THE ROLE OF SOUTH AFRICAN YOUTH IN POLITICS

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Introduction

The Republic of South Africa is 25 years into its democracy and the youth of the country find themselves inextricably linked with the country's politics. With a fast-growing population, rapid urbanisation, gross overpopulation, inequalities as well as other issues faced by most developing countries, the youth of South Africa find themselves in the position of being the product of their history as well as the catalysts for their future.

Historical background

The history of the country is crucial in understanding the current issues faced by its people as well as the role of the youth in the country's politics. Translated from the Afrikaans word meaning 'apartness', apartheid was the ideology supported by the National Party (NP) government (SA History, 2018) and was introduced in South Africa in 1948 even though racism was practiced and enforced as far back as colonial times.

"Apartheid called for the separate development of the different racial groups in South Africa" (SA History, 2018). This oppressive system was abolished after many discussions and negotiations and the first democratic elections took place in 1994. Through the peaceful transition into a democratic state and the move for the acceptance of all South Africans in their diversity, the country became known as the 'rainbow nation'.

Youth during apartheid

The youth of South Africa played a significant role in the struggle against apartheid. Different acts of rebellion from the youth were seen as far back as the colonial rule. This rebellion really set in within schools, although protests were sparse and not interconnected, as the youth had no set leader or organiser. Originally, it was believed that these protests were for short-term gains, however, this was later proved to not be the case.

In 1945, the African National Congress Youth League was established. The establishment of this youth-driven sector of the party led to the coordination of the protests across the country and for a more uniform voice of the youth to emerge. The

Bantu Education Bill of 1953 was an act that was established to ensure that the black population was given an inferior education system to that of the white population and this later led to the enforcement of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction (SA History, 2017). This only increased the boycotts and protests planned and executed by students and student bodies but the government fought back against these actions, which were seen as radical at the time.

The climax and most notable moment in the history of South African youth would be the protest of 16 June 1976, known as the Soweto Uprising. This saw scores of South African youth take to the streets to protest the apartheid government and its laws on education. The youth movement was confrontational and daring and seen as radical by the oppressive government. This watershed moment marked the day that the youth of South Africa really showed the power they possess. This day is commemorated yearly in South Africa as 'Youth Day' and is viewed as an opportunity to observe what the youth has done, take note of their current issues and reflect on what can be done to aid them in the future.

Present-day challenges
According to Statistics South Africa (2018), the population in South Africa is fast growing, reaching 57.7 million people in 2018, with 80.2% being black African, 8.4% being white, 8.8% being coloured and 2.5% being of Indian/Asian descent. This fast-growing population is largely youthful with about 42% of the population being between the ages of 25 and 54.

According to Youth Policy (2014), South Africa's National Youth Policy, as well as its National Youth Commission Act and its Integrated Youth Development Strategy, youth is defined as people between the ages of 14 and 35 years. This guideline is adopted and used countrywide to define youth.

South Africa, as a developing nation, is faced with many issues, with the youth of the country suffering the most. The issues in the country range from education to HIV/AIDS, inequality and other social issues that impede the progress of the youth and thus, in turn, hinder the potential of the youth, limiting South Africa's ability to tap into the potential human capital that the youth of the country represents.

Despite the significant progress made since democracy in 1994, most young South Africans remain cynical of a better life with opportunities for social and economic progress. Inequalities remain very evident in the country and due to the past they still exist along racial lines and the class divide continues to grow.

Education
In terms of education, South African youth now are much more highly educated than in previous generations. Although significant strides have been made in providing access to education since 1994, the content, curriculum, and quality of education remain of huge concern. Today South Africa has more than 7 million youth in no-fee schools receiving free education and since its start; the National Student Financial Aid Scheme has provided R41.5 billion in student financial aid to more than 2 million students from

an underprivileged background (Ycl.org.za, 2018). Despite this, few improvements have been made in decreasing the number of young people with little or no education.

Only 11% of black South African youth and 7% of coloured youth are enrolled in a higher education institution, compared to 60% of white South African youth (Chetty, 2014). Poor quality primary and secondary schooling are key reasons for these differences. South African youth in poverty often look to higher education as a means to a

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better life. However, access to higher education is hugely limited for those who are impoverished and from rural areas (Ycl.org.za, 2018).

Language-related challenges are also significant, with South Africa having 11 official languages. Most learners whose home language is not English or Afrikaans begin schooling in their mother tongue and then experience a switch to English. This is supposed to happen at the fourth-grade level, although it is not always successfully executed (Ycl.org.za, 2018). Teachers and classroom practices are other factors driving low-quality education. The quality of teacher training and the need for more teacher training institutions is crucial to improving the quality of education in schools. (Ycl.org.za, 2018).

Unemployment

Unemployment remains one of the top challenges for young South Africans. About 70% of all South African unemployed persons in 2013 were youth (Mhlongo, 2016). The 2011 South African census found that people in the youngest age groups (15–19 years and 20–24 years) face the most difficult challenges in the country's labour market (Mhlongo, 2016). Young South Africans who do obtain employment also often do so with the assistance of personal contacts or networks, which black youth are less likely to benefit from (Lorenzo and Cramm, 2012). The challenge of youth unemployment is a global one, however, and not unique to South Africa. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that there are over 75 million unemployed young people across the globe (Ycl.org.za, 2018).

Health

In terms of health, "despite the efforts and resources invested in South Africa's healthcare system, the indicators of a healthy nation remain unacceptable. South Africa has the highest number of people living with HIV/AIDS, the prevalence of this disease is highest amongst young people" (Ycl.org.za, 2018). Globally, South Africa has the "highest rate of inequity of access to health services. The public health system serves the vast majority of youth but is chronically underfunded and understaffed" (Ycl.org.za, 2018).

HIV/AIDS is the single most serious health challenge facing the country, with a 2016 United Nations report finding that the country has the 4th highest adult HIV prevalence rate in the world. This issue is most prevalent in the black communities and the most affected groups include sex workers, transgender women, men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, children and orphans and women and adolescent girls (United Nations, 2016). Despite the fact that HIV/AIDS can be seen as the most prominent threat to the health of South African youth, "the massive rollout of antiretrovirals (ARVs) through comprehensive government programmes has increased life expectancy and productivity, especially for the youth" (Ycl.org.za, 2018).

A concept introduced by the United Nation's programme on HIV/AIDS in 2013, 90-90-90 is a set of goals. The idea is that by 2020, 90% of people who are HIV infected will be diagnosed, 90% of people who are diagnosed will be on antiretroviral treatment and 90% of those who receive antiretrovirals will be virally suppressed (UNAIDS, 2017). South Africa has made great strides in this regard, with 86% of people being aware of their HIV status, 65% being on treatment and 81% of those people being virally suppressed.

Youth and race

In a country where the past was so negatively centered on race, the racial inequalities created during apartheid continue to have lasting effects on society today. The issues of race show themselves in different areas of society and between the many different racial groups of the country. Inequality ranges from wealth to land ownership, which has been thrust into the spotlight in the country as the expropriation of land that was forcibly taken from the black majority becomes the main focus of the country and its policies.

The main societal, and racial, inequality in the country is that of wealth. According to Africa Check (2018), 27.9% of black Africans are unemployed - compared to only 7% of white South Africans. Africa Check (2018) also states that the average income of black African households in the country is R69,632 as opposed to the average income of white households, which is R387,011. In terms of top management positions in various types of employment, white South Africans hold 70% of positions while black Africans hold only 13.6%.

Present-day potential

The 'Global Youth Bulge' refers to a demographic trend where the age group of people between 15 and 24 is "comparatively greater than other age groups in the state's population" (Mhlongo, 2016). It was put forward by Fuller, whose 1990 study "identified that the high presence of youth between the age of 15-24 in South Korea threatened the political

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stability of the state" (Mhlongo, 2016). This trend has meant that the participation of young people becomes extremely important in politics as they form a significant portion of society and alienating them poses a "major risk to the legitimacy of the state" (Mhlongo, 2016).

In South Africa, the Youth Bulge has been similar to most developing countries, with a large segment of citizens being under the age of 35. This has meant that the government has faced demands to design policies encouraging youth participation and development (Mhlongo, 2016).

Despite these worthy goals, the Human Science Research Council conducted a voter turnout research in 2012 and found that the majority of young South Africans do not engage in the formal structures of politics. Research has found that the "successful inclusion of youth in accessible community decision making structures, accompanied by genuine opportunities to engage in political decision making, can create a sense of inclusion and responsibility among young people that can significantly curb their participation in criminal activities plaguing society" (Mhlongo, 2016).

Including "youth in political decision making is vital in creating a sense of belonging in the state" and in South Africa in particular, "where youth voter turnout has been declining and where the youth are often involved in violent protest" (Mhlongo, 2016), engaging young South Africans should be a top priority for government and civil society alike.

Policies and initiatives
South Africa does put a great amount of emphasis on the youth, which can be seen by the country's many youth-focused policies and initiatives as well as those of the NGOs that focus on youth and their development.

National Youth Policy
The National Youth Policy (NYP) 2020 (National Youth Development Agency, 2015b) seeks to create an environment that enables the young people of South Africa to reach their potential, mindful of the global economic challenges that affect the country.

National Youth Development Agency
The National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) was established to address youth development issues at the national, provincial and local government level (National Youth Development Agency, 2015a). The NYDA plays a leading role in ensuring that all major stakeholders, i.e. the government, the private sector and civil society, "prioritise youth development and contribute towards identifying and implementing lasting solutions which address youth development challenges" (National Youth Development Agency, 2015b).

YES

Unemployment has plagued South Africa for many years with the rate increasing steadily. The most affected are the youth. These numbers are worsened when considering that 39% of all unemployed South Africans have never worked before. The unemployment issue has been in discussion in South Africa for many years and several plans have been put in place but none have been effective.

This issue has been stated as being at the top of the new government administration's priority list and President Ramaphosa launched the Youth Employment Service (YES). Over the next three years, YES will "incentivise businesses to employ young people, giving them a chance at a life-changing first work experience" (Yes4Youth, 2018). "With a unique collaboration between government, labour, civil society and the youth, this represents a benchmark in fresh, bold responses to our country's unemployment crisis."

Non-governmental organisations

According to NGO.org (2016), non-governmental organisations are usually non-profit and sometimes international organisations that are independent of governments and international governmental organisations (though often funded by governments) and are active in humanitarian response, education, health care, public policy, social issues, human rights, environment and other areas to effect changes according to their objectives.

South Africa has many such organisations that vary in their missions but a good amount of them are focused on combating issues that affect the youth as well as working with the youth to better their standing in society. This paper will look at two NGOs that have made such an impact and are working towards the empowerment of the youth in various ways.

Partners for Possibility

Ranked amongst the 100 best NGOs in the world, Partners for Possibility is a creative solution to South Africa's education crisis - it is a "co-action, co-learning partnership between School Principals and Business Leaders, enabling social cohesion through partnerships, and empowering Principals to become change leaders in their schools and communities" (Partners for Possibility, 2016).

Inkamva Youth

Ikamva Youth equips learners from disadvantaged communities with the knowledge, skills, networks and resources to access ter-

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tiary education and/or employment opportunities once they matriculate (Inkamva Youth, 2018).

These NGOs are just two of many that bring the government, the private sector as well as the respective communities together to make the challenges of the youth known and to aid the youth in their quest to overcome these barriers.

Present-day youth in politics

Despite a large amount of youth-oriented legislation and many institutions established since the start of democracy in 1994, post-apartheid youth have not been active in politics in a similar way that the youth of the 1970s and 1980s were" (Mhlongo, 2016). This does not, however, mean that young South Africans are not finding a way to make their voices heard (Campbell, 2017). In 2015, students from different universities around the country embarked on protests against the increase in fees for the year 2016 and the continuing inability of underprivileged students being able to access higher education opportunities.

The 'Fees Must Fall' movement was seen as a critical time for the young people of South Africa, with many viewing the protest action as one of the first times since 1994 that "young people across racial boundaries mobilised to put pressure on government and universities" (Mhlongo, 2016) and attracted international support and attention. Furthermore, the protests were widely viewed as a success after the South African government agreed to pledge more funds to higher education, although tensions at higher education institutions remain high more than 3 years after the initial protests.

Fees have since gone up and despite public promises from the government, it remains to be seen how and when these goals would be achieved.

When looking at political parties and their relationship with youth-based priorities, the Economic Freedom Fighters, a party that was created from an ANC split, emerge as a "party which taps into youthful frustration at the slow pace of change" in South Africa's democracy (Webb, 2018). They have enjoyed growing popularity and their supporters are younger than those of their political rivals, with 49% being under the age of 24 (Harris, 2014).

The party's manifesto includes many of the contentious proposals that its leader, Julius Malema had promoted while he was the head of the ANC's Youth League, "including the nationalization of mines and banks and the expropriation of land for redistribution, all towards the goal of economic emancipation" (McKenna, 2014). The manifesto also calls for a number of initiatives to increase access to quality education and improve health and welfare systems, which quickly gave it support among young adults, the poor and the unemployed (McKenna, 2014).

Another growing aspect of the relations between politics and youth in South Africa is the growing number of young members of parliament. With the candidacy age being 18, a few examples of youthful members of parliament include the Economic Freedom Fighters' Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, 33, Inkatha Freedom Party's Mkhuleko Hlengwa, 31, the African National Congress' Mduduzi Manana, 34 as well as the

Democratic Alliance's Hlomela Bucwa, who is the youngest candidate at 24 years of age according to Times Live (2018).

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Conclusion

The protests about access to higher education in South Africa became representative of a larger societal anger at the prevailing inequalities of South Africa's current state. Youth public action such as these student protests indicates that young people are very concerned about public issues. Although these protest actions are testimony that "youth do engage with politics and public issues that affect them, they also highlight a lack of formal engagements with the state by the youth, including participation in politics" (Davids et al., 2016).

Many people looked at student demonstrations and the growing voice of parties like the EFF and the values they espouse as the dawn of a "new generation of youth activists, comparable to those who struggled against apartheid" (Webb, 2018). But while the protests certainly highlight a profound frustration among young people, they have not "fundamentally challenged the inequality of South African society", nor do they "signal a turning of the political tides". They do capture a "deep frustration at the pace of socio-economic change, specifically among young people" (Webb, 2018) and their willingness to demand more. ☀

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