A political world within the parameters of SABC politics:
The case of Afrikaner students

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Political events are crucial in the political resocialisation of the youth. In this article the impact of the political unrest in the mid-1980s on the political consciousness of the Afrikaner student youth is investigated. Through a panel study of students of the Rand Afrikaans University in Johannesburg, South Africa, trends in exposure to political events were established. Exposure occurs through direct political participation, political discourse or through the mass media. The important role of the mass media for exposure of these youths is illuminated. Attention is also focused on which media are utilised for obtaining political information. The political implications of this exposure are considered.

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The acquisition of information about the political world is central to the formation of political consciousness.[1] Ideally, people should be exposed to a wide variety of sources; their consciousness about the political world would then be challenged, revised or supplemented continuously by new information. In reality, however, this process is subject to many restraints.

Generally, two restrictions apply. On the one hand, individuals are complacent about politics, they lack political interest and do have a real need for self-exposure. In addition, the distribution of political information may be controlled, either directly by the state, or indirectly through hegemonic co-operative control between the mass media and the state. Mutual reinforcement may also be important in the relation between these restrictions. State controls and political censorship can shield people from disconcerting information which may have induced political involvement; more complacency on the other hand means the state will not be challenged in its activities of information control.

As Gramsci (1971) points out, control over the way in which political ideas are formed will ensure consent to the hegemony of a particular regime. A controlled political consciousness accordingly will be "false"; and an alternative political consciousness will require the questioning of generally accepted presuppositions about politics (see also Gamson, 1985:614).

The distribution of political information in the South African social formation is subject to both these restrictions. In a case study this article will analyse the limited exposure of the Afrikaner student youth to political information sources. Guided by political socialisation theory — which stresses the importance of exposure to political events in

processes of adult political resocialisation — it will focus on the reduction in potential for resocialisation as a result of limited exposure to political events or information about them. The article will also analyse the reasons for non-employment of alternative sources of political information and will investigate the political implications of the Afrikaner student youth's confined political consciousness.

Theoretical context of the research

In dealing with the phenomenon of ADULT[2] political socialisation, two options are presented. On the one hand, the socialisation experiences can reinforce existing attitudes. Alternatively, adult experiences could contradict existing political attitudes and present the person with the opportunity to reconsider and possibly adapt. This will be referred to as "adult political resocialisation".[3]

Youth, incorporating early adulthood, is a period uniquely conducive to change in political consciousness. Both the theories of political generations and life-cycle effects (used as explanations of adult political resocialisation) stress the importance of the period of youth for the creation of fresh political insights (see Marks, 1979: 338). Youth is considered to be a period of optimal receptiveness, a phase of the life-cycle typically associated with changeability and increased opportunities for getting in touch with political events. At least a part of the explanation for this fluidity can be found in the variety of new personal and social circumstances to which young adults are exposed (see Sigel, 1970: 375-376). Equally important are the potentially high levels of cognitive and moral development which facilitates comprehension and synthesis in this age group (Cook, 1985; Rothman and Lichter, 1980; Torney-Purta, 1981).

Political events appear to have a greater potential impact on young adults. As Ryder (1965: 847) points out: "(T)he potential for change is concentrated in the cohorts of young adults who are old enough to participate directly in the movements propelled by change, but not old enough to have become committed to an occupation, a residence, a family ... or a way of life ... ". According to Sears (in Greenstein and Polsby, 1975: 135) it appears that "the major systematic defections from initial childhood socialization appears to be limited to the age period during and immediately following adolescence". In addition, research has shown that youth cohorts often retain values acquired in adolescence and early adulthood (see Bengtson et al., 1974: 20; Fendrich, 1977; Newcomb, 1963). In the case of retention, the distinctive cohort is referred to as a political generation.

Expectations of political change in the period of early adulthood in the case of students is further accentuated by their exposure to the so-called "high stimulus situation" of university attendance. Several authors substantiate this expectation. Trent and Craise (1967: 48) point to the role of the university in providing ". . . a moratorium (for students) to rethink their values critically and constructively in the light of what they learn, and come nearer to approaching truth and personal meaning" . According to Tedin et al. (1977) the university environment presents circumstances optimally conducive to reconsideration of attitudes and values. The university, especially in an urban environment, can equally be conducive to higher levels of political awareness and re-evaluation. Students will most probably experience political views not previously encountered either through informal contact or through encounters in the sphere of tuition.[4]

Juxtaposed to these circumstances which create perceptiveness and receptiveness among the youth, the actual availability and perception of political information have to be considered. As Chaffee et al. (1970) and Conway et al. (1975) indicate, mass media are usually the most important source of political information for the young. Meadow (1980) points out that mass media directly facilitate political learning processes in "critical learning periods" , of which youth is the foremost. These learning processes are, however, contingent upon the availability of new information, and a desire for information and involvement in sophisticated political thought (see also Lambert, 1972: 32-40).

Concerning the instructive features of mass media, political knowledge is much more clearly associated with the use of the printed than with electronic media (see Chaffee in Renshon, 1977: 233). The use of the printed media to obtain political information also shows a strong positive correlation with political participation, including political discourse. But despite the fact that the printed media have a bigger contribution to political knowledge, people rely on the electronic media for their political information to a much larger extent that on the printed media (which, of course, implies a more inadequate level of political knowledge).

A discussion of the importance of the mass media in the facilitation of change in political attitudes,

should however, be supplemented with the realisation that these media often act·as pseudo-agents of political socialisation. Frequently they merely transmit political information and interpretations generated by "true" agents. Grabe and Knobelsdorf (1980) draw attention to the fact that the mass media, irrespective of whether they are under direct state control or not, purvey the messages and interests of the state often under the veil of being autonomous agents. In this regard the state prescribes to often credulous audiences the way in which political events and state actions ought to be interpreted. Because of either scarcity of other sources (due to explicit restraints imposed by the state or to hegemonic control over the diffusion of information) or the lack of self-exposing initiatives these prescriptions may be accepted unquestioningly.

Premises of the study

On the basis of the preceding discussion it can be stated that the confluence of youth and the occurrence of significant political events provide the circumstance in which political resocialisation reaches an optimum potential (also see Booysen, 1987:118-133). Should the youth experience political events which contradict their existing political orientations, concomitant attitudinal change may be induced.

In the case of South African youths these expectations conditionally apply. As was noted above, the nature of their experience of political events and information obtained about events constitute crucial intervening variables. These factors will invariably mediate the resocialisation effect of potent and potentially traumatic political events. Events of this nature occurred in South Africa in the period of this study. From 1984 to 1986 unrest and general political turmoil were endemic. Undoubtedly these events had a major resocialisation potential.

This potential, however, can be diluted by these youths' experience of the events. In the absence of direct experience of (or involvement in) political events and personal contact with people who could expose them to a part of political reality which they were sheltered from during earlier periods of their lives, the existing political consciousness of these youths will most probably remain largely unchallenged.

Even in the absence of direct or personal challenges to their existing orientations, mass media can still put these students in touch with political events. Should this exposure, however, serve to shelter them from political reality, present feigned perceptions of political reality (which shape their political consciousness) can equally be expected to remain intact. In the case of the Afrikaner youths analysed, a precondition for political resocialisation would be exposure to mass media reportage countering existing prejudice and a dearth of political knowledge.[5]

In the South African social structure the state, facilitated by its extensive manipulation of mass media, has become the most important of all socialisation agencies, controlling the potential for political resocialisation of especially white South Africans. These are the people who rely extensively on certain mainstream mass media for their political information. The effect of mass media is also reinforced through similarly created orientations held by people who, or institutions which (for example, parents, friends, school teachers, the church, the army) may otherwise have constituted independent political socialisation influences.[6]

Although mass media generally play an important role in the acquisition of political information, their role in this case is complicated by a divergence between the media message and political events. The media, as an agent of the state, therefore assumes "a life of its own" . The media do not only transmit political events, but particularly transmit the state's interpretation thereof.

Afrikaner youths in South Africa encounter a chain of reinforcing and convergent political socialisation influences. The political influence exerted by their parents is reinforced both by political socialisation in schools and the mostly minimal political influence of adolescent peer groups. But while politics mostly is unimportant to these peer groups, their significance lies in the fact that very few influences which contradict the major premises of Afrikaner political culture emanate from them. As long as these are not contradicted, important implicit political socialisation influences are at work. When these youths enter Afrikaans universities the preceding socialisation experiences are usually extended (see Booysen, 1987: 232-273). Encouragement of political involvement and awareness is minimal. Politics is not of great consequence to these students, to their lecturers or in the broader context of the university. It is in this context that the mass media and their mediation of political events are very important.

The two major factors considered in the following

section are therefore the occurrence of powerful political events (which would, in the case of 'normal' political socialisation processes have had a resocialisation effect) and the sheltering and filtering processes applied by the mass media (either willingly or under coercion), which have the effect of limiting the political resocialisation potential of political events.

Methodology of the research

In order to obtain precise measures of the nature of mass media exposure among the Afrikaner student youth, a survey research was conducted among students of the Rand Afrikaans University in Johannesburg, South Africa. Information on change and non-change in exposure to the media and in the substance of political attitudes was obtained through a panel study research design.

Two groups of students were tested. The first panel (panel A) completed mailed questionnaires in the second half of 1984, 1985 and 1986. The second panel (B) completed their questionnaires in the first half of 1985, 1986 and 1987. In both cases, therefore, the students were tested in their first, second and third years at university (although these do not necessarily indicate successfully completed academic years). Response rates among the students varied from 63 to 93 per cent. For comparative purposes the parents of panel B were surveyed in 1985 and 1986. The response rates were 64 and 50 per cent, respectively. For Panel A the students were drawn through probability sampling from the total full-time student intake; no sampling was performed in the case of panel B — the whole complement of full-time first year students was surveyed. After eliminating all respondents whose home language is not Afrikaans, panel A, respectively for the three years, consisted of 335, 244 and 177 respondents, and panel B of 1 213, 581 and 331 respondents. The corresponding parent statistics in 1985 were 1 131 and 448 parents.

The students have predominantly middle-class backgrounds. In all but one case 50 per cent or more of the parents had matric as their highest educational qualification; the percentages of parents with educational qualifications lower than matric were far higher than those with tertiary qualifications. Approximately 30 per cent of the students of both panels came from the East Rand, 20 per cent from the West Rand, 21 per cent from Johannesburg, Randburg or Sandton and 21 per

cent from Pretoria or rural areas.[7]

In about equal proportions the questionnaire consisted of structured questions, often using the Likert format, and unstructured, open-ended questions where the respondents had to supply their own perceptions, personal reasons, etc. To obtain indications of change or consistency in attitudes and in media exposure, the majority of the items was repeated in the consecutive questionnaires.

The Afrikaner student youth's exposure to political events

Political reality can be experienced in various ways: through political participation or involvement, which can give direct exposure to politics, through political discourse with people who are politically aware and informed, or through exposure to the political contents of the mass media. Each of these possibilities will be investigated in this section. From the outset it should be noted that should one or more of these not present themselves as viable alternatives, the remaining options will become much more significant in the construction of political consciousness.

Exposure through political participation

A very low level of political participation occurs in the case of these RAU students. When the results of seven political activities in which students can readily be involved are transformed into three categories of low, moderate or high levels of participation,[8] it becomes evident that consistently more than 80 per cent of the students are placed in the lowest of the three categories. Students were questioned, for instance, on how regularly they attend meetings (also on campus) where political affairs may be discussed, how regularly their political opinions are sought or how often they would try to influence others politically. The percentages remained remarkably constant during the two years in which the measurements were repeated. Extraordinary consistency also occurred between the two panels.

The absence of political involvement is even more striking in the light of the political turmoil which South Africa experienced at the time. The information regarding panel B (see table 1) gains in importance if it is taken into account that the third measurements were obtained in the period of the white elections of 1987. Because of the obvious importance of this event for at least the white and Afrikaner communities, it could have been expected that higher levels of political participation should

Table 1

Levels of exposure through political participation

Levels of political Participation*	Percentages for panels	
	A	B
Low	1984 : 85,4 1985 : 85,2 1986 : 83,1	1985 : 91,0 1986 : 80,4 1987 : 92,4
Moderate	1984 : 13,1 1985 : 13,9 1986 : 16,4	1985 : 7,9 1986 : 18,2 1987 : 7,2
High	1984 : 1,5 1985 : 0,8 1986 : 0,6	1985 : 1,2 1986 : 1,4 1987 : 0,4

Statistics:	Arithmetic average			Standard deviation			Median		
	'84	'85	'86	'84	'85	'86	'84	'85	'86
Panel A:	11,7	11,2	11	4,9	3,5	3,4	10	11	1O
	'85	'86	'87	'85	'86	'87	'85	'86	'87
Panel B:	10,5	11,1	9,4	5,7	4,0	3,0	8	10	9

* The "additive method" of scale construction was used. The width of the scale ranged from 7-28. A score of 7-14 constituted a low level of political participation, of 15-21 a moderate level and 22-28 a high level.

have resulted.

It is evident that direct political participation does not constitute a way in which these students may gain direct experience of South African politics. Consequently they will lose the opportunity of possibly unintentionally becoming exposed to information stimulating political resocialisation.

Exposure through political discourse

Alternatively political resocialisation may occur due to the experience of new political information via "unusual" partners in political discourse.[9] As the details in table 2 indicate, however, political discourse with people who may facilitate exposure to the politically unfamiliar or to alternative interpretations of politics, hardly occurs. These students' political conversations predominantly take place within the politically homogeneous context of friendship groups and parents. Overwhelmingly large percentages of both student panels hardly ever, or never, conduct political conversations with black South Africans (including Blacks, coloureds and Indians).[10]

From a strong similarity in party identification between the students, their parents and friends (see Booysen, 1987: 252-255; 304-305), it can be de-

duced that exposure to a larger part of political reality or to alternative interpretations of this reality is highly unlikely. About 60 per cent of the students consistently support the National Party (NP). Their friends are also predominantly Nationalist. In comparison, approximately 20 per cent of the students and their friends support political parties or groups to the right of the NP and 6 per cent parties to the left of the NP. Support for extra-parliamentary groups like the United Democratic Front is virtually non-existent. The only significant ways in which these statistics differ from the parents' is that even larger percentages identify with political parties and groups on the far right-wing and only minute percentages with parties to the left of the NP. This indicates how politically conservative and homogeneous these students' environment of political discourse is.

Mass media exposure

Since political exposure does not occur either through political participation or through personal contact, the mass media gain additional importance. The implication is that the political consciousness of the students will — to the extent that exposure does occur — largely be constructed by

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Table 2

Levels of political discourse

Conversation partners	Year	How often politics is discussed*									
		2 or more times a day		Once a day		2 or 3 times a week		Once every 1-2 weeks		Hardly ever/ never	
		Panel		Panel		Panel		Panel		Panel	
		A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
White friends		3,0	2,8	6,3	3,5	28,7	15,6	34,0	34,4	28,1	43,7
		6,6	6,5	9,4	14,6	36,1	30,6	30,7	33,0	17,2	15,2
		4,5	6,2	11,9	11,4	34,5	30,2	42,4	35,1	6,8	17,2
Parents		2,1	3,3	5,1	5,2	19,4	19,3	37,3	33,2	36,1	39,0
		3,7	3,6	10,2	11,5	17,6	19,0	44,3	45,5	24,2	20,6
		1,1	3,2	5,1	8,1	24,3	21,1	46,3	45,5	23,2	22,1
Coloured, Black or Indian fellow students		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
		—	0,6	—	0,6	—	1,8	—	8,5	—	88,5
		0	0,6	0,6	0,6	2,3	1,6	16,4	11,4	80,8	85,7
Blacks in general		0	0,5	1,2	0,6	2,1	1,9	9,9	6,3	86,9	88,7
		1,2	0	0,4	0,2	1,2	2,8	19,7	16,8	77,5	80,2
		0	0	0,6	0,6	2,3	1,9	20,3	14,0	76,8	83,4
Coloureds in general		0	0,3	1,2	0,2	0,6	0,8	3,0	1,7	95,2	95,0
		0	0,2	0	0,4	1,6	0,6	2,9	6,3	95,5	92,5
		0	0	0,6	0,3	1,1	0,6	5,6	5,8	92,7	93,2
Indians in general		0	0,2	1,2	0,3	0,3	0,5	1,5	1,2	96,7	95,8
		0	0	0	0	0,8	0,4	2,9	3,2	96,3	96,4
		0	0	0	0	0	1,3	3,4	3,2	96,6	95,5

* Expressed in terms of percentages; the sum of percentages is not always 100, because non-responses were ignored.

the mass media.[11]

The data in table 3 indicate that both panels consistently had at least a moderate exposure to the mass media.[12] Up to 1984 the category of moderate exposure to the political contents of newspapers, radio and television was dominant. In 1985, however, a phenomenal increase manifested, which by 1986 (in the case of panel B) had started declining again. It is striking that this strong rise in media exposure occurred during the height of media coverage of events of political turmoil and unrest in South Africa.

The question arises of whether the increased exposure actually constituted higher levels of political interest. The details seem to negate this possibility. Instead, it appears to have been unintentional exposure, with the students passively taking in whatever the media presented. These students probably were not motivated by heightened interest to expose themselves more frequently. The passive nature of this exposure is underlined by the fact that the state's clampdown on unrest information disseminated by the media was followed by a decline in exposure. True political interest would have withstood this state action.

A number of statistics in table 3 can be highlighted. In the case of panel A the category of high exposure to the mass media rose from 26,3 per cent of the respondents in 1983 to 78,5 per cent two years later. A corresponding rise occurred regarding panel B. A diagonal comparison of statistics in table 3 indicates the manifestation of a period

TABLE 3

Levels of exposure to the political contents of the mass media (Newspapers, radio and television)

Levels of exposure through mass media*	Percentages for panels	
	A	B
Low	1984 : 23,3 1985 : 15,2 1986 : 2,8	1985 : 29,1 1986 : 4,0 1987 : 6,5
Moderate	1984 : 50,4 1985 : 56,6 1986 : 18,6	1985 : 46,0 1986 : 21,3 1987 : 29,2
High	1984 : 26,3 1985 : 28,3 1986 : 78,5	1985 : 24,8 1986 : 74,7 1987 : 64,3

Statistics:	Arithmetic average			Standard deviation			Median		
	'84	'85	'86	'84	'85	'86	'84	'85	'86
Panel A:	9,0	9,4	12,8	3,0	2,9	2,5	9	9	14
	'85	'86	'87	'85	'86	'87	'85	'86	'87
Panel B:	8,8	12,6	12,0	3,3	2,6	3,0	9	14	13

* The additive method of scale construction was used. The scale ranged from 3-15. A score of 3-6 constituted a low level of exposure, 7-11 a moderate level and 12-15 a high level.

effect in the use of mass media. It is also noticeable that the decline in mass media usage in 1985 among the panel B respondents coincided with the state's severe clampdown on news media and political protest.

An important question is whether the rise in mass media usage coincided with a *diversification* in the use of news sources. Did the political events which lead to heightened exposure, also induce these students to consult a wider variety of — especially more critical — news sources? Exploring this question, subsequent questionnaires probed the issue of which newspapers and radio stations the respondents were drawing on for their political information, and to what extent they were exposing themselves to both these and to the state-controlled television service.

The main impression from the data in table 4 is one of selective exposure — which would, once again, reinforce existing political attitudes supportive of the state. Regarding newspaper reading, the data illustrates that the printed media are not used as regular sources of political information. It is only the Afrikaans morning daily, Beeld, which can claim a fair level of regular readership. Political reports in Die Vaderland, The Star and The Citizen (in this order) are also consumed in small percentages. Considering the whole spectrum of political press reportage in South Africa, it is evident that these students expose only themselves to the conservative and non-challenging part of the spectrum. The analysis shows that it is almost without exception only the government and state supporting and/or Afrikaans papers which are consulted by these students.

Furthermore, about 90 to 98 per cent of the respondents never expose themselves to the more critical English newspapers, either directed at a non-racial or the primarily more radical black market. This can be illustrated regarding the Weekly Mail, which is regularly read by, respectively, 4,5 and 2,9 per cent of the two panels; Sowetan, which has a negligible readership; and City Press has even fewer readers among these students.

Altogether different statistics come to light in analyses of the consumption of political reportage by the state-controlled South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). It is especially television's political news and analyses which are widely consumed. In stark contrast to the newspaper statis-

Table 4
Detailed analyses of exposure to the political contents of the mass media

Mass media	Panels	How often exposure to the political contents of the mass media occurs (percentages)				
		1 or more times a day	2 or 3 times a week	Once a week	2-3 times per month	Hardly ever/ never
Newspapers						
Beeld	A	13,6	24,9	17,5	16,4	27,7
	B	15,6	14,9	12,7	19,5	37,3
The Citizen	A	2,3	5,1	4,0	10,2	78,5
	B	4,5	5,2	4,2	9,7	76,3
Business Day	A	0	0,6	0,6	1,1	97,7
	B	0	1,0	1,0	2,9	95,1
Sowetan	A	0,6	0,6	1,1	4,0	93,8
	B	0,3	0,6	1,0	4,5	93,5
Die Vaderland	A	10,2	10,2	10,2	23,2	46,3
	B	7,8	6,2	9,1	23,7	53,2
The Star	A	6,2	10,7	16,4	12,4	54,2
	B	7,8	7,5	10,7	15,3	58,8
Weekly Mail	A	—	—	4,5	0	95,5
	B	—	—	2,9	3,2	97,1
Rapport	A	—	—	55,9	19,8	24,3
	B	—	—	49,4	26,0	24,7
Sunday Times	A	—	—	19,8	13,0	67,2
	B	—	—	21,8	14,9	63,3
Sunday Star	A	—	—	4,0	6,8	89,3
	B	—	—	7,5	5,8	86,7
City Press	A	—	0	1,7	0	98,3
	B	—	0	2,6	1,0	96,4
Die Afrikaner/Die Patriot	A	—	—	—	—	—
	B	—	—	1,9	10,7	87,3
Television						
News (SABC)	A	41,8	39,5	7,9	6,8	4,0
	B	36,4	32,1	13,3	13,3	4,9
Network/Netwerk	A	13,0	11,1	26,0	16,4	13,6
	B	20,1	33,8	20,8	14,0	11,4
Radio						
News (SABC)	A	27,1	19,8	10,7	7,9	34,5
	B	21,1	11,4	11,0	10,4	46,1
News (702)	A	44,1	12,4	2,8	2,3	38,4
	B	30,2	8,8	7,1	11,7	42,2
News (Radio 5)	A	23,2	13,6	7,9	7,9	47,5
	B	26,6	13,6	8,4	10,4	40,9
SABC news comment	A	5,6	7,9	10,7	10,7	65,0
	B	5,8	7,1	7,1	8,4	71,4
Monitor	A	5,1	7,3	6,2	7,9	73,4
	B	7,8	4,2	5,5	6,2	76,3
Radio Today	A	0,6	0,6	2,8	1,7	94,4
	B	0,6	1,0	0	2,3	96,1

* The percentages for panel A were obtained in 1986 and for panel B in 1987.

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tics, a large proportion of students regularly watch the television news and "Network/Netwerk" programmes.[13] If the first two categories of television exposure in table 4 are combined, it shows that approximately 80 per cent of these students watch television news at least twice a week. In comparison not even 40 per cent read Beeld this regularly and none consult the more critical printed media at this rate. The comparative percentage for The Star, which can be considered to be merely mildly critical, ranges from 15 to 18 per cent.

The often coincidental nature of acquisition of political information is conspicuous in the statistics on the utilisation of radio as a source of political information. For instance, more respondents listen to news on channel 702 than those who listen to the standard SABC news service or to the news on Radio 5. Both 702 and Radio 5 are primarily used for recreation. In this way, however, the students do get a mild measure of exposure to news presented from an angle which sometimes diverges from the mainstream pro-government presentations.

The substance of predominant exposure

The dominant trend emanating from the analysis of exposure to the mass media's political contents is that despite an almost phenomenal rise in exposure during times of political turmoil, no concomitant diversification in exposure came about. Furthermore, the two media these students mostly expose themselves to, the SABC and the newspaper Beeld, almost invariably disseminate information strengthening conservative political dispositions. These media operate firmly within the parameters of acceptable political reality laid down by the state.[14]

The nature of the SABC's news coverage of township insurrection in the mid-1980s can be used as illustration. The SABC itself did not cover the events, but occasionally used footage from international television networks. Considering the drastic nature of the events, extremely limited coverage was afforded to it.[15] In addition, while the townships were going up in flames, images of "normal" South African life were beamed nightly to South African viewers. Only the briefest mention was made of the most extreme instances of revolt — and almost without exception it was interpretations of the events by cabinet members, securocrats or officials which were presented. The viewers thus were offered pre-interpreted renditions of political events.

On the level of philosophical notions, Greenberg (1987: 166, 184) notes that the SABC reaffirms core Nationalist philosophic notions about black politics; and that it takes on a legitimating role of state ideology of reform. The notions are also specifically linked to the regime's handling of black political protest. It was stressed by the SABC that in this period of unrest "the question of achieving full rights for Blacks living in the urban areas" had moved to the top of the political agenda. It should also be noted that in such broadcasts the state was always projected as acting from a position of strength and moral rightness.

Research has also drawn attention to the disproportionate amount of air time afforded to the National Party (see Hachten and Giffard, 1984: 48). Studies by the Journalism Department at Rhodes University have shown that the SABC devotes approximately 80 per cent of its coverage to Nationalist viewpoints — more than half of which were directly presented by Nationalists or government officials (also see Phelan, 1987: 58).

At the same time the political content of the Afrikaans newspapers which are relatively frequently consulted, especially Beeld, but also Rapport and Die Vaderland, mostly reflect parochial Afrikaner and white nationalist interests. In broad terms, these papers maintain a symbiotic relationship with the government and form an essential part of the network of hegemonic control. Criticisms of the state which sometimes emerge from the editorial pages are spasmodic and inconsistent.

It can be surmised therefore that the nature of media exposure to political events in the case of these youths precluded a change in political attitudes. The political information they were exposed to came from sources mostly sympathetic to existing political orientations.

The extent of attitudinal change among the student youth

The extent to which political attitudes changed serve as an indication of the validity of the assertions in the preceding paragraph. In the above discussion on identification with political party it was already noted that the students showed very little change in their almost unwavering support for the National Party and, to its right, for the Conservative Party. Although slightly less rigid, these youths' orientations towards issues on South African politics showed only modest change in the period from

Table 5

South African political issues: change in orientations.

Relative positions ons political issues*	Percentages for panels			
	A		B	
Relatively right-wing	1984 : 45,9 1985 : 31,1 1986 : 28,2		1985 : 46,7 1986 : 32,3 1987 : 29,2	
Relatively moderate	1984 : 44,7 1985 : 50,4 1986 : 54,8		1985 : 46,6 1986 : 51,5 1987 : 55,3	
Relatively left-wing	1984 : 9,3 1985 : 18,4 1986 : 16,9		1985 : 6,7 1986 : 16,2 1987 : 15,5	

Statistics:	Arithmetic average			Standard deviation			Median '84		
	'84	'85	'86	'84	'85	'86	'84	'85	'86
Panel A:	27,8	36,8	38,3	8,3	11,2	11,4	26	35	39
	'84	'85	'86	'84	'85	'86	'84	'85	'86
Panel B:	27,6	35,8	37,0	8,3	10,8	11,3	16	35	37

* The additive method of scale construction was used. The scale for panels A and B in, respectively, 1984 and 1985 ranged from 11-55. In these instances scores of 11-25 represented a relatively right-wing position, 26-39 a moderate position and 40-55 a left-wing position. In all other instances the scale ranged from 13-65 and scores of 13-30, 31-45 and 49-65 constituted the three categories.

1984 to 1987. A degree of "liberalisation" in attitudes was evident — in particular in terms of the second measurements for both the panels. The information in table 5 shows that if the answers to the items on South African politics are collated into three broad categories of relatively right-wing, moderate or left-wing, the right-wing category shows a depletion in the case of both panels A and B, the moderate category grows accordingly, and the left-wing category also shows modest gains. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the right-wing category still has approximately double the percentages the left-wing category has.

Considering the very conservative nature of the questions on South African politics, the significance of these results should not be overestimated. Compared with a fairly substantial decline in support for sections of the Immorality Act and Prohibition of Mixed Marriages, students were still adamant that white South Africans are entitled to the forceful maintenance of their politically dominant position; that there should not be negotiations with the Afri-

can National Congress; that political and economic repression is not the cause of political violence.[16]

The political consciousness of these students is further reflected in their views on the nature of certain political realities. To explore this, a number of questions regarding the causes, extent and handling of unrest in the townships of South Africa was put to them.[17]

Only minute percentages of each of the panels reckoned that unrest was caused by legitimate grievances among black South Africans. In addition, intimidation and instigation was overwhelmingly identified as the true causes. They realised that unrest was widespread. The involvement of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in quelling the unrest was almost unanimously condoned by the students, who seemed to be oblivious of opposition to and condemnation of this phenomenon. The students, however, seemed to be less certain of the consequences of the 1984 to 1986 revolt. A substantial proportion saw the unrest as part of the process of black liberation, but large num-

Table 6

Opinions on political unrest in South Africa

Statements on the nature of unrest	Percentages for panels	
	A	B
Causes		
The unrest is caused by intimidation and instigation.	83,6	90,1
The unrest is the result of blacks' legitimate grievances.	7,9	8,5
Scope		
The unrest is widespread in black areas.	71,8	75,7
The unrest occurs only in a couple of disenchanted communities	24,9	23,1
Handling		
The army protects the interests of the average black person in the townships.	67,2	85,2
The army should be withdrawn from the townships	13,6	13,0
Results		
The unrest is part of a process of black liberation.	38,4	56,3
The long-term position of the power of Whites is not threatened by the unrest.	29,2	35,6

* Percentages for panel A were obtained in 1986; those for panel B in 1987. The percentages do not add up to 100, because non-responses and statements of uncertainty were disregarded.

bers also thought that white power in the longer term will not be threatened by the unrest.

A number of corollaries between the student attitudes and the contents of their favoured media can be pointed out. For instance, the Afrikaans newspapers are tradionally loyal supporters of the Nationalist regime. Despite a certain measure of editorial dissent since the early 1980s, this phenomenon remained sporadic and always appeared within a context of so-called "loyal" or "constructive" opposition (see also the Study Commission on U.S. Policy toward Southern Africa, 1981: 221). Regarding the SABC, Hachten (1979:62) points out that television is used as an instrument of propaganda to promote the interests and aspirations of Afrikanerism. These characteristics were still in evidence in the period of this study. The political culture disseminated by the mass media controlled and favoured by Afrikaners, provide legitimation of the current political order (see also Phelan, 1987).

Rationale and implications: restricted exposure unquestioned

From the data presented it can be seen how exceptionally limited the extent of direct exposure to political events is. Exposure is mostly mediated through the use of mass media. Moreover, the mass media do not merely serve as the neutral conveyer of messages. The political nature of the media which these students expose themselves to serve to transmit information which will reinforce political attitudes dominant in Afrikaner political culture.

Regarding the political resocialisation potential of political events, it has to be concluded that even traumatic political events present only a limited potential for political change among these students. Because of selective exposure to political events, the potential for political resocialisation is severely reduced. A certain "Zeitgeist" or period effect which may otherwise have resulted from the experience

of far-reaching political events, only becomes apparent in a controlled form, mediated by state-sympathetic media.

Even more significantly, this control is exercised by the state. It takes on various forms, varying from restrictions on the more critical press (which hardly affects these students, because they are inclined not even to expose themselves marginally to these media) to hegemonic control (where many of the printed media voluntarily toe the government line, and all the political socialisation influences link into a broad pattern of reinforcing political socialisation) and the incorporation of the SABC as a state agency. The latter option represents the process through which the selected mass media in South Africa contribute toward the formation of political consciousness of these youths.

Various extremely important political orientations substantiate these students' lack of inclination to question or to be intent on exposure to a wider range of political information. These include an exceptionally high level of trust in the political leaders of the white community (see Booysen, 1987: 240-242), the conviction that these people genuinely act in their very best interest, and complementarily, that there consequently is no real imperative to become involved in politics and to try to affect political decisions. To the extent that these youths are aware of the existence of political problems, they probably also exercise a form of escapism through their trust in their leaders. Because of a lack of confidence in their knowledge of politics, they both rely on their leaders and are shielded from developing a need for a wider range of political knowledge.

Non-involvement and selective exposure can also be explained through the privileged middle-class existence that these students lead. Within the realm of the relatively short term their protected lives obtain a self-perpetuating quality. They are vaguely aware that there are political problems, but they are too busy leading the good, care-free life to stop and find out about these problems. Had they been aware of the real and pressing political issues, they may have cared. But, how do they arrive at the point of realisation of the hardships and struggles among the majority of South Africans? This study has elucidated the restrictions placed on these realisations by the students' limited political exposure, even in the presence of political events with a political resocialisation potential.

The main precondition for political resocialisation — set within the limits of what is possible for these youths — is that they become exposed to political information which will not reconfirm existing prejudice and ignorance. This broad condition, however, is not being met. The analysis showed that the students depend on mass media exposure to become informed about political events. However, the media to which they expose themselves serve to enhance existing features of their political consciousness. Their political reality therefore exists within the parameters of political information selected and presented by sympathetic mass media, especially the SABC.

Notes

1. Edelman (as quoted in Gamson, 1985:614) stresses that it is the political consciousness through which beliefs are formed about what is "proper" , perceptions come into being about what constitutes facts, and expectations are formed about how and in which situations one should act politically.

2. The period of youth considered in this study, people of the ages of roughly 18-22 years old, can be classified as early-adult.

3. Political socialisation in this study is conceptualised as an interactive life-long process of political learning. Accordingly political socialisation does not necessarily involve an "induction into a political culture". More aptly, it can be viewed as a "maturing, liberating, skill-developing process" (see Lindblom, 1982:17). In accordance with Grabe and Knobelsdorf, 1980: 227), political socialisation is conceptualised as a process of permanent adaptation of political orientations (irrespective of age) to the conditions, norms and structures of a given society.

4. This statement obviously could also apply to non-university going youths, although to a lesser extent. Research on the political socialisation role of the university stresses the role of the university in "amplifying" normal socialisation processes (see Booysen, 1987: 137-142).

5. The premises on the resocialisation role of the mass media in South Africa should be contextualised — firstly with reference to certain characteristics of Afrikaner political culture, and secondly the state's restrictions placed on the diffusion of political information. In a further section the mass media contents which these students are exposed to, will be illuminated and compared with the substance of student attitudes. At this stage it suffices to point out that the mass media operate under severe restric-

tions, imposed in terms of the states of emergencies of 1985-86 and 1986 and since. The restrictions, however, only marginally affect the political information which these students receive from the media.

6. See Merelman, 1980 for an exposition of arguments on simultaneous socialisation by "third forces"

7. See Booysen, 1987: 219-228 for full details of the sample and respondent characteristics.

8. Political participation in this section refers to manifest, conventional forms of political activity.

9. "Unusual" in this context refers to people holding other political orientations than the students themselves or to people, probably from other race groupings, with political information or views which these students are not ordinarily exposed to.

10. These group categorisations are used because it reflects the way in which the South African society has been structured during the period of Nationalist hegemony, not because the author concurs.

11. It could of course be argued that few people in any situation have the direct opportunity to experience political events. This could indeed also be maintained regarding South Africa and the specific case of these student youths. This situation, however, is a strange occurrence in a political order as politicised as South Africa.

12. The data in this table is based on three general questions, regarding how often the political sections in newspapers are read, and how often they listen to or watch political news on radio or television.

13. The biggest part of the research was done in the period when there was still a distinction between "News" and "Network/Netwerk"

14. These media, according to many definitions of the state, would be considered to be part of, or are indistinguishable from, the state.

15. Also see the analyses of Phelan, 1987: 56 and Adam and Moodley, 1986: 161.

16. A total of thirteen statements on South African politics were put to the respondents. These were evaluated on a Likert scale.

17. Regarding the causes, the students were asked whether in their opinion the unrest was caused by intimidation and instigation or whether it is the result of legitimate grievances; estimates of their perceptions of the scope of unrest were obtained through the question of whether the unrest is widespread in the townships or whether it was limited to a few disenchanted communities; perceptions of the handling of the unrest were gauged through the question of whether the army protects the interests of the average black person in the townships or whether the army should be withdrawn from these areas. In each case the respondents were also encouraged to offer alternative answers.

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