

**Modern celebrity and inspiration in South Africa:**

**An examination of the**

***Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans***

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## *Abstract*

The postapartheid condition of a majority of young people in South Africa is substantially similar to the apartheid conditions under which their parents lived. This results in a dominant narrative in the media and everyday talk circulating in South African that the youth are a ‘lost generation’ and also that they represent a significant danger and risk for the stability of our democracy. Against this backdrop *The Mail and Guardian*, one of the South Africa’s most influential newspapers has chosen to celebrate a small number of young people every year as inspirational and extraordinary in their achievements. This investigation into this representation of a significant – although small – group of young South Africans employed content analysis of the 2015 edition of *200 Young South Africans*, interviews with profiled individuals across the years, and a focus group of readers. The study aimed to unpack the complexity of constructing certain young people as exemplary given the structural conditions that constrain and prevent a majority from attaining the education and mobility they need to make a difference in their own lives. The study found through the content analysis that the *Mail&Guardian* is setting up these young people as exemplary citizens whose actions should inspire other young people to similarly ‘make a difference’. Through the interviews the study found that those featured on the list found both that there was significant social capital in being valorised this way, but that this position was also a complex one to negotiate given the structural limitations of poverty and lack of education for those out of whom they had been chosen. The readers in the focus group did find inspiration in reading about their exemplary peers but they too were conscious of how small a group this was in comparison to the majority of young South Africans. In conclusion the study found that the narrative of hope, inspiration and making a difference is an important message in relation to a generalised hopelessness about South African youth but that it runs the risk of ignoring the significant structural constraints that young, poor, undereducated, unskilled young South Africans face.

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## **1. Introduction and Context**

In this introductory chapter I provide the context of the material conditions faced by young people globally and then narrow it down to South Africa. I also outline the discursive context within which young people are represented in the South African news media. This context both informs and justifies the research focus – the construction of citizenship within the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans*, a supplementary edition of the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper. The chapter will then outline the history of the special supplementary edition by placing its intentions and purpose within the history of the *Mail & Guardian* and South Africa. In outlining the context of young people, this chapter seeks to shed light on the South African context that allows for the emergence of the particular representations within the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* and their implications on youth as a social group. Later, the chapter will state the research goals and further assert the value in investigating these representations.

### ***The notion of ‘youth’***

Central to the notion and construction of celebrity in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* is the social construction of 'youth' or 'young people' that the *Mail & Guardian* is drawing from to represent a particular kind of citizen. Young people have long been termed the future of any society, “the bearers of [it’s] Great Expectations” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2007: 264). The social construction of youth as a transitional period between innocent/irresponsible childhood and responsible adulthood has come to represent “the terrors of the present, the errors of the past, and the prospect of a future” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2007: 268). This enduring narrative suggests that young people are the future solutions to the current problems of a society. This has often meant that young people inherit the consequences of problems that pre-date them into their adulthood (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2007). Youth is perceived as a phase in the life course that we all have to experience within the spectrum of developmental stages (Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe, and Thomson 2007; 18). We understand youth within this spectrum, and it has come to mean a group of people who are transitioning towards “independent adulthood from dependent childhood” (Henderson et.al, 2007). This understanding and approach informs the way we think of youth as a generalized homogeneous group in society. In this research I use the words ‘youth’ or ‘young

people’ to refer to those between the ages of 18 and 35 – a definition that is also adopted by the *Mail & Guardian* to categorize the individuals who are featured as part of the 200 on the list each year.

### ***Youth context***

Young people across the globe are facing challenges of unemployment, lack of access to education and other economic opportunities like entrepreneurship, and a subsequent lack of civic participation (Goldin, 2014). Unemployment is reported to be the most pressing issue according to young people because it determines their economic and civic participation (Goldin, 2014; Boyce, 2010). High rates of unemployment among young people make it increasingly difficult for young people to make the smooth transition from ‘youth’ into ‘adulthood’, a social transition that comes with the expectation that they need to become autonomous, independent and contributing members of society (Boyce, 2010). As a result, young people throughout the world are migrating to other countries for opportunities (Goldin, 2014). Most young immigrants from developing economies in Africa and Asia, emigrate to ‘first world’ countries in Europe and North America (Goldin, 2014; United Nations Populations Fund, 2014). Statistics show that 15.3% of the immigrants in the United States are young people, 20.2% in Canada and 24.1% in the European Union (United Nations Youth Report, 2013). ‘Developing continents’ such as Asia and Africa have the highest populations of young people, 62% of the world’s youth population lives in Asia and the second largest proportion of 17% is in Africa (Goldin, 2014). These young people are facing similar challenges of unemployment and a growing dissatisfaction with not having opportunities to participate economically and democratically (Goldin, 2014). It is estimated that the number of young people will decrease in Asia and increase significantly in Africa over the next decades (Goldin, 2014; United Nations Youth Report, 2013).

The challenges for young people as a social group are higher in Africa because of the legacies of slavery and colonialism, established primarily by the British and the French with the economic incentive to exploit the economic potential of African labour and resources (Setai 1977; Afigbo. Ayandele, Gavin, Omer-Cooper, & Palmer, 1986). A majority of African countries obtained independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the exception of Liberia which was created as an independent state in 1847 (Olukoshi, 2005). The continent is regarded as a ‘developing continent’ because it is still recovering from a history of exploitation that left the continent exploited and poor (Szirmai, 2005; Setai, 1977: 72). But 21<sup>st</sup> century globalization demands that the African continent compete at

the same level with 'first world countries', or regions that have benefited from its exploitation (Hofmeyr, 2011). Although democracy has been argued to be the most fundamental framework for obtaining social and economic progress in Africa as a means of dealing with the continent's history of exploitation (Ake, 2000), Ake argues that it is a way of imposing the elitism that is inherent in representative democracy. Ake argues that it fails to prioritize the masses who need it most and that ultimately it becomes about the individual gain of the select few (Ake, 2000). This progress and the challenges posed by democracy within the development context in Africa are particularly significant for young people who will go on to inherit the challenges of the continent.

South Africa is hailed as one of the leading economies in the African continent with one of the most liberal and celebrated constitutions in the world (Mattes, 2002). In 2015 South Africa celebrated 21 years of democracy after apartheid, a systematic discriminatory form of governance that benefitted white South Africans while subordinating black South Africans. Although South Africa is celebrating its young democracy, young South Africans who constitute over 70% of the population, are increasingly dissatisfied with the promises of freedom that came with the transition from apartheid to democracy (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2015). 71% of young people in South Africa are unemployed and an additional three million are without education and training, these young people have given up seeking employment and education and are not counted among the unemployed (Cloete & Butler-Adam, 2009). Institutions of higher learning in South Africa are accessed by a small number of people amounting to less than 6% of the population (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2015). Within this figure only 38% of those who do get admitted to university are likely to graduate in the expected time and 51% is likely to not graduate at all (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2015: 2).

Although young South Africans face formidable challenges, it is important to note that they are not a homogenous group, that they encounter these challenges across class, race, gender and sexuality. For example, the latest reports show that women throughout the world constitute the highest number of people without access to education and South Africa is no exception to this (UNFPA, 2015). In addition to unemployment, reports show that crime and gender-based violence is on the rise among young South Africans (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2015). Young people between the ages of 14 and 24 make up 29% of the prison population (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2015: 2). Furthermore, HIV and AIDS remains a major health concern among young people (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2015: 2). These figures paint an uninviting and grim picture of

the harsh material reality that the majority of young people in South Africa live under in the post-apartheid era.

As a result, there is a significantly small number of young people who are well educated and employed and have access to social institutions that allow them the agency to be active citizens (Van Breda, 2014). An even smaller number of young people are trying to make opportunities for themselves through entrepreneurship and micro-businesses as a means of surviving unemployment outside of the state support (Van Breda, 2014). The conditions faced by many young South Africans have led them to not trust that the government has their best interests at heart (Malila, 2014). One could argue that this is why many young people have decided to take matters in their own hands by taking chances at entrepreneurship starting their own businesses and also taking to the streets to protest against the lack of service delivery.

The expectation placed on young people to obtain 'independent adulthood' has material implications for young people as citizens. It means that they need access to resources to meet these social expectations (Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Shapre and Thomson, 2007: 18). Employment as a means through which citizens participate in the economy is central to the 'transition from youth into independent adulthood' (Henderson et al., 2007; 18). Employment and education are important civic means for young people to enact their citizenship and participate in the economy and democratic state affairs, opportunities that are becoming increasingly difficult for young people to access globally. This has meant that young people have had to find alternative ways of enacting their citizenship outside of the orthodox 'developmental stages of life' that come with social expectations (such as employment) that young people cannot live up to (Henderson et al., 2007; 18).

The media has a significant role to play in ensuring that the voices of young people are heard and that their interests are represented within state affairs. The relationship between the media and citizens is a space that informs the citizenry about civic and public engagement within society. Malila observes that there is a noticeable absence of the voices of young people within the South African media which has contributed to their feelings of alienation (Malila, 2014). The study focused on young people aged between 15 and 35. In the study, Malila also refers to the young people born between in or after 1994 as the "born frees" – a contested term with various interpretations popularly used to refer to young people born in the new democratic South Africa (Malila, Duncan, Steenveld, Garman, Mare, Ngubane, Strelitz, Radloff, 2013 & Malila, 2014). In a content analysis of over 562 articles about young people based in the Eastern Cape, the study focused on the voice of young



people on matters related to education. Malila found that the voices of young people were "noticeably absent" and that journalists did not routinely consider the voices of the young people who they were writing about as important (Malila, 2014: 21). Malila also considers this odd given that the South African media has a strong sense of its role as being 'a voice for the voiceless' (Malila, 2014: 23).

### ***The discursive context of the South African Youth***

The representation by the *Mail & Guardian* of a small number of young South Africans as active citizens with outstanding achievements exists within a plethora of representations about young South Africans as dangerous, lost and volatile members of society (Boyce, 2010). Exclusion from social institutions encountered by many young South Africans has resulted in the post-apartheid generation being labelled "a ticking time bomb" and 'social threats' (Boyce, 2010: 10) in the media. In a study on the voices of young people in South Africa pre and post-apartheid, Boyce points out that the language of the "lost generation" applied to young black South Africans has persisted from the apartheid era into the post-apartheid era (2010: 11). Malila considers that the failure of the media to articulate the aspirations and frustrations that the youth faces have played a role in the exclusion of young people from social institutions (Malila, 2013). The representation of young people as a ticking time bomb or a social threat is rooted in the idea that young people who are not embedded in social institutions and are idle and dissatisfied are a social threat. A survey of recent news reports shows that young people constitute the majority of the people participating in protests against the lack of service delivery by the government (South African Institute of Race Relations 2015).

Back (1996: 86) observed that the marginalization of young people, at least in its present-day form, may be a general structural consequence of the rise of neoliberal capitalism characterized by a free market economy and the rights of the individual as more crucial than the wellbeing of the collective. Giddens has also argued that in a post-industrial economy, we each face the task of inventing ourselves, to decide who we are and what we want to be (in Henderson et.al, 2007), a task rooted in a neoliberal way of thinking which overlooks the limitations of structural oppression on the agency of citizens who might suffer from consequences and perceptions of historic marginalization. The neoliberal economy has made people feel like failures where it is the structure of the economy, which has actually failed them (Henderson et.al, 2007). Studies show that even though young people

occupy positions that are historically constructed and positioned, many young people still blame themselves instead of the socio-economic factors for failures to attain education or employment (Henderson et al., 2007; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Roberts, 1995). Scholars have argued that moral panics that are focused on young people having to worry about their futures are often socially constructed and commoditized to benefit those in power and maintain the status quo (Henderson et al., 2007). When young people are concerned with their futures, argues Henderson et.al (2007), they are detracted from focusing on their current conditions, which they could influence. The representation of young people as deviant has also been regarded as a commercial strategy used to sell the image of 'rebellion' to young people to profit purposes to corporations (Comaroff, 2007 & Henderson et.al, 2007).

There have been several studies conducted in South Africa reporting the challenges faced by young people and their discomfort with the status quo (Malila, 2014; Malila, Duncan, Steenveld, Garman, Mare, Ngubane, Strelitz, Radloff, 2013; Goldin, 2014; Klasen & Woolard, 2008; South African Institute of Race Relations, 2015). In South Africa, there have been very few studies conducted on the representation of young South Africans within the media. One of such study is by Malila et al (2013) which focused on the use of the media by young people. The study investigates if young people trust the media as an institution that represents them, speaks to them and provides them with reliable information. In this study Malila et al argue that the media has failed in speaking to young people as well as representing them in ways that they recognize as true for themselves (Malila et.al, 2013). The representations of young South Africans as the 'lost generation' do little to provide and explain the context under which they came to be 'lost'. The failure is placed on the young people without any recognition of the structural failures by the state and the condition of the global economy that inhibits young people from accessing opportunities. The relationship between the media and young people plays a role in ensuring that young people are heard and feel comfortable knowing that their aspirations and frustrations are being articulated (Malila, 2014).

The conditions faced by many young South Africans make them societal burdens as they are vulnerable to socially destructive behaviour like crime (Klasen & Woolard, 2008: 36). Their conditions are in fact symptomatic of the failure by the South African state to provide services and opportunities that enable young South Africans to be active citizens who can participate in the economy and state affairs (Klasen & Woolard, 2008: 37). In his book titled *What's Gone Wrong? On The Brink of a Failed State*, Alex Boraine tells us, "Wherever we look – education, health, safety and

security, unemployment, lack of housing and basic facilities, police brutality, inefficiency, mismanagement, jobs for pals, the right of entitlement of the ruling party, corruption in the public service and at every level of government – we see signs of a failing state” (Boraine, 2014: 6). Boraine further asserts that civil society organizations have a significant role to play in pursuing the principles of “democracy, transparency, integrity and justice in the context of a failing state” (Boraine, 2014: 126). While the notion of a ‘failing state’ might be a bit of a stretch, the responsibility that Boraine confers on civil society is the same responsibility that the *Mail & Guardian* also confers on the 200 young South Africans – through the call for nominations; a responsibility to save South Africa from the challenges it is currently facing.

This pool of young people and many others like them, are the kind of young South Africans whom the *Mail & Guardian* celebrates for standing out against the backdrop of hopelessness, challenges and difficulties. The young people profiled in the edition are acknowledged and celebrated for being successful and ‘making South Africa a better place’ in a country where the majority is struggling to merely survive.

### ***The Mail & Guardian***

The *Mail and Guardian* is a weekly newspaper that produces news for the South African middle to upper class with “large numbers of readers among professionals, academics, diplomats, lobbyists and non-governmental groups” (Mail & Guardian, 2015). The readership of the *Mail & Guardian* is estimated at 45 000 readers per week (Daniels, 2013). However, circulation of the newspaper has since declined after the newspaper faced financial difficulties. The paper, which is considered authoritative and prestigious covers current affairs and investigations with an online website which is among the oldest news websites on the continent. The *Mail & Guardian* readership is said to be “a critical approach to politics, arts and current affairs” (Mail & Guardian, 2015). Although it has a small readership, the *Mail & Guardian* is very influential because of its target audience being middle to upper class elites, which include business, and political elites (Daniels, 2014). The newspaper has a strong reputation for breaking crucial news and investigative journalism and has a dedicated investigative team, one of the very few in South African media companies (Daniels, 2014).

The *Mail & Guardian* was established in 1985 and has gained a reputation for fearless journalism, a reputation rooted in exposes of political scandals and they have been conducting this form of journalism dating back to the apartheid era when it was launched. The *Mail & Guardian* became the first African newspaper to have its own website which was launched in 1994. 87.5% of the Mail & Guardian Media is owned by Newtrust Company Botswana Limited, which is owned by Zimbabwean publisher Trevor Ncube (South Africa Media Club, 2015). The London-based Guardian Newspapers Limited holds 10% of the company and minority shareholders make up the rest. Since 2005 the newspaper has released an annual supplementary edition known as the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans*. In 2015 the edition marked its ten-year celebration as the “the country’s most celebrated hallmark of the up-and-coming generation, a who’s who of young people at the top of their field in 10 categories” (Mail & Guardian, 2015). The edition is a compilation of profiles of South Africans under the age of 35 categorized into: arts and culture, business, civil society, education, environment, health, film and media, politics and governance, science and technology and sport (Mail & Guardian, 2015).

### ***Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans***

The project to identify and celebrate exemplary young people was first titled the *Young South Africans You Must Take to Lunch* and started with 300 profiles. The following year the edition only listed 100 young South Africans. In 2010 the title was changed to *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* and has remained as such since. The numbers have also changed over time but seem to have stabilized at a choice of 200 each year. “The style of the profiles has evolved from short and sharp biographies to slightly more personal and in-depth profiles of people on the list” says former Editor at *Mail & Guardian* Angela Quintal (Quintal, 2015). The tenth year celebration of the edition coincided with the country’s celebration of the 21st year of democracy.

The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* was founded under the editorship of Ferial Haffajee in 2005. She also founded *The Little Black Book* when she was a reporter at the *Financial Mail* before she was Editor at the *Mail & Guardian* – to counter the narrative that there weren’t enough black columnists to give opinion and commentary on business news and events (Haffajee, 2015). She also founded *The Mail & Guardian Women’s Book*, which profiles outstanding women in various fields while serving as the Editor at *Mail & Guardian*. Later in her position as Editor at the *City*

*Press*, Haffajee founded the *100 World Class South Africans*. In her latest book, *What If There Were No Whites in South Africa*, Haffajee (2015: 8) notes that it is part of her “practice to track people for whom the new South Africa is a Mecca”. However, of all the lists that profile outstanding South Africans that Haffajee has founded, she says, “the publication of a new generation of young people we think are influential [the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans*] is the proudest work I’ve ever edited for it is a genuine showcase of a full range of young South Africans who have grasped freedom by the wings and flown with it” (Haffajee, 2015: 9).

The 2015 editor of the edition echoed Haffajee’s sentiments in her editorial statement in the 2015 edition, saying the purpose of the edition is “to seek out and highlight amazing young South Africans and give our readers a look at the people who are making a difference and driving the country forward” (Quintal, 2015). This idea of “driving the country forward” becomes the emphasis in the call for nominations and in the criteria for selection. The list is compiled through a nomination process: the *Mail and Guardian* puts out a call in the weekly newspaper as well on the website and on social networks for people to nominate “young people who are making a difference in their field or in their communities or in both” (Mail & Guardian, 2015). The process of nominating someone can only be done online where people send through motivational letters motivating for young people they think are influential and driving the country forward. The young people “do not need to be South African citizens or born in South Africa. They do, however, need to be residing in and committed to this country” (Mail & Guardian, 2015). The 2009 slogan presents the 300 profiles as the “Young people who will shape our country [for the better] in the decades to come” (Mail & Guardian, 2009).

In addition to opening up nominations to the public, the *Mail & Guardian* editorial team also embarks on research to recognize young people who might not be nominated but are known to have a significant influence in their spheres. They also check the credibility of candidates who have been nominated on to the list; “a list of this nature is only as good as the research and support behind it,” says the advertorial for the 2015 edition. The nominations by the public provide assistance to the editorial team that will make the final selection. The Mail and Guardian’s journalists then write the actual profiles of those chosen. This year, the editorial team added the ‘Rising Star’ category that profiles and recognizes children in high school and primary school as upcoming stars. The 2015 edition also introduced an alumni section that profiles a selection of individuals who have made it on the list from the previous nine editions. Their profiles are a reflection of what they have achieved

since they last made it on the list, what being on the list meant for them as well as a section for each of the profiles to offer advice to the young people who are on the 2015 list.

The edition is well received on social networks because of the trending hash tag ‘#MG200YOUNG’ (used in tweets posted about the edition) on the day of publication. The posts on social networks come from individuals, corporates, NGOs and universities congratulating young people associated with them for making it on the list. The University of the Witwatersrand, University of Cape Town and Rhodes University posted on social media congratulating staff, students and alumnus for making it onto the list. The *Mail & Guardian* also hosts a function on the day of the publication where the individuals featured on the list are invited and various esteemed speakers to congratulate them for making it on the list.

### ***Research statement***

This study seeks to investigate constructions of citizenship identities amongst a significant population; a select group of young people who are seen as active in a context where young people have very limited agency to participate in economic or social institutions. In order to do this, the study will conduct a content analysis of the 2015 edition to investigate the narrative strategies used to construct these 200 young South Africans as exemplary and inspirational, interview a group of young people to find out how they receive the messages of inspiration and emulation imbedded in these profiles and interview individuals who have been on the list to further interrogate what they make of being represented as outstanding citizens and role models in a South Africa characterized by inequalities.

### ***Research value***

It is important to study the representation and notion of “future movers and shakers” in a global context where young people have very limited agency. Youth as a social category that marks a transition into ‘adulthood’ has come to represent “the terrors of the present, the errors of the past and the prospect of a future” (Comaroff, 2007; 268). The representation of young South Africans in the

*Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* as the "future movers and shakers" provide us with a site to begin to investigate an intersection of the present, the past and the future of South Africa.

Boyce observes that there is a need to study youth circumstances and attitudes as young people are the ones who will inherit the future of their societies (2010). Knowles and Berman (2006) argue that it is economically sound to study young people as they will inherit the future of this country and will determine the condition for the next generation of young people. The United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) reported that the Millennium Development Goals are for young people so there is a need to study the people who will take up the burdens of society and will determine whether a lot of the long term goals will be achieved or not (Boyce, 2010; UNFPA 2015). The young people profiled in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* are celebrated for playing a significant role in shaping the future of South Africa, making them a significant, even if small, population of youth that is worthy of investigation.

This study is valuable because it affords a site to investigate the voices of young people in the media and how they make their way into the public space. The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young Africans* edition is a node in which the prevalent notion of young people as voiceless, disinterested and unheard can be contrasted against the deliberate intention by the *Mail & Guardian* to represent a select number of young South Africans as active and exemplary. This study insists that the young people represented in the *Mail & Guardian* do not exist in isolation but are selected in the context of the negative circumstances and representations of the majority of young South Africans. The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* in a sense becomes a vehicle for articulating youth aspirations through representation and giving certain young people a platform to be seen and heard in particular ways which offer a discursive counterbalance to the dominant representations of the youth.

However, it is important to also note that in the case of the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* study, the aspirations of youth are articulated in ways that are rooted in liberal values of individual achievement and merit. In an article about emerging young South African leaders and intellectuals, Mkhize observes that middle class young South Africans involved in politics are "driven by a narcissistic individualism cultivated by our Model C and private school system where we are led to believe we are natural leaders destined to be the most important voices in society" (Mkhize, 2014). She further suggests that the pinnacle of achievement amongst these young people is "a personal brand, media profile and perhaps an appearance on some top young people list" (Mkhize, 2014). The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* provides a platform that represents and

establishes these young South Africans as “the next leaders” and thereby also runs the risk of feeding into the "narcissistic individualism" as observed by Mkhize (Mkhize in The Oppidan Press, 2014).

It is also important to take into account that because young people are constructed as a volatile social group that needs as much guidance as possible to make a smooth transition into adulthood, that the notion of role-modeling also comes into play in such representations. Role models play the part of opening of paths for transition into responsible adulthood. This aspect means that this study also considers the messages of inspiration embedded in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans*, messages that celebrate and acknowledge the 200 young South Africans as individuals who are worthy of emulation in a context of great constraint for those who might wish to take up and follow through on that emulation.

### ***Research goals***

This research will investigate the construction and reception of the subject positions offered by the constructions of active young citizens in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans*. This research shall aim:

- To investigate and understand the various tropes used to construct the 200 annually as exemplary individuals.
- Explore the conditions under which the 200 young South Africans are constructed as distinctly successful and inspirational.
- To understand, from interviewing individuals who made it on the list, how the list informs their ideas of citizenship in South Africa.
- To understand how fellow young South African university students who fall within the target market of the *Mail & Guardian* respond to the supplementary edition – how it informs their ideas of citizenship as young South Africans.



## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on research done within areas of celebrity, citizenship and inspiration to construct a theoretical framework that will be employed to unpack constructions of citizenship in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* amongst a significant population group; a select group of young people who are seen as active in a context where young people have very limited agency to participate in economic or social institutions. The chapter will first look at the notion of how individuals come to occupy media space by drawing on celebrity theory, which accounts for the celebration of certain individuals in public. Then the notion of ‘inspiration’ and its implications within constructions of citizenship will be unpacked. The chapter will then turn to citizenship construction and theorizing of the idea of ‘acts’ of citizenship.

### ***Media capital and media attention***

The rise of celebrity is as a result of media attention and exposure, which has resulted in media capital. Before a theoretical discussion on the notion of celebrity and citizenship, it is important to note the media’s power in creating public figures. Media institutions are social organizations that produce symbolic products through an interaction between cultural and symbolic texts. For media institutions, signification is different from other commodity form because the symbolic object is a discursive one; the symbolic value found in the circulation of messages and meanings makes media texts and institutions crucial sites of power (Hall, 1982). “The power to signify events in a particular way” explains why and how the media have the ideological power to define the terms and conditions in which debate occurs in society (Hall, 1982: 69).

The impact and power of media rests significantly on the question of who is chosen to be seen or heard (Couldry, 2003). The journalistic field carries this symbolic power with complexity because of the responsibility they have to report on other fields such as economics, cultural, medicine and business (Couldry, 2003). The media's relationship with other fields is such that the media affects all the other fields and is affected by other fields, making the symbolic power of the media pervasive. Couldry suggests that the symbolic power of the media to represent and determine "symbolic capital in a range of different fields" makes the media's symbolic power an "increasing monopoly over the sites of social prestige" (Couldry, 2003: 668). Media exposure, in this sense, is inextricably linked to

the notion of celebrity and the attribution of "a glamorous status to individuals in public" (Rojek, 2001: 10) as a form of power. Celebrity theorists have observed that the power of individuals who attract media exposure is increasingly on the rise contributing to the rise and complexity of celebrity culture.

### ***The celebrity phenomenon***

This thesis draws on the notion of 'celebrity' as espoused by Rojek (2001), Monaco (1978), Turner (2012) and Marshall (2009) to understand and analyze the representation of the 200 young South Africans as outstanding and inspirational citizens. According to Rojek, 'celebrity' refers to "the attribution of a glamorous status to an individual within the public sphere" (2001:10). The phenomenon of celebrity then, is a social construction that involves the media taking interest in various individuals and representing them in a way that excites a level of public interest (Turner, 2013; Braudy, 1986; Giles, 2000).

Monaco observes that there are three different kinds of celebrities; the star, the quasar and the hero (1978: 7). Turner further draws on these categories to distinguish them: Stars are often represented as exuding 'charisma' or as individuals with characteristics or personalities that draw the attention of the media and are then constructed as worthy of paying attention to (Turner, 2013: 26). Quasars accidentally find themselves represented in the media without any intention on their part (Turner, 2013: 26). These are individuals who find themselves in an event that draws the attention of the media; events such as kidnappings, legal cases or car accidents (in Turner 2013; 26). Thirdly is the hero, the person who is acknowledged and celebrated for modeling ideal subjectivity; these individuals are regarded as noble for their 'humanitarian' or philanthropic efforts in a society constructed to be in need of their efforts (Turner, 2013: 26). Here I will use celebrity to unpack the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* as both heroes and stars; their outstanding achievements and their characterization as individuals with philanthropic intentions make them both stars and heroes.

The significant rise of celebrity content produced in the recent past has made celebrity news pervasive in the routines of journalism and in news values that prioritize stories about individuals (Marshall, 2014: 40). This is both indicative of, and feeds, a growth in the emotional power of

people's connection with figures they only know through their representation and a rise in entertainment news (Marshall, 2014; Glynn, 2000). Part of the investigation in this thesis is to understand how the glamorous status attributed to these individuals, operates to make them 'inspirational' and simultaneously to individualize their achievements so that broader socio-political structures, which impede their success, are minimized.

Studies of celebrity culture have either taken a sociological approach or a semiotic reading of celebrity (Charnes, 1993). Sociological approaches unpack the impact of celebrities as cultural events that occur in society while the semiotic approach analyses the meanings and significations that are attached to the notion of celebrity (Dyer, 1978). Both approaches take into account the context that allows for such interpretations and the emergence of celebrity. While these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, most studies on celebrity culture seem to be based in either one of these approaches. Most of the literature on celebrity culture is based in film and literary studies and rarely within the social sciences (Harmon, 2005). The earliest work on celebrities was *Stars* by Dyer (1979), which analyzed the representations and imagery of film stars as a site for unpacking dominant ideologies within western society. Dyer's analysis showed that film stars in the media acted to reinforce the culture of individualism that is at the heart of western societies.

Celebrity studies thus far have analyzed film stars, soccer stars and reality television stars, but little attention has been paid to individuals who occupy the media landscape as 'celebrities' outside of these categories, such as those in the 'hero stars' category noted earlier (Malt, 2008). Hero stars are individuals who possess characteristics and achievements of excellence and renown, individuals like those represented in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans*. Thus far, scholars agree that there has been very little scholarly attention given to such celebrities when one considers the impact of these individuals on culture and society in the form of celebrity culture and the interest around the citizens who are perceived to be renowned (Cowen, 2000; Glynn, 2000; Marshall, 1997).

The glamorous status that is attributed to celebrities becomes a mechanism for people to live vicariously through other people's success and to make ordinary people believe that they can also attain the same status (Marshall, 1997). Rojek concurs with this notion in observing that "celebrity culture creates more losers than winners because it propels us to construct ourselves into objects that immediately arouse sentiments of desire and approval in others" (Rojek, 2000: 23). Beyond creating a desire to attain fame and renown, there is an illusion that ordinary people too can easily attain the status and level of achievement that is attributed to celebrities. The notion of an achieved celebrity

status functions on the assumption that the individual succeeded in open competition and where people start off on the same playing field (Rojek, 2000: 34). This is false because it fails to account for the multiple factors that contribute to an individual succeeding, why and how the media takes a particular interest in particular individual over others, that factors such as race, gender, class and the dominant standards of beauty play a role in shaping perceptions of preference. Celebrity culture expresses an ideology of heroic individualism, upward mobility and choice "in social conditions where monotony and routine prevail" (Marshall, 1997: 46), South Africa is no exception to this where historic forms of oppression prevail. Marshall argues that we are ultimately interested in celebrity not because we truly believe that we can achieve it but because it "represents the antithesis of a generalized psychological lack in our lives" (Marshall, 1997: 46).

The rise of individual representations in public and their celebrity constitutes a change in the way cultural meanings are generated, with the celebrity as a crucial site of media attention and personal aspiration, and one of the key areas where cultural meanings are negotiated and organized (Marshall, 1997: 72–3 in Turner 2001: 6). One of these meanings negotiated, as argued by Marshall, is that celebrity functions as a form of vicarious reinforcement of both individual autonomy and a sense of collective identity in societies marked by competitiveness, gross inequalities and a growing sense of individualism (Marshall, 2001).

### ***Pedagogies of citizenship***

The narratives that accompany the creation of celebrities often serve to reconcile ordinary people to their subordination or to provide an escape from their realities (Marshall, 1997: 48). Another area that isn't well explicated but which is important is not just the consumer value of celebrity but also its relationship to democracy and citizenship. The vicarious nature of media consumption operates to promote consumption of celebrity news and stories, it also has impacts on modeling and understandings of ideal citizenship. The celebrity theorists pay attention to this aspect of celebrity, which is important for understanding a project like the 200 South Africans because it is cast differently than a straight glamorous celebration of newsmakers. The language that the celebrity theorists use to make this connection is that of "pedagogy of citizenship" which means that such people in the public eye implicitly play a role also in informing citizens about their roles in society on what constitutes a good or a bad citizen (Rojek, 2000: 20).

Robbroeck has used the notion of pedagogy of citizenship operating within that attribution of celebrity status in a South African study of Nelson Mandela. In an article titled 'The Visual Mandela Pedagogy of Citizenship', Robbroeck (2014) looks at the visual representation of Mandela in a comic book published by the Nelson Mandela Children's Foundation. In this analysis Robbroeck uses the character of Nelson Mandela to analyze how he is positioned as an ideal citizen who models exemplary subjectivity (Robbroeck, 2014). The pedagogy of citizenship arises in the representation of a moral hero, which takes two forms: representation as a depiction of the person himself and representation as speaking for an other (Robbroeck, 2014: 260).

Robbroeck draws from psychoanalytical theory to suggest that the political transitioning of South Africa into a democratic nation and the problems that have come with the new South Africa (such as income inequalities and feelings of disappointment directed towards the ruling party for corruption and inadequate use of state resources), have given rise to nationalistic feelings that are directed towards a powerful, idealized Other, who functions as "an internalized role model or a national superego" (Robbroeck, 2014: 256). This powerful other compensates for the perceived failures of the country. Robbroeck suggests that figures like Nelson Mandela "hold up the mirror" so that the nation can admire itself even amid the failures of the state (Robbroeck, 2014: 256). This analysis of the celebration and representation of Nelson Mandela provides a lot to draw from in our attempts to understand how the 200 Young South Africans are represented as vicarious moral heroes whom other young people should emulate.

Another South African study on celebrity linked to citizenship and democracy is by Bolsmann & Parker (2007) looking at Mark Fish, a South African 'celebrity soccer player' as a signifier of cultural change in the transition from apartheid to democracy. The study analyzed the implications of his celebrity representation on sports and politics in post-apartheid South Africa and found that the focus on Fish, the only white player in a predominantly black team, represented an ideal and a non-racial image for South Africans in a time of high racial tension (Bolsmann & Parker, 2007). The study further shows that the popularity of Fish as a football player did not emerge out of a vacuum, but emerged from a socio-political context that marked the end of apartheid and the establishment of what was meant to be 'a rainbow nation' with racial integration. They argue that Fish became a symbol of the rainbow nation where racial tension prevailed in the poverty and interpersonal experiences (2006: 119). The power of celebrities as signifiers of cultural change indeed informs

constructions of citizenship and how ordinary citizens understand their roles in society in relation to the abstraction of ‘society’ or ‘nation’.

The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* offers an opportunity to study the attribution of celebrity status in a highly charged political environment in which the status ascribed to the individual is connected to democratic purposes and is deliberately set up against a backdrop of severe deficits in the establishment of a new democracy. The insights of Rojek, Turner and Marshall on celebrity status within democratic societies is that a certain small minority of people in the public domain stand in vicariously for a large majority who can never hope to attain such a status (Turner, 2013: 26). The attribution of celebrity in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans*, at a surface level, is based on the kind of young person who occupies the public domain for their admirable acts of citizenship that are geared towards making the country better. The idea of inspiration – the perception that the edition will inspire other citizens to make the country a better place – is crucial to the function of the list, the selection criterion for the kind of individuals who make it onto the list and in the call for nominations for people to be featured in the list.

### ***Inspiration***

Lockwood and Kunda based in Canada have conducted multiple studies on celebrities and role models as inspirational individuals and their impact on informing citizens about their role as ‘less outstanding others’ within societies (2002: 957). They argue that the idea that celebrities can function as role models that inspire and motivate young people to model their behavior has played a significant role in affirming certain social groups while demoralizing others (2002: 957). The affirmation is done through selecting a group of individuals within a social group who are then represented as models for achievement that other people can or need to follow. These are the individuals who give talks in high schools, become regular guests on talk shows and newspapers telling 'less outstanding others' that they too can do it (2002: 957). Lockwood and Kunda observe that this notion can also serve to demoralize the very same people it seeks to empower when they (the intended recipients of the message of inspiration) realize that they are not likely to succeed at the same level as their role models, so the act of inspiring can have positive or negative effects by either empowering the recipients of the message or by completely demoralizing them (2002: 957). “Individuals will be enhanced and inspired by a superstar if they believe that they too can attain

comparable success but will be demoralized and deflated if they believe that they cannot” (2002; 952). The literature on the impact of ‘outstanding others’ on the people whom they stand out against is a growing body of work. However, two factors are important in their study that are useful for a further investigation on whether ‘superstars’ empower or demoralize less outstanding others; the relevance of the superstar and the attainability of their success.

Their study fundamentally sought to investigate the perceived attainability of the achievements of the outstanding others as a crucial factor for whether or not their success was demoralizing or empowering. They note that people compare themselves to the ‘stars’ because of the perceived relevance to their achievements (such as interest in the field within which the stars are celebrated), the more they are likely to believe that they too can attain that level of success (2002: 952). However, if the level of success feels unattainable and out of reach, one of two things is likely to take place: they are bound to admire the success from a distance and therefore not see the celebrities as relevant to their conditions or they are bound to feel demoralized and inferior (2002: 957). Role models are more likely to inspire when they make their success tangible by providing the means of achievement and making those means as practical as possible (2002: 952).

People are likely to compare themselves to others where there are structural similarities between the stars involved and the “less outstanding” other. One is especially likely to engage in possibly emulating the stars if the other is similar to the self in dimensions such as age, race, gender, or personality (Tesser, 1986; Tesser & Campbell, 1983). One of the factors in which people compare themselves to an outstanding other is based on the sphere of influence and the proximity and role of the less outstanding other within that sphere, this determines the relevance for the less outstanding other (Lockwood and Kunda, 2002: 954). When a star succeeds within a similar sphere of influence, the chances of drawing comparisons with the star are far more likely than if it was outside a sphere of influence, similarity in spheres also contributed towards the relevance of the celebrity or star.

A study conducted by MacCallum and Beltman (2002) in Australia looked at multiple role model programmes to investigate how the programmes were effective in spreading and teaching their values to young people. They look at programmes that included both positive role models and negative role models. Positive role models are individuals who model an ideal and desired self while negative role models are people who inspire others by avoiding a certain self-construction that is seen as potentially destructive (Lockwood and Kunda, 2002: 959). The purpose of role model programmes, note MacCallum and Beltman is to “stimulate young people to make sound life

choices, to progress their educational outcome and assist them develop skills, values and other attributes that encourage citizenship and lead to a full productive adulthood for the benefit of the economy and the community” (2002: 13). They do however go on to note that the success of each programme rests upon the context in which it emerges (2002: 23). The significance of role models is to serve as inspiration for young people who are in need guidance of choosing the right values to live by and the construction of celebrity is one of the functions used by role model programs to achieve this (MacCallum & Beltman, 2002: 26).

Lockwood and Kunda (2002) looked at inspiration and attributed to it three main characteristics; “transcendence, evocation and motivation” (2002; 956). Transcendence refers to the idea that inspiration is aimed towards something beyond the current condition, something better than the current reality. They argue that “to be inspired by an outstanding other, one must be able to imagine an equally outstanding possible future self” (2002: 214). Evocation refers to the idea that one is not responsible for being inspired, inspiration in this sense is said to be external and beyond one’s control. Lastly it is motivational which is to say that it seeks to attain that which has been conceived as possible, inspiration in this sense is conceived as “appetitive motivational state” (2002: 956), which means that it is state driven by a desired condition that is not yet attained. They observe that “inspiration thus implies transcendence of one’s previous conscious concerns. By definition, one cannot transcend oneself through an act of will; one is dependent on the existence of an evocative object that awakens one to better possibilities” (2002: 959). *The Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* in this sense functions as a mirror or an invitation for other young people – and citizens – to imagine a possible future self that transcends one’s current conditions.

### ***Celebrity and the loss of religion***

The rise of celebrity is a result of the growing consumption of entertainment news and a subsequent decline in ‘hard news’, this emerges within the shift towards an interest in people’s lives instead of ideas, issues and events (Marshall, 1997). Marshall observed that the rise of celebrity consumption is also a consequence of “the decline in religion and the rise of democratic governments and secular societies” (Marshall, 1997, 23). Celebrity with its ‘god-like’ attributes has thus become a substitute for the fall of gods (Marshall, 1997: 23). This is because of the impact of celebrities on public consciousness, an attribute that was historically only exclusive to religious leaders and gods that



people only know in public as ideas. Marshall notes; “celebrities have filled the absence created by the decay in the popular belief in the divine right of kings and the death of God” (Marshall, 1997: 26). The power that celebrities have in shaping society used to be reserved only for the political, economic and religious figures “whose decisions had an influence on present and future conditions of everyone else” (Turner, 2013: 23). In fact, we are seeing more and more that politicians are using their personalities to appeal to audiences for votes as a form of campaigning (Marshall, 2014: 36).

Marshall attributes the rise of celebrity significantly to a decline of religion and that in some way celebrity has come to substitute the strategies and ways of religion. Marshall argues that the mechanisms through which celebrity functions to circulate and negotiate meaning is affected a lot by religion, he notes:

“to the extent that organized religion has declined in the West, celebrity culture has emerged as one of the replacement strategies that promotes new orders of meaning and solidarity. As such, notwithstanding the role that some celebrities have played in destabilizing order, celebrity culture is a significant institution in the normative achievement of social integration” (2001: 99).

## ***Individualization***

The decline of religion and the rise of democratic societies as factors for the emergence of celebrity are at the heart of individualization that is espoused by democracy. In his analysis of the genealogy of power, Foucault (1978) argues that religion also played a significant role in entrenching individualism within western societies. In his later work, Foucault has theorized the mechanisms of power, the circulation of meaning and power and articulated that at the heart of discourse is “the problem of the government of the self and others” (Foucault, 1978; 63). Foucault through his French lectures on Security, Territory and Population in the late 1970s attempted to provide a coherent and broader conception of the mechanisms of power and how they infiltrate society through discourse in a manner that he himself observes was more ambitious than his previous work (Foucault, 1978). He provides the origin of the genealogy of power and knowledge in society, beyond just merely providing the mechanisms of power (Foucault, 1978). He traces the history of governance back to Christianity in the East Mediterranean where ‘pastoral power’ was central to the functioning of

societies (Foucault, 1978). The notion of a pastoral power, Foucault argues, has infiltrated the West and the rest of the world (Foucault, 1978). This form of power has always been a form of reference “to a relationship with the gods or men with gods” (Foucault, 1978; 138). It was the beginning of men giving his power to an other perceived as divine, “a relation between men and the divine” which was rooted in the biblical analogy of the shepherd-flock relationship as a political model (Foucault, 1978: 166).

The notion of pastoral power is rooted in the idea of a few individuals – or one – who represent the interests of others and have the capacity to help others realize their salvation. Salvation according to Foucault is a collective and shared vision of an ideal destiny that ought to be attained by everyone – this includes access to resources and opportunities for people. Foucault uses the pastoral state to argue that the one who demonstrates care as a form of power attains power. He theorized that this form of power functioned through an order of knowledge called 'lex suprema', a law and form of power that is legitimized by a primary focus on the wellbeing of others (Foucault, 1978). Pastoral power in addition to being a power of care is also an individualizing power (Foucault, 1978). The shepherd must first sacrifice himself as the individual icon of sacrifice for the collective flock, which is also constituted by individual sheep, each of which is as equally significant (Foucault, 1978).

Foucault's conception of power in this sense becomes particularly important when one considers that Rojek, and Marshall argue that the rise of celebrity has been characterized by the decline of religion and the rise of democracy (Marshall, 1997; Rojek, 2002). The emergence of hero celebrities in particular and the kind of individuals who are profiled in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* as leaders in their communities for their commitment to making the country better allows one to begin to test Foucault's pastoral power against the rise of celebrity.

Celebrity theorists further argue that the rise of celebrity, and the need to give individuals ‘god-like’ status is a way of substituting and subsequently making way to new forms of power that are inexplicably connected to old forms of power – like religions – which organized societies and new forms of political and media power. Rojek observed that "post-God, celebrity is now one of the mainstays of organizing recognition and belonging in a secular society" (2001: 58).

## *Steward citizenship*

Ramphela (2008) observes that citizens in South Africa have a limited capacity to assume their role of active citizens, a role expected from every citizen in South Africa in the post-apartheid dispensation. If we take Couldry's (2001) analysis of citizenship as a collection of rights and obligations, it is in this sense that Ramphela (2008: 126) argues that citizens (and not subjects) are "active participants in the democracy" who are able to enjoy their rights and fulfill their obligations. Ramphela further notes that South Africa poses a set of unique challenges and limitations for the citizenry to be active participants within a democracy (2008: 15). She notes that the racial history of South Africa means that there is a disparity between citizens who have a limited capacity to be active citizens as a result of benefitting from a society rooted in systematic racial discrimination, while black citizens possess a set of material challenges and lack of access to resources which limit their capacity to be active citizens who are active citizens and not subjects of a democratic society (2008: 27).

Ramphela notes two forms of citizenship that have been dominant within South Africa: republican citizenship and liberal citizenship. Republican citizenship is rooted in the idea that citizens must govern themselves but emphasizes an obligation to the collective as a fundamental way of recognizing and realizing one's citizenship (2008: 130). Liberal citizenship, which also prioritizes self-governance but, she says, over emphasizes the role of the state in intervening and ensuring the welfare of the society (2008: 130). Ramphela notes that the liberal form of citizenship was exercised by white South Africans who benefited from apartheid without publicly opposing it thinking that it was the state's mandate to govern with very little interference on their day-to-day lives. Republican citizens are the kind of people who outwardly opposed or supported apartheid with the logic that they had an obligation to influence state policy in what they perceived was best for their society (Ramphela, 2008: 130). Ramphela suggests that for South Africa to transcend its challenges inherited from apartheid, South Africans need to adopt a citizenship of stewardship which means that citizens must discharge their duties to the common good through their allegiance to the state in return for protection of their rights by the state (Ramphela, 2008: 126). This notion functions on the basic assumption that citizens are able to enjoy their rights.

Ramphela (2008) conceptualizes steward citizenship as citizens having an obligation to the wellbeing of the collective and the upholding of democratic ideas of equality. She draws on Chipkin (2007: 151

in Ramphela 2008: 131) when he asserts that "the public space is a domain for normative action". Ramphela (2008: 132) notes that the move from subject to citizen occurs when one says: "Yes I am a citizen. I have the same rights and responsibilities as those around me and I will respect them as citizens like me." This means a mutual realization among all citizens – that everyone is equal – that occurs not only in everyday encounters but also in the progressive realization of the rights and responsibilities of other citizens. She further notes that the only way South Africa can 'lay its ghosts [racism, sexism and ethnic chauvinism] to rest' is through transformative leadership, which she describes as "credible, visionary leadership that expands the boundaries of possibilities for all citizens, enabling them to contribute their talents, experience and skills to create a successful, prosperous democracy," (2008: 295).

Ramphela's conception of citizenship and transformative leadership allows us to locate the study of the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* and the representations on citizenship beyond just celebrity, and inspiration within the post-apartheid South Africa and conceptions of citizenship they evoke. It will allow us to test the citizen representations that emerge from celebrity theory to be analyzed through conceptions of the republican, liberal or steward citizen who is not a subject but an active participant within democracy. Ramphela's concern with transformation of citizenship is a crucial theme that is intertwined with the *Mail & Guardian's* project to highlight outstanding young South Africans who are committed to 'making South Africa a better place' (Mail & Guardian, 2015) and thus espousing "transformational leadership" (Ramphela, 2008: 295)..

### ***Acts of Citizenship***

The 200 young South Africans are celebrated as symbols that represent ideal citizenship. However, this representation occurs because they are active citizens who are seen to be doing something in realizing their citizenship. Engin and Nielsen (2008) theorize acts of citizenship within the framework of agency and actions, terms with which citizenship is spoken about. These theorists provide us with terms of reference for understanding the actions being represented and how acts come to constitute such a crucial factor in the realization of citizenship. Engin and Nielsen (2008) provide three principles of theorizing acts of citizenship, which will be adopted to further make sense of the actions of the 200 young South Africans represented in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans*.

The issues to unpack in understanding the construction of citizenship and the acts that legitimize it are the degree to which people are seen as subjects and how they become active citizens who are able to act instead of acted upon. Engin and Nielsen argue that status is a major factor in the construction of citizenship, status that is attributed to individuals based on the dominant discourse that establishes a particular kind of citizen as ideal (Engin and Nielsen, 2008). Here, Engin and Nielsen (2008) observe that the ‘creative’ means, which allow for certain citizens to realize their agency are inaccessible to the majority of citizens (Engin and Nielsen, 2008).

To act, defined as “to produce effects, fulfill functions or exert influence” (Engin and Nielsen, 2008; 22), ought to be investigated holistically with the act and the actor in mind. Context is a crucial factor in understanding acts of citizenships, the conditions that allow for the act to occur as a significant or not, the conditions that are part and parcel of co-creating the act. Engin and Nielsen (2008) provide three principles, which are crucial in studying acts of citizenship to provide insight on what constitutes an active citizen:

1. Acts of citizenship need to be interpreted through their surroundings and consequences. This includes investigating how subjects become activist or active through the scenes that are created. They make the distinction between active and activist citizens by arguing that “Active citizens act out already written scripts whilst activist citizens are creative and think beyond the law about justice” (Engin and Nielsen, 2008: 38).
2. “Acts of citizenship produce actors that become answerable to justice against injustice. Activist citizens undertake actions that affect the law that seeks to recognize and police them” (Engin and Nielsen, 2008: 38).
3. “Acts of citizenship do not need to be founded in law or enacted in the name of the law” (Engin and Nielsen, 2008; 39).

These principles allow us to recognize and investigate acts of citizenship recognized and celebrated by the *Mail & Guardian* founded outside of notions of rights and obligations of the state-controlled legality of citizenship. It is to investigate the construction of citizenship as a symbolic, political and social construction that is deeply rooted in the exchange of meaning and symbols. Couldry, arguing for the notion of ‘cultural citizenship’, says that citizenship is more than “a bundle of rights and obligations that formally define the legal status of a person” (drawing on Turner, 2002: 11). Couldry demonstrates that there is no specific set of factors that can be used to determine citizenship, which

makes the notion of citizenship more fluid than one, which is fixed into rights and obligations. He notes that factors such as media presence and fame, which have surfaced in the form of celebrity, have impacts on understandings of citizenship (Couldry 2003: 324). What is important to cultural citizenship is the question posed by Nick Stevenson (2002: 4), "what does it mean to belong to society?" (in Couldry 2003: 324), the significance of this question is that it begins to open up the space for further understanding how citizenship is constructed beyond the narrow but necessary discourse on rights and obligations.

This research attempts to obtain data to unpack notions of media attention, celebrity and inspiration, and interrogate the role of the media in establishing a particular kind of young, active citizen. The study rests on the assertion that the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* edition is participating in the construction of citizenship identities amongst a significant population group; a select group of young people who are seen as active in a context where young people have very limited agency to participate in economic or social institutions. This is done through an act of handpicking a few individuals and valorizing them as outstanding citizens worthy of emulation and subsequently attributing prestige to their actions – actions which are represented as acts of citizenship.

### **3. Methodology**

This research seeks to investigate the representations and constructions of citizenship within the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* in post-apartheid South Africa. I will employ a qualitative approach to obtaining data. A qualitative approach is concerned with obtaining meaning and interpretations to make a claim about the world. It involves interpreting data to obtain and understanding how meaning functions as opposed to quantitative data that draws on statistical research to make claims about patterns in society.

#### ***Qualitative research***

Qualitative research seeks to understand people as conscious, self-directing beings who are making sense of their realities (Babbie, 2013: 28). This methodological approach to research is concerned with describing and understanding how meaning circulates in society and its impact in how it informs and shapes peoples' realities. The qualitative approach is deeply rooted in phenomenology – the inquiry into consciousness, how and what people perceive their own realities as being central to knowledge production and research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Phenomenology asserts that if we are to study people, we ought to start with the assumption that people themselves are involved in a process of making sense of their realities (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that quantitative research excludes the research subjects' interpretations of their own reality (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

Crucial to qualitative research and the circulation of meaning in society is studying communication processes. Communication is an important field for research as communications are crucial to the organization of contemporary life because they shape and inform how we understand social structures, culture and the world as well as ourselves (Deacon et.al., 1999). The news media are important institutions for circulating meaning within society because they communicate with citizens and governments and they also (like other popular media) circulate cultural symbols.

In modern democracies where political parties must compete for the support of fluctuating voters and where social movements continually press to have their views and concerns added to the political agenda, the mass media have become the major public spaces where images are massaged, policies promoted, events made sense of and issues debated (Deacon et.al. 1999; 01).

This research adopts a qualitative approach to data collection to understand the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* as a cultural symbol. It also seeks to understand what the individuals in the editions make of their own realities and the meaning audiences attach to the social practice of valorization within this society.

## ***Research design***

This study will 1) investigate the narrative strategies used to construct these 200 young South Africans as exemplary and inspirational through a content analysis, and 2) Interview groups of young people to find out how they receive the messages of inspiration and emulation imbedded in these profiles and 3) interview the young people who appear in the edition to elicit their views on the edition itself and how they respond to their representations. I have used multiple methods to obtain data as a means of ensuring rich data, this method is referred to as triangulation.

### ***1. Content analysis***

Textual analysis is descriptive in that it involves unpacking the text to find metaphors and mechanisms to elicit underlying messages. Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Hansen and Cottle, 1998: 94). The criticism of content analysis as a way of obtaining data is centered on questioning the extent to which meaning can be deciphered ‘objectively’. However, content analysis that establishes aspects of the text for analysis involves making a subjective selection that is informed by a theoretical framework and ideas that speak to the research (Hansen and Cottle, 1998). Content analysis is a quantitative method by nature because the purpose is to “count the occurrences of specified characteristics or dimensions of texts, and through this to be able to say something about the messages, images, representations of such texts and their wider social significance” (Hansen and Cottle, 1998: 95). However, it is not merely concerned with numbers because it is more concerned with the significance of the counted meaning (Hansen and Cottle, 1998).

Content analysis, just like Critical Discourse Analysis, also is important for unmasking the power of language in naturalizing certain meanings over others (Janks, 2005: 332). Where the naturalizations



in a text are not natural for us as readers or listeners, we are at an advantage in that this teaches us that what texts construct are only versions of reality (Janks, 2005: 332). Content analysis seeks to analyze the manner in which individuals and institutions use language in ways that maintain or challenge power (Richardson, 2007).

### ***1.1 Sampling of profiles***

This research analyses the 2015 edition of the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* to unpack the themes and patterns of description and valorization used by the writers and editors. This will include a reading of the 200 profiles as well as the editor's note and advertorials that accompany the edition. I have purposefully selected the 2015 edition because it is celebrating its tenth year as South Africa was celebrating 21 years of democracy. While the content analysis does not include the previous editions and is not a historical reading, the 2015 edition does speak to South African issues at a time and plight of social instabilities that are noted in chapter 1.

The purpose of this method was to obtain data that would inform the focus group discussion with the readers of the edition and the in-depth interviews with individuals who were on the list. I used the edition to provide an overview of the 2015 edition and the editorial accompanying it and to decipher the dominant themes in the way the people in the edition are represented by the *Mail & Guardian*. This included determining the characteristics that are attributed to the individuals as a technique of valorizing and thereby positioning them as celebrity heroes as espoused by celebrity theory mentioned in the previous chapter. I also determined the kind of achievements that make them outstanding citizens who are worthy of emulation and inspirational. This method obtained data that informed how the *Mail & Guardian* represents the "acts of citizenship" in portraying the 200 young South Africans as active citizens with the capacity to realize their agency.

## ***2. Focus group interview***

Focus groups are a meeting of a small number of individuals in a space to participate in a discussion on a particular topic with the intention of eliciting their insights on a particular topic. Focus groups have served as an important qualitative research methodological tool because unlike experiment setups that raised a lot of ethical concerns, focus groups provide insights into a certain topic in the presence of a moderator (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996). Focus groups are rooted within qualitative

and phenomenological traditions that take seriously the idea that people are conscious self-directing entities who are constantly making sense of their own realities (Babbie, 2013: 28). Focus groups are important because they provide a space to gain insight into the perceptions people make of their own realities and how they ascribe meaning to certain social practices.

Focus group discussion on media consumption and reception analysis requires a set up where people engage in everyday talk about a particular media text, such focus group discussion also includes reflections about those methods of making sense of texts (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996). The purpose of focus groups is to elicit responses from the readers about how they respond to the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* list. However, it is important within replicating everyday lived conditions to take into account how experiences of race, class, gender and sexuality determine how people interact with each other (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996).

## ***2.1 Sampling and recruitment of groups***

I used purposive sampling to make sure that the people who participated in the focus group were a diverse group of people who are within the target market of the newspaper. My decision to focus on Rhodes University is because university students fall within the target market of the *Mail & Guardian* and because the newspaper is read and distributed widely at Rhodes University. The reason for choosing Rhodes University is two reasons; firstly, university students are a crucial target market of the *Mail & Guardian* because they constitute elite members of society in South Africa who have access to institutions of higher learning. Secondly, it is for convenience as I am currently located in Grahamstown. The purpose of selecting a diverse group of young people who read the edition is to ensure a gathering of individuals who would provide relevant information and who represent the interests of young people. The focus group discussion was an easy discussion as the individuals were opinionated about the edition, these are individuals who follow the edition and so they reflected on the edition with ease.

## ***2.2 Focus group interview guide***

In the focus group discussion, I deciphered what the individuals thought about the list in general. It was an open discussion that was mostly informed about the issues that people brought up regarding the edition. I went in with the intention to ask what their thoughts were on the list, what they thought of the individuals who were on the list, if they were 'inspired' by the individuals who were on the list and if they thought the edition spoke to them as young South Africans.

The data that was crucial for this part of the methodology was to test notions of inspiration as theorized by Lockwood and Kunda (2001) and how messages of inspiration are received. The focus group discussion was to also decipher how readers consumed the cultural symbol of celebrity, or the individual that is valorized by the media as an outstanding citizen. It was also to test notions of Marshall that celebrity functions as a form of vicarious reinforcement by eliciting from the individuals if the profiled individuals represent something that they lack in their own lives (Marshall, 1997). This data was also to test the notion of media capital from the perspective of a general reader, as none of the individuals were experts on any particular field as that they were mostly humanities students and two of whom were journalism students. Others come from disciplines such as English, politics and languages. The notion of media capital was tested by asking the individuals the kind of power that the profiled individuals had by being featured on the list.

## ***3. Interviews***

I conducted in-depth interviews with 15 individuals who have been featured on the list to find out what they think of their representation and the impact the list has had in their lives. I have interviewed individuals from the previous years to ensure that I got a sense of how the list has changed over time and how the different people have responded to it over time. I invited a wide range of interviewees because most of them are busy and hard to reach. I conducted Skype, telephonic interviews and face-to-face interview with the individuals. The interview set-ups varied from interview to interview and in some cases, I did live up to the first title of the project by taking some of them out for lunch.

### 3.1 Interview guide

The interviews were semi-structured, which means we discussed broad themes with the participants but the themes were discussed in a manner that allowed for the interviewees to speak as candidly as possible about their insights of the edition. After conducting a content analysis of the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans 2015*, I used some of the themes to guide the interviews. Individual interviews were also informed by the profiles of the individuals and how they were featured in the edition. All interviewees were questioned about their thoughts on the edition, what being on the edition meant for them and if their views of the edition changed after they were featured and how they understand the notion of ‘inspirational citizens’. I also explored whether or not they perceive the message of inspiration embedded in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* edition to be effective.

Some of the individuals I interviewed are academics and public figures that are used to doing interviews with the media and might be prone to giving media-friendly responses instead of being thoroughly honest. I asked open-ended questions to allow room for individuals to interpret the questions for themselves and answer in ways that might be new to and to direct the conversation based on some of those responses.

In these interviews I sought to find out broadly, like with the focus group discussion what the individuals thought about the list, particularly before they made it on to the list and their thoughts before the list. I ask before and after, partly to determine what being on the list meant for them, a question I also asked explicitly to decipher if the list comes with any social capital, testing Couldry's (2003) conception of media capital. I also asked the individuals to define the kind of young person they think makes it on to the list, this was to confirm or test the characteristics and achievements I deciphered from the content analysis on the tropes used to valorize the individuals in the list. This part of methodology was also meant to shed light on the notion of celebrity as espoused by Rojek, Marshall and Turner from the perspective of the individuals who were valorized by asking them to reflect on themselves being represented as aspiring and outstanding citizens particularly in South Africa.

### ***3.2 Recording the interviews***

Before I started each interview, and the focus group, I asked permission from the participants to record the sessions for purposes of research. Although I asked for participants' personal details such as age, education and careers, I assured the participants anonymity in the thesis unless they agreed to disclosure of their names.

#### ***My role as moderator***

My role as the moderator of the focus group and in-depth interviews was to facilitate a conversation between a group of people and a one-on-one conversation with individuals. I did already know many of the people involved in my research and was conscious of the fact that it is important for a moderator to reflect on their role in the process of trying to understanding how meaning circulates because they also bring in their own subjectivities to the table.

#### ***Data analysis***

This research will investigate the construction and reception analysis of citizenship in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans*. The data from the content analysis will thus be concerned with assessing the ways in which;

- The 200 young South Africans are constructed as exemplary individuals.
- The 200 young South Africans are constructed as distinctly successful and inspirational.

The interviews will assess how:

- The individuals who were on the list made sense of their representation on the edition and their positions as citizens in South Africa.

Focus group discussion will elicit how:

- Fellow young South African university students who fall within the target market of the *Mail & Guardian* respond to the supplementary edition and how it has shaped or informed their ideas of citizenship as young South Africans.

## **4. Findings**

This chapter will report on the findings from the data collection. The chapter starts with the content analysis of the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* 2015 edition by providing a broad analysis of the layout and the edition. I will then provide an in-depth analysis of the characteristics and achievements used by the *Mail & Guardian* to valorize the 200 Young South Africans as outstanding citizens. The chapter will provide a report back on the dominant themes that emerged from the interviews with individuals who were featured on the list followed by the outcomes from the focus group discussion with readers of the edition.

### ***4.1 Content Analysis***

#### ***Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans 2015 layout***

The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* is a tabloid-sized newspaper with a bold and colourful banner title. The edition is an 80-page newspaper, and the first four pages are made up of the editor's note, credits to the *Mail & Guardian* staff, the contents page, a note on the selection process and the acknowledgement of sponsors and their logos. Other than the adverts from the sponsors, the *Mail & Guardian* has an advert to download the edition "to your iPad or Android tablet" which appears 12 times throughout the edition.

The Alumni section and the Rising Star section are new sections and do not constitute part of the '200'. The alumni section is "a look back at some of the people who have featured in Young South Africans over the past nine editions" and has two profiles on each page with the exception of one candidate sharing a page with the *Mail & Guardian* advert on the application. The section profiles 15 individuals who also go on to offer "advice to the 2015 nominees". Their profiles are reflective of their achievements over the years since they were first profiled. The Rising Star section profiles 16 young people who are still at school, it lists young people who are "leaders" in their communities, "excelling students", entrepreneurs, artists, and those who represent the country in sport at various levels. The editor notes that the Rising Star section is for children who are still in primary school and high school but don't get to make it onto the '200' because "they lack the experience of others on the list. This does not diminish the magnitude of their achievement and so we created a category just for

them this year” (Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans, 2015). This section covered 16 profiles, 10 of whom appear to be learners wearing school uniform. The Rising Star and all the other 10 sections appear with four profiles on each page, unless on the few occasions where there is an advert.

The edition profiles 231 individuals in 12 categories in total. The 200 profiles are arranged across the categories as follows: Science and technology profiles 30 individuals; the Media and Film section profiles 24 individuals; the Arts and Culture section profiled 24 individuals; the Business and Law section profiles 20 individuals; sport profiles 19 individuals; Environment section profiles 16 individuals; Health section profiles 16 individuals; Civil Society profiles 14 individuals; Politics and Government section profiles 14 individuals and Education section profiles 13 individuals. Most of the images accompanying the profiles are captioned “supplied” and next to all the images are people’s twitter handles or websites for people to further contact the individuals or follow their work.

### ***Sponsorship and advertorial: Corporate Social Responsibility***

The City of Johannesburg municipality is the main sponsor of the edition with Crawford Schools sponsoring the Rising Star section; the Johannesburg Youth Orchestra Company is acknowledged for sponsoring the venue and entertainment at the 200 Young South Africans event hosted in Johannesburg; Khaya FM was the marketing partner and sponsored the media and film section; Medshield sponsored the Health section; Momentum sponsored the education section; the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) sponsored the new Alumni section and Place in the Sun sponsored wine at the event.

The Johannesburg Youth Orchestra Company and the Place in The Sun appear on the acknowledgements with brief summaries of the company's’ Corporate Social Responsibility projects geared towards educating young people in South Africa. The City of Johannesburg municipality’s logo appears at the top all the pages with the profiles, and the last six pages of the edition where they lay out their plans in “mobilizing Joburg’s youth” and “keeping the youth free”. Other sponsors appear throughout the edition before the sections that they sponsor, for example Crawford Schools has a full-page advert before the Rising Stars section advertising the private school followed by a congratulatory statement, “Crawford Schools congratulates all our current and past students on the



200 Young award nominations. You've done us proud". Their logo also appears at the top of each page on the Rising star section. PRASA has a full-page ad before the Alumni section with a bold tagline, "changing long distance travel experience". Momentum's ad before the education section is a full page describing the company's corporate social responsibility geared towards "investment in quality education" for young people and Medshield's ad is an image portraying father and daughter and the tagline "assuring all our members of the best possible health care, for nearly 50 years". Khaya FM appears with a full page before the Media and Film section congratulating nominees and encouraging them to "find the strength to keep going and inspire others".

These companies are using this platform to assert their Corporate Social Responsibility projects and using the *Mail & Guardian* platform to assert this. These companies are aligning themselves as part of people who are concerned with the future of this country, they are using this as a publicity mechanism to align their brands with national values of unity and appearing to being committed to solving the problems of the country. They are drawing on the media capital provided by the *Mail & Guardian* platform and the subsequent excitement and buzz on social media to gain visibility. This highlights the need for Couldry's question about the significance of media capital: "Is media exposure a significant, or even a predominant, form of symbolic capital in [various] field(s)?" (2003: 670). In the case of the *Mail & Guardian*, we see that if companies are willing to pay or sponsor platforms to attain visibility and appear in the media and to be seen as active on issues constructed to be crucial to the country – the future of the youth – then media exposure is a significant and predominant form of symbolic capital.

It is also important to take into account that the *Mail & Guardian* is struggling to financially sustain itself in a very competitive media market in South Africa. In this edition particularly, we see that the *Mail & Guardian* is using the public platform it has as symbolic capital in the Bourdieuan sense (Bourdieu, 1998) to be sold to other businesses in other fields and industries other than journalism. The media exposure as symbolic capital is not only afforded to the sponsors but the individuals who appear on the list as outstanding citizens. The next section highlights the characteristics used to valorize the 200 young South Africans as outstanding, characteristics that are at the core of this project to recognize and celebrate young South Africans.

## ***Characteristics of the Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans***

In looking at how the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* constructs the individuals profiled in the edition, I found eight significant characteristics and achievements used to profile the 200 individuals. Here I draw on the characteristics of the kind of the individuals who get to make it onto the list, and how they are represented by the *Mail & Guardian*. Consequently, while heroic figures are distinguished by their achievements or by “the great simple virtues of their character”, celebrities are also said to be differentiated “mainly by trivia of personality” (Turner, 2001: 5). Celebrities are often constructed as personalities with rare characteristics different from everyone else that warrant them media exposure or as stars with outstanding achievement making them distinct from everyone else (Turner, 2001: 5). The rarified characteristics of celebrities and their outstanding achievements are also prevalent in the characteristics used by the *Mail & Guardian* to represent the personalities and achievements of the 200 young South Africans as stars.

The eight characteristics and achievements attributed to the profiled individuals that recur are 1) Committed to making a difference; 2) Educated and Well-travelled; 3) Excellent and Renowned; 4) Innovative and trendy; 5) New and Upcoming; 6) Resilient risk takers; 7) Privileged and Conscious and 8) Influential.

### ***Committed to making a difference***

One of the key characteristics of the young people profiled in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* is that they embody the idea of “making a difference”, as noted in the call for nominations, these are “young people who are making a difference in their field or in their communities” (Mail & Guardian, 2015). This trope is rooted in the idea of young people acknowledging the problems within their societies or fields of influence and coming up with the solutions to “make a difference”. The notion is also linked to these individuals having themselves suffered and struggled. The Rising Star section profiles young school children that have endured difficulties in the communities in which they live and have decided to start initiatives to eradicate the very same problems that affect them. There are also individuals who have encountered crime and poverty, and are determined to ensure that others won’t have it as difficult as they’ve had it. The edition profiles young people who are entrepreneurs and are addressing social issues in their business ventures and individuals who are

creating employment for young people and providing them with skills through their business ventures. The most common thread of the individuals in the edition profiled are individuals who are concerned with how to make the world “a better place” in their business and career pursuits. In essence these are young people who have identified problems in society and are using their time and energy to solve these issues.

Some of these individuals are reported to have gone abroad to universities from where they returned to apply what they learnt in South Africa or their communities as a way of giving back. There is a great sense of nationalism and patriotism about being committed to their fellow citizens and making conditions better for other citizens. The profiles are of people who are committed to finding local solutions to South Africa’s problems such as young lawyers who are committed to public interest law to address social inequalities in South Africa. The section further profiles people who are thriving in global or international markets and business and are determined to share their skills or help others do the same. Ensuring that the less privileged citizens in this country has access to legal, education and health institutions. The edition also profiles influential young people who are directors of NGOs and other major South African businesses or entities and are seen to be using this influence to bring about change that is geared towards resolving the social issues of inequality and poverty in the country.

Others are constructed as people with a reputation for activism and advocates for human rights. Here one finds young people who are committed to educating other citizens on a variety of topics, from the Constitution and democratic practices to ensuring that others have access to education by assisting disadvantaged communities apply to universities, offering career advice and establishing relationships with universities and schools; mentoring other young people or running mentorship programs; doctors who are dedicated to working in poor communities and giving back where their skills are mostly needed. The idea of individuals making a difference is rooted in making an impact and leaving behind a legacy, the idea that one has to be committed to something bigger than oneself.

### ***Educated and well-travelled***

The second recurring theme I have identified is that the 200 are individuals who are well travelled, a large number of the profiled individuals have studied abroad and returned. There are a lot who have received prestigious scholarships and have studied at esteemed universities abroad and locally. They

have received Mandela Rhodes scholarships, Rhodes scholarships, Fulbright scholarships and the recently launched Mandela Washington Fellowship, founded by President of the United States, Barack Obama. In fact, 90% of the 200 profiles have senior degrees from prestigious universities. The key thing for individuals who have studied abroad that is always highlighted is that they came back to South Africa to share their skills and use them to give back to the country. There are scientists who are internationally recognized and have attended conferences abroad. While education as a form of achievement is a recurring theme among the profiles, it is often coupled with having travelled abroad. Studying abroad and having travelled abroad to attend a conference, participate in competitions or receive awards are recurring themes of the individuals who are seen to be waving the South African flag high internationally. Some of the individuals are constructed as individuals who have managed to beat the odds to receive an education and being the first among their families to graduate.

### ***Acclaimed and excellent***

The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* profiles individuals who have received awards and have been recognized elsewhere, locally and abroad, for their “hard work and excellence”. They are represented as individuals with innovative ideas that lead to them winning awards, they are people who have been recognized for their work through philanthropic awards; received prestigious scholarships and have studied at esteemed universities; different forms of sport performed at various levels, from provincial, national, international championships and Olympics. The profiles include awards such as sportsman of the year awards and businessperson of the year awards. One individual for example is noted as having been recognized in the *Financial Mail's Little Black Book* of 300 professionals and the *MTN/Mail and Guardian 100 Women* in South Africa. Beyond winning awards, there are individuals who have been invited abroad to perform, share their work and share knowledge on international or global platforms such as at the United Nations, which are deemed as esteemed. Their excellence is affirmed and measured in the form of recognitions that come in being featured on prominent lists, having won awards and having a platform abroad to share their ideas, exhibit their art, play sport at international tournaments and working with reputable companies and brands. Some of the profiled come from disadvantaged backgrounds and are celebrated for having managed to occupy influential and prominent positions at a young age, which is seen as a privilege for people of their age and background. Radio personality Redi Tlhabi notes in the alumni section,

“It is very important for South Africans to know and see young people who are exerting their potential at changing the world. We have a myriad of problems and it is crucial that we also communicate our success so that future generations can strive for excellence.”

### ***Innovative and trendy***

The individuals in the edition are represented also as keeping up with trends and as innovative in introducing ideas. Profiles present the individuals as people who are creating opportunities for themselves and others where there are no opportunities for employment in places where there are few resources. In this sense, these individuals are profiled as breaking new ground in realizing their agency by being active citizens who can break away and transcend the conventional ways of doing things and structural problems that categorize individuals according to their class, race, gender and age. The individuals include entrepreneurs who have started businesses or created systems that draw from the environmental conditions within communities to solve problems within those communities and have managed to received funding for these projects; researchers who are doing well in their fields and are also dedicated to producing knowledge that will break new ground in science and technology, health and environmental matters. There are also entrepreneurs who are coming up with new ideas such as mobile applications and young people who are occupying influential and managerial positions within the media industry. These innovative and trendy individuals are also exploring digital platforms and using online platforms to benefit their organizations, NGOs or the companies they work for. There are people who are keeping up-to-date with the trends and fashion and are seen as “contributing towards the diverse culture of South Africa”.

### ***New and upcoming***

Although the individuals in the profiles are constructed as excellent, established and young, they are also represented as individuals who are coming up and “on their way to success” within their fields and communities. They are represented as those who are yet to attain even greater things, and as such people whom the reader should be on the lookout for. The list acknowledges and celebrates individuals who seem to be in the early stages of making a difference or excelling within their fields. One finds media personalities “with a growing visibility” and filmmakers who are telling South

Africa's story in multiple and creative ways whom people should take note of. The list also notes possible future plans, projects or championships and competitions that they will be participating in. In the sport category there is mention of some individuals who are juggling studying at university and their involvement in sport and the importance of studying as having "something to fall back on". Even in noting the excellence and acclaim of the individuals in the list, the list notes that these individuals are visionaries who are committed to growing and becoming better, the reader is invited to expect more excellence from the individuals.

### ***Resilient risk-takers***

The list celebrates and acknowledges young people who have taken risks "to follow their hearts" or "passion" and have encountered difficulties along the way to achieving their dreams. The list involves individuals who have embarked on business and career pursuits that were regarded as risky at the time (Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans, 2015). One such example is Mogau Seshoene who "finally quit her job and began to channel all her energies towards breathing life into her business" (2015: 28). The profiles involve people who started off with little but managed to grow their business into respectable brands. The profiles also note the challenges that the individuals encounter along their journeys and emphasize that they have triumphed in the end. As a result of these representations, the reader is also invited to take risks to pursue their goals. One profile of a young writer and motivational speaker notes, "I was trying to make young people realize that regardless of what situation you come from you can still make it. If I can write a book with a Blackberry phone, what is stopping you from realizing your vision?" The Arts and Culture section profiles artists who have managed to commit themselves to making art and are able to make a living out of their craft and thereby challenging ideas of broke artists, and other individuals who are helping artists manage their funds thus making a difference. They are represented as people who take risks by jumping into the unknown to launch projects. We are invited to acknowledge individuals who have taken risks that have paid off regardless of the obstacles. The profiles acknowledge people who always had an urge to solve problems from a young age, and took risks that might not have always paid off, but took them nonetheless. This characteristic is prevalent among individuals who are seen to be breaking through the ceiling and succeeding in circumstances where their gender, class, race or age would've historically made it structurally impossible.

### ***Privileged and conscious***

The individuals featured in the list are represented as individuals who are in positions of privilege relative to the majority of South Africans, and are conscious of this fact and feel a sense of responsibility to use their privilege “to move the country forward”. Their drive towards social justice in the country is driven by dissatisfaction with the current socio-political conditions of the country and they are using the privilege they have to access political and democratic institutions to speak up against inequalities. Victoria Barry is a fundraiser who’s noted as having “felt privileged that her dad was able to afford to buy her a prosthetic leg and realized that many children are not so blessed. She then decided that she wanted to raise money for the organization Jumping Kids which provides prosthetic legs to children” (2015: 33). Another such profile is Nomzamo Zondo in the Civil Society section who notes, “Very early in my life, I decided that I would fight against social injustice. I decided to study law because I believed that it could assist in balancing the scales of social justice... I will continue as long as children live in buildings that are not safe for human habitation and people go to sleep hungry” (2015: 31). The 200 Young South Africans are individuals who enjoy privileges that are not enjoyed by many young people – access to education, employment and funding opportunities to startup businesses or study abroad – the edition profiles such individuals and underlines that they are deliberately using their privileges to contribute positively to society.

### ***Influential***

A recurring trait about the 200 Young People other than enjoying privileges that are not enjoyed by the majority of the population is that they occupy influential positions within South Africa. They sit on various committee boards, are directors of reputable companies, are directors and founders of Non-Governmental Organizations; write books or columns for national magazines and newspapers; are founders of media firms with growing reputations and are creating opportunities for other young people locally. They are represented as individuals who share their work on a national, global or international platform; shape national policies or lead influential businesses in South Africa. This means that their views and decisions have the potential to change views, affect policies or get projects funded and implemented.

## ***Content analysis summary***

The trait that is central to the recognition and celebration of the profiled individuals is the commitment to making a difference with a particular focus on addressing the social inequalities in the country. The individuals who are in positions of being committed to making a difference, as represented in this edition, are educated and well travelled as they have studied in prestigious local and international universities and received various renowned scholarships. They are excellent individuals who have received awards on local and internal platforms and have been featured on other lists that recognize outstanding individuals. The young people who profiled in the edition are innovative and trendy individuals who are keeping up to date with information, technology and the various trends including fashion. Because the notion of youth is central to the edition, the young people who are profiled are characterized as new and upcoming and as risk takers who are resilient to challenges to failure. Another characteristic that is prevalent among all the profiled individuals as represented in the edition is that they are individuals who enjoy the privileges that are not afforded to many South Africans and they are conscious of this fact, in fact, it seems to be their privilege that propels them to make a difference in a country characterized by inequalities. Last but not least, the young people featured in the edition occupy influential positions that allow them to participate in democratic process and the economy of the country.

The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* in essence portrays the young people who make up a small number of the population. These individuals constitute less than 6 % of the population that have access to institutions of higher learning thereby making them privileged individuals in relative contrast to the majority of the population. The individuals in the edition are active citizens who are in positions to enjoy their rights and exert their responsibility towards the state. Their achievements and characteristics make them ideal citizens who are worthy of being emulated.



## 4.2. Interviews

I conducted interviews with 15 individuals who were on the list to find out how they made sense of the representations of themselves as well as their views and interpretations of the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* edition. The interviews revealed four broad themes. The first was Media Exposure as Social Capital, which is the idea that the list contained media capital that allowed them the social mobility to rise up the ranks within their various fields. Secondly, although these individuals enjoyed the perks of being featured on the list, they were ambivalent about the list as they felt that the list also embodied Elitism and Exclusion. Thirdly, because the individuals in the list are valorized as ideal citizens who are worthy of being emulated, they reflected on what being a symbol of Inspiration and Renown meant for them. Lastly, the individuals reflected on one of the central themes of the edition noted in the call for nominations and the content analysis, the notion of being committed to making a Difference.

### *Media exposure as social capital*

The *Mail & Guardian* provides individuals with the symbolic power that comes with media exposure. The newspaper has acquired a reputation as a credible newspaper within South African discourse and abroad because the newspaper is also linked to the *Mail & Guardian* franchise which was established in the UK, as a result an appearance on the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* offers individuals symbolic capital that gives them social capital to move around society. Individuals who were on the list confirmed this in saying:

James: It was really nice being profiled on the list, I got invited to nice dinners and met some really cool people as a result.

Thabang: You get invited to cool conferences or spaces with important and influential people. You are seen as someone who matters. What you say is taken more seriously than before I was on the list. Before I used to write opinion pieces on my blog and the national media would pick once in a while them up. Post list: I found myself being asked to write for the *Mail & Guardian* and the tagline at the bottom is that I was on the list before they even mentioned my occupation. You get the sense that now you matter and you don't even have to say that you were on the list. You get a sense that people identify you as someone who was

on the list before anything else about you. The crowning thing is always that oh yeah you were on the list. It increases your value, maybe not in the entire society but in the civic and media space. People think oh you were on the list; you must be really cool. You must be smart. Come tell us things and let us listen to you. And even though all of that would have happened without the list, the list has certainly made it easier.

Jabulani: It has also been helpful for my CV. I mean the last two jobs I got, my bosses always mentioned the top 200 list wherever they introduced me. My current boss said that he saw me on the list and took interest in my work from there, and that's how he reached out to me.

Tom: There is a kind of recognition and benefit that is not physical when you appear on the list. People literally think you are one of the top 200 young South Africans in the entire country.

Another individual notes that although she made it onto another prestigious list, the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* provided her with more social capital:

Phumi: I was on the Young African Leadership Initiative which was founded by Obama and you would think that is a bigger achievement but I can tell you now that I got more benefits and opportunities from being on the *Mail & Guardian* list than the fellowship.

A teacher spoke about how she uses the visibility of having been on the list to get in touch with individuals and invite them to speak to her learners:

Emily: One thing it has helped me with as a teacher, which I try to do is invite people to my school to speak to my learners. I say I am so and so and I saw you on this list, I was also on the list in this year and I think you are so great. And people are always like oh I know you! So it has created a form of a community. That's when I realized that people really notice this thing and it can work to help me.

The media capital that comes with the media exposure of being on the list is significant because the readership of the *Mail & Guardian* is a significantly influential population. Individuals who were featured on the list reflected on this:

Peter: The truth is that the *Mail & Guardian* readers are in positions of power, they are managers and bosses. So when they see you on the list, it gives you clout to move about and a means to be recognized.

Jane: I took the list home to my mother and she didn't get the magnitude of what it meant to be in the list. My sister who is in an influential position understood the importance of the list and what it meant for me as a young South African.

Ntombi: The university management made it a thing. I got a personal email from the dean and other senior management staff members congratulating me and I remember thinking "this must be really important then".

Sipho: I do think making it on the list is an achievement because they get thousands of applications and they have to cut it down to 200. That means they have to see something in you that is worth their readers to see for you to be selected.

Although the list provides individuals with the social capital to be viewed as significant, appearing on the list, individuals also felt that they were validated and that legitimized their work. When asked what being on the list meant for them personally individuals responded saying it was affirming:

Joy: Anyone who is doing any work needs to know that his or her work is important. I got a lot of affirmations on the social media congratulating me and for me that was affirming.

Bruce: It was affirming. It said to me that you are in the right direction especially because I didn't know about the nomination so there was no pressure and it was my first year lecturing. So it was a great nod to say keep moving.

Scott: It was very ego stroking. I actually have it on my wall framed, which means it was kind of important. How I made sense of it was that someone cared to share the story and celebrate a young person making strides. The fact that someone thought the story was worth sharing was feedback to me that my work was something that, at least he or she, thought was important. For me, it was positive feedback that people were celebrated in public for that which they practiced. So I was chuffed. I wasn't working on being on the list, so it was a great nod.

Liz: I was torn when I found out because I was just offered a big job in corporate abroad and then I got the nomination as I was contemplating the job. I remember thinking that this is big, this is nine years of my life and now I am being recognized for it. So being on the list affirmed my work and made me stay on to continue being committed to my own country.

The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* carries so much significance as a form of prestige that some individuals who made it onto the list, thought they were not good enough to be on the list or that they hadn't worked hard enough to deserve it. Two individuals noted:

Scott: I don't think I did enough work to be on that list. Especially when one thinks of the kind of people who make it on that list. When I first heard I was going to be profiled, I was like geez, and what have I done with my life for me to be on that list. I was hoping it was not a lie or a prank.

Thabo: My reaction when the journalist from the *Mail & Guardian* called me was, "Why is the *Mail & Guardian* calling me? Are you sure you have the right name? Because I don't think I have done enough work for me to be on that list. Thanks but I think it is a mistake".

Another one who thought they worked hard enough, believed that they were worthy of being on the list:

Thabang: I never thought that I didn't deserve being there. I always thought that I deserved to be there. I should be there. I knew it long before I made it that my work was worthy of being in those kinds of lists.

The significance of the list is such that it has become what people aspire to, and that being featured on the list becomes important for individuals. An individual talking about her friends confirmed this:

Emily: I know a lot of people who want to get onto the list. Like friends ask me to nominate them every year so they can be on that list. It's like they need the affirmation so they can be seen and join the cool crew. I mean the title is something like 'movers and shakers', who wouldn't want to be on that list?!

Although the list offers benefits – social capital, affirmation and visibility – some individuals are aware that the list is also exclusionary and elitist, but are ambivalent and overlook what they

perceive to be a damaging representation for the overarching benefits provided by the list. Individuals noted:

Phumi: When they called me I started to think about how when I was younger I wanted to be on the list but now I am actually not comfortable with the list anymore because of how inherently elitist it really is. But what swayed me in the end was that this list brings with it a lot of social capital and for the kind of work that I do the social capital comes in handy when applying for things like grants and access to exclusive networks. So I thought I can leverage this list to make my work better. I thought even though I have issues with the list, there are many others who don't and had to do bigger picture thinking.

Thabang: Even growing up I never attended award ceremonies because of the people who were always being left out who I knew were excellent in some ways. So I am honestly ambivalent about the list.

Peck: The people who need the social capital that the list provides don't make it. For me, the list provides to people who already have a reserve of social capital and not to those who mostly need it.

The ambivalence about the media exposure, the visibility and social capital that the list provides at the exclusion of the majority of young South Africans who are unable to attain the status that is accorded the 200 is a strong factor in how those who've been on the list consider their position.

### ***Elitism and exclusion***

The *Mail & Guardian* readership consists of middle to upper class South Africans and the edition reaches a select portion of the South African population who occupy influential positions in the economy, civil society and governments. This gives the publication social capital for people seeking access to opportunities because they are somehow introduced to an influential and elite population as outstanding young people to look out for. The list represents upward social mobility for a lot of young people, in that it promises to open up opportunities to move up in class rank and within their respective careers. Inherent to ideas of upward social mobility and the elite target audience of the newspaper is the reality that those who do not fit into any of these models and can't be represented

on the list are bound to be excluded from the social mobility and the media capital that the list affords – or so the following individuals thought:

Thabang: The list is problematic because it is inherently elitist because of the people who get to do nomination; you must have access to the internet and we know that in South Africa not everyone has access to the internet. My friends nominated me because they were in privileged positions to do so.

Phumi: When the list started I wanted to be on the list. I aspired to be on the list but when I came to university and started growing up, I started to think about this list and I realized how elitist this list really is. You look at the people who are on the list and it's a certain kind of person. It's very exclusionary. There are kids in townships, rural areas and even urban area who don't have the social capital that I have to be recognized or featured on the list.

Beck: Only people with privilege make it on this list. Look at the civil society list, you don't find people who don't have registered NGOs. You don't find township people. Those people won't be featured and they should.

The idea that the list excludes the majority of young South Africans, provoked quite strong feelings among some of my respondents. One noted that he chose to prioritize his own personal struggle in a climate characterized by inequalities:

Bruce: Those who don't have dreams of coming out of where they are, are wasting time. You might as well commit suicide. What's the point? There are things that need to change structurally and I'm all for that collective struggle but there is the other struggle that we don't like to talk about and that is personal struggle. My story is driven by the fact that I was driven to get out of the township. I put myself through school from grade 7 to matric. I used to work as a tuck-shop assistant because my mom was sick. I knew what I wanted and was willing to do anything. I didn't let myself be consumed by issues of bread and butter. I didn't have time to feel sorry for myself. I think that is a waste of time. Hustle is something I learnt early in life so I hustled even in school, because I went to a bad school. It was either that or crime, you choose.

This respondent further notes:

Bruce: It was hardcore survival. It is a tiring experience because one is always surrounded by negativity. In the township you always see peers and people who made it take care of everyone

around them because they are the breadwinners. I realized that that model wasn't going to work for me. Even my little sisters, I told them that I won't be responsible for them, I can help but you are not my responsibility. And by help I mean you have to do most of the work and all I do is help with the 10 percent otherwise I am helping them by feeding them free shit. That's why I don't pay people by the streets. While you are out working your ass off and paying taxes they are sitting around waiting on you and they don't even pay tax. And the guy probably spends his money on alcohol and cigarettes. I don't drink. I don't smoke. Why am I supporting his lifestyle? We all have to grind. Ubuntu for me means bring something to the table. And I am talking about people who can offer something therefore I am talking about anyone who is an adult. You are not mentally or physically disabled. You are capable of doing something. You have no excuse. There are people who were thrown into the bin at birth and they are living beautifully now.

Another individual argues that the majority of young South Africans are not taking advantage of the opportunities given to them post-apartheid because they are concerned with what their parents suffered during apartheid:

Donald: As young black people we have so many opportunities that we are squandering because we want things to be easy because our parents suffered. So what? Who cares? The ANC doesn't care; the DA also doesn't care. Life is not for the weak minded or the emotionally unstable. A lot of us who come from poor backgrounds make it worse for ourselves by insisting that it should be better and that someone else should do it. You have to do the best with what you have where you are.

This individual further observed:

Donald: The story of poverty and limitations in this country is old. We must get over it. I can't be like aaw... I was the only one to do this or that, there are people with worse struggles. So just because I got into the *Mail & Guardian 200 young South Africans* doesn't mean I struggled the most. The difference is that I did some work that got me noticed and therefore got me there. The difference with someone else that wasn't on that list is that maybe they are just not working hard enough for them to be recognized by someone.

However, three individuals problematize the narrative that individuals have to work hard to be successful because the structure of the economy and South Africa's history play major roles in

positioning individuals within various classes. They note that the opportunities they have had are unattainable for the vast majority of the country:

Ntombi: There is no effort by the *Mail & Guardian* to break new ground in challenging our idea of success. It can't be the space one needs to uphold as a space for modeling an ideal citizen especially when it is producing damaging stereotypes about poverty and conflates whatever freedom people have to suggest that the structure no longer matters. At this rate, it might get to the point where some of us who have been on that list might have to resist it publicly. If it tells my little brothers in the township that they are where they are because of their own doing and that they can never attain being a model citizen, then some of us might have to resist it publicly.

Phumi: The list is inspirational to young people who have trajectories set on their path. Otherwise I think the list is a reminder to most of the youth of what they will never have.

Thandi: On a broader scale it assumes or affirms the kind of young person that doesn't need the state to assist and can do it by themselves. And we all know that is a very small number who are probably mostly white or well off. I think that it is a damaging script to say that we are all able to do it for ourselves. It perpetuates the idea that poor people are responsible for poverty and we forget that we have commoditized resources that enable people to be active citizens. It excuses the structural and racialized and classed poverty that is the reality of many young people in this country. It runs the risk of making these young people blame themselves for their conditions when that is not the case.

One factor that was very dominant in the interviews was that a lot of individuals who had made it onto the list knew many other people who were on the list and nominated other individuals who were on the list. This makes the list a small, elite, rather closed circle of people who mostly know each other.

Joy: You can predict pretty much who will be on the list and that's why I don't follow it anymore. I don't look to the list for a frame of reference on which young people are breaking new ground, which people are helping us, I don't think they have the capacity to see such young people. This is not to say that the list is useless, it is just limited.



Ellen: The list affirms the same kind of people. I guarantee you that if I look at that list now, I know 25% of the people in there. It's the same group of people linked together. So what is this list actually doing? It is difficult to get a sense of what is going outside of that list.

Beck: You can count the people on the list by universities. It is the people who are the Mandela Rhodes Scholars and people who are part of the Brightest Young Minds annual summit. It's a very small group of people, and I'm not sure if the list is just a group of people nominating each other or if it is creating a small circle of people who were on the list.

James: I've had friends on the list. I've had partners on the list. My closest friends were all on that list, from civil society to science.

Phumi: When I heard I was going to be profiled I was totally surprised because I had nominated a friend instead. I didn't know that someone nominated me as well.

An individual who has followed the list religiously ever since it started noted that the list has become more elite over time:

Joy: I've always found the list to be a great platform for showcasing what young people in the country were doing. But it has changed over the years, it has become this elite crew of cool kids who all know each other and are affirming each other. It's about awards and badges.

Another questioned the kinds of factors used to choose those on the list:

Ntombi: The people who make it are the same kind of crowd and this is worrisome because it constrains ideas of what it means to be successful. It's mostly people who have travelled, have postgraduate degrees and have received some scholarship. I fear it is making all these factors prerequisites for success. You can't make it seem like one can always do those things and that one should aspire to obtaining those things and just work harder. It's not that easy. Now I have to ask myself to ask myself that if I didn't go to the US to study and have received the Fulbright scholarship if I would have made it on that list.

The list is deemed exclusionary and elitist because the profile of the kind of individual who makes it on the list is limited to a small portion of the population. This is a particularly crucial contrast given the class disparities in South Africa. The individuals in the list reflected above on what it meant for

them to be valorized and celebrated as outstanding in the South African context where young people face limitations to be active. The question of structure, agency and privilege in South Africa remains a very provocative discussion that brings out strong views and feelings from individuals who believe that the structure supersedes the agency while other individuals believe that the agency and personal struggles of the individual ultimately determines how individuals are positioned within the broader structure. Most of the profiled individuals are ambivalent with being on the list because they believe it over emphasizes the agency of those valorized and seem to suggest that they have transcended the socio-economic classed, radicalized and gendered society.

### ***Inspiration and renown***

The individuals who are featured in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* enjoy a glamorized status in public and are celebrities as defined by Rojek (2001), Marshall (2006) and Turner (2004). My interviewees reflected on the desirability of achieving this form of celebrity and assuming a public status of being an outstanding citizen:

Scott: I don't like rubbing my success in people's face because I really do a lot of cool things. But if I were to share it with people they would be like what's up with this guy? And people do feel the pressure so I try to make sure that I don't rub my success in people's face because they will end up thinking they are failures when they realize that perhaps they might not achieve what I have achieved

The renown that comes with being on the list has become the sought after goal for other young people. An individual further notes that her friends aspire to be on the list:

Joy: The list has changed from recognizing exceptional young South Africans to something people aspire to. Like when we were in school it was all the awards and badges and now we are adults and we still looking for awards and badges. The list is one of the awards and badges. If it's not a scholarship, it's an award to affirm young upcoming professionals. Like I have friends who want to be on that list so badly. And these are young people who are doing important work but it's like they are looking for the affirmation and public recognition. For some people it really is a big deal. Being on the list is a big deal and people I know really look forward to being on the list.

An individual argued that fame has become a substitute for the work and acts of citizenship and that people aspire for the renown more than they aspire to do ‘the work’:

Paul: Fame is a value. The more we see you on TV, newspapers and magazine the more valuable you get. You better know why you are doing what you doing beyond the cover page. For some people that is everything. If you don’t know why you are doing what you doing you will make the noise about the work but not do the work. People want to reap the benefits and be seen but no one wants to do the work.

There were other individuals like James and Sipho who were concerned with the list being the aspiration instead of the work that puts people on the list:

James: I think and hope that as adults we do things because we think they are important and not because you want to get on a list, which is what I got a sense of what is happening. Why do we need lists to affirm us? We should do things because we constitutionally believe they are important. Maybe it’s because we live in this culture of wanting to be seen, driven by the idea that it doesn’t matter unless it has been liked or tagged, or tweeted or shared. It feeds into that kind of idea.

Sipho: For me it becomes weird when people become branded activists. You are talking about social issues at the same time you have a poster of yourself. It took me a while to come to terms with the list because I struggle with what being on the list means and being placed in public like that. Being on that list was weird for me, it actually still is.

For others, public recognition does not carry any significance beyond the work. However, it is important to note that the individual who insisted on making this point had framed a copy of himself in the edition, which is up on the wall in his office:

Scott: Someone recognizing it doesn’t make it any more real for me. Even if it didn’t happen I’d still be okay because I am not driven by public recognition.

People also value the list because it celebrates the work that young people are doing, and it is important for the individuals I interviewed to know there was a counter narrative to the dominant discourse on young people being the ‘lost generation’:

Nick: Before I was on the list I always thought it was a compilation of exceptional young South Africans who have committed their lives to making a difference and were excelling. For me what I loved about the list was that it was a celebration and recognition of the work of exceptional young people, we really don't hear that enough.

Theo: I like the list also because I get to see what other young people are doing to move the country forward.

This recognition is celebrated because it portrays young people who are doing work that is regarded as more important in contrast to entertainment and pop culture:

Phumi: I would like to believe that there are people who find it worth celebrating someone who is not a Kardashian or someone who sees value in seeing what other people are doing to better the country instead being occupied with AKA's love life. Celebrating people for the work that they do acknowledges that in a society where we consume popular culture, we can still pause and be like, there is also a person who is trying to get children in her community to go to school who is worth celebrating.

In this sense, the list functions as a good vehicle for inspiration that should be providing young people with role models.

Nick: I feel like the list is just scratching the surface in a country where many young people need to know that there are other cool young people doing important things. When I was young I didn't have role models, I had to seek them out. But the list begins to offer young people those kinds of platforms.

However, the list is said to be inaccessible to many young people who should be viewing these young people as role models.

Joy: Unless people know about the list will they be inspired? For example, I am a teacher and none of the students I teach know about the list. Even if I told them, they wouldn't know what it means.

Another individual notes that she hopes her having made it on to the list inspires young people to want to be better. However few might know and comprehend it:

Thandi: We need to tell other stories about success that does not follow the same script. To allow different paths. The thing about being portrayed as an achiever can create a system where people want to follow the same path so they too can also make it onto the list. But it can also highlight and create role models. In my community there are no role models because everyone leaves the town as soon as they've made it. The list can make people like me role models for the very few people who manage to see on my Facebook timeline or hear about it in the community.

The list is particularly significant for other young people on the list because it provides an alternative narrative to the dominant discourse that young people are a lost generation. Two individuals note:

Tshepo: I think it is important to celebrate such young people given that there are so many stories about the youth being useless, so I think it is important to offer a counter narrative for the nay sayers.

Nicole: In a country like South Africa with high inequalities and our racial history, to be able to see young black people being excellent in what it is that they are doing are worth celebrating, I think.

The function of the edition as a vehicle for inspiration is seen as ineffective by the individuals who were featured on the list. Few respondents saw themselves as vehicles of inspirations while others were concerned with flaunting their achievements to other young people. The vast majority thought the list was great and that they attained a certain level of renown, however, felt that the list was inaccessible to the vast majority of young people who do need role models like they did growing up. The renown around the list is centered on individuals who are characterized by a commitment to making a difference in South Africa, however, responses from the interviews show that the media exposure is instead becoming the greater source of renown that individuals are now aspiring for. The question of whether individuals were driven by a desire for renown in the form of media exposure or a commitment to making a difference seems a difficult one to reconcile.

### ***Committed to making a difference***

As noted in the content analysis the idea of being “committed to making a difference” is central to the edition. This is seen as a crucial aspect of being a responsible South African citizen

Bruce: I have always known that I wanted to do the work that affected citizens. I developed this very young. As a child, I always wanted to do more, a sense of duty that some of us who have privilege should use that to make the world a better place. I was fortunate in that I went to Wits and I learnt about social issues and immersed myself in activism.

The commitment to making a difference is informed by individuals who are now enjoying positions of privilege and as a result feel a great sense of responsibility to give back to the less privileged others – a characteristic noted earlier in the content analysis of the 2015 edition.

Phumi: The thing about privilege in this country is that talking about it doesn't change it. But being able to use that privilege to bring about change helps. I am very aware that there are people who are concerned with putting bread on the table and that you can't expect such people to worry about pushing social change. In my case, I didn't have to worry about food, which in South Africa is a privileged position. It is pointless to have all this privilege, especially having gone to university, not to use that. We can't be just sitting around and enjoying our privilege and sipping on it. This doesn't address the fact that some people suffer.

Joy: People with privilege and who went to a good school or came from an established family or who have a prominent name must use that to make a difference. The list says to people; you are privileged, what is your responsibility to society? It is a case of to whom much is given, much is expected.

For other young people, the commitment to making a difference is informed by being in positions of privilege and knowing what it means to be in a disadvantaged position, and as a result are driven to make things better and easier for others who might be coming after them. Two individuals reflected on this:

Jane: I wish I had someone tell me how it was on the other side after finishing high school to prepare me for the experience of university. So I was determined to be that for the children I work with. I was really surprised when I went there to realize that a lot of the township schools had never had someone from Wits come talk to them. So I started doing work in that area to help fill the gap.

Tshepo: University was trial and error for me. I didn't have mentors in my circles and family and so I am trying to make sure that other young people don't have to go through that.

Sipho: I came out as the only queer person in my community. Having dealt with homophobia, psychologically and physically I now realize that this experience has informed a bulk of my work. My commitment to social justice came from experiencing the world as being an other from a really young age and realizing that I wanted a world where anyone could be who they wanted to be as long as you do no harm to others.

Another says he was always compelled to do more for others:

Thabang: It was almost seen as important my peers that the university experience should be more. For the people around me it was education and so we worked hard to give back in that field.

Someone else spoke about having nominated individuals dedicated to making a difference:

Liz: I personally nominated two people who made it on the list because they are individuals who are committed to service and they worked with marginalized youth.

The idea of being committed to making a difference and changing the world is a crucial message that allows these individuals to be vehicles of inspiration. One individual notes:

Scott: The list inspires people by telling them that there are people who want to change the world. It sounds fluffy but there is truth in that

The *Mail & Guardian* seeks to use these young people as vehicles for inspiration to inspire other young people and citizens to become citizens who are committed to making a difference. This focus of the edition to showcase and handpick young people who making a difference is central to the intention of the project as encapsulated by the *Mail & Guardian* and the founding editor of the project (Haffajee, 2015). The young people interviewed for this study did believe that they were making a difference, and described other young people who were featured as being committed to service. This is born of out South Africa as a politically charged environment in which there is a need to address social ills. Individuals in privileged positions feel compelled to make a difference within their communities and from the responses in this section, the privileged individuals are the ones who are expected to be concerned with making a difference in South Africa.

### ***4.3 Focus group discussion***

I conducted a focus group discussion with 6 individuals who are readers and followers of *The Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans*. In the focus group discussion, I discussed the 2015 edition with the group to elicit their views on the list and the people who make it onto the list – particularly as vehicles for inspiration. The following themes emerged from the focus group discussion.

#### ***Social capital***

The participants observed that the list in the form of media exposure did function to give the individuals who were on it social capital that would come in handy in their fields and in doing their work. One participant said:

Jack: This list also allows these people's careers to springboard. Let's be honest, these people have been hard at work for many years and it's not easy to get exposure and that kind of thing. So platforms like these affirm and springboard people's careers and this is important not just for them as individuals but for their work and the people who benefit from their work.

Thandi: I think being featured in a newspaper is a big deal and so I see how it seeks to make young people want to do better. I am sure there are people working towards being on that list.

However, another participant was of the view that the individuals who are featured in the edition were already occupying public spaces and that the *Mail & Guardian* was drawing on their fame instead of attributing it to them:

Jack: The kind of people who make it are the individuals who already occupying the public space in whatever ways. They occupy that space and they demand that space. They are more visible than most of us in that sense. I think they were already visible and the *Mail & Guardian* caught up.



### *Counter narrative to the 'lost generation' narrative*

The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* is an edition that offers a counter narrative to the dominant discourse about young people being lazy and apathetic. Readers of the list appreciated this counter narrative:

Tom: I think it is an important edition because there is always bad news about people in the media, and I think it is particularly important to hear good news about young people who are changing South Africa for the better.

Lungile: Visibility is important for many of us. The list affirms a lot of young people who are following their hearts, we don't see a lot of young people like that, especially images of young people living like that.

Thembi: I think it is important to have a platform like this. When one thinks of the revolutionary stages that have taken place this year in the country by students you begin to see the element of contribution made by young people that may seem quite small. But we recognize these young leaders who are the potential of the world.

However, the focus group discussion did reflect that people were still aware of the fact that although the list offers a counter narrative about the young people being lazy, it was certainly selective and exclusionary in its attempt at singling out these young people.

Thembi: I have this view that the *Mail & Guardian* is an elitist publication. As a young working class senior student at university, they always choose young people who are affluent and speak well and perhaps like me went to great universities. There are other young people who would not enjoy the same exposure. Even though I have access to universities, I am still just a lucky guy who got access and still doesn't fit nicely into these spaces. And every time I see the *Mail & Guardian 200* or hear it mentioned I am reminded of how much I don't fit in.

Jack: I agree that other young people wouldn't enjoy the same benefits, I mean if you go to townships and rural areas I am sure to be inspired by different people compared to the ones we are seeing in the *Mail & Guardian*. It's almost like we are being told who has to inspire us.

Lungile: Indeed, this edition follows western model of making it: getting educated, becomes a lawyer and start a project to give back to your community and that sort of thing. If you are in Khayelitsha and are running a crèche or soup kitchen, chances of you making it are very slim.

The focus group discussion moved from the limitations of the list to what the group found appealing about the list after an individual made it clear that she thought the list was inspirational to her.

Tom: However, I have personally benefitted from the list tremendously because it is so easy in a country like South Africa to become cynical about life with everything going on and the structural violence. It is amazing to see young people still pushing themselves and pushing social justice and doing well in their fields. No matter how aware of social issues you are, the world is still bigger than we see it, there are always people doing great work and so it is has been great for me getting a glimpse of that.

Jack: I agree, we shouldn't vilify people who go to UCT, Wits and Rhodes and those who give back because they also inspire me and push me to also contribute to the wider world, to affect my social sphere and to make South Africa better. The list has potential to inspire a lot of young people to see beyond ourselves and to contribute towards the wider society.

Thembi: It is also inspiring for me to see someone else who looks like me occupy these platforms. It is inspiring and affirming for someone as a black female from the township to see that it is possible.

Tom: This list is not necessarily about who is getting money and who isn't. These are people who will be our leaders and so this list affirms their work to also keep them encouraged.

### ***The notion of celebrity***

The focus group discussion revealed that the kind of celebrity that is emerging in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* is different from the conception of celebrity in entertainment and 'pop culture'.

Jack: I think South African audiences are critical when it comes to celebrity. It's not just about being visible and hanging with cool people, the bottom line comes to what it is you are doing to push social justice.

Tom: I agree with you; we still consume popular culture with a pinch of salt. Inasmuch as we like Bonang (media personality), South Africans, especially on Twitter, can tell the difference between celebrity and an important figure in society – which is what you are seeing in this edition. People are still clear about what kinds of public figures they deem to be important and worth celebrating. A lot of this for us comes from Nelson Mandela, he defined what being a public figure that was worth celebrating was. Yes, we all consume popular culture, but we still look at what it is that individuals have to offer our society.

Thembi: I think we have found a way to make the distinction between being a celebrity that is incredibly fickle versus what it means to be a visionary who is committed to change. We respond differently to the kind of celebrity we deem to be important figures that have something to offer the world. It's almost like celebrities are symbolic of something that is exterior and material while these visionaries or leaders remind us of that which is internal and lasts.

### ***Making a difference: responsibilities and privileges***

The notion of making a difference came up in the focus group discussion as the participants reflected on what it means that the 200 young South Africans were characterized as individuals who were committed to making South Africa better:

Thandi: When institutions of the state fail, like we have seen with how our government treats young people it becomes very important to see that citizens also have responsibilities that come with rights. I think the state needs to do its part and ensure access to opportunities for its citizens. But even with that, we see in the *Mail & Guardian* 200 that even people with little resources and opportunities are still making moves and are still committed to making a difference.

The progression of the focus group discussion also revealed that the idea of making a difference was something that was expected from individuals who were regarded as privileged:

Tom: We shouldn't be afraid to say that the people who have privilege, that the people who have learnt need to give back and share that knowledge. They have a duty to give back and it shouldn't be done with arrogance, one should be able to give back but also be able to listen and never to impose.

Lungile: You are right because our universities can practically only take about 10% of those who matriculate. Unfortunately, at this rate not everyone can be able to give back. I guess our duty as the ones who have access to universities is thinking through how we structure our society, especially in South Africa with our racial history, these universities have been built for a small elite white minority and not the rest the majority of the black population. Unfortunately, as young educated individuals these issues are our burdens to think through in ensuring access for all.

Although the focus group discussion did agree that most on the list are privileged individuals, they also acknowledged for having struggled in getting there:

Jack: I think what is particularly inspiring about the list is that some of these people have had to find alternatives in a situation with very limited resources like access to education, they've had to think of alternative ways of being successful without following the mainstream route.

Thembi: Yes, we need to find ways of opening up these alternatives and make room for the different ways of what it means to be successful citizens. At this rate, there isn't room for everyone. I mean even if we all got distinctions not all of us would have access to universities, not all of us would get the Mandela Rhodes scholarships. It is not practical just in numbers for everyone to be employed so we really need to find innovative ways of opening opportunities like entrepreneurship.

Lastly, an individual noted that although these individuals are committed to making a difference, it is important to remember that there are various factors, reasons and motivations for why these young people do what they do:

Tom: We must remember that people are driven by their circumstances, their passions, and a sense of duty for what has to be done. There are many young exceptional South Africans who may or not be on such lists but their work carries on because they are motivated by various reasons.

The focus group discussion revealed that readers of the edition were aware that the profiled individuals attained social capital as a result of the media exposure that comes with being featured on the list. However, the participants were not opposed to this idea, they acknowledged that the media exposure must be very useful within their fields to further advance the work they were doing which was regarded as important in driving the country forward. The participants were also pleased with the edition as a voice that provides a counter narrative to the dominant discourse on young people as lazy and lost. They recognized the edition as inspirational because it reminded them of their responsibility as citizens to give back and make a difference in the country, particularly as university students, which means they are already in positions of privilege to which they alluded to. The participants also acknowledged individuals who made it onto the list without having gone to university and suggest that perhaps there is more work expected in showcasing individuals who've had to find alternative ways of making a difference and being outstanding. One particular respondent felt that even though they had access to a university that was deemed prestigious, the edition was a reminder of what they would never attain.

## ***Conclusion***

The data collected across the three methods revealed analysis that allows for a rich reading of the Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans. The content analysis highlighted the characteristics of the profiled individuals as characteristics that were inaccessible to the vast majority of young South Africans and were enjoyed by an exceptionally small population of the country; the interviews demonstrated the ambivalence of being celebrated as outstanding in a country where the majority of young people were unable to participate in democratic processes and the economy, the ambivalence faced by these individuals also propelled them to deal with that conflict by continuing to make a difference for others; and the focus group discussion revealed the list does function as a vehicle for inspiration to the majority of the participants whom by mere virtue of being university students make a small number of young South Africans with access to education, another right that is not enjoyed by the vast majority of South Africans.

## **5. Conclusion**

The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* is an important platform that offers certain young people access to opportunities by giving them media exposure in a print and digital form that makes it possible to negotiate their standing within South Africa's social hierarchy. The 200 young South Africans make up a small and elite group of young people who have access to and enjoy opportunities and resources that the majority of young people in the country do not have. The media exposure given to the profiled individuals plays a role in supporting their rise within their careers and respective fields of influence, further widening the gap between them and the majority of young South Africans.

Young people who appear in the list have had to reconcile themselves with the fact that they have been chosen as outstanding citizens in a country where the majority of young people have a difficult time surviving and enjoying basic rights such as education. This conflict of structure and agency appeared in the interviews for this study with a few individuals saying that they believed that young South Africans need to work harder in order to be successful. However, most of the individuals interviewed had a greater sense of social justice and understood the socio-political context of South Africa. These interviewees were uncomfortable with being featured as 'outstanding' against the backdrop of the vast majority of young South Africans who are struggling. It is this discomfort with occupying positions of privilege in a politically charged context that propels them to exert their efforts and mobilize their privilege towards making a difference in South Africa. This was best captured by one individual who said "to whom much is given, much is expected".

There is a strong perception that everyone who is not concerned with bread and butter issues (i.e. everyone who is not concerned with basic survival) should be concerned with making the country better for the vast majority as a way of upholding the democratic ideal of equality for all.

An interesting outcome of the ambivalence that many of the 200 Young South Africans feel about their elevated situation is that this discomfort seems to also be a fundamental motivation for why they are committed to making the country better for less privileged others. What we see here is a paradox: although neoliberal capitalism and the celebrity status at play espouse competitiveness and individualism through individual recognition and merit, the competitiveness and individualism emerge in a context where 'care' for the struggling majority is the very basis of renown and recognition.

The small and elite readership of the *Mail & Guardian* and the reputation of the newspaper as a formidable and established source of news make it an inviting platform for anyone who seeks social mobility and recognition. The list has provided certain individuals with the social capital to navigate class in South Africa, and consequently there are many who desire to be on the list for the benefits it promises. This currency is an important benefit considering the difficulties faced by many young people in negotiating the challenges imposed by neoliberal capitalism which forces young people to fend for themselves in highly unequal societies. Although the edition is seen to be exclusionary in its limitation of the kind of young South African whom it recognizes, the very few young people who are recognized are afforded recognition and validation as citizens who can negotiate and occupy spaces they wouldn't ordinarily access as young people. While the list recognizes young people who are making a difference, it affirms them through this recognition and further gives them the social currency necessary to continue with their work. This is particularly significant for the individuals who seek to use such platforms and influential positions to speak up for other young people, and thus being truly committed to making a difference.

To turn to a broader discursive representation of young people in South Africa, The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* edition challenges the dominant representation of young people as an apathetic and lost generation. It challenges the notion of youth as a homogenous group of people and demonstrates that the notion of 'youth' is a complex one that cannot be simply characterized with terms such as 'the lost generation'. Youth is a complex notion affected by factors such as class, race and gender. *The Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* edition particularly highlights the complexity of negotiating the consequences of a classed and raced society as experienced by various young people.

Beyond highlighting the complexity of the idea of youth and challenging the 'lost generation' narrative, this study shows also the complexity and burdens that come with being valorized as 'future movers and shakers'. This complexity is important to note in our analysis and understanding of young South Africans, considering that they have long been regarded the future of the country and the bearer of its great expectations. The fact that just a few are in a position to make a difference makes their burden doubly onerous because they must strive not only for themselves but also with the consciousness that so many millions of others do not have their privileges.

The perception of the 'future movers and shakers' as those who are dedicated to upholding ideals of democracy is rooted in a notion of citizenship as stewardship. Ramphela (2008:126) outlines

stewardship citizenship as a form of citizenship where individuals of the citizenry take the responsibility to uphold democratic ideals of making a difference and ensuring equality for everyone by owning up to their state as statesmen. Ramphela is aware that this ideal form of citizenship can only be realized when individuals have their basic rights met and are able to form an allegiance with the state by doing their part to also contribute to the wellbeing of the country. The young people in the edition are represented as individuals who are not concerned with having their basic rights met, and as such are able to contribute towards the wellbeing of the country because they have assumed their citizenship status as belonging to South Africa and having a role to play within their country's affairs.

The implication behind the notion that citizens are individuals who enjoy their rights and as a result are able to give back to society – in a climate where young people are displaced, out of work and struggling to afford or access education - is that the vast majority of the population are not citizens but subjects. The vast majority of young people are not in positions to be committed to making a difference and upholding the ideals of democracy. Instead, they are subjects who are inactive within democratic practice, they are there to be acted upon because they don't have the means to be active citizens in the form of fulfilling responsibilities. Stewardship or active citizenship remains a distant illusion to the vast majority of young South Africans as people struggle to access basic rights and opportunities that enable them to participate in the economy or democratic processes. The implication behind this valorization and recognition of stewardship citizenship as ideal is that only a few individuals constitute citizens – a prevalent reality of post-apartheid South Africa.

The celebration of a small portion of young people as outstanding in a context where the vast majority has limited opportunities and resources also runs the risk of being in itself elitist and exclusionary. The act of singling out a small number of individuals (based on characteristics that are only attainable to a few) as outstanding citizens automatically excludes various individuals who do not fall within the criterion, this constricts ideas of what it means to be a successful citizen within a limited spectrum that is unattainable to many. The outstanding individuals who get featured on the list are further represented as individuals who have managed to overcome the structural barriers encountered by the vast majority thereby foregrounding individual agency to minimize the structure. And in this way the list prioritizes the agency of the individual as triumphant over the broader socio-economic and structural nature of violence. This could be read as representing the kind of young person who is not limited by fearsome and significant structural limitations.



The use of celebrity culture techniques to valorize a few individuals as outstanding also informs normative ideas of what a good citizen should and shouldn't be. This echoes Robbroeck's sentiments in the visual representation of Nelson Mandela, where he argues that figures like Nelson Mandela compensate for the failures of a society. The idea that South Africa is in need of a hero/es who will come to the rescue and save the country – thereby compensating for the governance challenges is evident in the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* profiles. The 200 Young South Africans, as individuals who are "committed to making a difference" are represented as 'the shepherd' who will lead the country – the flock – into the Promised Land, echoing Foucault's notion of pastoral power (Foucault, 1978). Against the South African backdrop, the valorized hero status brings forth a form of renown that is deeply rooted in a *lex suprema* – 'care as a form of power' (Foucault, 1978). It is the form of fame and renown that was central to the celebrity of Nelson Mandela – an individual who modeled an ideal subjectivity rooted in selflessness and a commitment to making South Africa a better place. This representation of an ideal subjectivity acts to conceal the national problems by reinforcing the need for heroes and highlighting a few individuals as a form of stand in for the challenge of dealing with real and practicable citizenship for every South African. The attribution of celebrity status to the profiled individuals affirms Rojek's sentiments in arguing that celebrity is a form of vicarious reinforcement that stands in for that which people lack and may possibly never attain (Rojek, 2000: 34).

Ramphela observed that the challenges of inequalities and the legacy of apartheid that still prevails in South African can only be solved through what Ramphela (2008: 295) calls 'Transformative leadership', which she describes as "credible, visionary leadership that expands the boundaries of possibilities for all citizens, enabling them to contribute their talents, experience and skills to create a successful, prosperous democracy" (2008: 295). One can postulate from the characteristics of the profiled individuals and the intention of the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* project that the intention is to recognize and inspire this kind of leadership that would begin to resolve the challenges that have grown to characterize South Africa.

The representation of the *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* as role models who are vehicles of inspiration emerged in the focus group discussion and the interviews. But inspiration too has its ambiguities. Lockwood and Kunda (1999) argue that inspiration can either function to empower or demoralize the social groups they seek to empower depending on the perception of attainability of success. The young people in the focus group discussion thought of themselves as

peers with the profiled individuals because they also have access to prestigious universities. As a result, the focus group discussion members also thought of themselves as having a responsibility to give back to their communities. The list further functions to remind them of their responsibility as citizens by highlighting peers with equal opportunities who were making a difference. In this sense, the message of inspiration is empowering because the success is perceived as attainable. Although this study did not survey or interview those young South Africans not within the target market of the *Mail & Guardian*, it is not far-fetched to imagine that these young people would have had very different attitudes and responses to the attainability of such ‘inspirational’ stories of success.

The *Mail & Guardian 200 Young South Africans* is a representation of the actions of young people, which involves characterizing them as acts of citizenship. The list includes both active citizens who follow through on already written scripts of what a good citizen should or shouldn’t be and also highlights activist citizens who are “creative and think beyond the law about justice” (Engin and Nielsen, 2008: 38), these are individuals who’ve had to find alternatives in their pursuit of making a difference. The edition is a crucial site that highlights that acts of citizenship do not exclusively have to be founded in law or responsibility, although responsibility is crucial in this edition as those in privileged positions have a responsibility to make a difference, the edition also shows that symbolic representation is at the heart of what informs a good or bad citizen. This neatly and conclusively leads to the third principle in theorizing acts of citizenship according to Engin and Nielsen (2008: 39), who emphasize a recognition that “acts of citizenship do not need to be founded in law or enacted in the name of the law” (Engin and Nielsen, 2008; 39). This is true in this study because beyond rights and obligations, symbolic representation in the form of celebrity, renown and inspiration inform acts of citizenship and citizenship as we understand as well as shape general understandings on what a good citizen should or shouldn’t be.

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