessary and final proof of the death of apartheid:

What I like in the new South Africa is that we are now a one nation which can build something. We are now equal in many things. The most important thing that I like in the new South Africa is that black can do what whites used to do. Now we can find blacks marry a white, to show that South Africa has changed.

... What I would change if I could are those people who still have apartheid and I would like to change to see a white marrying a black. — Letter 567

Robert is from the former Venda and is studying personnel management at Technikon SA. He is either confused about the state of play in the new dispensation, or believes that only certain gender/race combinations are allowed:

Another thing that makes me feel happy is that there is no one reserved for black and whites. We can be the neighbour of whites. The only factor left is the name of marriage. Whites can marry blacks but blacks are prohibited to marry whites. — Letter 143

Nokuthula lives in Durban and is happy with the changes the new South Africa has brought. She apparently views marital integration as part and parcel of the upwardly mobile life in the new SA:

I want to married with a lawyer or doctor and that gentleman must be a white man and I want to have a clothing shop at Durban and to build big house in Cape Town or Newland West, and to have one boy and two girls, and three difference car and one taxi that is my ambitions becomes now in new South Africa. — Letter 386

Resuscitating black self-image

This last letter is indicative of the racial shame imposed by years of apartheid rule and the consequent poor social conditions suffered by blacks. Black self-image is further impacted by the increase in crime and violence in poor areas. Despite the fact that Nicholas says his

home in Lindelani is free of violence, he plans on leaving when he gets older:

I like to live with a white in the flats near the sea. I like to be a businessman. I like to buy a house and a car. I don't like to stay near the blacks because there is so much violence in the townships and in the location. — Letter 508

Promise, who lives in Chesterville, says nothing has changed in the new South Africa. She complains about the crime and pollution in the townships, but seems most upset by the political violence:

Look what is happening outside they are just fighting to one another. Killing each other why? It is because they don't use their minds. For example: look at the ANC and IFP. They are the big topics in this world and they are black. Black people they will end up killing another because they will always be stupid. — Letter 672

Dombuso recognises that there are no inherent differences between blacks and whites, and so discredits the view that “a black person got a black brain”. There are, however, behavioural differences that disturb him:

You will go all over the world but you didn't get the white people kill some white in that moment you will see the black do that. — Letter 812

Andile, who suggested intermarriage as a way to resolve racial tensions, still feels the need to debunk the most crass stereotypes of the past:

What I hate about the new South Africa is that some whites don't like blacks because they can see that we are equal. They think blacks still don't bath and stink which is not true. Most of the blacks work for white people. Some of us talk rude things about others, but they don't know that it doesn't matter what colour or what language we speak, we are the same. — Letter 567

Many of the black youth dream of a revision or a reversal of the roles assigned to the races during the apartheid era, particularly in the KwaZulu-Natal sample. Bandile, the young cricketer quoted above, looks forward to the day when race distinctions are gone:

My dreams and hopes is that white peoples should come and live in townships with black. In the townships we must also have things that what white people have in they areas like pools, tennis courts and shopping centres. — Letter 558

Surprise from KwaMashu waits for the day when blacks assume a proportional share in the upper ranks of society:

My dreams about New South Africa. Black must be in a higher level than the whites, not always whites. All blacks must be educated we must have a large number of engineers, CA's and large number of professionals which are in a high level. The education institution must be the same for blacks and whites not that whites must have a better education than the blacks. Even in the place where we are living in not that this is the whites area and this is the blacks area. I hope that we must live together don't fight with one another. We are Africans not animals or what else. We are rainbow nation.

What I like or love in this New South Africa is that no one is at lower level now all we are in the same level blacks and whites. Like males and females we are now doing the same task as the males. What I love very much is that of our government black government an inauguration presidential. And what I hate is that of the Afrikaners they have an apartheid I hate that situation of apartheid. Afrikaners they think for their families only not for all nation. — Letter 741

Dombuso, who was quoted above, will not be satisfied until whites also take up their share of honest labour:

Until now nobody can see white person go to help black person like you get more blacks everyday they go to clean the houses, wash clothes and do ironing for the white person but you didn't see white person do that for the blacks. — Letter 812

Thabile from KwaMashu would be more comfortable if people of her own race owned more of the large businesses:

I really happy when we have a bank who own by a black people. Because most of them are owned by white. And the big stores like Edgars, SalesHouse, Miladys, etc. are own by white. — Letter 791

Celiwe, quoted earlier, finds that some of the old roles have changed. Sometimes, the smallest consideration can make all the difference:

*I am beginning to like the fact that I can beat a white person and be known and seen. Not that I am a racist or anything.
... I remember once when I was at Edgars and nobody followed me, and when I called for help (assistance) the lady there was so nice and she called me madam, and the thing that shocked was that she was white and called me a black kid madam. I wish you could have been there and saw my face, it was filled with joy. — Letter 798*

On the whole, the spirit of reconciliation pervades among the youth of the new South Africa. Pearl, who was quoted earlier discussing the advantages of life in a white suburb, has found forgiveness through personal contact:

I am a person who doesn't actually believe in politics but when my grandfather used to tell my cousins and I how the whites used to treat them in the apartheid days I wished that the apartheid would go vice versa. But then I thought about it and then realised that I had to forgive because there are some very kind whites out there. Being in a white school also helped me a lot because I came to understand them and I even have white friends of my own. — Letter 519

Ntombozuko really drives home the implications of political equality for a nation of the formerly dispossessed:

We now rule shoulder to shoulder with white kids at school, in sports and in places of leisure like our beaches. I respect white kids because they also now respect me and see me as a person. Cases of black people in court are now judged like any other white men's. Every man now has a vote. It is everyone's right to vote. — Letter 628

"...we are the same"

The black South Africans who wrote in express a tremendous need to be accepted and find their way as leaders of a new democracy. Apartheid has had a great impact on their view of themselves and of other ethnic groups. The non-African writers who discuss race do so in a voice tinged by fear, guilt, and hope. But, especially among the younger writers who are being raised in multiracial schools, the dawning bliss of racial ignorance is apparent.

Chapter 14

"The key to
the future":

Perspectives on education

Christa van Zyl

Apartheid is now six feet down. — Letter 212

Although apartheid has been officially declared dead, we are left to contend with its heritage. The imperilled state of education in South Africa is a part of this heritage. For many years, education was a battleground in the struggle against apartheid. Many young people in South Africa have not known any form of education other than one characterised by disruption and a virtual breakdown of effective teaching and learning. Some were only able to attend schools in segregated and isolated areas, having no means to compare the standards of their education with those of more privileged counterparts. Today, with apartheid "six feet down", the struggle has not ended. For the most part, young people living in rural and isolated areas are still not in a position to exercise much choice in their selection of school, subjects or teachers. This impacts on their current and future career prospects, a problem highlighted in many letters:

I am a boy of 20 years old. I live in rural area in the homeland of Transkei ... In my ambition I want to be a doctor. But I don't know if how can I do because I'm poor. And also my parents have no money for educate me because we are many about 5 offspring. Only what is important in my ambition is to see my future bright. It will be bright only if I to manage to go to school. — Letter 382

I don't want to be like my parents to work for a farmer ... What bother me very much is that my parent they don't have money for to go on with education after passing matric it make me feel hard and harder. Sometime I think my future is rotten. — Letter 376

Education in a new dispensation

With the new political dispensation, many new opportunities for the future have been introduced for South Africa's youth. There is a sense of optimism about the future.

My life has changed now. When I was in lower classes I was just thinking that I will be a teacher ... I think everything has changed now ... Maybe someday I will be a president because it doesn't chose whether you are a girl or a boy. — Letter 700

Education is seen as an essential component of this bright new future. Amos lives in Mamelodi near Pretoria. He writes:

Going to school is a very important step in building a bright future for both ourselves and the country. Remember one thing no education no job and no job no future no future no life. — Letter 573

There is a link between education, freedom and responsibility, as Mokgothu from Zeerust explains:

Since I live in the new South Africa my life is completely changed. I used to hate school, but now I like school because a future without being educated is corrupt. I would like to advise the young South Africans who run away from school to go back to school. Since there

be the new South Africa we have to do anything we want, but not illegal things. — Letter 1

S'bongo from Greytown in KwaZulu Natal says:

I have used the type of idiom which says "education is the key to success". I like to encourage our nation to please go back to school in order to enter the New South Africa. There is no one enter in the New South Africa beside education. — Letter 121

There is a great deal of optimism about the future. In the new South Africa there are many opportunities, with living examples of people who have reached their goals in life:

One day I wish I could be one of the top singers and football players in the New South Africa. — Letter 1

Louis is 24 years old and lives in a rural village near the Kruger National Park. He was unable to further his studies at the technikon owing to financial constraints, but still has dreams for the future:

And I am dreaming to become a top executive member of parliament during the coming election campaign. — Letter 83

Vincent, a Standard 9 pupil living in Pimville, hopes to enter a career in finance:

Well to what I'd like to be is an accountant but if ever I did not get a bursary I intent to financial or Personnel Manager because I'm person who really enjoy working with money or be successfully Minister of Finance for my new fast developing country. Then if ever I succeed being given a chance to work with those deprived people I will promote their life style. — Letter 88

The setting of ambitious levels of academic achievement and career goals among black youth is also reported by Kuzwayo (1990). The perceptions, aspirations and hopes of young blacks are described by this author as bright, highly ambitious and motivated rather than

sentimental or unrealistic. The removal of political barriers has also removed barriers to their dreams and expectations for the future.

Many of the young respondents wish to enter higher education. Although this is often associated with a desire for personal social and economic improvement, quite a number of the writers also indicated that they wished to study further to be able to render a service to their communities:

After school I have intended to go to Military College because I want to be a soldier... The time when I will be a soldier, I will protect South Africa from terrorists and drug dealers. — Letter 1

Blessings is 20 years old, lives in Soweto and is studying Housing Development at the Technikon SA:

My future plans for these courses is that I realised the housing problems encountered by new South Africa and I'll be glad to take part in solving these problems to help the poor. — Letter 26

And Caroline, who lives in the far northern town of Louis Trichardt, also wishes to contribute to the upliftment of people living in difficult conditions:

After finishing my school at a secondary level I wish to go to tertiary to do further studies like Social Worker so as I can try to help the people of our country which are suffering for their life. — Letter 100

Education is seen by many as an antidote to social problems. Sandile from KwaMashu sees a strong inverse relationship between education and violence:

Because violence they make people that not educated. If all people have educated there no violence. — Letter 714

Eighteen-year-old Janana Millicent, also living in KwaMashu, writes:

The reason why we have too much robbery, murder, homeless child, crime and prostitute is because of the lack of education. If peoples of

South Africa can get education we wont have those problems like for instance the homeless child, if young girls of this country can get education about how to prevent pregnancy we will not have those street child. — Letter 675

Unfortunately, education does not offer a quick-fix, cure-all solution to all the ailments of society. If the roots of a problem are to be found outside the system of education, then changes in the system of education alone will not be able to change the fabric of society. Economic, social, political and technological factors are not only influenced by education - they also influence the nature and viability of educational reform (cf. World Bank, 1995).

What are the realities? Schools in South Africa

The stark differences that used to exist between black and white schools in the past have not disappeared overnight. Available facilities are reported to differ substantially, and the expectation is that government should foot the bill for the required improvements.

The education in our school is low. Myself I'm doing commercial subjects. The teacher taught us about computer; we don't know that thing, whereas in private schools computers are there. — Letter 160

Caroline of Louis Trichardt does not seem to realise that private schools are not funded at the same level as public schools. Nevertheless, her concern is real:

I'm attending private school. And this school has a shortage of Textbooks so many children are suffering of Textbooks. I wish if the Minister of Education knows this maybe they can try by the all means to help the school which they are suffering about Textbook. Textbooks are more important in many schools. — Letter 100

Sindisiwe is 19 years old and lives in Umlazi. Like others, she considers the lack of laboratory facilities to be a serious problem,

but sees the shortage of equipment for extramural activities as an equally important issue.

We need some dresses that we wear when we are playing some different sports. For example the netball uniform. Even the balls are not enough, that we use where we are playing netball. — Letter 719

Tholozani comes from KwaZulu-Natal and stresses that school buildings and materials in their area are inadequate:

We don't have enough schools and all the materials for school like Library, Laboratory and many things. Even the buildings of our schools are not certified. If you look at white schools, you find the good builder and expensive, you find the big classes and many classes. — Letter 786

In fact, there is a concern that things have not really changed in schools in the new South Africa:

Even at school thing it is still like the old government. — Letter 573
What I hate about schools in this New South Africa is that schools are not even started to be improved, they are still the same. Instead they are improving schools that are already improved but they are still improving them. Schools that are in rural areas are so shamed but if you can go to the whites schools, you will see a big difference there. — Letter 694

Some realise that these differences are also due to funding over and above government sources.

I want to see some changes in education like to see a syllabus of a white schools becomes same like that of the black schools and the black schools need many sponsors to sponsor them with computers, typing machinery etc. — Letter 749

Policy-makers are facing the difficulty of meeting all needs and expectations with a very limited budget. As stated in the National

Assembly: "The learners in the black ghettos of this country need more than their teachers for the inculcation of political and social responsibility. They do not want to pay school fees whatsoever. They also do not trust their teachers in the handling of school funds. As political leaders we urgently need to attend to these problems. I know that the good guarantee that a learner will not be chased away from school for financial reasons is very likely to be abused by learners in the ghettos, despite any understanding by their parents" (Hansard, 24 October 1996: 4708).

Unsuitably qualified teachers

There are still many teachers who are unqualified or unsuitably qualified for the classes they are required to teach. Although some of these teachers are very good and became masters in the required subject through personal study and dedication, the majority of them are not able to cope. Unfortunately, most of the unqualified and underqualified teachers are also employed in historically disadvantaged institutions, where upgrading of knowledge and skills cannot be supported without considerable effort.

I also like to indicate that the problem lies in a fact that you find a teacher is given a post and that particular teacher passed matric with school leaving certificate, so how can that teacher produce exemption students whereas the teacher himself did not obtain exemption. The Department of Education must take this into consideration. — Letter 228

English as medium of instruction

It is difficult to communicate freely in a language that is not heard or spoken outside the formal confines of the school and classroom. English, a foreign language for many students, often poses a

problem to students who need to learn and communicate effectively through the medium of this language.

In 1994, Franks and Glass reported on a study undertaken among black youth in rural areas of the Northern Province and KwaZulu-Natal. In general, respondents were positive about learning in the medium of English. People who were less positive about English as medium of instruction were mostly critical about the poor quality of teachers and the teaching of English in schools.

This sentiment was also echoed in some of the letters, such as the one from 17-year-old Thabile from KwaMashu:

... every teacher in Zulu school must teach students in English not explaining in Zulu because they kill the young South African. They give them a problem when he meet another people who can [not] speak Zulu. — Letter 791

Inability to communicate fluently in English has a detrimental effect on further study prospects in tertiary institutions, according to 18-year-old Thabisile, a matriculant in Pinetown:

If you are in white school you speak english well than the black school, then you go to the tertiary institution the first thing in tertiary you make a interview if you don't speak english well they don't care about you because you came from black school they do not help you. — Letter 760

The culture of teaching and learning in schools

The motivation and personal input of both teachers and learners are often sadly lacking. This is a worrying phenomenon, as the expectations of learners for the future are nevertheless very high.

Motlare is 24 years old and a Standard 10 student in Tembisa. Her subjects are Northern Sotho, English, Afrikaans, Geography,

History and Biology, and she intends to become a lawyer in the future:

... what worries me a lot is the way I don't concentrate in class more especially during History period. The teacher who teaches us is shorttempered. He does not give me an opportunity to ask questions in class. Everyday when he attend our class he is angry with us or is it that there is no cooperation between students and teachers I know not. — Letter 321

She also complains about students who don't do their work properly:

What I dislike most is the students who don't do their works. In our class about 50% copy homeworks and assignments from others. — Letter 321

And Amos, who is 24 years old and lives in Mamelodi, where he is also doing his Standard 10 year, has the following to say:

In many high school there is no proper teaching particular the black nation school. You find that the syllabus of history for example is not taught fully because it is said that it is not important. In some school certain subject are taught by the teacher who have never studies them at college or when they were at school. Pupils are also encouraged to choose subject that are chosen by majority eg science is not encouraged I would like to appeal to Professor Bhengu to pay attention to this matter. — Letter 573

The need for guidance

Many students do not study the subjects needed to help them achieve their goals — sometimes because the options are not available to them, and sometimes because they prefer “soft” subjects. To become nuclear physicists, chartered accountants, engineers or lawyers (cf. Kuzwayo, 1990), subject choice and

performance at secondary school level become important. Malan (1995: 16) refers to a system skewed in favour of subjects such as Biology, Geography, History and Biblical Studies: "Clearly if this trend were to continue, the youth would become even more frustrated with the learning opportunities offered to them."

There is an acute need for guidance regarding subject choice, study skills, career choice, study and bursary opportunities, and general life orientation. The changes in the political environment have, however, led to some positive changes and improvements in education. Gift, a 16-year-old boy living in a rural part of the Northern Province, has the following to say about changes in the culture of teaching and learning in his school:

New South Africa come with just little change, the teacher change their boring style of teaching but not all of them. Corporal punish is abolish, is buried like apartheid ... — Letter 376

Social problems

Teenage pregnancy is a social problem with implications for education. Mmako (1996: 7-8) refers to teenage sexuality and child-bearing as a major concern which may adversely affect the education as well as the health of the teenage mother.

Some have their own babies to attend to:

I attend school... and doing matric. In my everyday life I have to wake up wash my baby and do my homework. After that I have to wash nappies and I also have to feed my baby girl. Doing this work every day they disturbed my studies. — Letter 242

Anthony is 29 and lives in Boipatong. Currently unemployed, he is involved in a number of community upliftment programmes. He writes:

My grave great concern is about children who abuses drugs and alcohol. If they are excessively drunk they become aggressive. According to recent statistics the rate of children using drugs and alcohol is very high. They forget that they are schoolgoing children. They are lazy and don't do their schoolwork properly. They are the ones who are very troublesome at school and a threat to the society. Something very drastic must be done with these children so they must come back to normal society life. — Letter 214

Cultural barriers

Although apartheid is dead in the new South Africa, there are still vast cultural differences between members of different groups and the schools traditionally attended by them. Some blacks have entered previously white or Indian schools, and report on their experiences in this regard. Since the vast majority of our schoolgoing population is black, however, it will only be a small percentage of learners that will be able to attend schools that are not predominantly or exclusively attended by blacks. The effect of the abolishment of apartheid in the composition of school populations will therefore only be evident in a relatively small percentage of schools that have become multiracial.

Sixteen-year-old Hlengiwe from Umlazi has an ideal of seeing all South Africans united as one nation. As the majority of black learners will probably remain in black schools, however, there are stumbling-blocks in the way.

What I would change is first the education system, as you know that schools are divided in groups there are black schools, white schools, coloured schools, Indian schools and Afrikaans schools. The point is that the blacks do go to other cultures schools but the culture do not come to our schools. I will open the doors for those pupils from

cultures who are interested in coming to our schools. I will stop racism in work places ... — Letter 822

It is not always easy to cross cultural barriers and to encounter the established hidden curriculum of a new school. Abegail is in Standard 10 now, and writes the following about how she experienced her first year in a multiracial school:

I started standard six there [at a multiracial school] guiding myself in another planet until 1993 when I passed my standard seven. It was difficult to understand each other at school because the whites had dominated the school and everyone had their point of view from her background. — Letter 202

Being in a multiracial school has also affected her relationships with friends and family in the township:

Since I started at the multi racial school my life style in the township changed which made other people to call me a "noble" person. — Letter 202

Sixteen-year-old Tiisetso from Pietersburg also refers to the alienating effect of attending a multiracial school on relationships with old friends:

People started saying that we, the black students in "white" schools, think we're white and that we are racist. — Letter 368

The pros of attending a multiracial school nevertheless seem to outweigh the cons:

But I am glad that I had a privilege of going to a multiracial school because I hadn't got money of going to a private school. — Letter 202

I really enjoy being in [a multiracial] school, but I do not have enough money for all my prescribed books. My teachers are very friendly and

helpful and I enjoy working with them. When I am at school I feel better than when I am at home. — Letter 138

At the same time, it should be noted that there are also good schools with excellent examples of educational leadership in predominantly black areas, even in the most deprived and desperate situations. Catherine lives in a part of Tembisa that has suffered much through violence and disruption. She writes:

Since I was born I didn't experience such problem but know am experiencing much problems like killing people and shooting of the helicopter, so the situation is not good ... And in our school we plant trees to protect the area and we try hard to make the place clean and our principal is a very good person I ever meet. — Letter 102

And, as one writer states it:

However the poor kind of education one gets, it is better than nothing. Many a great men have risen to greatness through education conducted under trees or in mud classrooms. — Letter 308

Opportunities beyond the formal school system

The provision of education — in particular, primary and lower secondary (basic) education — is an individual human right. In fact, Chapter 2 of the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states the following:

Everyone has the right —
(a) to a basic education, including adult basic education; and
(b) to further education, which the state must take reasonable measures to make progressively available and accessible

The provision of quality basic education is also regarded as critical for economic growth and the reduction of poverty (World Bank, 1995: 1, 17). The introduction of universal compulsory general education in South Africa, by means of the South African Schools

Act as well as the various provincial education and training acts, represents the realisation of a long-term commitment of government.

Even though the provision and funding of general education already represents a considerable burden on education budgets, provision should be made for access to further and higher education and training. Individual learners stand to gain much from relevant further and higher education in terms of employability and future earnings. At the same time, there are also potential benefits to be gained from further education by society at large and the state.

The young people who wrote letters have successfully completed their basic education — most of them are either in the final years of secondary education, or they have completed this phase of schooling. Many are very poor and are feeling desperate that they are unable to further their studies owing to financial constraints. What most of these young people ask for is the opportunity to enter tertiary education. Once they have graduated, perhaps, they may be able to break with the spiral of poverty and achieve the dreams and ideals expressed in their letters.

There are many problems and concerns facing youth outside the formal school system. Although education is universally regarded as the key to the future, most realise that basic education alone does not magically open doors to jobs, to careers and to empowerment.

Limited job opportunities

Many of the writers are currently unemployed. They realise that there are not enough jobs for all the people in South Africa:

Another thing is that students who had been passed their matrics, they still at their homes, but there are no enough schools and jobs. —

Letter 694

In the new South Africa if you need work you'll need a certificate of those works. If you have not certificate and you will get no work. — Letter 7

Ms Tlhaka lives in a rural area near Pietersburg. She completed her matric in 1992 with an average E symbol and, after a first unsuccessful attempt in 1994, passed her first year for the B.A. degree at the University of the North in 1995. She worked as a private teacher in 1993 in order to raise funds for her studies. She says:

I'm a lady of 28 years old, unmarried with a baby daughter aged 10 years. I will have been at the university at the moment but due to certain finance matters I'm at home looking for a job. I'm in a dark position not knowing what kind of job I will be offered because I'm in no position. I have not yet completed my degree, no computer courses, only matric certificate. — Letter 262

Although education is regarded as a means to improve future employability, it is recognised that some "qualification inflation" has already occurred:

In these days even having matric is like having standard seven certificate. — Letter 675

Madala lives in Bronkhorstspuit and completed her matric in 1994. She has not been able to enrol at a technikon due to financial constraints, and, despite many job applications with a variety of possible employers, she is still unemployed. She writes:

I realise that a mere matric doesn't guarantee someone a job. What I dislike again is that the government don't give a damn about helping matriculants whom their parents can't afford tertiary expenses. I think their concentration is only in urban areas... — Letter 675

Even graduates do not always find a job. Mandoli, who lives in Bethal, writes:

Most of the things that we have been promised are not yet done, only few that exist ... There must be jobs for educated and uneducated people. There are students who has graduated in 1994 but even now they are waiting for jobs. What's a use then to be educated and if you have finished you became the same as those who are not educated? — Letter 326

The problem of the educated unemployed, and accompanying inflation of entry standards was described by Engelbrecht and Nieuwenhuis (1988: 165-166) as a phenomenon typical of many developed and developing countries. Improved educational opportunities lead to increased numbers of qualified job-seekers. When the economy and employment opportunities do not grow at a similar rate, grave problems may be experienced.

Financial problems

Many writers refer to an urgent need for bursaries and financial support to enter higher education:

I used to be a keen student and passed my matric with flying colours. I had thought that life starts after matriculation. How wrong I was! I may add, I'm from a very underprivileged family. — Letter 231

My only problem is that I don't have enough funds to further my studies so that I too can have a better future like other people. In this new life I'd like to live a better life. — Letter 600

These extracts from letters underline the importance and the complexity of the task of planners and decision-makers regarding educational financing. The plea for financial support to enable access to further and higher education is understood and addressed in many documents dealing with educational finance and investment. The 1996 report of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) devotes substantial space to proposals on the introduction

of a student financial aid scheme, as well as to the problems and challenges of affording and administering such a scheme in the long run.

Finite budgets have to be brought in line with almost infinite needs and expectations. A balance needs to be struck between national developmental goals and priorities, and individual development, needs and expectations. The 1995 World Bank report underlines quite a number of issues typically associated with the public funding of education. The point is made there that it is reasonable to expect students and parents to be willing to contribute to higher education costs — as the private (individual) returns on higher education may well be more than the social (national) gains. To achieve equity and redress, however, provision should also be made for loans and scholarships (World Bank, 1995: 10-11; NCHE 1996: 321).

But, as pointed out in the letters, in the World Bank report, as well as in the discussions contained in the NCHE report, it will be extremely difficult to fund and administer such a scheme in a sustainable fashion. It has been estimated, for instance, that it will require some R895 million per year to meet the need of about 70 000 students — at least R350 million per year to be raised from sources other than government and student contributions (1996 figures). International experience shows that such amounts are not easily recovered, owing to high default rates, administration costs and heavily subsidised interest rates (World Bank, 1995: 108).

The need for financial support may eventually lead to wrong choices and a waste of human and financial resources. An anonymous student teacher implies that she only entered this study field because of the availability of a bursary:

Regardless of being a student teacher, I am planning to be a journalist and after completing my secondary teachers diploma, I would like to study journalism at any institution which will admit me. To be have

studied teaching or being studying teaching as my career is just because our "new" South Africa does not offer black students with the financial assistance. — Letter 193

Some writers realise that they themselves should also try to fund their own further education. Lillian is 24 years old, already married, and has one child. Although she is not formally employed, she is still working to make her dream of entering tertiary education come true:

I beat unemployment in 1994 when I started baking cookies and buns sell them take nearest firms and to my community ... When I pass matric 1992 I wanted to be a administration manager, so because of lack of money I didn't study further to tertiary level. At the moment I am still banking money and searching for bursaries. Sometimes my dream will come true one day. To all South Africa I say let us work hard for ourselves and for the future of our children. If you are not working try something that can get you money. My slogan is BE CREATIVE AND BE YOUR OWN BOSS IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA. — Letter 272

Motlare, who lives in Tembisa, writes the following about her contribution to the future:

What I feel strongly about is that I must pass my matric with flying colours. I must be educated not certificated. I must marry an educated man ... I feel that in the New South Africa where a person has got free education we must not fold up our hands, waiting for manna to fall from heaven. We must try by all means to be educated ... Education is the key to success. — Letter 321

Seventeen-year-old Simangile from KwaMashu writes:

... I always tell myself that I fight for my future because there is no one who can help me in my future my self. I always tell myself that I can do it. — Letter 708

And Louis, who lives in a small village near the Kruger National Park, hopes to get a good job to meet his needs and expectations:

And if was supposed to train three years from the well known Technikon Northern Transvaal. But due to financial problem I am a school leaver at tertiary level that is embarrassing. And now I am expecting to get job that will give competitive salary in order to sum my expenses. To pay all the academic fees next year and even to eat delicious. — Letter 83

Student responses and solutions

After the first democratic elections, expectations of dramatic improvements in living conditions — including the condition of education and training — were running high. Lack of delivery and delays in delivery are regarded as serious problems and may eventually impact negatively on the credibility of the government.

A young student teacher writes the following:

I think it is wise for the government or any political party to stick on their promises which they promised we people at ground, because if they do not stick onto their promises, we will no longer cast our vote for them. We won't appreciate empty promises. In everyday news, magazines and newspapers, they talk of how good education is, but they do not offer student teachers with bursaries. When you apply for a bursary they will tell you that no bursaries for student teachers. So, where is our new South Africa we are suppose to live? — Letter 193

These statements are indicative of a serious problem, echoed in the following extract from a debate in the National Assembly on the South African Schools Bill: "A hungry man will dislike you if you refuse to give him help. He will hate you if you promise help and give him a cheque that bounces. Many young children out there are

hungry for education. We cannot delay any longer" (Hansard, 24 October 1996: 4720).

The young people who wrote letters also offered a broad range of solutions to the problems and concerns they highlighted. Some of the solutions may be idealistic or relatively unaffordable, but the many suggested solutions indicate that the young people do analyse their environment in a creative and effective way. They need to become part of the solution, to understand why certain harsh decisions are taken. There is a need to harness together the creativity and enthusiasm of our young people, for the benefit of themselves and of the society at large.

Provision of additional facilities

If more and better facilities for education and extramural activities are provided, some of the problems currently experienced by many writers may be addressed. Suggestions range from youth centres built by the government and big companies, where young people will be involved in various activities (Letter 214), to community team sports centres where group discussions can be held and through which matric results might improve (Letter 242). More schools, technikons and universities are also requested - especially in areas where these are inadequate in number or simply lacking altogether:

There are no centres where we can ask as many questions as we can about writing ... Here at Mpumalanga we don't even have one tertiary institution like universities and technikons. — Letter 326

My opinion about education the government and Minister of education must build more schools, Technikons, Universities. If all people educated no violence going on. — Letter 714

... increase the number of schools in all Township because people are growing and school are remain the same. And can increase the number of colleges, Technikons and universities. Because we need educated people who can lead the country of South Africa. Because everything need education now. — Letter 791

Unfortunately, there are very few suggestions as to how such facilities will be funded.

Utilising available resources

Some writers indicated that, although they have not been able to enter institutions of higher learning, they are learning a lot from resources such as the public library.

Vincent is in Standard 9 and hopes to pursue a successful career in the financial field:

The thing is that I like to research in library to find out more about economics subject which are subject I do at school and try find out more about this subject by poising more question to my teachers while they teach in class, and read business news and challenge other students to discuss those issues and find more from them what do they think about our future as economy of tomorrow and South Africans. — Letter 88

Mandoli, who lives in Bethal, was unable to follow a course at the technikon owing to financial constraints. She is currently unemployed and helps with chores around the house. But she learns a lot from visits to the library:

... where I read different books. We grew up knowing that libraries are for the white only, but least new South Africa has played a role this time. These different books has made me a little bit different from my friends eg most of the things that they do now know or understand I always be the solver. — Letter 326

Twenty-one-year-old Solly, who lives in Kazerne, is adding value to his distance education course:

My motto is that "there is power in working together". After registering [at the Technikon SA — distance education], I realised that there's no daytoday classes. I decided to conduct other students. I did that by writing pamphlets. After those pamphlets, other students started to recognise that they are not alone and then they joined me. So automatically a child is born, I mean the group discussion started to function... There is no need to worry, one could enjoy distance education. As long as we work together, together as one. — Letter 217

Hard work and concentration bear fruit

Although some letters portray a feeling of dependency on external forces to improve a given situation, there are also many writers who convey a spirit of personal responsibility and hard work.

S'bongo from Greytown wishes to become a successful electrician and a leader in his community:

During the learning I am concentrating in my subject like maths and physical science. I like to be at school anytime and spend in my time in school work. Ever since I am on the high school level, I like to work hard refer to success. I am not wasting time with clothing. — Letter 121

Felicia, only 15 years old and in Standard 7, writes the following about her future:

But I don't worry "mitswana o hi are o se bone nong gorakalala godima goya tlase ke ga yona" Ka ba ka gopola mafoko a morutabana vogme are "if you want to live like a king now live like a slave tomorrow, and if you want to live like a slave now live like king tomorrow. — Letter 138

Proposed changes in policy — Special provision should be made for youth

I believe that there should be protection and entrenchment of youth rights in the New Constitution. — Letter 368

The Constitution makes specific provision for the rights of children under the age of 18. Access to education, health and social care is protected for these children. Young people older than 18 do not enjoy the same level of protection, and in many respects these young people may feel somewhat marginalised by the new dispensation for which they also fought. It should be noted that a National Youth Commission was formally appointed by government. At its workshop in December 1996, this commission was focusing on the formulation of a national youth policy framework. Young people should become involved in the formulation of a viable and acceptable policy framework on youth affairs.

Change in funding priorities

Madala has not been able to enter tertiary education owing to lack of funds. She is aware of instances where funds for feeding schemes have been maladministered, and has the following to say:

I think the government can do something. The government must stop the school feeding scheme. It must be suspended effectively. A lot of money is being wasted on this feeding scheme by so doing, the government can use that money for bursary projects. I mean with this project many of us can benefit a lot and so the whole country. In this way the government can eliminate or combat the problem or lack of literacy. Why suspending the school feeding scheme is because there is corruption and theft of money. I have a strong belief that every parent can afford to give children money for eating at school. I feel it's time for government to think constructively in terms of bursary project.

This will be good for the country. I don't say we must all get bursary and we can't all be qualified but we can all become literal active. — Letter 266

Her proposal clearly highlights the problematic nature of funding decisions. Access to education is a right entrenched in the Constitution — but to what extent is access to further and higher education a human right? At the same time, Section 2 of the Constitution protects the specific rights of children, which includes a right to *basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services*. To what extent can government afford to support and finance all of these rights, and how can government introduce funding and administrative systems that will see to it that funds are allocated to those that are in real need of these funds, and that maladministration does not take place?

Population development?

Some writers realise that funds will remain limited if the demand keeps growing. Twenty-nine-year-old Anthony from Boipatong has the following to propose:

I think the government have to try bring about measure which I read from paper that Japan ... people with children more than two to be tax more and they pension be cut because those children most end up living street children being criminals robbers and murders. I think by that parents will be able to give they children love and fair chances that must be given to children. — Letter 88

Nation-building

Sixteen-year-old Hlengiwe from Umlazi believes that co-operation and nation-building are the real key to the future:

My expectations in South Africa is that South Africans can work together as one, people of all colour and races, that one day there would be peace ... My hopes for South Africa are for South Africans to succeed in everything it does, to provide for it's citizens, to have rights which protects young children and women from the menace people who hurt them, for everyone to put a hand in making this a united country successful and happy. — Letter 822

The key to the future

The importance of education in our new South Africa was pointed out time and again by the letter writers. Education was aptly described as the key to the future. But the shortcomings of our current system are also evident in the many problems and concerns raised in the letters.

The writers of the letters refer to many issues that represent top priorities for education authorities — priorities for further investigation, for action to be taken, for clear communication. Although they come from many different parts of the country, the writers do identify common problems and concerns.

Some of the expectations voiced in the letters may well be regarded as unrealistic and unaffordable, but the message from the letters is clear. There are still many problems and inequalities in our society and in our education and training system that need to be addressed. Some writers offer solutions; others are simply hoping for a better future. The challenge facing the government of South Africa and the young education departments established to serve our nation is immense. Education has been a starting-point, a battleground, and an ultimate aim in the struggle — the long and arduous walk to freedom.

In the words of eighteen-year-old Winnie, who lives in KwaMashu near Durban:

I have so many dreams about South Africa but I am very happy because one of them is fulfill. Where our country is back, we struggle hard before we got our government of National Unity that mark the first freedom. Nelson Mandela became our first black president. Everybody who was waiting for Mandela is free but now the only thing I can say is that the youth of South Africa must look forward to the second freedom that is to be educated. During this time of the new South Africa you need to be educated nobody will take you education there is no other way to life even in freedom there is no easy walk and freedom was everybody's dream in this country. To the young people my strong words I can say go to school, be educated because education is the key to success, and if we are educated our nation will be together and free forever. — Letter 751

The insights obtained from the letters clearly point to the need to reconcile individual needs with national priorities. If we do not communicate clearly, if correct guidance and support are not given, problems may arise. The creative power of our young people is impatiently waiting to be brought on board in the new South Africa. Education can and should provide the bridge. The challenge remains with us all.

Chapter 15

Careers in transition

Siyabonga Mngadi

In this chapter, the ambitions of the young South Africans who entered the letter writing competition will be discussed. The main focus will be on what work experiences these young writers would like to have in the future and the causes of these aspirations. The youths' preferred career choices will be explored in the first part of this chapter, followed by a discussion of the reasons for these choices.

Post-matric in the new South Africa

In the new South Africa, black youth have become aware of the ways in which their talents were underdeveloped in the past. Victory in the struggle against apartheid has given young African people the confidence to believe that nothing is unattainable. This newfound self-assurance, teamed with a heightened political awareness, has led the writers to see their lives in terms of a struggle with broader social issues such as crime, education, child abuse and violence.

Although some of the writers are pessimistic, most write positively about their lives. This is true despite the many problems they face, particularly after matric. Most of these problems are related to

unemployment and lack of finance to further their studies, leading many into unacceptable means of income generation. Some have resorted to informal trading in order to cope with life. For many, there have been no immediate solutions other than to remain at home.

The young people have realised that it is through them that their communities will be improved. They express a desire to prove that the lost generation has been found. This is illustrated by their occupational choices, most of which are not only directed towards individual satisfaction but are also geared towards the upliftment of their communities. Reasons given by the following two entrants for their careers illustrate the patriotism of this young generation:

This interest in medicine is aroused by the shortage of doctors in South Africa. — Letter 188

Upgrading my country's engineering is my dream. — Letter 190

Apartheid, combined with the struggle for political freedom, created an atmosphere where the career development of young African people was obstructed. Owing to poor education, they were not allowed to develop their potential fully. For a good number of the students, the effects of apartheid continue to be felt in many ways. As Murarha, a Venda student argues:

The education in our school is low. Myself I'm doing commercial subjects. The teacher taught us about computer; we don't know that thing, whereas in private schools computers are there. — Letter 160

In 1996 the youth recognise that their education is not meant to remain in its present state. They realise that they will need better education to make their dreams come true. As one entrant suggests:

My opinion about education [-] the government and Minister of education must build more schools, Technikons, Universities. If all people [are] educated [there will be] no violence going on. Violence

make[s] all people [suffer from] unemployment. If people [are] educated they [will] get jobs [-] education helps people which [are] not [able] to get jobs. That's why I say the government must build more schools. — Letter 714

"What I want to be in the new South Africa..."

The letters show the breadth of the young people's career choices. Table 1 illustrates a wide variety of occupations to which the letter

Government executives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● State president ● Lawyer ● Judge
Health occupations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Doctor ● Dentist ● Nurse ● Chemist ● Pharmacist ● Physiotherapist ● Veterinarian ● Optometrist
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School teacher ● Adult education teacher ● University teacher
Travel and transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pilot ● Flight attendant
Clerical and secretarial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clerk ● Administrator ● Secretary
Social services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social worker ● Child care worker ● Psychiatrist ● Psychologist ● Au pair

Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Broadcaster ● Public relations officer ● Foreign exchange director ● Journalist ● Writer ● Interpreter
Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Designer ● Hairdresser ● Actor/Actress ● Musician ● Artist ● Cartoonist ● Sign writer
Protective services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Security guard ● Police officer ● Detective ● Soldier ● Traffic warden
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accountant ● Auditor ● Administrative manager ● Economist ● Financial manager ● Insurance agent/broker ● Hotel manager
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Electrician ● Carpenter
Table 1 Job classification according to Scharf (1993)	

writers in the competition aspire, from State president to Foreign Exchange Director, from Sign Writer to Traffic Warden.

One of the schools participating in the survey was Gresswold Senior School, a special school for students with learning disabilities, which includes vocational training in its curriculum. Most of the writers who aspire to a career in sign writing or hairdressing are from Gresswold, where skills training is offered in these areas.

Improved education has sparked an interest in drama and the music industry. Popular artists, like Mbongeni Ngema and Mzwakhe Mbuli, seem to be influential in promoting this interest. The influence of local arts leaders was evident in letters like that received from Robert from Rooihuiskraal:

In my successfulness I would like to build a theatre and promote street kids. I would like to follow on the footsteps of (Mbongeni Ngema, Gibson Kente, Godfrey "Godfather" Moloi etc.) my super stars. — Letter 46

A number of letter writers also show a strong interest in sports. The fact that the letter writing competition was run during a period when South Africa scored a number of great sports victories could have influenced young people to consider sports activities as a career. Some of the writers expressed their wishes to become professional soccer, tennis and rugby players.

Table 2: Preferred occupations

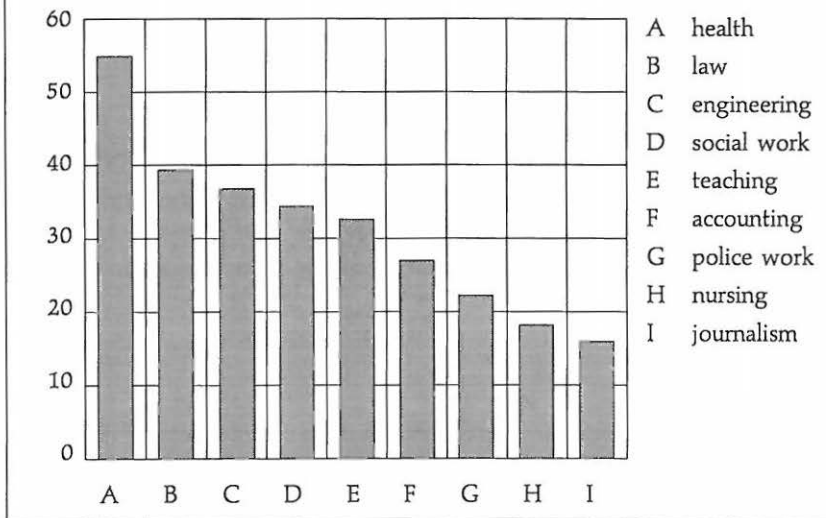


Table 2 illustrates the most popular occupational preferences of the letter writers. Here, health occupations are grouped together, with the exception of nursing which scored highly on its own.

Subjective factors influencing career selection

Gender, age, education and social background are among the most powerful determinants of career ambitions, but more subjective elements also play a role. Personal interests, talents and early experiences are all important factors in shaping occupational choice.

● Interests and ambitions

Beverley from Diepkloof is an example of a young person whose fascination with computers has dictated her career choice:

When I finish school I want to go to university to do Bachelor of Science degree which take three years. I want to be a computer programmer. I love computers that is why I chose a career in them. — Letter 247

Some of the writers seem to be motivated by the challenge of overcoming stereotypes about race or gender. This ambition is expressed by a 19-year-old student from Manglasi village:

My intention is to further my studies at Rhodes University doing engineering. I want to make impossible things possible by becoming the first female pilot, who will explore the world as a whole. My hobbies include going to church, reading, watching television and sports. — Letter 251

● Talents

Some young writers are eager to develop their talents further in their future careers. This is illustrated by Joseph, who hopes to be a qualified architect someday:

I would like to become an Architect. The reason is that I know and aware where my talent lie. As I already mentioned about the drawing. This is my talent as I proved recently at my school. And now I am famous because of my skill. — Letter 5

● Life experiences

Negative and positive life experiences can have an impact on later career choices. For people like Mohammed and Meera, career choices have been influenced by life experiences:

I'd one day like to become a dentist. I remember that I had a dental problem while at school. My dentist rectified my problem and the way he treated me, made me feel that dentistry is the career I 'd like to undertake. — Letter 292 (from Mohammed)

I love to be a nurse which will given my a golden opportunity to help the sick. It touches me the most to work with them because five years ago my father suffered a heart attack. He was rushed to hospital but dies on a bench at the hospital because of a shortage of doctors. — Letter 503 (from Meera)

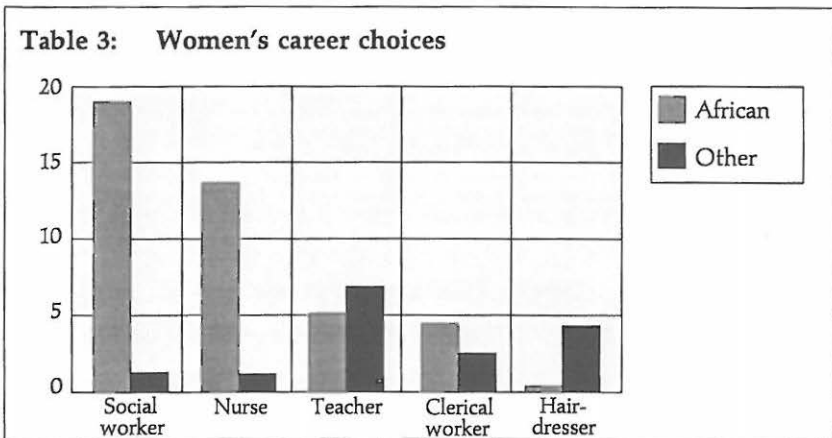
Encounters such as these have in many cases inspired people to take on related occupations. A 23-year-old male from Jouberton, who suffered greatly after his parents died, tells how this early trauma has influenced his ambitions:

In the new South Africa I intend to be a social worker. I realised that here in South Africa most of social workers are females who some of them can't handle rights of children. I suffered most that is why I want to be social worker. We nearly becomes street children but I thanks God Almighty for giving me strength and showing me the way to combat all the attacks which are against us. I want to help those children who are homelessness, who have nothing to eat. I

intend to help them and to show them the way they can live.—
Letter 161

Gender

In South Africa, career choices were limited for women in the past. Generally, women's occupations were regarded as low status, either because they were low-paying or because they required low qualifications and therefore received less recognition. Traditionally, the fields of child care, clerical work, teaching and nursing were



reserved for women. It is only recently that men have entered these occupations.

This assignment of occupations along gender lines was particularly true in the African community. Table 3 compares the career choices of African women and women of other race groups for the five most popular "female occupations".

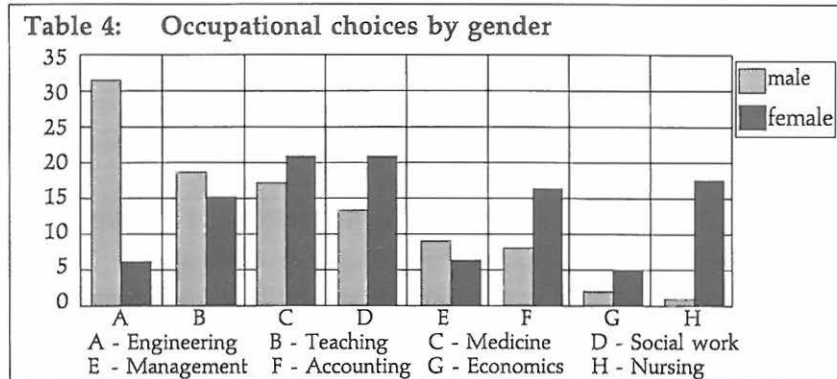
With the rise of feminism in South Africa, the gender division of labour was among the many aspects of oppression that were attacked. As a result, more and more women have risen to

managerial positions and other highly respected occupations. Opportunities for African women to advance were slow in coming because of their double oppression under apartheid and the traditional patriarchal system. Even though the racial barriers have been removed, female advancement will continue to be a problem in those communities which still adhere strongly to their cultures and traditions. As a young women from Vuwami reminds:

... but, don't forget that I am staying in a rural area, where our senior citizens and some stoics do not accept that a women can be a leader, for her is to fetch water, cook and look after the children. — Letter 299

It is commonly known that parts of the African communities have remained patriarchal. Traditionally, in these communities a married woman is expected to remain at home to look after the children and the husband's parents. This is also a reason why parents have not been enthusiastic about sending female children to school. Teaching and nursing were the two careers that helped in strengthening the women's recognition in these traditional communities. African people had easy access to these occupations. At the same time, these occupations also provided a door to the world of work for females as they did not clash with their housekeeping responsibilities and also matched their "caring" personalities. These

Table 4: Occupational choices by gender



occupations were also accessible in terms of transport, as they were mainly locally based.

The role of women in African communities may be changing. Many female letter writers wished to enter into those occupations which were previously male-dominated. Although only 15 entrants specifically mentioned a willingness to take managerial positions, it is evident that young females also feel fit to take these positions. Table 4 illustrates the degree to which young females are willing to overcome the legacy of apartheid and male domination.

Social work is one area that became popular among South African women in the 1980s. The young women of the 1990s still feel strongly about this career, and it was the most popular career choice among young female African writers, followed closely by nursing. One explanation for the continued popularity of social work is that teaching, one of the other traditional career options, continues to carry little social prestige. If the wishes of these letter writers come true, social work and nursing will continue to be dominated by African females.

It will take time to close the gender gap in occupational choice, but the number of young people expressing interest in entering those jobs which have been dominated by the opposite sex is quite significant. The women who entered the contest are exploring the possibility of entering even such male-dominated fields as engineering. African males are also interested in engineering in increasing numbers, a field which had been closed to them owing to their poor education. Social work, teaching and medicine are popular occupational choices for both males and females. Nursing proves to be the only occupation which continues to attract little gender crossover. The new generation has high aspirations, and a career in nursing is still regarded by males to be of low status.

Age

It is not always the case that adolescents will still want to become what they wished to be at the age of eight. As children grow older, they become exposed to a wider range of career choices, and new career aspirations emerge. Many of the younger writers chose careers which match their current after-school interests and the heroes in their lives:

When I get older I want to be a veterinarian because I love animals. I have at home two dogs and two cats. I love to play with them. It's been nice writing to you. — Letter 391

Two of my all time favourite hobbies are readings and playing TV games my favourites are MK3 and Earthworm Jim 2...

When I grow up I want to develop games, I would like to follow in the footsteps of Shigeru Miyamoto, Yu Yu Suzuki and Tim Stamper. — Letter 393

Family background

Sociologists have long argued that human beings are social products, and that the family is a primary building-block of child development. It is likely that children will be influenced by the occupations of their parents and other immediate members of the family. Parents as role models can encourage or hinder a child's interest in an occupation, the family financial background can have an impact on the child's career choice, and parental attitudes towards careers can either encourage or discourage a child to enter certain occupations.

● Parents as role models

Since parents are the first people in life that a child comes to know well, their careers will have a great impact on the way their child

views the world of work. Natasha and Tarralyn, both 13 years old, are cases in point:

In the future I would like to be a chartered accountant and study at Oxford University of University of Cape Town (that's where my brother is study). and work at I.F.F. (that's where my dad work). — Letter 37 (from Natasha)

My parents both work my mom, Telkom, my father, policeman. He is an inspector. When I grow up I would like to be a police woman like my father, I have always want to be a that when I grow up. — Letter 530 (from Tarralyn)

It is common for young children to want to emulate their parents, but this does not mean that children will follow the same career path as their parents. Realisation of these early choices cannot be guaranteed as adolescents will explore many other careers and in the process might modify their attitudes towards their parents' occupations.

● Parental motivation and attitudes

Parents can also directly encourage their children to follow a particular career path. As Bridget in Standard 10 notes, educated parents are likely to encourage their children to gain an education:

Most of things that I like doing after school is to study further because I really want to be educated and to provide for my family my parents always encourage us to study further because they are already educated and they want us to be just like them. I think they have set a good example for us. I can encourage more scholars to attend school. — Letter 209

Intumelang from Katlehong and Roxan from Durban both indicate that family members sometimes do have a direct influence in choosing a career:

Actually in my life, I wanted to be a Social Worker. But because I did not pass my matric well to make me enter University, so I had to think of another career that I can do. My family and friends advised me to do public relations. I agreed so that I'm able to express myself more clearly. I do have many things though not enough that is wanted by this department. — Letter 596 (from Intumelang).

In the future I plan to be a veterinarian because I love to work with animals since I was in std 1 I have wanted to become a veterinarian. My dad said it was a good job to do. — Letter 388 (from Roxan).

In some cases, children have their own career in mind and the parents can either support or discourage the child to pursue that career. Other career choices are reinforced simply because of the interest that parents show in them or in their related characteristics, as in the case of a Standard 9 rural Muslim girl:

There is another dream I would like to pursue. A career in music. I would really like to start a band. Anything in music would make me happy. Even if I could work for a music magazine or produce music. My musical interests are quite uncommon for a coloured teenage girl. I guess I picked it up from my father. He digs bands like: The Doors, Family, The Moodie Blues, etc. That as well is uncommon for a middle-aged Muslim married man. Some people I know are pretty racist when it comes to music. I hear remarks like: Metal music is white trash quite frequently. But when it comes to music nothing and nobody can put me down. — Letter 218

● Family financial status

The family's financial status plays a big role in determining a child's future career. Children can lose interest in certain careers when they see that their parents cannot afford the training costs for that career. A number of students who entered the competition have been forced to remain at home after matric because of lack of finance to

take their studies further. In other cases, the parents might not encourage a child to pursue a given career. The Muslim girl quoted above argues:

... for instance, I want to become a journalist. I think I'll make pretty good journalist. Unfortunately my mother doesn't share my optimism. I don't know if it's the university costs scaring her but whatever it is, I can't really blame her. — Letter 218

Social background and careers

Social background plays a crucial role in the creation of the individual as a psychological and social being. Among the social factors that have an impact are the community in which the child grows up, their role models in the society, political pressures, and available institutions that can have a direct or indirect influence on a child.

● The community

A number of letter writers said that they wanted to be engaged in those occupations that will be helpful to their communities. Nursing attracts Lizzy, who wishes to serve her rural community:

I want to be a community nurse after finishing my tertiary studies. I chose this field because I have realised that we people in the rural areas receive less or no attention with regard to health, education, etc. — Letter 157

Such community service ideals were a recurrent theme in the letters. Community limitations can also shape aspirations. Geoffrey from Bushbuck Ridge and Selby from Shatale describe the problem facing them and others in rural areas:

The main thing that borders me is that in our village there many talented people but they don't get exposed to the public and their

talents end up in a fatal. This is because the government pay less attention to us and so we don't get enough and proper facilities. — Letter 52 (from Geoffrey)

What worries me a lot is that that the youth in rural areas are now getting down committing crimes in the streets because they've got nothing to do; there is no recreational centres and gymnasiums and many things that can keep we youth out of the streets. We tried playing soccer because it doesn't need many things and we got bored for playing something which you know you'll end up no where. There is more talent hiding in our youths; there is the young chiccos and young Dingaana Thobela but because there is nothing to help you to go up and show your talent you end up throwing your talent in the streets corners. We the youth in the rural areas are in the deepest dark. — Letter 127 (from Selby)

In urban areas also, lack of relevant institutions to develop skills has deprived many people of their occupational choices:

I have planned to be a writer of short stories and novels, both in English and Zulu. There are no centres where we can ask as many questions as we can about writing. Most of the things that we have been promised are not yet done, only few that exist... Here at Mpumalanga we don't even have one tertiary institution like universities and technikons. — Letter 326

● Role models

The role models that the community offers to a child provide a crucial example that helps determine what the child will be in future. Some young writers are concerned about the lack of strong role models to provide direction for township youth. This argument is best expressed by an 18-year-old young male from Sebokeng:

I am glad such a competition came up, because it has helped me to think very hard and discover the reason why people from the Ghetto fail to succeed more than any other communities ...

The main problem in the Ghetto is that there are not enough good role models to show the youth the right path to take. The general youth of South Africa face a problem of not having enough good role models in the music and film industry. The youth from the Ghetto have a double problem, because on top of that, they have a problem of bad role models in their real lives. They are surrounded by a bunch of unemployed relatives and neighbours. Around them there are role models who finds pleasure in spinning stolen cars and being outlaws ... — Letter 153

● Politics

Young people, who have been at the forefront of the struggles in the past, realise the need to prepare themselves to become the leaders of tomorrow. South African national politics has deeply penetrated young people's thinking. They have become fully conscious of the important role they can play in building the nation. This young writer from Tokoza and many others see themselves as having a big role to play in national politics:

I'd like to be the leader of the Nation because I know that a lot of our people are not educated. I would like to be educated to lead the nation that is why I intend to finish my matric and pass then further my studies in University then be a leader. The way I see things is that the New South Africa doesn't seem to satisfy the people and me myself I'm not satisfied the way the country is being governed. That is why I want to be the leader ... — Letter 603

Education

Education is one aspect of the social environment over which policy-makers have some control. Since school is often viewed by the writers in terms of vocational preparation, it is not surprising that they express an awareness of the role their schooling will play in determining their future jobs.

Schools that provide skills training can determine career choice through course offerings:

At my school my subjects are hairdressing, cookery, shop and office and Afrikaans, English, science and health and history and maths ... When I leave school, I want to become a hairdresser, at the moment I'm already doing module 2 and going on to module 3, then once I have module 3 I'll be an apprentice after module 6 I'll be qualified. — Letter 468

Subjects taken at school may put pupils on an irreversible career path, as a 26-year-old Benoni male writes:

My worry is that the luckiest people to get jobs in this country are those who have done physical science and mathematics, those who have done history and bibs are not recognised like myself. It has been a long time roaming around seeking for job, but don't get it, telling me about experience. — Letter 216

Poor quality education has been an obstacle to desired occupations. The South African education system was the primary tool used by the past government to secure the apartheid system, which was designed to prevent black advancement. This education system was structured in such a way that it did not provide for transfer of skills to the Africans. Aggravating the situation are the lack of qualified staff and poor service provision, which will need the government's attention. As a Mamelodi West student notes:

In many high school there is no proper teaching particular the black nation school. You find that the syllabus of history for example is not taught fully because it is said that it is not important. In some school certain subject are taught by the teacher who have never studies them at college or when they were at school. Pupils are also encouraged to choose subject that are chosen by majority e.g. science is not encouraged I would like to appeal to Professor Bhengu to pay attention to this matter. — Letter 573

There is a shortage of skilled professionals in South Africa, especially in the science and technology fields. As a result of limited choice of school subjects, African education did not provide access to these occupations even though there was a supply of eager learners ready to fill the gap.

Lack of finance to further studies continues to be a big problem for the South African youth. Many entrants emphasise their eagerness to continue with their studies, but their hopes fade as bursary applications are turned down, their parents continue to be unemployed, and they are unsuccessful in obtaining part-time employment. They look to the government for solutions and emphasise a need for the government to spend more on education.

Lack of finance has resulted in students having to drop out of school or change career plans. Gugulethu from Botshabelo demonstrates how the quirks of the educational finance system can lead students down a rather convoluted career path:

Regardless of being a student teacher, I am planning to be a journalist and after completing my secondary teachers diploma, I would like to study journalism at any institution which will admit me. To be have studied teaching or being studying teaching as my career is just because our new South Africa does not offer black students with the financial assistance. Last year we are being promised to be offered bursaries this year, but even today we have not yet received bursaries

in which they have promised us. So what South Africa is this in a modern life like today? Is this free education or privilege education? There is a silence, they are no longer talking about millions and millions kept aside for education. So, what South Africa is this? We are losing a direction toward you South Africa. — Letter 193

For many, like Nicholas from Bryanston, career hopes have faded:

I attend at Damelin Management School at Braamfontein. I'm doing local government study. Actually I was supposed to study law at Bloemfontein University but unfortunately fail because of financial problems. — Letter 145

The following experience for a male writer from Gazankulu is similar to that of many other South African youth, who have been forced to give up their original career choices because of financial hardships:

I was compelled to seek a job after completing my matric due to my financial ill background, my parents are both unemployed and our guardian was my brother who has also lost his job and he has an extended family. I became a victim of oppression and suppression in the hands of those who resisted change during the old system of homelands, whereby I was employed and kept on temporary status for a period of three (3) years. These predicaments persuaded me to further my studies with the meagre wage I received and registered for a BA with the University of the North on part-time basis, where I am doing my second years. There were lots of things which I like doing...

My visualised work was to become a lawyer but because of the above-mentioned impediment I failed. Due to the interest I developed in weight lifting, I am intending to be a boxer to supplement my income. — Letter 173

Career choice as an evolving process

Young South Africans realise that some flexibility is necessary to adapt to the demands of a changing economy. This open attitude is probably due in part to a degree of indecisiveness, brought on by a blinding array of options:

I enjoy debates and rendering my poems to the people. My forth plans are to be a journalist or rather a chef and I can't worry if I can be an artist. — Letter 20

Presently I didn't make a final decision of what I want to be in future. I still have three careers in mind which I like. I sometimes think of being an economist sometimes an Accountant or Business Management. But I thought of having business and be an Accountant only if I go abroad because I don't want to be a normal Accountant like everybody in S.A... If I can't be able to reach my goals of being one of the above mentioned careers. I can still be a Social Worker or anything where I can work with people because I'm easy in socialisation. — Letter 107

For both of these students, it is likely that only one of these preferred career choices will finally be realised; "time is ... required for people to learn about the world of work" (Greenhaus, 1987).

What I really want to be

For black South Africans particularly, the possibilities in the world of work have expanded dramatically in recent years. Expectations have grown accordingly. But this generation of young people with their dazzling ambitions are limited by their educational and social backgrounds. Again and again, the limitations of secondary education are bemoaned. Again and again, the inaccessibility of tertiary education places a ceiling on youth achievement. Despite these social realities, the writers felt free to send us their dreams of their future lives in the new South Africa.

Chapter 16

The mindset of contemporary youth

Valerie Møller

Competitions are popular among the youth. A letter writing contest seemed to be the ideal vehicle to engage the participation of young people from different backgrounds in defining their life situation. In time, the letters from the competition will gain value as historical documents of the responses of young South Africans to the changes occurring in their society two years into a new democracy.

Taken together, the chapters of this book give insight into the mindset of young South Africans. In this final chapter it remains to pick up some of the common threads which run through the narrative and to tentatively define the outlook of contemporary youth compared to the recent past.

Of course, this study of the letters written by a self-selected group of young people cannot claim to give an exhaustive account of the situation of youth in society. The competition aimed at reaching a cross-section rather than a fully representative sample of young people. In addition, the social category of "youth" is broad and defies strict generalisation. Nevertheless, the 905 letters received from young people from different walks of life should suffice to give an overview of their major concerns. Seen from the perspective

which assumes that all youth share a common experience and are therefore able to speak knowledgeably on behalf of their social category, the material collected for the study probably covers the most important issues for contemporary youth. Moreover, the concerns are ones identified by the young people themselves.

The letter writing competition was launched as a follow-up to studies conducted by members of the Quality of Life Research Unit in the late eighties and the early nineties, which inquired into the expectations and aspirations of young people in a rapidly changing society. The earlier studies varied according to focus of inquiry but they all yielded rich insights into the morale of young people and their outlook on the future. The studies included research on unemployment conducted in the mid-1980s, which provided evidence of the low morale and self-confidence of school leavers without jobs (Møller, 1993); a range of inquiries conducted for the Youth Centre Project between 1988 and 1991, which focused on the spare-time pursuits of township youth but also produced a wealth of information on educational aspirations and general behaviour patterns (Møller, 1991; 1992; Møller, Mtembu & Richards, 1994); and a study of intergenerational relations in the early nineties, which highlighted the problems and challenges of providing role models and educational support for township youth affected by disruptions of schooling in the eighties (Møller, 1994a, 1994b, 1995a, 1996a).

The knowledge of youth viewpoints gained in these earlier studies is a useful starting point when drawing tentative conclusions on how young people have adjusted to the social changes occurring in society in the past decade. Judging from the earlier evidence, many of the issues addressed in the letters of the youth are not new ones. It is apparent, however, that the new era has shifted the youth perspective on these same issues.

Optimism and vulnerability

Many of the chapters in this book observe that contemporary young people are instilled with a strong sense of optimism and community. The new generation make career choices which will benefit not only themselves but also the wider community and society at large. Altruism appears to come naturally to many young people, in many cases as an apparent expression of the ideal of sharing in African society. At the same time, career aspirations are much wider in scope than hitherto for the large segment of young people whose upward mobility was blocked under apartheid. The letters testify that youth today do not shy away from dreaming of material wealth and careers beyond the reaches of the broad masses of youth under apartheid. While the earlier studies (Mthembu & Möller, 1991) found that township youth sought alternative routes to fame and fortune to overcome the problem — sports and gospel singing were shortcut routes to stardom — contemporary youth are just as likely to opt for the mainstream occupations and aspire to become, say, accountants and business people.

In the letters from the young women, one detects a greater self-assurance than in the earlier studies, which found that women often lacked assertiveness when interacting with peers. Contemporary young women appear to be more aware than earlier female cohorts of their rights and opportunities in a society which has gender equality written into its constitution. This is most apparent where the career choices and activity patterns of young men and women tend to converge. By the same token, a few women also wrote in 1996 that their freedom was curtailed relative to other youth, which is itself an indication of awareness that there are now multiple channels of advancement and different choices of lifestyle for young females.

The positive tenor of most letters does not mask the fact that youth are the most vulnerable category in society when it comes to crime and unemployment. The batch of letters from high school pupils in KwaZulu-Natal is a stark reminder that there are still many storm clouds on the horizon which threaten the summertime of democracy. Political conflict is still an everyday reality for youth in KwaZulu-Natal. In other parts of the country crime has replaced political violence as a critical factor depressing quality of life.

In earlier studies among black youth the impression was gained that political violence, like conditions of apartheid which fuelled the violence, was the backdrop to everyday life. Violence had a strong influence on lifestyle but was taken for granted. Of necessity, life was lived in the shadow of political violence. When youth discussed family life, school, work and play in the eighties, reference to violent events and their impact on living conditions was made as a statement of fact. In other words, youth had learned to live with violence. In 1996, violent crime has replaced political violence as a permanent feature of life for contemporary youth. For the young people of the suburbs, living with crime is a new experience; fear of crime has had a decisive impact on their lifestyles and worldview. Our earlier quality of life studies showed that at the height of the political unrest in the mid-eighties, youth condemned violence and yearned for peace, just as contemporary youth feel strongly about crime and call for the return of law and order.

Finding jobs is difficult for young people: many new positions in commerce and industry are opening up to black youth, but they are limited relative to the large number of school-leavers. At the same time some doors are closing. White, Indian and coloured youth worry about their future job prospects with affirmative action policy in place. Some letter writers appear to be resigned about their job prospects, others are angry, but most understand why the job

market has changed. Again, youth who have their whole lives before them have adjusted their expectations and are making alternative plans. In earlier studies, aspirations for higher education as a means of accessing better jobs were equally high, and not all youth expected instant results from paper qualifications. The startling finding from a survey of unemployed township dwellers was that the majority in all age groups fully expected school leavers to look for work for up to three years before finding a job (Møller, 1993).

Preparation for a new era

In the early nineties, youth who participated in research conducted for the Youth Centre Project appeared to be in search of a new moral order (Møller, Richards & Mthembu, 1991). Unlike the generation of their parents, they were ready for an integrated society and keen to reach out to other youth to make it work. Their ideal vision for youth centres and schools of the future were blueprints for a harmonious multiracial society which would celebrate the richness of diverse cultures and mingling of people from different social backgrounds. Several years before the politicians met to negotiate a settlement between opposing parties, youth envisaged post-apartheid society in the microcosm of their multiracial youth centres (Richards & Møller, 1990). Interestingly, the earlier models of youth centres included a number of safeguards to ensure that no group would dominate others. The later models were bolder, more confident and embraced wholeheartedly the notion of youth solidarity across the colour line. Before the idea of "levelling the playing fields" became a fashionable catchphrase among the team negotiating a new political dispensation, youth used the sports field as metaphor for harmony in society. They recommended that the art of team play perfected on the sports field be applied in community life to prevent strife among youth

(Mthembu & Møller, 1991). Many of the ideas put forward by the youth for their spare time occupations in the late eighties and early nineties have now been put into practice full-time in the educational sphere. A number of youth participating in the letter writing competition reported on their mainly positive experience of integrated schooling. Their letters suggest that contemporary youth have already adjusted to this still novel aspect of school life in 1996 which will soon be taken for granted. The next cohort of writers may fail to comment on mixed classes altogether.

The new morality: Beyond the lost generation

In the chapter on the rainbow nation, it becomes apparent that the youth of the mid-nineties have finally found the moral code and the direction for which they searched in the late eighties. The rainbow ideal embodies all the aspirations for peace and harmony, riches and beauty to which the youth aspire. The idea of building a rainbow nation fires their imagination; it is an ideal they are willing to strive for. The rainbow society is wholesome, crime-free, embraces all members of society, and radiates a bright future — in short, it represents the utopia which young people fervently believe in or wish to believe in.

In the rainbow concept, contemporary youth have found a new morality to assist them in finding themselves and their place in society. President Mandela, a father-figure for South African youth, has set a fine example of the moral high ground to which the youth aspire. For once, youthful ambitions are not ahead of the times but in step with the overarching national goals of the era. The aims and ambitions of young people are precisely in tune with the spirit of reconciliation and tolerance preached by the architects of the new political dispensation.

If the rainbow nation encompasses all the positive ideals the youth hold for society, strong negative feelings are reserved for the social ills which might shatter the positive image. Young people express concern about crime and abuse, corruption, unemployment, alcoholism and drugs, teenage pregnancy, and undisciplined and antisocial behaviour, all of which threaten to tear the fabric of society apart before it is woven into rainbow colours. Similarly, some youth question whether the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will further the ideal of reconciliation or have the opposite effect of creating disharmony in society.

Worth noting in this connection is that disillusioned youth did not reject the concept of the rainbow nation out of hand, but tended to point out how far short of the ideal society South Africa is at present. Others expressed fears that the nation-building process might not achieve its aims. The letters testify that South African society is still deeply divided along racial and socio-economic lines.

Morality and education

The new slogan "education is the key to the future" which is associated with the rainbow nation concept is perfectly matched with the personal ambitions of contemporary youth. The end of apartheid has opened up new career options, but also places responsibility on young people to acquire the skills to take their rightful places in society. President Mandela, an important role model for the youth, has sanctioned education with his "back to school" campaign. Young people starved for education as a result of the disruptions of schooling in the last decade need no further invitation.

Youth participating in earlier research on youth centres indicated that the slogan "liberation before education" had already lost its significance for them in the late 1980s (Møller, 1991:58-61).

Liberation was almost in sight at that time and they wanted to catch up on the lost years out of the classroom. There were many indications that young people at the end of the eighties wanted education as desperately as they yearned for apartheid to be overturned during the earlier years of the struggle. The need for education was so strong that teenagers in the townships were willing to sacrifice their spare time to catch up on the education which they did not receive during school hours. Students flocked to extra-curricular classes on Saturday (Møller, 1994a). In some instances, recreation was sidelined when youth centres were transformed into centres of education and training.

The thirst for knowledge may go a long way toward explaining the eagerness with which youth, black youth in particular, absorb whatever is on offer in the electronic and print media. The letters written in 1996 confirm evidence from earlier studies: contemporary youth most certainly regard reading newspapers and magazines, listening to the news and watching television as being both educational and recreational.

Many of the letters written in 1996 bristle with slogans, aphorisms and folk wisdom. It is possible that the young people wanted to impress the judges. Earlier studies, however, also found that youth used slogans and proverbs to punctuate their speech and state their principles in life. For example, the youth of 1989 believed in a "bright future", possibly anticipating the dismantling of apartheid (Møller, 1991). Contemporary youth suggest that the brightness has come when they talk of the summer season of democracy in South Africa. Township youth in an earlier study identified hard work and perseverance as a recipe for success in education. The letter writers in 1996 also advocate deferred gratification and cite the proverb "work like a slave today and live like a king tomorrow".

Morality and social integration

The first commission of inquiry into the situation of South African youth, which produced its report in 1987, was concerned about the moral fibre of society (Republic of South Africa, 1987). It found that one of the few unifying factors among youth was religion; Christianity was a common denominator for about three-quarters of the youth.

The later inquiries into the situation of the youth in the late eighties and early nineties were equally concerned about marginalised, brutalised and traumatised youth (Everatt, 1994; Everatt & Sisulu, 1992; Seekings, 1993; Straker, 1992). The CASE surveys for the Joint Enrichment Programme's study of youth found that only a small proportion of the youth were marginalised (Everatt & Orkin, 1993). It was recommended that youth policy should focus in the first instance on youth who are integrated into society. The Human Sciences Research Council's report on the South African youth concluded on the basis of a co-operative programme of research that South Africa did not have a "youth crisis". The majority of youth wanted to play a constructive role in the transformation of society and to contribute to the "new" South Africa (Slabbert et al., 1994: 15, 19).

The youth of the democratic era share the concerns of the earlier inquiries conducted on their behalf. The letters received from youth in 1996 discuss the major institutions which afford social integration for young people. They talk about family life, their education and work life, career aspirations and politics. The family is an important reference group for most youth. It is apparent that the post-liberation youth are still very politically aware and are now keen to learn more about democracy in theory and practice. The youth write that they find strength in religion of the churchgoing and civil variety. They set store by traditional virtues of humanity and

subscribe to the ethic of hard work and perseverance to achieve their goals in life. Generally contemporary youth wish to be a moral generation. They deliver "sermonettes" on how to succeed in life. There are also signs of growing self-confidence and tolerance and respect for fellow men and women. In South Africa, where young people have grown up with violence, promoting self-esteem and respect among youth must be regarded as a positive measure to restore humanity in a brutalised society.

The majority of youth who entered the competition portrayed themselves as *prosocial* youth. In this respect the letters mailed from prisons and detention centres read no differently from others. Obviously, the competition would have attracted letters from prosocial youth or ones who described themselves as such to find favour with judges who presumably would subscribe to the values of mainstream society. It is possible, however, that prosocial youth may represent the majority among contemporary youth. This viewpoint would be consistent with the findings of the CASE/JEP and HSRC studies of youth and the various inquiries by quality of life researchers at the University of Natal. The earlier quality of life research found that youth regularly distanced themselves from their antisocial peers and antisocial elements in society. Antisocial behaviour was regularly attributed to others but not to the respondents themselves. Such behaviour was considered wrong but understandable given the social circumstances. The youth writing for the competition in 1996 also take a strong moral stand and make a strict divide between good and bad behaviour, but similarly try to fathom the origins of deviant behaviour. It is worrying, however, that some youth are capable of "understanding" brutality as necessary, as in the letter describing the motivation of the hijacker whose poverty would lead him to murder the affluent owner of an expensive car (Letter 729).

In the present study, the young people who submitted letters to the competition, like those who responded in earlier studies, distance themselves from antisocial youth and are keen to remedy what they see as social ills. A new trend, however, may be the open discussion of how to deal with negative peer pressure. Life-skills training has become more accessible to youth in the 1990s and may have opened the debate among youth on the positive and negative aspects of cohesive forces in groups.

The categories of alienated youth have grown over the past decade. Street children, a social problem referred to in several letters from the youth, is a fairly recent post-apartheid phenomenon. *Comtsothis* and gangs are the older manifestations of alienated youth. A striking finding of the earlier quality-of-life studies was that the ambitions of mainstream youth and youth on the periphery were very similar (Richards, 1991a, 1991b, 1994). Young people want to belong and to get ahead in life. A number of letter writers recommend youth clubs as an antidote to alienation and the boredom which plagues youth worldwide. Research on the formation of informal youth clubs found that the most common motivations for joining youth clubs were to combat boredom and to keep out of trouble, precisely the predicament of marginalised youth (Møller, Mthembu & Richards, 1994; Richards, 1995). A number of the prosocial clubs were founded by former *tsotsis* and antisocial gang leaders. These clubs held a particular attraction for peripheral youth who instantly converted to mainstream values when they found a new identity and constructive purpose in life (Mthembu & Møller, 1991).

The stance of the youth against drugs, crime and violence is not new. Contemporary youth, however, have found in the slogans of the rainbow nation new allies to support their goals of an ideal society. Young people who offend are no longer the heroes of the

liberation movement, defying a social order which lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of youth. The antisocial behaviour of contemporary youth is an obstacle to achieving the goals of the rainbow people to which the majority of youth subscribe. The letter writers see through antisocial behaviour masquerading as democracy, as in the case of youth shirking their school duties.

A thumbnail sketch

If one were to attempt a thumbnail sketch of the mindset of young South Africans — admittedly a hazardous undertaking given the breadth of “the youth” as a category and the diversity of society — the following would be key findings.

It is apparent that the youth of the new era are no longer anti-establishment but are pro-nation-building. The young nation-builders are the prosocial youth who hope to be better educated than their parents, to help at home and in the community, to become rich and famous, all in the name of the cause. Their opposition is reserved for social ills which threaten to mar their vision of a society at peace with itself.

The vacuum of ideals which occurred when the liberation movement lost its momentum at the end of the eighties has now been filled. The goals of the rainbow nation channel the energy and motivation of young people. The civil religion of the rainbow (Dickow, 1996) provides moral guidance for the new generation just as the struggle to bring down apartheid captured the imagination of the preceding generation.

In the rainbow poem of Letter 34, quoted earlier, the young writer probably speaks for many of her contemporaries when she projects her personal goals onto those of the larger society. With a legitimate government in power, there is no longer a contradiction between personal and national aspirations.

Returning to the general tenor of the letters, it is young people's prerogative to be idealistic and over-optimistic at the expense of a more realistic appraisal of the situation. In the letters written by young people in 1996, there are moments of pessimism, anxiety and resignation, but the sentiment is overwhelmingly positive and hopeful. If there is one lesson that the older generation can learn from the young people's evaluation of their quality of life in the new South Africa, it is to take courage in the future of their new democracy.



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"My life in the new South Africa": A youth perspective

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