

Young people cannot accept an abnormal society

Imraan Buccus reflects

Young people want to play a greater role in determining the future of this country.

Young people have a great responsibility; future generations would ask them where they were when South Africa began to degenerate.

Part of that (moral) degeneration is the fact that SA is increasingly becoming distinctly two nations – one fabulously wealthy and the other desperately poor.

South Africa needs to have young people who understand the implications of living in a country where almost half the population live in poverty while we have pockets of opulence and wealth.

And unfortunately there aren't too many youngsters in the forefront of pointing out and attempting to address this immorality. For the middle classes in South Africa, it has become completely expected and normal to choose private health, private education and private security. Prince Mashele, a political analyst, points out that South Africa is creating a private sub-state insulated from the masses of poor people.

This private sub-state is populated by the wealthy, who have access to private services while the poor struggle to survive. And they, the poor, are becoming increasingly angry with the wealthy.

This reminds us of the words of the English cultural theorist Terry Eagleton: "It is not hard to imagine affluent communities of the future protected by watch towers, searchlights and machine-guns, while the poor scavenge for food in the wastelands beyond." Is this not, in many ways, already the situation in South Africa?

In this context, we need to think particularly of the responsibility young people have - especially those considered to be leaders in our society. Young people cannot accept the abnormality of South African society. The wealth gap in this country is the largest in the world.

Just think of the juxtaposition of Sandton and Alexandra township, of Umhlanga Rocks and Amaoti and of Camps Bay and Gugulethu. As anger brews, the poor will eventually strike back at the rich.

Mashele reminds us that "the poor have it within their power to take over society in ways that leave the middle class kicking and screaming from the margins as if they are little children crying for help".

Young people cannot remain indifferent and allow South Africa to degenerate further into two nations.

It is not in the interests of anyone to let this happen - not the state, not young people and not the middle classes, for the poor can destroy their fragile tranquility very quickly. It is clear that the state needs to approach the idea of a developmental state with greater speed, political will and urgency. At the same time, young people who consider themselves leaders need to do more.

Young writers need to write more about the plight of the poor; young journalists need to do more to expose corrupt politicians; young doctors need to take health care to the margins of society; young entrepreneurs need to contribute to improving the lives of the destitute; and young singers need to sing in defence of the downtrodden.

The future cannot be ours if we continue to live lives completely insulated from the poor - for how long will the searchlights, watch towers and machine-guns protect us?