YOUTHS, CULTURE, AND POLITICS IN SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION:
The Past, Present, and Future

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In the book *Resistance & Transformation*, I discussed in detail the different meanings attached to the concept of culture.[1] I emphasized the fact that there is no single unproblematic definition of culture. I outlined the main assumptions on which the concept of culture pursued in this article rests, namely, (a) that although culture can be conceived of as a *uniting force* binding social groups or classes together, it is also a *divisive element* reflecting the complexity of social formations generally constituted by various subgroups and subcultures in a struggle with the culture of the dominant society or the hegemonic culture; (b) that South Africa is a *limit case* where the salience of racial and ethnic features cannot for a moment be denied and where the process of race polarization and its concomitant cultural implications must not be ignored in analyzing culture; (c) that culture is not a *neutral concept*[2] but is historical, specific, and ideological and reflects the way that class and hegemonic articulations are organized in society; and (d) that culture is not a *timeless and motionless* body of value systems or life-styles that remain unaltered by social change as put forward by our common sense but is a *dialectical process* that incorporates new forms and meanings while changing or reshaping traditional ones.[3] I also emphasized that new cultural forms emerge as a response to and mediation of social experience;[4] culture is not an unchangeable text but a complex, contradictory and uneven process.

Having this framework in mind, I would like to concentrate on the concept of youth culture or youth subcultures. Given the com-

plexity of the South African society, class, race, language, gender, and generation all together generate specific focal concerns that allow us to develop the concept of youth culture in South Africa. This cannot simply be defined in terms of age. It is a complex combination of several subcultures, of different age groups, related to the class position of those in them and their common historical experience of racial and national oppression under the apartheid system. Complementing these broader categories are also the social meanings of notions such as township life, community, neighborhood, and "gang territory."

One can say that *subcultures* are subsets of the larger cultural configurations sometimes called "*parent cultures*," for example, urban working-class culture, Zulu military culture, and so forth. The membership of a subculture necessarily involves membership of a parent culture. A subculture may be an extension of, or in opposition to, the parent culture. However, a subculture may even form its own subworld. Subcultures exist where there is some form of a organized and recognized constellation of values, behavior and action, which are responded to as different from the prevailing sets of norms and value systems.

The notion of "youth culture" and "subcultures" can save us from the tendency to romanticize resistance by categorizing the different cultural expressions displayed by youth. For example, South African theorists, including those within the liberal wisdom, seem to agree that many children who schooled under Bantu education are demonstrating attitudes and patterns of behavior that can be interpreted as counterhegemonic. However, wider youth practices cannot unproblematically be explained as exclusive manifestations of resistance or in terms of "struggle." This could certainly lead to an idealization or romanticization of the complex manifestations of youth culture. Their short- and long-term effects are unpredictable. They might have unexpected effects in the long run once the political crisis has been resolved.[5]

For an understanding of the framework used in examining the emergence and development of youth culture in South Africa, a brief look at the literature on youth issues is pertinent.

LITERATURE ON YOUTH CULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Literature dealing with youth culture in South Africa falls within two main traditions: literature within a framework of the consensus model (liberal or conservative) and literature within a framework of the conflict model.[6] The first concentrates almost exclusively on those aspects perceived as of "national interest," such as riots, terrorism, and "black on black violence" or tribal clashes and delinquency, to use its conventional terminology. These are generally explained as (a) aimless and gratuitous violence; (b) erosion of traditional authority, community, and family control; (c) imitation of violent behavior transmitted by mass media; (d) social disorganization involving the breakdown of "civilized" behavior; (e) communist onslaught; (f) influence of violent gangs in slum townships; and so forth.[7] Cultural roots are traced to explain the violent nature of all these forms of behavior. Cloete, for example, argues that the culturally inspired view of violence still exists in modern black communities. He goes on to say that "the idea that violent action is inadmissible is not yet internalized, and many members of these communities still regard it as an acceptable form of behavior."[8] Without denying the empirical basis that supports some of their allegations, the problem is that they preclude any possibility of class conflict, or class-mediated resistance, concealing the meaning, the creativity, and the counterhegemonic nature of youth subcultures.

"Conflict-model" literature considers class, race, and gender as important analytical categories. Literature under this category stresses the need to recognize the power of children in determining or conditioning the course of state policy and social process in South Africa.[9] It calls for an analysis that recognizes (a) the role of the political economy in the shaping of youth resistance culture, (b) the role played by the contradictions within the institutional structure of school, and (c) the importance of sociological categories such as *generational unit*,[10] race, class, and gender in the analysis of youth culture. This set of literature can be subdivided into three categories according to the prevailing paradigmatic positions: (a) those that give primacy to the role of structures in shaping youth

cultural forms; (b) those that give primacy to "human agency"; and, most important, (c) those that seek balance between the two schools of thought. The latter reassert the role of contestation and resistance, although they recognize the importance of the existing social and economic agencies in generating or reproducing particular subcultures (e.g., middle-class youth subcultures).

Attempting to reconstruct the history and sociology of youth subculture within this framework are the writings by Nkomo, Bonner, Glaser, Bundy, and Seekings.[11] They developed theoretical elements for an understanding of the evolution and the nature of youth culture in South Africa. These are Seekings's contention that the changing political economy has some bearing on the diverging forms of political action or culture; Nkomo's assumption that the complex and contradictory dynamics in education have played a crucial role in the shaping of youth resistance culture; Bonner's class approach to the relationship between black working-class cultures and the dominant culture; and Bundy's notions of a self-conscious "generational unit" with its counterideology, the demographic pressure determined by the large proportion of youth in the total population, and an overproduction of intellectuals without or with little opportunity of employment.

Against this background, one can speculate that increasing alienation from the prevailing economic, political, and social structure has produced a wide variety of cultural responses among South African black urban youth: classroom disobedience, school boycotts, "stayaways" and absenteeism, social crime, and street gang life. These activities have developed into three distinguishable but interrelated youth subcultural worlds: lumpen and unemployed youth delinquent and semidelinquent subcultures; middle-class cultural rebellion and reformist movements; and working-class student and youth resistance culture, activism, and political militancy. This stratification appears sometimes blurred because of the dominant role played by *race* in mediating social relations. The three social groups have generally experienced similar living conditions in the townships. Black youths have been floating from one class or cultural category to another.

I shall examine how these subcultures have developed in education and wider community life throughout South African history.

An attempt will be made to highlight their interrelatedness at given points in time. The thesis developed in this article posits four arguments. First, given the particular nature of South African racial capitalism and its harsh social and economic conditions, youth culture emerged predominantly as *tsotsi*, or street gang culture. Second, with the expansion of the secondary school system, demographic pressures and the development of new forms of ideological and political socialization (e.g., the Black Consciousness Movement) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in particular the Soweto uprising in 1976 and its consequences, the emerging street gang culture was increasingly brought into school grounds. Third, these became a *melting pot* where school cultures inherited from past rural experience, street gang culture, and new cultural forms were combined and processed to forge a wider national youth resistance culture. Fourth, contradictions generated in the making of this culture and increasing state repression resulted in the crisis of youth resistance culture in the late 1980s (the symptoms were internal struggles, the phenomenon of the *comtsotsis*, the resurgence of gangsterism targeting the comrades and schoolchildren, and the emergence of middle-class youth subcultures).

YOUTH CULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1888-1990: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The history of youth culture in South Africa can be divided into five periods: 1888-1939, the increasing disintegration of precolonial ethnic cultures; 1939-1955, the emergence of black urban working-class cultures; 1955-1976, the emergence of urban youth working-class cultures; 1976-1985, the development of youth resistance culture; and 1985-1990, the crisis of youth resistance culture and the emergence of youth middle-class cultures.

THE DISINTEGRATION OF PRECOLONIAL ETHNIC CULTURES, 1888-1939

Under the South African industrial evolution, profound changes began to take place in the periphery of the main industrial centers:

the creation of reserves, the establishment of a migrant labor system, and the penetration of new economic and cultural forms within traditional societies as a result of changes in the family division of labor and the impact of new values and patterns of life from urban areas. However, no significant development took place in youth behavior and practices. Why?

Wolpe's *dissolution/conservation* thesis offers a good theoretical framework for answering the question.[12] So long as precapitalist modes of production survive, they restrict the recomposition of class relationships and reabsorb part of the labor force, including unemployed youth, thrown off by capital. They thus provide for the structural reintegration of unemployed youth into traditional relationships that prevent the proliferation of delinquent behavior.[13] Structural reincorporation is consolidated by a wide range of cultural institutions, such as *lobola* and circumcision, that reintegrate them into communal relationships, exert traditional controls that support traditionally acceptable behavior, and impede alienation of youth and consequent development of distinctive subcultures. Therefore, embryonic youth subcultures were generally aborted or absorbed into parent/family cultures without being able to develop a distinctive and autonomous expression.

THE EMERGENCE OF BLACK URBAN CULTURES, 1939-1955

Depending on the nature of articulation, capitalist forces can undermine the domestic sector, driving peasants into urban slums as underemployed laborers and breeding working-class and lumpen cultures. They can simultaneously give rise to small groups of elite with petty bourgeois or middle-class subcultures.[14] In South Africa, this process followed the development of the manufacturing industry from the 1920s onward. Substantial numbers of African women and men made their way from the farms and the reserves to the urban areas. Their concentration in towns gave rise to a relatively stable urban proletariat and created sociological conditions for the advent of black urban cultures.

A word of gratitude should be awarded to Professor P. Bonner, who traced the roots of earlier African urban cultures in South

Africa with an unprecedented authority. His argument deserves special attention in this article. Bonner argues that a distinctive black urban culture on the Rand has been forged out of a cultural exchange between a variety of elements involving the educated African elite, the Cape "colored" and Oorlams communities, and the migrant and urban working class.[15] He distinguishes three main sources: the educated Christian black middle class, the vast proletarian mass, and the migrant who labored in the mine shafts, the kitchens, and stores, particularly the segment of these migrants that failed to remain anchored in either homestead or compound and became cultural brokers and innovators in the towns.[16] The exchange of cultural experiences between these groups, fermented by external influences from the neighboring countries and Afro-American elements, was behind the creation of the black urban cultures. Bonner concentrates on working-class cultures that appear to incorporate street gang cultures.[17]

THE EMERGENCE OF URBAN WORKING-CLASS YOUTH CULTURES, 1955-1976

Urban black cultures developed under several constraints: the instability of the black urban family, the lack of family and social discipline, the generalized poverty that permeated African life, a stagnant employment market and the massive unemployment of urban juveniles, the flood of immigrants and massive overcrowding, inadequate housing and shortage of housing, and malnutrition and disease. The migrant labor system spawned "loose family unions," family disintegration, a high illegitimacy rate, and the breakdown of family and community socialization and disciplinary agencies. On the one hand, parental control was sluggish or entirely lacking and, on the other, besides being insufficient in numbers, schools were confronted with a high dropout rate and low school attendance.[18] General frustration and strategies of survival, mainly social crime, dominated the lives of the black urban youths. Under these circumstances, men went to work in the factories, mines, and businesses. Women spent their days washing and hawking or as maids in white suburbs. Children flooded the streets. In the streets,

they developed methods of survival and compensation for their socially mutilated life and social insecurity. There they engaged in gang competitions and battles, gambling, soccer matches, and various games as well as burglary and crime.

Along the same line, Pinnock develops an interesting argument that, in many aspects, can be generalized to the rest of the country. For him, ganging is primarily a "survival technique" in response to the socioeconomic system that reproduces poverty.[19] With the Group Areas relocations, the poor were sealed off in single-class townships "with no one to buy their labor or products," with no access to income opportunities.[20] Only gang functions could offer them a substitute for what society had failed to give. They represented an attempt to resolve the contradictions that remain unresolved in the parent culture, such as unemployment and poverty, or to retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in their parent culture, such as family care and the solidarities of the traditional neighborhood destroyed by Group Areas.[21] Bonner also argues that the principal factors in the breeding of juvenile delinquents and youth gangs in the 1950s were the shortage of schools, the absence of employment opportunities for youth, the grinding poverty of black urban life, and the general instability of family life.[22]

It appears that youth gang culture developed under the same constraints that conditioned the development of their parent cultures, urban black working-class cultures. Under these constraints, the consequence was the development of a youth culture associated with tsotsis because of its antisocial makeup.[23] An important distinction should be made here. The black urban cultures that emerged in the 1920s and the 1930s were cultures of survival around the collective but politically passive institutions of the *shebeen*, *stokvel* (rotating credit associations), and *marabi* dance.[24] By the early 1950s, the criminal element became dominant. Tsotsi or youth gang culture began to command township life and spread instability through the black locations. This harsh reality of township life was well captured in the words of Steve Biko: "Township life alone makes it a miracle for anyone to live up to adulthood."[25]

Tsotsi culture, very often referred to as "delinquency," was a culture manufactured on the streets where black urban youths spent

most of their leisure time because of the absence of other outlets into which their energies could be channeled. Delinquency is, however, a notion that does not entirely do justice to the complex manifestations of street gang culture. For this purpose, Humphries's concept of "social crime" appears to be a valuable complementary tool.[26] It encompasses "the innumerable minor crimes against property committed by black youth that are condoned by large sections of both the youth and parent cultures as legitimate, despite their illegality, and justified by extreme poverty and the working-class family's struggle for survival."[27] Although it does not apply to earlier forms of street gang culture in South Africa, where township residents were indiscriminately terrorized, as will be shown it does highlight new forms of gang violence in the post-1976 period.

Gangs and Resistance Politics, 1950-1976

Can those initial forms of youth culture, i.e. tsotsi culture, be conceptualized in political terms? What political content (if any) did they have? There are not final answers to these questions. There are indications, however, that the actions of youth gangs very often assumed a political character.

The late 1940s and the 1950s were characterized by an increasing militancy in South African black politics. The foundation of the ANC Youth League in 1949 not only changed the course of African nationalism from a liberal and accommodationist approach to a militant and active challenge to the system of apartheid, but it also brought increasing numbers of youths into the liberation movement. What role did gangs or street gang culture play in this process? Evidence indicates that in spite of their antisocial behavior youth gangs were a potentially powerful resource "in wider political struggles presenting both opportunities and constraints to political action."[28] Gangs took part in the defiance campaign, "stayaways," and boycotts. In the process they brought with them some of the anarchy, self-assertion, and spirit of defiance of the streets. As will be shown, this observation offers an excellent background for an understanding of the post-1976 youth practices and subcultures.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A YOUTH RESISTANCE CULTURE, 1976-1985

From the late 1960s on, a process began whereby initial forms of youth gang culture were increasingly integrated into the resistance movement. Three main factors played a central role in this process: the psychological appeal that the Black Consciousness Movement had for youths by giving them the hope that they were capable of controlling their own destiny; the expansion of the secondary schools, which incorporated a considerable portion of the surplus youth from the street and absorbed its subcultures; and the political mobilization of the 1976 Soweto, which cut across the boundaries of the developing youth subcultures. To these factors one can also add the sense of *generational unit* produced by the demographic nature of South African society, with half of its population under the age of 21 and 45% of the African population under the age of 15.[29] Of relative importance was also the increasing rate of unemployment and the sense of social insecurity that it inculcated in youths.

The Black Consciousness Movement inherited the youthful militancy of the ANC Youth League, which challenged the liberal nationalism and reformist approach adopted by the old ANC leadership. As spelled out by Biko, the Black Consciousness Movement represented the emergence of a group of militant youths who were beginning to "grasp the notion of (their) peculiar uniqueness," the peculiarity of their problems, history, and culture and thus to realize the need to evolve a political philosophy based on and directed by blacks toward their own emancipation outside white liberal tutelage.[30] Accordingly, the process of emancipation had to start with the individual person, particularly "the mind of the oppressed," the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor. To put it differently, the Black Consciousness Movement involved a psychological and cultural liberation, whereby black people would overcome the question of black-white dependency, the traditional inferior-superior and black-white complexes, and restore their inherent dignity to develop a national consciousness. It expressed group pride and the determination by blacks to rise and attain the envisaged self. As a political culture, it was a unifying force that brought together the whole generation of youths (from the school

grounds to the streets) to see with greater clarity the immensity of their responsibility in the process of their emancipation.

The expansion of secondary schooling had a double and contradictory effect. First, it bridged the gap between street subcultures and student movements by bringing the mobs and surplus children from the streets to the classrooms. Second, the contradictions determined by the overcrowding in the classroom and the deterioration of the school environment (lack of staff, shortage of accommodation, packed classrooms, etc.) plus the rising political consciousness of the black university students created objective and subjective conditions for the development of a nationwide counterhegemonic resistance culture.

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

Another important factor was of a cultural nature. Street gang life involves activities that require courage, adventurism, and a sense of masculinity and self-confidence. To most Soweto youths, the uprising represented an unprecedented opportunity for asserting and testing these qualities. In the context of the rebellion, gangs could easily face hardship and undertake tasks that an average untrained youth could not successfully perform, such as attack a police car or set fire to what were perceived as symbols of oppression (council buildings, police stations, etc.). Similarly, children from middle-class backgrounds were able to transcend their one

time petty bourgeois expectations. As will be illustrated, these expectations returned to their attention in the late 1980s, which reflected wider structural changes and disillusionment with the struggle.

In its expression, resistance consisted of persistent rule breaking at school, opposition to township authorities, and attempts to establish forms of alternative educational, social, and political institutions in the townships, such as street committees, people's courts, and people's education. The most dramatic manifestation of working-class youth resistance has been the school boycott, including demonstrations, the singing and dancing of freedom songs well known as *toyi-toyi*, and meetings to enlist the support of both children and parents and to encourage solidarity. Generally, it involved the widespread use of pupil pickets, banners, street marches and demonstrations, and stone throwing. From the 1980 school boycott on, resistance assumed more constructive initiatives, such as cultural activities and programs of political awareness including forms of alternative education.

THE CRISIS OF YOUTH RESISTANCE CULTURE AND
THE RESURGENCE OF URBAN STREET GANGS, 1985-1990

The period 1985-1990 was characterized by the intensification of the contradictions that emerged as youths negotiated their various subcultural experiences (school, street, family, etc.), which resulted in a nationwide youth resistance culture. The distinguishing features of this period include unprecedented state repression, a leadership and organizational crisis in the youth resistance movement, the increasing marginalization of youth following the disruption of organizational structures, the resurgence of the street gang subculture, the emergence of middle-class subcultures, and, recently, greater polarization in youth politics.

The 1985 crisis and the consequent declaration of a state of emergency was accompanied by profound change in the state's mode of repression: a shift from *total strategy* to what Haysom calls the counterinsurgency doctrine of *low-intensity conflict* that had been used in El Salvador and the Philippines.[31] The theory of

low-intensity conflict stresses *total war* at the grass-roots level against popular rebellions with *soft war* tactics or WHAM tactics (*winning the hearts and minds* of the people) to destroy popular insurgency without appearing to be waging war directly on the masses. It eliminates revolutionary forces, particularly by isolating the leadership from its mass base and neutralizing its structures, including homes, families, and the entire grass-roots organizational network. The new strategy was expected to minimize the crisis determined by the deteriorating economic climate in the early 1980s, the proliferation of political organizations and the rapid politicalization of black communities manifested in the nationwide demonstrations, school boycotts, consumer boycotts, and stay-aways, phenomena that assumed the dimension of *total resistance*.[32]

Curiously, this shift also inaugurated the emergence of vigilante groups in South Africa, violent reactionary groupings operating in black communities to neutralize individuals or organizations that opposed the apartheid system. To mention just a few, vigilante groups that emerged in the course of 1985 and 1986 included the Phakatis in Thabong township of the Orange Free State, the Amabutho in Umlazi in Natal, the Mbhokoto in KwaNdebele/Uitenhage, the Ama-Afrika in KwaNobuhle in the Eastern Cape, and the Witdoeke in Crossroads in the Cape Peninsula. The vigilantes penetrated the youth resistance movement, disorganizing its structures and eliminating its leadership.[33] The climate of terror spread by vigilante groupings was exacerbated by the activity of the state killing machine or death squads.[34] The leadership began to show signs of weakness. Organizational structures became fragmented and ineffective under the pressure of the vigilantes and the disruptive effects of successive school closures. Informal methods of social control exercised over the youths by these structures and by the older generation, parents, teachers, community leaders, and working-class organizations were gradually swept away. This caused a growing alienation and marginalization of youths which increased the pace and scope of gang formation in the late 1980s. There were also other important factors in the development of the new wave of gangs. Scharf identifies three converging sets of factors: the education crisis in the schools, the lack of alternative

education, and thorough political conscientization in a context where youth had little hope of employment; the politicization of sport; and militaristic populism associated with the rise of youth soldiers, or Young Lions.[35] The latter represents what Webster has labeled "military voluntarism," characterized by uncontrolled and counterproductive military adventurism of a "terrorist" kind:

> The state's coercive response to the rising levels of mobilization prevented the trade unions and the national political organizations from consolidating their structures. After the army occupied the townships, protest became increasingly militaristic as large members of youths began engaging the security forces in running street battles that claimed hundreds of lives. The militaristic voluntarism of the youth eclipsed the organizational concerns of the activists as the township became 'ungovernable'.[36]

Evidence indicates that these factors played relatively the same role in several parts of the country. Gangs of youths spread terror over black townships, eliminating youth leaders, assaulting and raping schoolchildren, and curtailing social mobility of residents and political mobilization. As a result, in Soweto many schools were temporarily closed.

Two aspects characterized the new wave of street gangs in the late 1980s. First, some actions of youth gangs clearly assumed a political character. They targeted schoolchildren, mainly girls, and student and youth political leaders. Gangs, particularly those who reemerged from the resistance movement—well-known as *comtsotsis*—became a potentially powerful resource for state officialdom as tools against political "agitators." Comtsotsis is the term used to refer to ex-comrades: gangs who have joined the resistance movement since the 1976 school crisis but have not been able to assimilate its political discipline or marginalized youth who have appropriated the status and the label of comrade to serve their opportunistic goals. Bonner argues that youth gang culture can be "a vital resource in wider political struggles presenting both opportunities and constraints to political action."[37] However, Pinnock presents a view that highlights more clearly the nature of the gangs in the 1980s. For him, gang activities "are obviously not a recipe for winning popular hegemony" and perhaps "not even part of

resistance."[38] Gangs easily enter into agreements or partnership with the authorities in policing the townships and doing the dirty work of the police, and their presence can be disruptive for mass events held on weekends or at night. During the gang invasion of schools in Diepkloof in 1989, there were indications that some "jackrollers"—operating within the mass democratic movement—were involved in a systematic elimination of activists. In this sense, the gangs are generally reactionary.[39] Second, unlike in the 1950s, the gangs of the 1980s were more educated (school-leavers or dropouts) and more politically aware, which illustrates the contradictions generated by the nature of the South African educational system.

THE RESURGENCE OF YOUTH
CONFORMIST AND MIDDLE-CLASS SUBCULTURE, 1985-1990

A recent but important development in youth culture is the emergence of a typically middle-class subculture dominated by liberalism, elitism, tolerance of some aspects of dominant ideologies, concern with personal autonomy, selfishness, and political indifference or apathy. Factors determining this cultural process range from (a) the values and new forms of behavior brought to the township life by those attending "open" schools, and (b) the effects on youth perceptions of the structural changes undertaken by the state in the townships, such as the promotion of exclusively high-income housing and townships, to (c) different family, employment, and leisure experience.

The "open" schools, as schools for the elite, provide highly personalizing forms of socialization stressing individuality rather than collectivity, personal autonomy rather than ascription, competition rather than cooperation, and other values that are seen as negative within an African setting and are not directly open to parental surveillance. Thus children attending these schools acquire new life-styles that are regarded as alienating them from their African traditions, values, and costumes.[40] They tend to display more docile, diligent, and conscientious behavior. They show preference for foreign and culturally exotic forms of practice, interests,

and leisure pursuits. They return to the neighborhood with a clearly identifiable sense of cultural displacement and consequent lack of authenticity. Unable to negotiate successfully their school experience with their township counterparts, they tend to form a marginal but solid subcultural group.

Material benefits, environment, and the social status achieved by their parents also have profound effects on their perceptions, consciousness, and social practices. They tend to engage in symbolically narcissistic forms of practice that allow for personal satisfaction and outward prestige or, in Bernstein's words, "a celebration of the present over the past, the subjective over the objective, the personal over the positional."[41] Luxurious cars, "leather jackets," foreign music, and nightclubs dominate their interests and hobbies. Their parents play a central role in this process of socialization.[42] Seekings says that in Soweto, for example, many people under this category are widely

> accused of being "snobs", who have changed their attitudes so drastically that they no longer seem part of the community. . . . They have lost all the warmth one never misses elsewhere in Soweto. . . . They only know each other by the posh cars they drive . . . though they see themselves as still swimming in the same waters with every other black.[43]

The size and social weight of this stratum is growing in response to the burgeoning modes of middle-class socialization: Elitist schools, rich families, better townships, and better employment opportunities. Although politics have blurred the boundaries between working-class and middle-class youth subcultures, in Soweto the contours of these class strata have increasingly crystallized and their different social worlds are more distinguishable. One can speculate that the recent state initiative to rehabilitate black townships and introduce separate elite housing schemes is, to a large extent, a clear response to or an attempt to accelerate these trends in the social structure.[44] In Soweto, this strategy has militated against the emergence of a strong sense of a (working-class) "community" as has developed in poorer townships on the East Rand and in the Eastern Cape.

YOUTHS AND THE TASKS
OF NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

The question that emerges against the above background is whether social forces exist that have the potential to redirect youth culture into positive modes of social practice and reintegrate youth in more constructive ways of life, without perpetuating the existing oppressive status quo. The agenda is dramatically extensive. It is necessary to (a) reduce and remove gangsterism in the townships, (b) reunite youths who have been fragmented by conflicting cultural experiences and political competition after the unbanning of political organizations, (c) liberate youths from the legacy of ideological indoctrination, racism, white-black, superior-inferior complexes of inferiority, (d) empower youth with a sense of self-confidence, assertiveness, and self-pride, and (e) provide youths with the necessary skills, knowledge, and critical thinking to cope with the challenge of reconstruction and so forth. This article was not aimed at addressing these specific issues. That must be an object of wider debate at the grass-roots level as the process of national reconstruction unfolds. What this article hoped to achieve was to contribute with a historical background and a framework that can possibly inform the debate on related policy strategies.

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

The problem with a structural functional view is that it overlooks the role of subjectivity and contradiction in the process of change. It disregards the role of ideology in reproducing and *transforming* social relations. There are subjective factors embedded in culture and ideology that may curtail or inhibit structural changes in society. Furthermore, history has shown that revolutions do not automatically eradicate all cultural styles that come to be seen as

undesirable, outdated, or incompatible with the new social order, even if profound structural changes take place.[45]

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

The question of resistance culture requires clarification. Two important concepts are essential for an understanding of this concept in South Africa: the concept of *struggles of resistance* and the concept of *struggles of transformation*.[46] The concept of struggles of resistance refers to oppositional practices that challenge control and power in school relations by focusing on immediate issues (such as democratic representative councils, free textbooks, and better equipment and school conditions). The main strategy is dominated by immediatism or short-term fulfillment of the expressed demands or needs. The concept of struggles of transformation embodies medium- and long-term goals, which are directed in some way at the relations of production and reproduction imposed by the apartheid system in general and segregated schooling in particular. Political strategies in this case contain a new dimension. They transcend the purely destructive nature of the struggles of resistance to incorporate the need for reconstruction, which is a fundamental factor toward emancipation.

I would like to stress that the need to emphasize struggles of transformation rather than struggles of resistance stems from the very nature of the resistance culture. Commonsensical views of resistance culture unproblematically see culture as a positive transformative process. This is an oversimplification of the matter. Resistance may serve to reproduce rather than transform existing social relations.[47] Aggleton uses the term *reproductive resistance* to refer to systematic intentioned resistance that works contradictorily by contributing to hegemonic rather than counterhegemonic tendencies in contrast to *effective resistance* that may contribute counterhegemonically within power struggles.[48] It is necessary to under-

stand the significance of "resistance" as social practice, how it is worked out, and how it is articulated with other practices within society. As Bowles and Gintis have demonstrated, determinate effects arise as an outcome of complex and contradictory articulation between practices at different sites within social formation, which means that the effects of "resistance" are unpredictable.[49] There are constraints imposed on the development of social practices within a particular site by virtue of that site's articulation with others, as well as the possibilities allowed for by the transportation of practices across sites, for example, gang culture in resistance culture and vice versa.

NOTES

1. See Crossm, M. (1992). *Resistance & transformation: Culture, education and national unity.* Johannesburg: Skotaville.

2. See Brake, M. (1980). *The sociology of youth culture and youth subcultures* (pp. 6-7). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; and Hall, S. (1980). Race, articulation and societies structured in dominance. In UNESCO, *Sociological theories: Race and colonialism* (pp. 308-309). Poole: Sydenhams.

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