

# WE ARE THE FUTURE: YOUTH NARRATIVES ON PROSPECTS IN A DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

**Elirea Bornman**

orcid.org/0000-0002-6300-4768

University of South Africa

bornme@unisa.ac.za

**Alison Odendaal**

orcid.org/0000-0001-6668-1441

University of South Africa

alisonodendaal@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

The study reports on an investigation into the perceptions of white and black South African youths regarding the future of the country as well as their own prospects. The qualitative research design consisted of five focus group discussions conducted between 2014 and 2016, and the number of participants involved was 48. White and black participants alike expressed their love for and dedication to the country. Black participants in particular indicated an appreciation of the opportunities and freedom that democracy afforded them and they believed they could bring about change through voting. However, both groups voiced their dissatisfaction and even despair and feelings of fatalism about the country's political situation and the general stagnation and/or deterioration of conditions. Whereas some white participants felt they had no future in South Africa and intended to emigrate, participants of both the black and white groups expressed the hope that they could make a difference. The conclusion reached was that the optimism and dedication of the youth were vital resources for building a prosperous South Africa, provided that the government heeded the concerns of the young people of the country.

**Keywords:** future orientations; South Africa; democracy; deterioration; catastrophe; hope; youth



## INTRODUCTION

Research into future perceptions can be traced back to the work of Karl Mannheim (1936). According to Mannheim, people's thought patterns are not only influenced by events happening in their world, but these thought patterns also influence and shape current and future events (Leslie and Finchilescu 2013). In particular during times of social and political upheaval, people tend to generate transcendent ideas of the future of their society. These ideas are, however, not solely generated spontaneously by individuals but are derived from inherited social situations. Specific ways of thinking develop within certain groups as a series of responses to situations typically encountered in everyday life, but narratives of the past also serve as important resources for thinking patterns (Bradbury 2012). In stable and homogeneous societies, ways of thinking often converge to form a single world view. In heterogeneous societies characterised by social and political instability and varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the current order, a clash of values and disharmony could, however, arise. In such situations, perceptions of the future will reflect not only the existing social crisis but also the group positions in the power hierarchy (Leslie and Finchilescu 2013).

South African society has been characterised by socio-political upheaval and wide-ranging social change for decades (Bradbury 2012; Leslie and Finchilescu 2013). It was hoped that the advent of democracy in 1994 would not only end the disenfranchisement of people of colour, but also promote peace, stability, economic prosperity and harmony to the benefit of all South Africans. However, since the new dispensation, the country has had to contend with a range of problems such as escalating crime rates, government corruption, mismanagement of public funds, poor service delivery often resulting in violent protests, and an increase in HIV infections and AIDS (Kamper and Badenhorst 2010).

When a country is beset by such problems it becomes important to establish how its young people of different groups view and discuss their future prospects and those of the country (Bradbury 2012). According to Kamper and Badenhorst (2010), perceptions of the future not only indicate the "state of the nation" but also people's potential future behaviour such as their intention to engage in positive or negative action to stabilise or change the status quo and/or their intention to stay in the country or to emigrate.

This article reports on a study undertaken to investigate the narratives of youths of various South African groups to determine their views on South Africa as a country, their own future prospects and the future of the country.

## RESEARCH ON FUTURE PERCEPTIONS

The typology of possible future orientations developed by Mannheim (1936) has formed the basis of a number of South African studies, for instance those conducted by Danziger (1963), Finchilescu and Dawes (1999), Du Preez et al. (1981) and Leslie and Finchilescu (2013).

Leslie and Finchilescu (2013) categorise Mannheim's orientations, including orientations that emerged from South African studies, as follows:

- Conservative/Segregationist: Although stability in society may be temporarily disturbed, conditions will remain largely the same as in the present; current policies will be maintained and there will be no change of power.
- Technicist: Societal change will be predominantly technical in nature due to new inventions and alternative processes acting as drivers of change and progress.
- Catastrophic: Social violence and upheaval is inevitable; there is no solution to the current deadlock and the situation will deteriorate even further; there is little that individuals can do to change the course of events and therefore there is little hope for recovery or improvement.
- Liberal: Gradual reforms will be instituted smoothly and peacefully as enlightened self-interest will lead people to negotiate a better and different society.
- Revolutionary: Due to irreconcilable differences between interest groups, violence is the only means to bring about change; strategic foresight and planning is necessary to overthrow the current and to introduce a new order.
- Socialist: Socialist and communist policies such as the redistribution of land are proposed as solutions for the failure of the current dispensation to bring about economic justice and to eradicate poverty.
- Social/Democratic redress: No significant changes are foreseen in the current political order; future well-being and the eradication of poverty will result from governmental interventions such as redress (affirmative action), housing development, and education.
- Deterioration: Fatalistic assumptions are made that the current political order is resulting in an overall deterioration of conditions; there is little hope that it can be stopped and/or prevented.

During the height of the apartheid era, Danziger (1963) initiated a research tradition in South Africa by requesting high-school learners and university students to imagine themselves as historians writing South Africa's history from 1960 to 2010. A major finding was that the frequencies for the various orientations as identified by Mannheim (1936) reflected the group positions in the social structure at that time. Whereas Afrikaans-speaking white respondents—who were then at the top of the power hierarchy—predominantly held conservative or technicist viewpoints, the majority of English-speaking white respondents foresaw a catastrophic future. Liberal views were mostly voiced by Indians, whilst the orientation of the black respondents—who were at the bottom of the hierarchy—was predominantly revolutionary.

Various follow-up studies were conducted. The study of Du Preez et al. (1981) among psychology students was done at a time when societal change became increasingly inevitable. Drastic changes in orientation could be observed among

the Afrikaans-speaking white respondents. Instead of displaying conservative and technicist orientations, the majority displayed liberal orientations, whilst a considerable percentage also believed that the country was heading towards a catastrophe. Similar to the finding in 1963, the majority of English-speaking white respondents foresaw a catastrophic future, while the viewpoint of a noteworthy percentage was liberal. In contrast to the predominantly revolutionary orientation that black respondents displayed in 1963, the majority of them reported a liberal viewpoint, and the second highest percentage displayed a catastrophic orientation. The predominant orientation of Indians and coloured people became revolutionary.

In their report on similar studies conducted shortly before and after the political transition in 1994, Finchilescu and Dawes (1999) identified a significant rise in catastrophic orientations. In fact, only two scenarios emerged, namely catastrophic and liberal. Similar to previous studies, significant group differences could be observed. Whereas English- and Afrikaans-speaking white respondents predominantly tended to predict catastrophic situations, liberal views were more prevalent among black respondents. In fact, black respondents displayed lower levels of catastrophic orientations than the other groups. Indian and coloured respondents displayed predominantly liberal orientations.

At the time when Leslie and Finchilescu (2013) conducted their study, radical political shifts were starting to disrupt the plateau of political stability reached in 1994. Therefore it became necessary to reconceptualise some of the categories of Mannheim (1936). Social and democratic redress had come to be the standard liberal orientation and these categories were integrated into the liberal category. A new category, deterioration, was identified as many respondents expressed a negative orientation that was less extreme than the catastrophic orientation. Among the sample as a whole, the most frequently mentioned orientations were liberal followed by deterioration and catastrophic. Whilst approximately one third of the respondents predicted a worsening of conditions in South Africa, revolutionary, technicist and socialist orientations were rare. A rise in catastrophic and deterioration orientations was found among English-speaking white people. In contrast, liberal orientations were most frequently recorded among black people. Concomitant quantitative research indicated that black respondents were more positive than white respondents about the country's future.

Based on the responses of the black learners who participated in a multi-method study, Kamper and Badenhorst (2010) found that social aspects (human rights, positive human relations and freedom of speech) and economic aspects were the country's most important strengths, but work opportunities and opportunities to serve were rated on a much lower scale. The majority of the respondents were positive about the country's future whereas only a small percentage (less than 5%) felt that they had no future here.

In the current study, the narratives of young people regarding the future of South Africa and their own prospects in the country were investigated. The following broad research questions directed the research:

- How do you see South Africa and its future?
- How do you feel about your own place and prospects in the country?

## METHOD

The qualitative study involved five focus group discussions conducted between 2014 and 2016 with 48 young white and black participants aged between 18 and 35 residing in Gauteng (see Table 1). MA students of the Department of Psychology at the University of South Africa recruited participants and moderated the groups under the leadership of the project leader.

**Table 1:** Demographics of focus group participants

	<b>Group 1 Black</b>	<b>Group 2 White</b>	<b>Group 3 Black</b>	<b>Group 4 White</b>	<b>Group 5 White</b>
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	6	2	7	2	6
Female	6	8	3	4	4
<b>Age range (years)</b>	18 to 26	21 to 24	19 to 25	23 to 25	18 to 26
<b>Language</b>					
Afrikaans		6		6	3
English		1	2		7
Afrikaans and English		1			
African language	12		8		
Other		2			
<b>Total group size</b>	12	10	10	6	10

The group discussions were recorded electronically and thereafter transcribed. Deductive thematic coding was employed in analysing the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). Although the categories as identified by Mannheim (1936) and Leslie and Finchilescu (2013) were used as a guiding framework, the thematic analyses were not restricted to these categories/themes. In order to enhance the credibility of the analyses and conclusions, two members of the research team analysed the data concurrently. They discussed the identified themes and made a final selection. (The themes are dealt with in the Results section below). For the purpose of this article, the narratives of the participants who spoke Afrikaans (Group 4) and African languages (Group 1) were translated into English.

## RESULTS

### Pride in South Africa and in Being South African

A major theme emerging from all the groups was pride in South Africa and in being a South African. Both white and black participants voiced the feeling that South Africa was their “home”, a place that was closely tied to their destiny and for which they longed when they were away. In particular, they were proud of the country because of the beauty of its landscapes, the good climate, the friendliness of the people, the diversity of the people and a number of other features such as township life. However, their pride was tempered by the awareness that the country was experiencing serious problems. They nevertheless acknowledged the uniqueness of the country and its problems. It was furthermore mentioned that South Africa was still better than any other African country.

The participants expressed their pride as follows:

- G1: I’m very proud of being a South African ... it goes back to a sense of ... belonging.
- G2: We spent two months in Europe last year ... you only heard positive things, and it made us feel so cool coming from South Africa ... by the end of the two months ... we missed South African people so much, like we were craving friendly people. When we arrived at the airport we wanted to hug the first security guard that we saw, because we were so happy to see them.
- G2: So, I am very proud because we have an amazingly beautiful country and so much to offer and to see. The friendly people—you do not get that anywhere else.
- G1: I am a South African ... I have a place that I can say it’s home.
- G1: I’m very, very proud to be South African ... even though there are a lot of negative things.
- G2: Yes, things go wrong, and yes, things aren’t always good, but we are in a completely unique situation, with unique people and [a] unique country. It’s the only country in Africa that’s actually ... a little bit better than the rest. So I would say in comparison, we’re good.
- G2: It’s a good country. Every day, like, there’s always something ... then you hate it, but ... when you see the flag ... then ... you’re enjoying it and you just love it. Because [when] you go somewhere else ... it’s not the same.
- G1: I’m proud of where we come from and how far we’ve come.

### The Past and the Future

Participants held divergent opinions on how the past—the apartheid past in particular— informed their future in South Africa. Both black and white participants voiced frustration with the fact that too much emphasis was placed on apartheid. Black participants pointed out that they had never experienced apartheid and that it should, therefore, not influence their lives in any way. However, one participant acknowledged

that the negative experiences of her grandparents inspired her to make the best of the opportunities she had. Some participants felt strongly that apartheid should be left behind in order to move forward. On the other hand, some participants were of the view that the atrocities of apartheid should not be forgotten. Similar to other human tragedies such as the holocaust, it should be remembered in order to prevent similar atrocities happening in the future.

- G5: I think there's putting huge emphasis, and the government ... constantly bringing up apartheid, the past, and it was so horrible, the past. ... I think we can't move forward if we're putting such huge emphasis on what happened, but I also think it could be detrimental if we snuff it out.
- G2: But I also feel like we're not fighting the apartheid battle anymore; it's, like, it's ... pressed down our throats by the black people.
- G3: But we did not live in apartheid. Why are we on that train? My grandmother ... they were sjambokked to death ... this is why I am fighting and trying to make a living and the best of what I have; I am using all I can, all that I have ... to celebrate what they did ... we weren't part of apartheid; why are we still hanging this up, or hopping onto this train. ... Why?
- G3: I am going to ban every school from teaching about apartheid, I swear.
- G3: When as human beings we forget certain atrocities that took place, we risk repeating them. We talk of the holocaust, between the Jews and the Germans. And the reason we talk about such things ... slavery ... colonisation, it's that we do not repeat them. It is not to celebrate them but to learn from them.

## Freedom and Opportunities

Black participants, in particular, appreciated their freedom and privileges in a democratic South Africa. This freedom had not only opened a world of almost unlimited opportunities to them, but was also perceived as the basis of hope for the future. They acknowledged that their parents had not enjoyed similar privileges.

- G1: I will say that I am proud because of what the country has allowed me to do ... looking at my career currently as a black South African. ... The opportunities available for me today in this country, because looking back ... in the years that our parents ... they couldn't do certain things and currently I, I can, I am able to do that.
- G3: We've worked for freedom, here's freedom now. Freedom, I believe, is what you choose to do with your life, where do you choose to go, who do you choose to be yourself, mentally, physically, and spiritually.
- G3: Freedom means for me, being able to live in a predominantly or previously white area without the fear of being arrested. Freedom means marrying whoever you choose to marry. For me, those are the fundamentals that we have gotten right.



And when I was voting, I was voting, looking forward ... saying yes, we have the basics right, but what do we want from the future?

Some participants indicated that their freedom was still limited by factors such as a lack of financial resources, which they believed afflicted black people in particular.

G3: Because we might be free to vote, but then we have limitation[s] in terms of finances, most of us Africans know; so within that aspect we're not free yet.

Other participants pointed out that freedom carried with it the responsibility of making the best of it, something which they felt did not always happen.

G3: I feel like you ... you fight for freedom, you're granted freedom, and then freedom comes with a responsibility.

G3: That's the freedom that we're talking about, that's the freedom that the Government has given us, but we're not using it. So even though the freedom is there, we are not really making full use of it as individuals.

## Liberal Change

The awareness that the country was experiencing serious problems dominated the group discussions. Black participants, and also some white participants, were, however, optimistic that the country was heading "in the right way" and "moving forward". This optimism was mainly based on their trust in democracy and democratic procedures. Generally, existing problems were ascribed to the fact that South Africa was still a young democracy. The freedom to vote was regarded as an important vehicle for bringing about change; therefore this freedom should be exercised. Even amidst uncertainty about where the country was heading, the majority of black participants believed that everything would work out for the best. Similar sentiments were voiced by some of the white participants.

G3: If you have that belief ... change will come ... from 1994 when black people voted, there was a change.

G5: Change is imminent. ... We're definitely on our way somewhere. I don't know where, but we're definitely on our way, because you know ... we're just having voted twice.

G3: I believe now in democracy, and I believe in our country. I appreciate our past, but I was also voting for the future.

G3: So I felt it was my responsibility to voice my issues or my concerns, because I believe that if I'm voting, you are enabling the wrongs that you see to be made right, and by not voting you allow them to continue. So I voted for change ... for movement forward.



- G5: We're ... trying to find our way, because we don't know where to go. There's no direction; we have no previous history that I know of where we can say, oh, we can do this now. But, we're getting there, believe it; we are slowly but surely getting together, we are understanding each other, we are listening, maybe not all the time, but we are getting there.
- G2: It's not as though they didn't want to vote, they did not realise that all of them voting makes a difference.
- G1: Looking in the future I can see that ... we are [going] in the right direction; we are on the right path.

Nevertheless, some black participants were despondent about whether anything could be changed by voting.

- G1: It's like voting, standing in a long queue and knowing who's gonna win. For me it's a predetermined thing. I don't feel that there is a need for me to stand in that long queue for something I know the outcome of.
- G3: The reason why I didn't vote; well, it's because I believed that nothing will be changed, the way people believe it will change.

A number of participants pointed out that there was a need for healing a fractured and wounded society and a need for good leadership to steer the country towards a positive future.

- G5: South Africa [is] an injured animal ... it would be nice for me if a leader rises up who could nurture the wounds of this country ... we are still bleeding.
- G5: I think I'm very optimistic. ... I'm quite excited about where we are in the country. ... I'm hoping for the best. I'm hoping that in [a] few generations we can overcome the wounds that we're facing or that we have as a country.

## Stagnation and Deterioration

Participants from all the groups voiced feelings of disappointment that the high hopes that were cherished for the new democratic South Africa had not been realised. Various examples of stagnation and deterioration were given such as streetlights that were out of order, the lack of water in townships, the downgrading of universities and the lack of work opportunities for graduates. One participant went so far as to say that their dreams for the future had been "crushed" in the process. The government of the day was perceived as the main culprit. It was blamed for having become "arrogant", for not keeping its promises and for wasting money. Fears of the further deterioration of the country were expressed, and the possibility that the prospects available to future generations could be limited was also mentioned.

- G2: I feel like we have so much and it can be so much more, that it's just like we should be moving forward. ... Like, after apartheid it was amazing to move forward.
- G1: Like, we had dreams that when we've completed our matric year, we wanted to achieve this and that, but now we are not focused on the dreams any longer ... it seems like these dreams were crushed.
- G5: If I, the white male, get a degree in this country, will I be able to finish, will there still be universities in three, four years? Will my degree actually be of worth then? Will ... the university standards be downgraded so much that, you know, when I graduate that I don't get accredited for anything because it's not worth anything. And also ... if that's what it's like right now, fast-forward 20 years ... will my kids have the same opportunity than me? ... That would be a deciding factor.
- G1: We come from painful experiences and the next thing, you get the freedom, and that freedom you use it to the fullest ... you are arrogant. Like ... where I stay in Soshanguve, [it] is worse. Those are the things that don't make me proud. I cannot say I have experienced painful things, then I end up abusing those painful experiences, then I am no longer treasuring the painful experiences as they should be treasured and turn it into a good thing.
- G1: We cry about streetlights; when the streetlights go off and it becomes a problem, but ... I become very emotional when I see that two-hundred-and-fifty million was spent on a swimming pool that someone can't use because they can't swim. ... I believe that the government and politics ... they are not in a state where I have got confidence in.
- G2: So I just feel ... they are always just promising, promising, promising ... before elections they always promise all these things ... then you'll see the government rides around in these fancy ANC cars, beautiful women popping out of the roofs ... through the townships where they don't have water.
- G1: Our government promised us jobs ... and now when you look at the stats they'll say, yes, they have created lots of jobs and it's very true: they created a lot of temporary jobs. ... Graduates are not employed; we do not have opportunities for the graduates here in South Africa.

## Catastrophe

Some of the participants perceived the current situation in the country in a very negative light: they saw the country spiralling downwards towards catastrophe. There was agreement that the situation could be compared with a scenario that was sometimes experienced in township life—climbing into a taxi (or a car) driven by someone who was intoxicated. This incompetent “driver” was the South African government. Other participants described specifically the Zuma government as a farce, a “joke” or a “circus”. Comparisons were drawn between South Africa and Zimbabwe, strengthening feelings that a bleak future lay ahead. Fears of feeling and being unsafe, scared and

devoid of hope, and fears that white people would be driven out of the country, were also voiced. Nevertheless, participants expressed the hope that circumstances would improve so that all people would be able to thrive.

- G3: Now our Government is predominantly black, so they said that they were fighting for freedom for black people, for Africans. Now ... government facilities, government hospitals, government schools, they are crap.
- G2: I think sometimes you feel a little bit powerless. It's like they ... have hold of our country and it's not safe. ... so it's like you're forced to drive in a car and there are no seatbelts, and there's no airbags ... and the driver is intoxicated or doesn't have [a] drivers' licence ... And you have no control over it.
- G5: For me, I don't see, if we couldn't heal by now what we've already broken, how are we going to heal what we're breaking next. So, for me, I'm a pessimist, I'm a realist, I don't see how it's feasibly possible to fix the country in the next six months, let alone [in] the next twenty years.
- G4: I feel ... piece by piece ... Zuma ... and his whole cabinet are pulling the country apart. One does not see it immediately ... because it takes time ... as it took time to build it all up ... so it takes time to pull it apart. ... So we are on our way to a bad side, and we are near to getting junk status.
- G5: I just feel like the world is moving forward too quickly for South Africa to stay uninjured. It needs to pick up, it needs to [provide] quality and services, construction; just everything needs to be uplifted. We need to carry on or else we are just going to fall behind and just spiral into a Zimbabwe. ... Very bad.
- G5: I love being South African, but if South Africa's gonna go the way of Zimbabwe, I don't think I'll feel as much national pride in it anymore. If things get really bad and, sort of, the EFF come to power and start chasing white people away ... I'm gonna go away. But, I would really love it to change and [to] be able to stay and enjoy this diverse country; all its cultures.
- G5: So, I see it all as ironic and hopeless, but I see it in a hopeful mode as something positive because there are lots of chaotic events happening and it somehow is progressing South Africa's political system.

## Emigration or Not

In some groups, the discussions of the problems that the country was experiencing led to the question whether emigration was an option or not. Some black participants indicated that they would leave the country to take up promising opportunities elsewhere but that they would undoubtedly return home at some time. Among the white participants the opinions expressed were diverse. Some felt that conditions had deteriorated to such an extent that many people wanted to emigrate. As opportunities to do so could become scarce, they intended to leave as soon as possible. Others were of the opinion that large-scale emigration would cause a "brain drain" and result in skills shortages in the country,

which would lead to further deterioration. Some participants were, however, adamant that their own future prospects were more important than South Africa and that they would leave the country if need be. One of the participants remarked that, having been overseas for a prolonged period of time and yearning for South Africa continuously, leaving the country was not an option. Yet another participant indicated that he/she did not intend to go anywhere. Similar to black participants, there were white participants who indicated that they would take up opportunities available to them elsewhere but that they would eventually return to South Africa.

- G1: Are you going elsewhere to say, listen, this is what we are going through, please help us? Let us ... bring those resources or those skills back to your country. So, yes, I, given the chance, I would leave, but I would never turn my back against the country and say ... bye-bye.
- G4: I do not believe that I would go anywhere.
- G4: So that implies ... when that happens [conditions deteriorate further], so many people will emigrate. So I rather want to be one of the first. As many countries will say “sorry”, there is no more space.
- G4: The people who now want to emigrate ... it feels for me that the people that really are important for this country ... decide to run away ... think that it is not worthwhile to stay here ... what will become of South Africa? Now all the resources ... the people with the highest education ... have run away ... as it is better on the other side.
- G4: There is going to be a skills shortage. ... A greater skills shortage is coming, all the time.
- G4: It is difficult. You want better for yourself. You do not want to run away. You want to make this a positive place. But how far can you go?
- G4: If you get the opportunity, you should take it. ... But you do not need to emigrate ... you can always come back.
- G5: It is better to rather [go] where it would be better for you. You think about your own future.
- G5: Regarding ... leaving South Africa; when I went overseas ... by week three or four I just wanted to come back. ... The people I met ... the culture was different. It wasn't warm, it wasn't friendly, it did not make me feel at home. ... The only time I would leave the country is if I feel that I cannot get ... my future family one day the same opportunities that I have had.

## Hope for the Future

Many participants said that they had hope for the future and that they intended to stay in the country to make a difference. They did not pin their hope on the roles played in the country by political leaders, political parties or even democratic processes such

as voting, but on the fact that individuals can make a difference wherever they are. For example, one white participant said that one should strive to make one's own environment clean and safe; once one starts doing that it will have a ripple effect. Other participants commented as follows:

G2: I can't make a difference to politics, and I can't make a difference to crime, but ... you know, people should be encouraged to make a difference in what they can make, and not just say politics are bad, so I'm just going to do nothing now. So, everybody should be encouraged to do what they can in their situation and in their environment.

G5: It's what I experience on a day-to-day basis. ... It does give me hope for this country and it's for that that I'll stay; to go and prove that.

G1: So, I think we should take the responsibility into our hands.

A white participant voiced the conviction that that was exactly what was going to happen.

G4: We are going to make a difference!

The characteristics and nature of the people of South Africa served as beacons of hope for many of the participants.

G5: You know, it's those instances of humanity that kind of bring back hope about the situation and I think as long as everyone can kind of delay those animal instincts, that fear and that mob mentality a little bit longer and hold on to that humanity ... South Africa should be okay.

G5: We've got very friendly people even though we're all separate; we can approach most people in South Africa to ask for directions, where overseas, like, some people are really, like, brush you off and give you a cold shoulder. So ... I think there's hope for us and I ... get scared, I won't lie, because of the unknown ... but I still love my home.

G5: I really enjoy South Africa ... I like the people, I really do. They're friendly, they're approachable, they're not as judgemental as one initially thinks ... it's so difficult to focus on that when the country is essentially burning down ... there are so many things ... that just ... remind you of hope ... you can have a discussion with a car guard about chess or something.

The diversity of the South African landscape—in particular the fauna and flora—created unique opportunities that one of the participants wanted to pursue.

G5: I like the land and the diversity of the animals and I'd actually like to stay here and pursue an academic career in South Africa, researching South African species.

Another participant's religion inspired her to have hope and to put her trust in God as she believed that He held the future of the country in His hands.

G2: It is just in God's hands and He holds the keys to our future and for the country.

## FINDINGS

The findings of the study reflected that, on the one hand, the participating youth loved South Africa as a country, appreciated their freedom in the new dispensation, had trust in democracy and its procedures and were dedicated to make a difference for the better. On the other hand, the study also revealed the participants' deep disappointment, large-scale dissatisfaction and intense frustration with the current government and the direction the country was moving in at the time of the study.

As posited by Bradbury (2012), the future perceptions of the youth are influenced by the past, and, in the case of South Africa, the apartheid past in particular. Some of the participants expressed their frustration with the heavy emphasis that was still placed on the apartheid legacy. Others felt that the apartheid history should be remembered in order to enlighten the future and ensure that atrocities of that kind would never be repeated. Some of the other themes identified in the study—liberalism, stagnation and deterioration, and catastrophe—corresponded with themes identified in previous studies (Danziger 1963; Du Preez et al. 1981; Finchilescu and Dawes 1999; Leslie and Finchilescu 2013; Mannheim 1936). However, due to the qualitative nature of the study, it was not possible to draw direct comparisons. Nevertheless, it could be said that the findings corroborated the findings reached in some previous research.

Similar to the black participants involved in the study of Kamper and Badenhorst (2010), the black participants in the current study appeared to have a more positive attitude than their white counterparts regarding South Africa's future. Their optimism stemmed primarily from their recognition that they were privileged in comparison with their parents in that they enjoyed freedom in the new dispensation. Furthermore, they appreciated their right to vote and believed that they could make use of their voting power to change the course of events. The white participants tended to be more fatalistic about the future and to express more contempt for the current government. Whereas the black group indicated that they would only go abroad to take up opportunities and would always return to the country, many of the white participants intended to emigrate permanently. However, both white and black participants expressed a deep love for the country and indicated that they were dedicated to further its interests. A number of the participants were inspired by the beauty of the country's landscapes and, in particular, by the friendliness of the people. South Africa remained their "home", a home they yearned for when they were overseas.

The findings about the future perceptions of the participants in the current study confirmed many of the findings of Kamper and Badenhorst (2010) regarding intended behaviour. Whereas many black participants intended to use their vote to bring about changes to a perceived corrupt government, others were motivated to make a difference in the personal sphere where they had influence. However, some were so demotivated that they did not see any future for themselves in the country. As they regarded their personal prospects as more important than the destiny of the country, they intended to leave permanently and seek a future elsewhere.

## CONCLUSIONS

It should be of concern to the South African leadership that some of the country's youth—white youths in particular—do not see a future for themselves in South Africa. The finding of the study that both black and white youths celebrate the democratic dispensation, love their country and are dedicated to further its interests should, however, be regarded as a vital resource for building a prosperous and harmonious South African society. If the South African leadership takes heed of the concerns of the youth, engages constructively with them to establish what their points of criticism are and taps into their energy, enthusiasm and dedication, South Africans of all racial groups can look forward to a bright future.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors wish to thank the following MA Psychology students for their contributions in recruiting the participants and conducting the focus group discussions: Bongsi Madakane, Jacqueline Harvey, Lesego Ramphela and Herman Janse van Vuuren.

## REFERENCES

- Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Bradbury, J. 2012. "Narrative Possibilities of the Past and the Future." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18 (3): 341–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246313493595>.
- Danziger, K. 1963. "Ideology and Utopia in South Africa: A Methodological Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge." *British Journal of Sociology* 14 (1): 59–76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/587322>.
- Du Preez, P. D., K. Bhana, N. Broekmati, J. Louw, and E. Nel. 1981. "Ideology and Utopia Revisited." *Social Dynamics* 7 (1): 52–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533958108458296>.
- Finchilescu, G., and A. Dawes. 1999. "Adolescents' Future Ideologies through Four Decades of South African History." *Social Dynamics* 25 (2): 98–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533959908458677>.



- Kamper, G., and J. Badenhorst. 2010. "Facing the Future: The Perceptions of Black Adolescents on their Prospects in South Africa." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 45 (3): 243–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909610364774>.
- Leslie, T., and G. Finchilescu. 2013. "Perceptions of the Future of South Africa: A 2009 Replication." *South African Journal of Psychology* 43 (3): 340–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246313493595>.
- Mannheim, K. 1936. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.