VIII IDENTITY AND SELF-WORTH

The characterisation above illustrates the fact that South Africa is a land of intense social diversity, defined primarily around race, nationality and language, class and religion. How important each of these identities is in the self-definition of South Africans is critical to social cohesion. Do these multiple identities fuse in a melting pot of national identity? Do they co-exist in a variety of multiple combinations, with an overarching common identity emerging in the course of social integration, nation-formation and nation-building?

32 Trends in social self-definition

Using FutureFact Mindset Survey data, in 2000, 44% of South Africans considered their primary form of social identification as racial or nationality/language. By September 2001, this had declined with only 22% (12% racial and 10% nationality) using these categories as groups to which they 'belong first and foremost'. Further, there is a suggestion that class identity is rising in prominence. While in 2000, 14% used class or occupational descriptions for primary self-definition, 37% defined themselves in this way in 2004 – while the figure for 1994 was only 3%.

From the FutureFact PeopleScape 2004 Survey of South Africans 16 years and older, the following trends play themselves out:

Table 29: Primary form of identity

Population group					
How would you describe yourself?	Total	Black	Coloured	Indian/ Asian	White
Total	29 773 126	22 323 529	2 487 592	777 115	4 184 890
% of total	100%	75%	8%	3%	14%
An African	18%	23%	4%	4%	5%
A South African	53%	44%	78%	70%	82%
Black/white/coloured/Indian	4%	3%	12%	18%	4%
Zulu/Xhosa/Swazi/English/Dutch	14%	18%	1%	0%	2%

Source: FutureFact PeopleScape 2004 Survey

- 71% of these South Africans define themselves either as African or South African, and this is strongest among whites, followed in this order by coloureds, Indians and Africans.
- Language/nationality is strongest as a primary form of identity among Africans (18%) compared with less than 2% among the other racial groups. The language/nationality preponderance seems to be declining from 23% for Africans in 1999 and about 4% for other races.
- Language identity seems to be strongest among those in the lower income bracket, with low educational qualifications.

There is also a slight variation of this in terms of age, with suggestions of a stronger African/South African identity among younger citizens, especially in the age group 25 – 34 years:

Table 30: Primary self-identity by age

Age group					
How would you describe yourself?	Total	16 – 24 years	25 – 34 years	35 – 49 years	50+ years
Total	29 773 126	9 130 289	6 332 386	7 176 261	7 134 190
% of total	100%	31%	21%	24%	24%
An African	18%	20%	18%	21%	14%
A South African	53%	52%	58%	50%	51%
Black/white/coloured/Indian	4%	5%	3%	3%	6%
Zulu/Xhosa/Swazi/English/Dutch	14%	9%	13%	16%	17%

Source: FutureFact PeopleScape 2004 Survey

- comparatively, more young people across all race groups use the identity of African/South African as a self-descriptor
- language/nationality is most pronounced among Africans over 50 years of age.

Is there a relationship between attainment of democracy and improvement in material conditions on the one hand and the growth of national identity on the other? Does it also correspond with improvements in race relations? How do the respondents understand the concepts 'African' and 'South African'and can these be used as a way of salving a conscience and claiming that the past is buried and forgotten and so freezing social relations in their current form? All this is a matter of conjecture; but what is clear is that despite the different meanings that could be attached to these concepts, the trends reflect widespread identification with the territory of South Africa as well as the presence of some society-wide loyalties.

33 Identity and social values

In the discussion on social networks, the chain of social circles stretches from families and households, to relatives and close acquaintances, geographic communities, language/nationality and class, to race and society at large. In addition to this, affiliation to sectoral and political organisations also plays a large part in defining a sense of belonging.

It can be argued that these multiple sites of social intercourse exert significant influence on individuals'social values both as incentives to their social capital and as instruments of regulating behaviour. However, central in determining social behaviour is the system of ownership and distribution of resources, coloured – in the South African setting – by race.

In this context, our social system is a market-based economy which retains most of the features of racial exclusion within which it was constructed. As such, survival-of-the-fittest does inform a great part of society's morality; and individuals and groups ally with one another or act variously in order to thrive in the market jungle: as owners or producers of wealth, as holders of political office or the governed, or as the economically marginalised.

At the same time, efforts to reconfigure social relations – both in terms of the history of struggle and current efforts at reconstruction – pose an alternative value system of human solidarity. Such a value system has as its starting point reform of the economic system compared with the rapacious licence of the apartheid economic order.

Policies to achieve equity and ensure redistribution of wealth and income are aimed at achieving this objective, as is the recognition of the rights of workers. The new Constitution and jurisprudence aim at constructing a legitimate polity and law-governed society.

This requires conscious individuals determined to propagate humane values – in government not enticed by the arrogance and illicit rewards that power can bring; in business not mesmerised by the glitter that purely selfish pursuits can harvest into the personal purse; and in civil society not fazed by mindsets that pour scorn on the humble lifestyle of an honest day's work.

The tension between the reality of a market-based highly competitive social system and the endeavours to build humane and just social relations represents in the same measure tension within value systems and social morality.

As the State seeks to redistribute wealth and income through the fiscus and other instruments, the market, impacted on by global realities, emphasises huge rewards and ostentatious lifestyles among the upper middle strata and owners of capital.

At the same time, lifestyles tend to be determined not only by social status, but also by the desire to flaunt such status – even in instances where remuneration does not allow it. To generalise: so, neighbours compete in conspicuous consumption; poor university students seek other sources of income to keep up with their richer peers; households go into debt to finance unaffordable lifestyles; and the country cannot introduce a low-cost entry vehicle because everyone prefers some 'extra' for comfort

and bragging! Rich and poor are impelled by the demands of an individualistic system to operate on, and sometimes beyond, the margins of legality – be it with regard to finding ways to minimise tax payments, avoiding to pay rates and licences, and succumbing where regulation is weak to the temptation as worker and employer alike to 'make it' by fair means or foul.

34 Attitudes towards corruption in government

The HSRC recently began to track public perceptions of corruption. In the 1999 survey, three direct questions were asked about the extent of corruption and government responses to it.

Just over half (53%) of the respondents indicated that they thought corruption within state institutions was increasing, while just less than one quarter (22%) thought it was decreasing. A rather large segment (25%) said they did not know. The recent HSRC's South African Social Attitudes Survey shows that there appears to be some improvement in the public's trust in government. At an aggregate level, 55% of respondents in the 2003 survey trusted public institutions compared with 50% of respondents in the 1999 survey.

Within all race groups, an outright majority or close to a majority argued that corruption was increasing. The figures ranged from 45% among Africans, 63% among coloureds, 81% among Asians and 84% among whites.

Among Africans, 27% felt corruption was decreasing with a similar 'do not know' figure. Male respondents were slightly more likely to feel that corruption was increasing than female respondents (58% to 50% respectively). Since this was the first time that this question was asked in this way, no clear trends over time can yet be drawn.

Table 31: Do you think corruption among government officials is increasing or decreasing? (%, rounded off)

	African	Coloured	Asian	White	All respondents
Increasing	45	63	81	84	53
Decreasing	27	15	9	4	22
Do not know	27	22	10	13	25
Total	99	100	100	100	100

Source: HSRC (1999)

Also of interest is the connection between the perceptions of respondents and their political party affiliations. Supporters of the United Democratic Movement, closely followed by the then Democratic Party had the most negative perceptions. IFP supporters had the most positive attitude.

Table 32: Major parties' supporters: Is corruption increasing or decreasing? (%)

	ANC	DP	IFP	NNP	PAC	UDM
Increasing	48	85	30	76	41	89
Decreasing	27	7	41	10	54	6
Do not know	26	8	28	15	6	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	10

Source: HSRC (1999)

The data appears to suggest that the balance of opinion among South Africans is that the Government is doing enough to control corruption. Just over one third (34%) believes that the Government is giving 'sufficient'priority while another 17% believes that the Government is giving it 'too high' a priority. Just under one third (30%) believes it gets 'too low' a priority. The remaining 18% reports a 'do not know' response.

These responses, it should be emphasised, reflect opinions on pointed questions pertaining to the public sector: someone else's problem outside of the domain of day-

to-day life in the private sector as it affects the behaviour of employers and employees; outside of community practices on such issues as buying stolen goods. Corporate incidents also point to pervasiveness of this problem within the private sector. These include such specific instances as raids on pension surpluses, blatant theft of shares and the conduct of small businesses which complicate projects such as housing and the provision of transport to learners.

What it does show, though, as an aspirational value system is that the bigger family that is the nation knows that collective survival depends on successful regulation of social behaviour, including elements of the private space in so far as they bear direct relevance to the social sphere. The State, supported by the system of political organisation, is the pre-eminent authority charged with leading this process, and civil society should add to both the formal and informal mechanisms of social regulation and morality.

It can be argued that there is in our country a dominant collective social aspiration to fashion a society that cares, an aspiration informed by the ideals of equity, compassion for the most vulnerable, gender-sensitivity, and honesty in individual and collective behaviour. These are the ideals that inform the core values of the Constitution. The truth, however, is that aspiration and reality do not necessarily, and not always, coincide. Real life, even if it may jar with ideals, influences social behaviour in the here and now.

35 Social values and frames of reference

Issues pertaining to identity and social morality are influenced also by the dominant views in society, which often are in sync with social relations, but which can in some instances be at variance with these relations. As argued above, the values of our society reflect a continuing struggle between survival/prospering in the market jungle and the humaneness of the human spirit.

Beyond the social networks referred to above, the media and creative industries, including performing arts, music, literature, the fashion industry, marketing and advertising as well as educational curricula play a critical role in moulding social behaviour. Constitutional democracy has provided ample space for the flourishing of these expressions and the emergence of new genres.

However, the tension described above between the base instincts spawned by the social system and the aspiration for a caring society manifests itself, perhaps even more intensely, in the creative industries and other means of discourse. Within these areas of social endeavour, the outlook of non-racialism, non-sexism, unity in diversity, democracy, equity, inclusivity and transparency is continually struggling for pre-eminence against value systems attached to the old order: racism, sexism, diversity as a source of social conflict, political and social exclusion and opaqueness.

At the same time, while the art forms that promote new value systems reflect good intentions and are of good content, they may not necessarily be the most creative and attractive. Further, the creative space afforded by the new order is continually under strain, with bounds of sensibility in terms of obscenity, gratuitous violence, insensitivity to human dignity and other offensive portrayals often tested. Commercialism, including cost-cutting measures such as the importation of cheap forms as well as discarding of the concept of public service and public goods in relation to the means of discourse, can impact negatively on the definition of value systems.

Related to all this is the tendency to devalue – both in terms of social status and social rewards – some of the professions that deal with the moulding of social values, particularly pedagogy and the teaching profession from primary to tertiary level, writing, research in social sciences and other such pursuits. Intellectual consumption is then often satiated by imported products (much of them of low quality), with the popularity especially of reading, cinema and live theatre undermined.

An aspect of the challenge is a false 'cosmopolitanism' under the guise of globalisation, which can conceal, though scantily, a paradigm to view Europe, Australia/New Zealand and Northern America as the paragons of civilisation. In the end, this reflects a modernisation of a colonial mindset, a view that South Africa should be an extension of Europe and its historical offshoots 'in the free world'.

Combined with a history in which acceptance or rejection by 'the world' played a crucial role, this can encourage a 'catwalk syndrome' within society: on the one hand, with those who seek to retain apartheid privilege using racial kith-and-kin sentiment across the globe to demand conformity with norms of already 'normal' more equitable societies; and on the other, with those in political office constantly and subconsciously seeking to demonstrate how 'good and civilised' they are.

Much work needs to be done for the nation to use its own prism to define itself, without craving for affirmation from others as the starting point of self-worth. As with instances where individuals are trapped by loyalty to a cause or reliance on employment for self-sustenance to the extent of tolerating abuse, much of South African society, in its mindset, is still struggling to strike the right balance between self-assertion on the one hand and reasonable, principled conformity based on enlightened self-interest on the other.

In the past few years, the discourse and practical programmes on the regeneration of Africa has posited a new frame of reference whose significance is only now starting to be felt. But as with the long march of the African Renaissance itself, this will be a hard slog – protracted in its time frames and slow in shifting paradigms.

IX CONCLUSION – DISTILLING THE MAJOR TRENDS

36 Overall characterisation of society

The data overall points to a society in dynamic change, both materially and spiritually. It is subject to debate whether some of the volatility, for instance in social