

Editorial

Over the past year some 40 percent of all detainees have been persons under the age of 18. In addition many young people have faced charges under the State of Emergency Regulations and other legislation such as the Internal Security Act and the Public Safety Act. During this time, various groups both internal to South Africa and abroad have protested strongly about these events and have voiced their concern regarding the traumatic consequences of such practices for young people. Clearly not only politically active youths have been affected by these measures. On occasions whole schools have been arrested. Children as young as 8 years of age have been subject to teargassing, sjamboking and other practices simply because they happened to be in an area where security forces took action. Then there have been, and continue to be, those children who have witnessed their parents' disappearance into detention for indeterminate periods. Finally some children have been caught up in internecine feuds between different political groupings.

All these events are products of the death throes of Apartheid. As the state clings to and modernises the policy of group separation and white dominance, so these events will continue. What are the likely effects of this totally unacceptable situation on young people?

This edition brings together a collection of papers which attempt to provide some answers. They illustrate that findings of research studies and theoretical principles developed within mainstream psychology and psychiatry have considerable importance in developing our understanding of local conditions. At the same time, as Straker's paper makes clear, our situation of continuous stress is different, and requires its own solutions.

While the work of Gibson, Dawes and Straker focuses on political repression, its likely effects, and ways of treating the victims, the paper by Levett problematises a different type of trauma - namely sexual abuse. While this form of trauma is not political in the same way, it nonetheless takes place within the realm of sexual politics and gender oppression. What links these papers is a theme which suggests that there are powerful mediators of trauma, which are socially constructed. Responses to oppression of various kinds are thus shaped by one's political

socialisation - that subtle process whereby ideology converts the unacceptable into the natural.

Louw-Potgieter's work on Afrikaners whose ways of thinking about South Africa have parted company with Afrikaner Nationalist philosophy and practice, also falls within the field of political socialisation. The struggles of South Africans such as these may be very different from those in the black townships. But they nonetheless form part of the mosaic that reflects the painful path towards the formation of a new social order.