

## COMMENT

## Anger of black youth is rooted in more than policy

EDWARD BUYS



ON YOUTH Day and during Youth Month, it has become easy to mention the many students and young South Africans who mobilised across the country on June 16, 1976. It has become even easier to talk about the hundreds murdered and thousands injured. However, what we seldom spend time on is the "why" of it all.

Why were they unsettled, disturbed and unhappy? What made each student peacefully step out that day and the days that followed? And what made them finally decide that enough was enough?

In searching for answers, we almost instinctively allude to the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which brought the education of black people under the control of the apartheid government, as well as the Extension of the University Education Act 45 of 1959 whereby young black South Africans could not attend traditional white universities.

This unequal education system had dire consequences for young black people. They were denied the right to quality education and training in their mother tongue and were basically set up for mediocre employment and manual labour. Their potential, aspirations and hopes for emancipation and a better future of prosperity were dashed and put to an abrupt end. They faced a dimmed future of struggle and oppression with no positive outcome in sight.

Naturally this was more than enough reason for outrage. However, it would be foolish to assume that the anger of the black youth was rooted only in the enactment of policy. I would like to argue that they were not only simply concerned about what affected them at present, but also about what affected their futures and the generations that would follow.

The black youth of decades ago fought against inequality. Today's young people face more than just inequality; they are overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy, self-hate and depression that do not discriminate against race, gender, sexuality or religion.

Where our predecessors once fought for the security of the future, we battle for relevance. We find ourselves caught up in a cycle of constantly having to prove something, while trying to figure out who we really are in a fast-changing world.

In a sense, this is exacerbated by social media where fake societal expectations and standards make today's youth feel more depressed, anxious and lonely.

Social media has genuinely become the place where young people take everything as real, everything that we value, and trade it for validation and relevance. The love we fail to receive from our significant others, the invalidation from people we care about the most, and the good that we refuse to see in ourselves.

These are all things that we overcompensate for on social media. It is much easier to post that picture of yourself looking fulfilled in a frozen frame than to think about that empty feeling you have had for weeks on end. As long as the world thinks you are doing better than the next person, then everything that consumes you on the inside is okay.

Let's forget, on June 16, 1976 struggling students and young people understood that they were the only ones who could save themselves.

We too, the youth of today, must find the strength in ourselves to be emancipated from the shackles of self-doubt, instant gratification and destructive entitlement. Instagram accounts such as @thertspodcast are the first of their kind aimed at addressing the mental health issues and pretentious standards induced not only by social media but throughout society. I believe the same spirit of resilience, perseverance and belief beyond measure that was ignited in Soweto and rippled through the country also burns and thrives within all of us today.

Our shortcomings and diversity bind us and give us our strength to realise we cannot win our current battles on our own, but by embracing the fact that we are attacked as a collective, and so together we must stand. Just as our predecessors did, we must mobilise in the present to defend our futures. This is bigger than us, it is bigger than what we know today. The future is not grim, our hopes have not been taken away. As long as we fight for the good of each other, then one day we too, the youth of today, will all be free.

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