

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF *SKHOTHANE* ON YOUTH'S (UNDER)DEVELOPMENT AT EKURHULENI'S TOWNSHIP(S) OF SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the socio-economic implications that the controversial sub-culture of *skhothane* has on the development or underdevelopment of youth at Ekurhuleni and surrounding townships. It interrogates *skhothane* within the post-modern expressive youth culture. In the township(s) of Ekurhuleni, *skhothane* is regarded not only as a controversial sub-culture but also as a lifestyle whereby young people compete in acquiring material goods with the ultimate purpose of destroying them. This practice co-exists alongside youth unemployment and underdevelopment which is exacerbated by poverty, rising unemployment and gross inequalities. The author argues that the practice of *skhothane* sub-culture does not only undermine the policies and programmes aimed at the socio-economic upliftment of young people, but turns the youth into materialistic consumers. In this article, young people are viewed as victims of post-modern lifestyles who are socialised under an intergenerational culture of poverty and underdevelopment. It uses primary data from selected interviews

with *skhothane* members and general members of local communities and secondary sources from books, accredited journals and newspapers.

Keywords: *skhothane*, youth culture, youth development and underdevelopment youth sub-culture

INTRODUCTION

Since the democratic dispensation, young people have not recovered from socio-economic alienation and marginalisation (Cebekhulu 2013). Added to these challenges are high levels of youth unemployment and poverty due to lack of skills and a hostile socio-economic environment, and they often suffer from unemployment (Tshishonga 2014, 63). Tetyana (2013, 4) argues that young people in South Africa are over-represented among the unemployed and under-employed. In order to reverse this bleak situation, the African National Congress (1994, 73) advocates that youth development should focus on education and training, job creation and should enable young people to realise their full potential and participate fully in the society and their future. Roggers *et al.* (1997, 26) argue that the commitment to promote the life opportunities of young people rests in finding out about the new world in which they are growing up. One of such worlds is the world of *skhothane*, a controversial sub-culture that means 'those who lick' and the youth are commonly known for their spendthrift lifestyle whereby youth compete in purchasing expensive clothes, food and alcohol, and taking turns in burning and destroying the items. According to Du Preez (2013, 8), the phenomenon of the *skhothane* is whereby the township youngsters from poor homes have 'dissing' contests, showing off the most expensive designer clothes and shoes before destroying them in hosted competitions.

This article therefore interrogates the emergence of the controversial sub-culture of *skhothane* as practised in the townships, including its implications on youth (under) development. The paper is divided into four sections. Section one establishes the socio-economic situation of young people in South Africa while the second section lays the theoretical background by defining culture, youth culture and sub-culture. The third section explores the meaning of *skhothane* and how it is expressed. The fourth section examines the implications *skhothane* has on perpetuating the cycle of deprivation and intergenerational poverty and underdevelopment. Lastly the main arguments are summed up and recommendations made. In this article the discourse on *skhothane* is debated within a post-modern framework.

METHODOLOGY

This article used a qualitative approach, which is exploratory in nature. According Fox and Bayat (2007, 7), the qualitative research method is designed to explain events, people and matters. The approach was chosen because it allows the researcher

to explore the sub-culture of *skhothane*, a new phenomenon which emerged in the African townships at Ekurhuleni and the surrounding areas. An emergence of a controversial sub-culture of *skhothane* translated as 'those who lick' is also known for its spendthrift lifestyle. The paper sampled participants mainly from Katlehong, KwaThema and Tokoza.

For the purpose of this paper, purposive and snowballing sampling techniques were used in order to select relevant participants. Purposive sampling was chosen because it targets the suitable population sample while snowballing was relevant as the researcher was introduced to other participants involved in *skhothane*. Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole's (2013) purposive sampling is grounded on its strength to consider units judged to be the most common, while snowball a sampling technique was useful for identifying people not easily identifiable to be interviewed. The sample had a total of 40 participants. This included 20 *skhothane* members, four parents of *skhothane* members, three community members and three professionals (two social workers and one psychologist) five anti-*skhothane* youth and five anti-*skhothane* parents. Both primary and secondary information was used. The primary sources entailed selected interviews with individual members of *skhothane* while documentaries, internet, books and journal articles formed part of the secondary sources. In addition, the author used observation as a research technique to observe the behaviours of the youth, who are part of *skhothane* sub-culture. The paper was guided by three key questions:

- Skhothane youth: What is the point of destroying new and expensive clothing and food?
- Parents: Why do you feed a wasteful culture?
- Professional: What pushes the young to be wasteful?

BACKGROUND TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION OF YOUTH IN SOUTH AFRICA

Mlatsheni (2012, 31) argues that in a well-functioning society youth should be afforded the opportunity to be youth. Despite South Africa's celebration of 20 years into democracy, rural and urban youth are still experiencing and continue to face social dislocation, alienation and marginalisation. In this regard, Cebekhulu (2013, 105) argues that:

Despite advances made after the democratic transition, many young people are still faced with barriers and unequal opportunities to fully participate in society.

Noyoo, Patel and Loffell (2006, 94) argue that, prior to 1994, the position of youth was insecure and unpredictable. The apartheid regime had no programmes for the African youths as they were perceived as enemies of the state. Although the apartheid regime

saw them as enemies, the outside world perceived them as heroes after the 1976 Soweto uprisings. Throughout South African history, young people have undergone various stages and phases through the liberation struggle (Sharpeville, Soweto uprising) to the democratic dispensation. Tshishonga (1998) argues that during both the colonial and apartheid periods, black youth in particular were alienated and they were subjected to oppressive and discriminatory laws that undermined their potential to grow and become full citizens. In responding to these inhumane laws, young people became vanguards of the struggle for political liberation. Many abandoned their education in pursuit of national liberation. Consequently, young people entered the democratic era without education and skills to contribute in building the newly found democracy and they earned the nickname the 'lost generation'. In this regard, Tshishonga (1998) posits that during the apartheid era, young people who engaged themselves in the struggle for liberation in the 1970s and 1980s earned the label, 'lost generation', as they missed out in education under the slogan 'liberation before education'. It could be argued that young people's exclusion, marginalisation and oppression led Besant (1995, 29) to write about the concept of 'delayed adulthood' by describing those young people who no longer have access to economic independence through employment. Delayed adulthood in the South African context is youth between the ages of 24 and 35 who, according to Besant (1995), have become an 'extension of adolescent dependency'.

Since the democratic dispensation in 1994, the South African government enacted various policies and programmes such as National Youth Commission (NYC) in 1996, Umsobomvu Youth Fund (UYF) in 2001 and National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) in 2009 (Zuze 2012, 49; Cebekhulu 2013, 108; Twenty Year Review 2014, 74–75). The National Youth Commission is a statutory body set up to advance the development of young people, and the UYF focuses on skills development, job creation and small business development for young people. Importantly, the NYDA was established to engage young people in their own socio-economic and political wellbeing (including enhancing their economic participation). According to Cebekhulu (2013, 108), all these youth development interventions are anchored towards promoting employment opportunities for young people and enhancing entrepreneurship among them for sustainable livelihoods. Thus, the priority of such initiatives is given mainly to previously disadvantaged youth whereby youth development is facilitated through education and social development (RDP 1994) as a strategy to reverse harsh conditions created by apartheid on youth development. For Chigunta (2002), this evidence suggests that South African youth, like other youth in Africa, are going through change as a result of a changing culture and contradictions in the context of economic stagnation. Mills and Herbst (2012, 17) argue that apart from the progress, sub-Saharan Africa still faces extraordinary challenges of jobs for young people and unless afforded opportunity countries could face powerful poverty-fuelled unrest similar to the Arab Spring. During his 2014 State of the Nation address, President Jacob Zuma committed the government to

introduce further measures to speed up the employment of young people, consistent with the Youth Employment Accord (Zuma 2014: 7). Zuma further highlighted that this could be achieved by expanding the number of internship positions in the public sector, with every government department and public entity being required to take on interns for experiential training. The Twenty Year Review (2014, 74) reports that since 1994, South Africa adopted a developmental approach to youth empowerment and further ground them as agents of their own advancement and not just passive recipients of government services.

Compared with the youth in the 1970s and 1980s, Mlatsheni (2012, 31) argues that the current generation of youth in South Africa has the greatest opportunities of any past generation; however, the same youth are also confronted by many challenges. In this regard, Tshishonga (2014) argues that the legacy of apartheid affects all young people, with African youth bearing the brunt of oppressive, racial and constraining policies that continue to haunt youth to this day. Tshishonga further highlighted that, added to the historical legacies and new challenges in the wake of democracy, problems facing youth continue to multiply. Maphunye *et al.* (2014, 164) argue that apart from some improvement since the dawn of democracy, young people are, however, still confronted by a myriad of challenges, which adversely affect youth participation in the country's democratic institutions and system. Despite young people having contributed in the liberation struggle, they are still in the majority of those mostly affected by poverty, unemployment, violence, crime, substance abuse, lack of housing and the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Twenty Year Review 2014, 75). Mlatsheni (2012, 31) states that challenges facing youth are centred on causality interrelationships related issues, which include the threats of compromised health, teen pregnancy, gangsterism and crime. For Mlatsheni (2012, 33), good health is fundamental especially in the transition to a healthy adulthood. However, this is compromised by risks such as early pregnancy and childbearing as well as contracting HIV/Aids, including addiction to tobacco and alcohol. These challenges are further compounded by risks of gang membership and criminal activity, discouragement to enter the labour market as well as teenage pregnancy and poor education (*ibid.*, 33–36). These challenges contribute to the vulnerability of youth, which is attributed or exacerbated in large part by unemployment (Mlatsheni 2012, 37). On one hand, Cebekhulu (2013, 106) says unemployment is one of the key indicators of poverty and has various detrimental effects on people, including feelings of powerlessness and futility and manifests in depression and even despair. On the other hand, Mlatsheni (2012, 37) further argues that unemployment results in discouragement, depression and the susceptibility to delinquent behaviour.

Cebekhulu (2013, 104) posits that the socio-economic hardships facing many unemployed youth in South Africa has the potential of putting political democracy in peril. Fundamental to these challenges is youth unemployment. Altman (2007 in Cebekhulu 2013, 105) observes that in South Africa, youth are twice as likely to be unemployed with 58% of young people aged 15 to 19 and 50% aged 20 to 24 unemployed

in 2005. Considering that 21.7 million young South Africans are unemployed or not benefiting from education, Pienaar (2013) postulates that government has a lot to do, especially in investing in job creation and skills development. Various interventions and strategies such as entrepreneurship, training, youth co-operatives, technical knowledge are proposed to deal with youth employment (Cebekhulu 2013, 106–107; Mlatsheni, 2012, 33, 37). For example, Mlatsheni (2012, 33) argues that combating unemployment does not just depend on producing a highly skilled labour force, but also depends on the extent of employment availability and the nature of the available jobs. Erasmus *et al.* (2004 in Cebekhulu 2013, 107) see a solution to youth unemployment problem in the acquisition of practical knowledge to enable them to make any headway in life. In order to deal with vulnerability, Mlatsheni (2012, 37) advocates that young people should be encouraged to remain active either through further studies or through labour-market interventions that encourage interaction with potential employers. For any attempt to improve the productive capacity of youth as citizens, Cebekhulu (2013, 110) argues that such attempts should promote their employability and enhance their entrepreneurship abilities for them to function more effectively in society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON YOUTH CULTURE AND SUB-CULTURE

Sub-cultures are the offshoot of dominant cultures. Culture has become the domain of multidisciplinary fields including Sociology and Anthropology, Theology, Geography and Economics. While others view culture as ‘all that in human society which is socially transmitted’, Tylor refers to it as a learned complex of knowledge, belief, art, morals, law and custom (in Marshall 1998, 137). Lewis (1985, 16) argues that the possession of culture conventionally marks the great divide separating humans from animals, but different societies tend to possess distinct cultures. For Giddens (2004, 22), culture refers to the ways of life of the members of a society. In essence it entails how people dress, their marriage customs and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits. In addition, Giddens (2004) envisages a societal culture to comprise both intangible aspects, the beliefs, ideas and values that form the content of culture, and tangible aspects, the objectives, symbols or technology that represent that content. Ferrante (2008, 60) concurs with Giddens (2004) that culture is the way of life of a people, more specifically the human-created strategies for adjusting to the environment.

Boeck (2009, 100) asserts that young people need to have the possibility and the freedom to create, change and influence events within their life transitions. It is during these transitional phases that youth culture and sub-cultures emerged in their struggle for integration or in defiance of the mainstream culture in society. In reacting to the dominant cultures, young people create their own sub-cultures,

which Parson (1964) views as a mechanism for dealing with feeling of anomie (in France 2009, 19). On the one hand, culture plays an important role in perpetuating the values and norms of a society, while on the other hand, sub-cultures and counter-cultures reject the prevailing values and norms of society (Giddens 2004, 25). Thus the sub-cultures could promote alternatives to the dominant culture. According to Marshall (1998, 649), the notion of sub-culture is embedded within the sub-cultural theory with its formation of sub-cultures as a collective solution to, or resolution of problems arising from the blocked aspirations of members or their ambiguous position in the wider society. Sociologists often study deviance within the context of youth culture.

Background of *skhothane*

Skhothane is street slang, derived from the Zulu word *ukukhothana*, which means 'to lick like a snake' (Du Preez 2014, 9). The slang term originally referred to playful competition between various 'crews' whose members see themselves as icons of street fashion and kings and queens of the latest dance moves (Nkosi 2011). This youth craze began in Ekurhuleni and is now sweeping through the city's townships. In the early days, in 2008, the craze was simply a South African version of the 'dance battles', popular among urban, black youth in the United States. But there is nothing playful about *skhothane*'s latest incarnation. According to Makuya (2013), *skhothane* is the youth sub-culture in which

[y]oung people show off their material possessions in the form of money enabling them to purchase expensive clothes with labels. On one hand, some make use of their money to buy drinks to wash their hands with while others on the other hand draw money from the bank with the ultimate purpose of burning it in front of their peers. This also includes cars such as BMW, etc (Respondent No. 1, 2013).

In its current form, *skhothane* involves gatherings that often culminate in the burning of expensive designer clothes and even money. It is about standing out from the crowd: proving to mates that they are so rich that expensive possessions mean nothing. The culture involves the destruction of food, such as KFC and drinks such as Walker Blue whisky, which the dancers stamp into the ground as other kids look on. Du Preez (2013, 9) reports that some jump on their smartphones and the battles are usually held at a local park or other open space, and the news of the gatherings is spread by word of mouth and the crews are mobbed by hundreds of admiring children and teenagers as they arrive. It is instant celebrity. In order to be a member of the group, Du Preez (2013, 9) highlighted that one should be prepared to wear designer shoes such as Carvela (which cost not less than R2 000), Sfarzo Couture jeans, Nike, Adidas, Versace.. Carvela shoes are admired by everyone in the townships; they are expensive and the wearer has to be prepared to destroy them in public to show how rich they are (Nkosi 2011).

Findings: Implications of zikhothane on young people's (under) development

Skhothane as youth expressive sub-culture

Skhothane is not unique or different from other youth sub-cultures in the world even though they might take a different expression. Youth sub-cultures are underpinned and expressed through music, gangsters, fashion or behaviour and as such they become a dramatic way in which young people identify themselves. Coon (in Lyndon 1993, 79) argues that Punk 'dramatised rage' against exiting musical establishment or rising unemployment. Similarly to The Mods (in the 1960s), Punk (in the 1980s) and Rasters, it could be said that *skhothane* symbolises rejection, pleasure and resistance (Haralambos and Holborn 2008, 772).

Members of the *skhothane* are arguably set apart by their taste for expensive clothes and alcohol, and recently the practice has graduated to include food and cars. For Garratt (1997, 145), young people are set apart simply by their market choices, and were more defined in terms of leisure and leisure goods. Through the practice of *skhothane*, competitions are staged in which individual members bring labelled designer fashions and burn them in front of other competitors. One of the proponents of skhothane said:

Skhothane are a group of young men who as part of their identity wear expensive clothing, consume a lot of alcohol and specialise in organising parties for themselves. As a new trend which emerged in the township, *skhothane* does not only give young people a sense of identity but also a sense of belonging. (Respondent No. 2 2013)

Ironically, despite the fact that this sub-culture is populated mainly by teenage boys from poorer families most of whom are sustained through survivalist strategies, the practice is all about displaying wealth, which once obtained is also destroyed or burnt in a competition. The kids involved in *skhothane* are not rich. Many of them are children of domestic workers, shop or factory workers struggling to make ends meet. In his study, Du Preez (2013, 9) found that some of the teenagers do loose jobs on weekends, some resort to petty crime, while others blackmail their parents into giving them money.

In trying to justify this practice, a 17 year old stated that:

On one hand belonging to skhothane makes me feel good more especially when I am able to afford to out-stage others while on the other hand the failure to buy expensive items makes me a failure, and it depresses me (Respondent No. 3 2013).

A more senior member of the group had this to say:

Being the winner of the competition has enormous benefits. As a crowned king of skhothane, I earned respect from my peers; I stopped chasing girls rather they compete in getting my

attention. You turn to be overwhelmed by that good feeling of belonging, a winner with expensive taste, an over the moon feeling as you walk down the streets, being adored by the followers (Respondent No. 4 2013).

The sub-culture is famous especially among the teenagers and school going age youth, and infamous among adults. Interviewees associated *skhothane* with words and phrases such as youngsters with expensive taste of clothing, *esikhothane*, affordability, display of one's wealth, best entertainer in South Africa. Similarly to any competition, both winners and losers are rewarded. The winners are rewarded with fame while the losers are spat at with custard or expensive alcohol.

Table 1: Clothing items

| Item | Purchasing price |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Carvella shirt | R950.00 |
| Carvella shoes | R2 000. 00 |
| Diesel jeans | R799.00 |
| Nike cap | R360.00 |
| Diesel t-shirt | R450.00 |
| Polo golfer | R699.00 |
| Lacoste golfer | R699.00 |
| Lacoste Watch | R1 400.00 |
| Antonio Maurizio shoes | R3 995.00 |
| Kurt Geiger shoes | R1 595.00 |
| Dolce & Gabbana jacket | R3 000.00 |

Source: Author's research findings

The sub-culture of *skhothane* fits in well with what Caracas calls 'the culture of urgency'. It is a culture based on the idea that 'there is no future and no roots but only the present' (in Castells 2000, 164). For Caracas the present is made up of instants, of each instant, so life has to be lived as if each instant were individualised hyperconsumption. Similarly to the *skhothane* practice, this instant is pregnant with fearless challenge to explore life beyond its present dereliction, which keeps destitute youth going, for a little while, until they face utter destruction. Despite the negative connotations attached the sub-culture of *skhothane*, the young people interviewed view *skhothane* as a unique sub-culture that gives them a sense of belonging. Among the young people the quest to belong manifests itself negatively in various ways in gangsterism, drug and alcohol abuse, Satanism, economic crime (theft, shoplifting, house breaking, fraud), while on the positive side some youth are geared and motivated to seize the available opportunities in pursuing their dreams by acquiring education and venturing into entrepreneurship related activities. Maphunye (2014) describes the sub-culture of *skhothane* not only as extravagant and anti-social but

also a sub-culture whereby young seek attention. Some commentators refer to this sub-culture as a desperate quest for individualism, while others say it is a search for self-value or an attempt to escape the squalid uniformity of the township (Du Preez 2013, 9).

Skhothane and its anti-youth development and empowerment

The practice of *skhothane* co-exists alongside youth unemployment and underdevelopment, and it is exacerbated by soaring poverty, rising unemployment and gross inequalities. *Skhothane* adds to the plight of young people who, according to Tetyana (2013, 4), are 'over-represented among the unemployed and under-employed'. This situation is further exacerbated by the reality that in South Africa, the youth unemployment rate of those aged below 35 years is at about 48.2%, with approximately 44.6 per cent and 52.5 per cent of unemployed men and women, respectively (ibid). Cebekhulu (2011, 34) posits that politics, money and power have reconfigured post-apartheid South Africa, which in turn has led to a widening gap between the rich and the poor including youth. Internationally, Jensen *et al.* (2003, 301) alludes, youth unemployment is a grave concern to many countries and as such it is considered a serious social problem. According to Grigoryeva (2012, 7) there are various reasons attached to the high rate of youth unemployment such as

lacking experience especially in searching for jobs, youth have fewer resources and lastly the mismatch of their vocational training with labour market requirement and the lack of up-to-date career guidance for young people (*ibid.*, 8).

For Mufune *et al.* (1990, 21), youth are caught up in a struggle for power and authority as they strive to be independent in a society that treats them as dependents. In this article the author argues that the practice of *skhothane* sub-culture does not only undermine the policies and programmes aimed at the socio-economic upliftment of young people but also makes a mockery of youth as materialistic consumers. An anti-*skhothane* youth said that:

Considering the high level of poverty and unemployment among the youth, the sub-culture of *skhothane* makes an irony and morkery of policies, programmes and initiaves put forward with the aim of helping young people to find their feet. It contributes towards government and private sector not taking us serious about the challenges facing us (Respondent No. 5 2013).

The active practice of *skhothane* is the antithesis of youth development and economic emancipation. Instead of recycling poverty and underdevelopment out of young people, it falsely denies the existence of powerlessness, exclusion and loss of dignity due to lack of economic opportunities. The sub-culture of *skhothane* recycles intergenerational poverty and deprivation. According to Mafema and Tshishonga (2011, 184), young people who find themselves isolated in disadvantaged

environments find life-sustaining opportunities limited. They add that exposure to such an alienating environment often closes doors and limits young people's capacity to make optimal use of the educational and developmental resources provided by government-directed programmes. The isolation faced by youth in this study thus pushes them to join *skhothane*, which gives them a sense of belonging and identity.

The sub-culture of *skhothane* is anti-saving. Pienaar (2013, 1) sees it as one of challenges facing South African youth. Lebo Motshegoa (cited in Du Preez 2013, 90) views *skhothane* as extreme waste. Considering that 21.7 million young South Africans are unemployed or not benefiting from education, Pienaar (2013) states that government has a lot to do especially in investing in job creation and skills development. In order to inculcate the culture of saving among the youth, Pillay (2013, 3) proposes that their mind-set has to be changed and young people should be motivated to put money aside for future use instead of spending all that they have on consumer items that will soon be forgotten. On the one hand, Phetla (in Critical Thinking Forum 2013, 35) says that enterprise development is important in unlocking the potential of young people as they are regarded as the source and energy of a developing country such as South Africa. Considering the opportunities available in making youth dreams come true, Kuhle indicated that job creation is primarily focused on the youth but they have become passive participants in their own development and empowerment (in Critical Thinking Forum 2013, 35).

Criminal elements embedded in the sub-culture of *skhothane*

Considering that almost all *skhothane* members are still high school learners, the practice of *skhothane* is dependent on their parents, the majority of whom are not in gainful employment. For them to purchase such expensive goods, they have to harass their guardians and the majority threaten their parents by threatening to commit suicide unless they are given money.

Even though I like expensive clothes I would not go as far as committing suicide like most my peers. One of our group member committed suicide over R2 500. That is not money because we sometimes burn that much (Respondent No. 6 2013).

Skhothane could be equated to what Chouhan (2009, 71) calls 'false life' by young people, whereby individual young people agree that for one to have money one has to work, but they fail to take personal responsibility of whom they are and their actions, accepting values and attitudes that have a detrimental impact on themselves and the lives of other people. A professional interviewee revealed that:

Skhothane members have an expensive taste of clothes, food, cars, alcohol, etc. and as such are often caught in the quandary of funding their practice and out-compete their opponents.

The youth have the tendencies of blackmailing their parents by demanding money which is not there in the first place. For example in places such as Thembisa one of the *skhothane* members committed suicide because he could not access finances to purchase items for *skhothane* competition (Respondent No. 7 2014).

In order to keep up with this spendthrift sub-culture, members are involved in criminal activities such as gangsterism and robbery as a source of finance in order to sustain their identity. One of the critics of *skhothane* has this to say:

What do you expect from boys who don't work? Most of them are still at school. Where do they get money to keep their lavish life styles if not mugging people, engaging in burglary and other criminal related activities (Respondent No. 8 2014)?

One of the ring leaders of *skhothane* attest to this accusation by saying that:

In this industry, one has to be creative. In the case where parents are unable to afford expensive luxuries, it is upon the individuals to venture into other avenues which can bring quick bucks (Respondent No 9, 2014).

Such activities form part of deviance that relegates young people to be irresponsible and people who negate their responsibilities as active and responsible citizens. In this context, deviance is seen as involving social contradictions and is generally defined as having adverse consequences on the quality of life of young people (Mufune *et al.* 1990, 186). This perception is reinforced by the idea that young people are seen as a problem to be managed, moulded and reformed, rather than as active citizens who can think and make decisions about issues that concern them (Gewirtz 2000). One could link *skhothane* with 'anti-social behaviour', which is often associated with harassment, alarm or distress, and as such Yates (2009, 164) alludes to this by arguing that it has some implications of marginalising the young people. Within the dominant constructions of youth, social problems are linked to young people and social problems are perceived primarily as a consequence of their youth. Viewed from a socio-cultural perspective, Mafema and Tshishonga (2011, 184) allude to the fact that a culture that labels young people as deviant and delinquent is often used as a courier to recycle the stigmatisation of youth, thus fostering young people's anti-norms and values.

Skhothane youth as victims of materialism and neo-liberalism

Young people throughout the world are the victims of global culture of materialism and neo-liberal clapping. The employment of victim blaming approach (Griffin 1997, 21) has a negative impact as it victimises young people as both the causers and perpetrators of social problems. These perceptions victimise the youth and criminologists such as Treadwell (2006, 89) point out that young people in this regard are considered as potential criminals and troublesome. Despite various

policies and programmes put forward since 1994 to integrate young people into the mainstream society, young people are still alienated, marginalised and subjected to abject poverty and unemployment. In the case of youth unemployment, Orzag and Snower (1999, 198) argue that the problem is aggravated by the inefficient outcome of the free market forces. Ledwith and Springett (2010, 46) associate such changes to empty rhetoric of change, which simply obscures the reality that poverty is the fallout of neo-liberalism.

It could be argued that young people suffer from being left out and as result are easily swept in the global culture, which manifests itself in music and dance, clothing and dressing code, language and communication. This culture is underpinned by materialism and widely marketed through neo-liberalism, which has become an aspirant sub-culture. *Skhothane* is materialistic in nature and its sustenance is heavily dependent on spending. It operates under the false pretence of affordability by the young people themselves. In this regard, Giddens (2004, 63) argues that the cultural impacts of globalisation have received much attention. Images, ideas, goods and styles are now disseminated around the world more rapidly than ever before. A clinical psychologist cited in Du Preez (2013, 10) argues that *skhothane* is a 'nihilistic reaction to a rampantly consumerist culture, a negation of that stuff has over us'. The psychologist further argued that *skhothane* comes off as an exaggerated homage to consumerism, a desperate quest for individualism that ties its success to brand names and price tags.

In his article titled 'From a culture of consumption to a culture of saving', Pillay (2013, 3) writes about the exploitation of South African youth. He argues that 'in recent time, youth have become more and more obsessed with the culture of consumption, constantly striving for instant gratification in the form of latest technological gadgets, fashion trends and hair styles'. Pienaar (2013, 1) points out that saving is prevented by the persistence of two cultures, the consumption-driven culture and a culture of dependence and entitlement. The findings in this article demonstrated that young people are more excited about being associated with *skhothane* sub-culture despite that, when viewed from the mainstream culture, their destruction of wealth sounds trivial. Young people value material goods, communication and information as the most positive aspects of the globalised connectivity via technological advancement. On one hand the older participants are worried about how the foreign cultures are eroding their children's behaviours and ways of doing things. The older generation reported the threat posed by *skhothane* brought by globalisation.

One *skhothane* member said:

Hey man, it is cool to have a sense of belonging where as young people we have our own space to express ourselves without any interference from our parents (Respondent No. 8 2013).

And an older participant (community member) made a counter assertion:

It is very disturbing because some of them cannot even afford that kind of life style. I also think it is somehow Satanic because some of them develop suicidal tendencies when they run out of money to continue with those practices (Respondent No. 9 2013).

While the sub-culture gives solace to the young people, it is influenced by consumerism and materialism, which have a negative impact on their wellbeing. News reports show a significant number of suicides committed by those who cannot afford the expensive clothes.

Skhothane and intergenerational poverty and underdevelopment

Intergenerational poverty refers to the poverty induced by the socially and economically challenged background of a person's parents (Commission on Poverty 2005). Intergenerational poverty could be best described in terms of deprivation of material, emotional as well as intellectual of the older generation passed down the family line. Mafema and Tshishonga (2010, 184) argue that the integrated nature of poverty manifests itself not only intergenerationally but also through a socio-economic, political disadvantaging environment. The young people often find themselves isolated in disadvantaged environments, where life sustaining opportunities are limited, coupled with a situation that socialises them away from the contemporary society. One of the professionals said:

The exposure to such alienating environment often closes doors and limits young people's capacity to optimally make use of educational and developmental resources set aside by government related programmes.

Intergenerational poverty is designated to the occurrences of poverty that recycle themselves through the misfortunes and other socio-economic and political as well as policy blockages. Thus the type of poverty or deprivation that is passed from one generation to another and the perpetual nature of intergenerational poverty in developing nations, particularly in South Africa, cannot be divorced from the legacy of apartheid and its discriminatory laws. A mother commented:

People don't understand we may be poor but we want our children to have what we never had. I am not going to deprive my child from what he wants regardless of where the funds will come from.

Intergenerational poverty engenders underdevelopment, which in turn manifests itself through the transfer of or absence of assets or capital in the context of social, institutional and policy environments. Moore (2004) argues that intergenerational poverty involves both transmission of poverty from older generations of individuals and families to younger generations, especially but not solely from parents to their children and lack of transfer of resources from one generation to the next. Moore

further argues that transfers of poverty could be positive in the form of cash, assets and positive aspirations and sometimes negative through bonded slavery, poor diet or gender discrimination. Intergenerational poverty transfers are affected by social, cultural, political, economic and institutional contexts in which they occur. Youth exposed to intergenerational poverty face discrimination in many contexts. A professional commented that:

The notion of intergenerational poverty has a socio-political connotation whereby those who were historically disadvantaged by apartheid's policies. It could be said that the perpetuation of this phenomenon was Bantu education which denied mainly the black people relevant education and skills. Still in the democratic era, poor education is thorny issue resulting into learners who are unable to write or read.

One such context is socio-economical where poverty-related capital is often transferred through generations depending on the norms and values of entitlement based either on gender, position in family and marital or parental status (this is the ideal in African families). Within this context, intergenerational poverty is aggravated by institutional incapacity and bias in treating members of the family and community unfairly and on a gender basis.

From a socio-cultural perspective, due to the culture that labels young people as deviant and delinquent, culture is often used as a courier to recycle the stigmatisation of youth, thus fostering youth anti-norms and values. This has a negative impact that perpetuates the imposition of cultural norms on the youth with little or no consultation regarding their inputs that engender the vicious cycle of poverty. Through this cycle, young people could grow into poor or even poorer adults. For instance when parents cannot afford to educate and motivate their children to acquire basic education, the uneducated child grows up to be an unemployable adult.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE ABSENCE OF QUALITY ROLE MODELS

Young black people are part and parcel of townships. Townships are a creation of an apartheid spatial planning where black people throughout the country were dumped to semi-peripheral places with no or little socio-economic opportunities. This situation has contributed to a situation where young people grow up without proper guidance and role models. The scarcity of quality role models in the context of townships is complicated and further worsened by the movement of young people from their place of birth to the suburbs. The young people interviewed in this paper expressed their disappointment with the reality of township life, where their role models are taxi drivers, drug dealers and shady business people whose sources of wealth cannot be established or traced. One of the interviewees indicated:

The absence of good and visionary role models in our communities has detrimental effects on the lives and development of township youth. Without role model to lead the way especially in sectors such as education, economic-business contributed to young people ending up roaming the streets without anything substantial to do with their lives (Respondent No. 10 2013).

The forerunner of *skhothane* is Kenny Kunene, famously known as the 'King of Sushi' whose fame is derived from eating sushi on top of naked women at big parties. It is therefore not surprising that most of the *skhothane* members draw their inspiration and sustenance from people like Kunene, a man who is not shy to display his wealth in public. These include the socialites such as Khulubuse Zuma who show off flashy cars, dress expensively and feast in expensive restaurants. Kunene is seen as the king of *skhothane*; he discourages the *skhothane* ritual of burning money and highlights the importance of having a good education as well as being responsible. Kunene, however, contradicts himself by also encouraging youth to always go for the best while showing off his clothing, which he said cost R113 000 (Kgafe 2012). Although some *skhothane* youth complain that they do not have the role models in the townships, others admire the emergent class of black elites who became wealthy through tendering and other Black Economic Empowerment deals. Regarding the black elite, Terreblanche (2002, 133) argues that while those who now constitute the black elite were unjustly prevented under apartheid from reaching their full potential, it is heartening to witness their current progress and their contribution to the larger South African society. The author further posits that it is unfortunate that the black elite have emerged during the same period in which the black underclass has become even poorer.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

If we want to promote the life opportunities of young people, if we want to help them to prepare or their futures and make well-informed choices about them, then we need to find out about this new world in which they are growing up (Rogers *et al.* 1997, 26).

Skhothane, like any other sub-culture, allows especially young people to have a sense of belonging and identity. Giddens (2004, 25) alludes to the fact that sub-cultures allow freedom for people to express and act on their opinions, hopes and beliefs. This article found that *skhothane* is no different from other sub-cultures, a phase that captures the imagination and energies of young people in a given period. *Skhothane* is a complex phenomenon and its complexity is underpinned by the irony that this controversial and spendthrift practice of *skhothane* is sustained by parents who are themselves poor and destitute. In this case, parents of the members of *skhothane* together with other role models are to be blamed as both victims and perpetrators of this sub-culture. Thus parents become victims and perpetrators in the sense that

they allow to be coerced and harassed into giving money, which is not available, and continuing to feed the habits of these young people.

The author argues that young people in general, including skhothane members, are victims of the neo-liberal dominant culture where the accumulation material wealth is the driving force. The author found that young people view *skhothane* as a space that gives them a sense of belonging and identity while at the same time sucking them into a cycle of perpetual deprivation and intergenerational poverty and underdevelopment. Since a sub-culture is a phase in young people's lives, it is recommended that those professionals and structures interested in the development of youth should adopt a developmental framework in order to address the challenges of young people. Adopting an asset-based approach to people's development, a conducive environment is imperative for youth to be engaged especially in assisting them to identify their own talents, abilities as part of solution to deal with socio-economic and political challenges facing young people in general and those confronted by hardships in the South Africa. In return, young people should make conscious decisions that can enable them to seize opportunities available for them.

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