"Desenrascar a vida": youth employment and transitions to adulthood

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Conference Paper nº 29

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Abstract

The paper examines the lives of young people in Africa struggling with unemployment and sustainable livelihoods in the context of the economic crisis. Failed neo-liberal economic policies, bad governance and political instability have caused stable jobs to disappear—without jobs that pay living wages, young people cannot support families, thus becoming fully participating members of society. Most young Africans are living in, what I call, "waithood," a period of suspension between childhood and adulthood. As this limbo becomes pervasive and prolonged, waithood in Africa becomes seemingly permanent, gradually replacing conventional adulthood. And with the deepening of the world economic crisis, youth in Europe, North America and other parts of the world face the same crisis of joblessness and restricted futures. The paper draws from in-depth interviews in four African countries: Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia. While the case studies are local to Africa, the paper argues that the "waithood generation" is global, and possesses a tremendous transformative potential, as young people believe the struggle to overcome their socio-economic predicament requires radical social and political change. From riots and protests in the streets of Maputo, Dakar, Madrid, London, New York and Santiago, to revolutions that overthrow dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the "waithood generation" appears to be taking upon itself to redress the wrongs of contemporary society and remake the world.

Introduction

The majority of African youths are today grappling with a lack of jobs and deficient education. After they leave school with few skills they are unable to obtain work and become independent—to build, buy, or rent a house for themselves, support their relatives, get married, establish families, and gain

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social recognition as adults. These attributes of adulthood are becoming increasingly unattainable by the majority of young people in Africa. Young Mozambicans used the Portuguese term *desenrascar a vida* (eke out a living); young Senegalese and Tunisians employed the French term *débrouillage* (making do); and young South Africans spoke about "just getting by." All these expressions vividly convey the extemporaneous nature of these young people's lives.

I use the notion *waithood*, which means waiting for adulthood, to call this phase in young people's life. On the one hand, young people have reached a point in which they should be transitioning to a new stage of life, become adults with all the economic and social responsibilities inherent to such status; but the are still waiting for that to happened. On the other hand, young people are struggling to survive and make sense of their lives in an environment of economic hardship, massive unemployment, poverty HIV/AIDS and other social ills.

This paper discusses *waithood* as a new stage in youth transitions to adulthood. Rather than defining youth on the basis of chronological age (for example 15-24 or 14-35)[1] this paper understands youth as defined by social expectations and responsibilities and considers all those who have not yet been able to attain social adulthood, despite their age, as youth.

The paper examines young people's experiences of waithood in four different African contexts namely, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia. It also analyzes youth strategies for coping with waithood and carving out forms of livelihoods, which albeit precarious, keeps some of them afloat even if just for

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[1] The United Nations and the World Bank defined youth as all those between the ages of 15-25 (United Nations 2007; World Bank 2007). The African Union, and many African nations, define youth as those aged 15-35 (African Union 2006).

one day at a time. The paper argues that waithood does not result from a failed transition on the part of the youth themselves but rather from a breakdown in the social economic system supposed to provide them with the opportunities to grow up healthy, get good education, find employment, form families and contribute to society as fully fledged citizens. What is broken is the social contract between the state and its citizens. Unsound economic policies, bad governance, corruption and absence of civil liberties are often at the origin of this problem.

The research for this paper was conducted in 2010 -2011 in the four countries. During my research I met young people from a range of social and economic backgrounds, most of them aged between 18 and 38. I conducted individual interviews and focus-group discussions with students, young professionals, musicians and other artists, activists from various fields, and unemployed young men and women carrying out the most diverse activities to try to make ends meet. Young people were eager to tell their stories. In long individual interviews and group discussions I listened to their life stories and their views about their peers, their elders, the economy, politics and aspirations for the future.

Waithood and the Transition to Adulthood

French sociologist Olivier Galland (1991) analyzed three dimensions of youth transitions: professional transitions from school to work; residential transitions from the parental home to a home of one's own; and relationship transitions from being single to getting married and forming a family. When these three transitions take place in a sequential or synchronized manner—for example, when a person completes his or her education, secures a job, finds a place to live, and then marries and has children—entering adulthood follows a standardized path and is seen as unproblematic.

This model is inapplicable to many young people, especially those who are disadvantaged by gender, race, or social class. Women and impoverished youths may make some of these transitions much earlier (Molgat 2007) or much later, if at all. Indeed, these transitions are now subject to considerable fragmentation, interruptions, and reversals (Bradley and Devadason 2008; Dwyer and Wyn 2001; Holdsworth and Morgan 2005; Pilcher et al. 2003; Pollock 2008; Walther 2006). They rarely follow the neat unidirectional pattern projected in Galland's model. Wide variations in access to opportunities for education and professional and occupational training, employment, and social support mean that the timing and order of these transitions depend on young people's specific situations. Social, economic, and political conditions both constrain and enable youths to carve out particular pathways into adulthood. In Africa today, the majority of youths are stuck in waithood.

Waithood, a portmanteau term of "wait" and "-hood" meaning waiting for adulthood, which describes a period of suspension between childhood and adulthood. It represents a prolonged adolescence or an involuntary delay in reaching adulthood, in which young people are unable to attain the social markers of adulthood - getting a job or some form of livelihood; leaving their parents' house and building their own home; getting married; having children; and providing for their families.

The notion of waithood was first used by Navtej Dhillon and Tarik Yousef (2007) and Dianne Singerman (2007) in their work on youth in the Middle East and North Africa. They rightly suggested that waithood encompasses the multifaceted nature of youth transitions to adulthood, which goes beyond securing a job and extends to social life and civic participation. While the notion of waithood might give a sense of passively lingering, in this analysis I try to

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push this concept further to show that young people in waithood are not inactively "waiting" for their situation to change. Despite the challenges, youth in waithood are dynamic and using their creativity to invent new forms of being and interacting with society. Waithood accounts for a multiplicity of young people's experiences, ranging from daily survival strategies such as street vending and cross-border trade to involvement in gangs and criminal activities.

To a greater extend waithood also represents the contradictions of modernity, in which young people's opportunities and expectations are simultaneously broadened and constrained. They are enlarged by the new technologies of information and communication that make young people more globally integrated. Youth relate to local social structures and cultural patterns, but they are also connected to global culture via mobile telephones, cyberspace, television, and advertising. At the same time, they are also constrained by lack of access to basic resources due to unsound socioeconomic policies, epidemics, and political instability and repression. There is no doubt that this situation stems from bad governance and from the social and economic policies espoused by international financial institutions that were imposed on Africa and other countries in the global South. Structural adjustment programs (later known as the poverty reduction strategy programs), deeply weakened African state's ability to determine national socioeconomic policies and priorities and to uphold the social contract with their citizenry.[2] But bad governance and pervasive corruption

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[2] As various scholars observed, structural adjustment policies were against state investments in health, education, transport, and telecommunications. They favored the removal of trade barriers that protected local producers, the relaxation of tax regimes as well as the privatization of agriculture, land, and food production and distribution (Manji 1998; Manji et al. 2011). The result was the increase of socioeconomic disparities and the gradual transformation of citizens into consumers. Power and influence over social policy were increasingly determined by wealth and those who had no means to participate in consumer society were disenfranchised (Manji 2011).

absence of freedom of expression and civil liberties further compounded the problem.

Nevertheless, waithood does not affect every young African man or woman in the same way. Some have become adults too soon, as child soldiers, child laborers, or surrogate parents to younger siblings after their parents died. Others can never attain the economic autonomy that allows them to partake on the social responsibilities of adulthood. At ten, a child soldier is an adult; at fourty, an unemployed and unmarried man is still a youth. But many children who assume adult roles at a tender age are later pushed back into waithood as they grow up and try to attain their independence.

Moreover, waithood manifests itself differently among a small group of elite youths who are generally able to afford a good education in private schools and abroad and are often well connected to networks of the powerful that facilitate their access to secure jobs. Some privileged youths may choose to avoid some the responsibilities of adulthood, as some may continue to live with and depend on their parents, and not take up the opportunities that might come their way.

For the vast majority of young Africans, however, waithood is involuntary. Rather than being a short interruption in their transition to adulthood, waithood may last for extended periods, well into their thirties and even forties. Some never get out of it and remain permanently in the precarious and improvised life that waithood imposes. Prolonged waithood is becoming the rule rather than the exception. For many, being young in Africa today is synonymous with living in involuntary waithood.

Nevertheless, waithood is not just an African phenomenon. In the United States

and the UK terms such as, *kidults, adultolescents*[3] and *thresholders* (Apter 2001) have been used to describe youths who are in limbo between childhood and adulthood, struck in what some scholars called "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2004). Expressions like the "boomerang" or "yo-yo" generation have been used to describe college graduates who return home and continue to depend on their parents. In Japan *freeters* (furītā)[4] and *parasaito shinguru* (parasite singles) refer to the growing number of young people who are having difficulties joining the labor force and forming their own families (Miyamoto 2002; 2004; Kosugi 2006). In Italy, *bamboccioni* (big dummy boys) is a sarcastic term that indicates the growing number of young men in their mid-twenties and thirties who are still unmarried and living with their parents.[5] Thus, waithood is global.

Experiences of Waithood

In African countries the socialization of young people into adult life was traditionally marked by a series of symbolic and educational steps and was the responsibility of the entire community. In many societies, initiation rituals conferred on young men the right to be accepted among adults, receive land, leave the parental home, and marry; they offered young women the means to become good wives and mothers. For both men and women, marriage was a

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[3] See Grossman article in *Time* magazine 16 January 2003; and also Tyre article in *Newsweek* 25 March 2002.

[4] Freeter (*furītā*) is a Japanese expression for people between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four who lack full-time employment or are unemployed.

[5] In October 2007 Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, then minister of economy and finance, spoke to a parliamentary committee about the government's plan for tax relief (approximately 500€/year) to people twenty to thirty years old, especially males, who are still living with their family, saying it would help them move out on their own. He used the ironic or sarcastic term *bamboccioni*. Many Italians found the term offensive because in their opinion the problem is not the youth themselves but rather the system. A substantial number of young Italians live on approximately 1000€ per month and cannot afford to leave their parents' house.

crucial step in a ritualized journey to adulthood. This traditional path to adulthood has gradually been eroded by urbanization, modernization, and globalization, as youths increasingly migrate to urban centers for schooling or employment. Formal education becomes one of the principal agents for socializing and training the next generation. Wage labor provides youth with newfound independence from parents and kinship groups (Calvès et al. 2007).

As Joel, a 28-year-old resident of Maputo, explained: *"At the age of eighteen our fathers would go to South Africa as labor migrants to work in the mines . . . [and] come home with enough money to pay lobolo (bridewealth) for a girl. They would then go back for another contract and return with more money to build a house and pay for the wedding and other family expenses."* Becoming a labor migrant was a rite of passage into adulthood, as work in the mines provided the resources the young men from southern Mozambique needed to become workers, husbands, fathers, and providers for their families, as well as taxpayers and contributors to the wider society.

Today, however, society no longer endows young men and women with the social, economic, cultural, and moral resources they need to follow robust pathways to adulthood. African societies are struggling with economic decline, strained educational systems, high unemployment rates, and insecure livelihoods, all of which seriously weaken the social fabric. So extreme is the situation, particularly with the current global economic crisis, that most governments are unable to provide their citizens with basic social and economic resources. The decline of opportunities in rural areas has led young men and women to migrate to the cities, where their chances of finding employment remain very slim. Young people increasingly are forced to survive in an oversaturated informal economy or as informal labour in the formal sector.

All these factors create serious constraints on youths' ability to attain adult independence. Adulthood eludes them as they are deprived of its main building blocks: skills, jobs, housing, and family formation. The difficulties they experience in one area spill over into other areas and have a debilitating effect on their entire lives (Dhillon and Yousef 2007). Youths find themselves perpetually waiting to enter adulthood (Dhillon and Yousef 2007; Singerman 2007). They are consigned to a liminal space in which they are neither dependent children nor autonomous adults.

In West Africa the term *youthman* is commonly used to refer to people who have not attained social adulthood despite their biological adulthood (Abdullah 1998). Even men over forty continue to be seen as youths because of their inability to gain a stable livelihood, live independently, marry and form families. The very existence of the expression *youthman*, as Ibrahim Abdullah observes, stands as a metaphor for Africa's poverty and attests to the pervasiveness of waithood across the continent. The lyrics of a popular song from Sierra Leone lament the conditions of a *youthman*'s life.

> *I feel sorry for the youthman today*
> *The system is bad for the youthman today*
> *Every day and every night they suffer*
> *The youthman want to sleep but no place*
> *The youthman want to eat but no food*
> *The youthman want good dress but no good dress*
> *The youthman want to buy but no money*
> *The youthman want to work*
> *If no work, how do you expect him to eat?*

In South Africa, similarly, Mark Hunter has found the *Xizulu* term *umnqolo* is used to describe a grown but unmarried man who lives with his parents, capturing the idea of men who are not progressing in life. This masculine word has a feminine counterpart. The term *uzendazamshiya* indicates an unmarried woman of marriageable age who is still living in her parents home, indicating that she has been left behind (Hunter 2010, 155). Young men and women experience waithood in very different ways. For men, waithood entails facing the pressures of finding a steady job; securing the resources to purchase, build, or rent a home; and covering the costs of marriage and family formation. Although women are increasingly being educated and have always engaged in productive labor alongside household chores, marriage and motherhood are still the most important markers of adulthood. Yet their ability to attain this social status depends on men's moving beyond waithood (Singerman 2007; Calvès et al. 2007).

Waithood involves a long process of negotiating personal identity and financial independence in circumstances of deep socioeconomic crisis. Narratives from young women in Mali and Tunisia and young men in South Africa and Mozambique point to the impact of structural conditions on their lives and highlight their inescapable socioeconomic vulnerability. Nyele, a young Malian woman, describes how she was led into a way of life that offers no real future:

> *I come from a poor family and was kicked out of high school because I was unable to make steady progress…. Like my other girl friends, I was hired as a waitress in a restaurant. . . . Men who frequented the restaurant started to give me tips and relations developed between some of them and me. Sometimes I went out with some of them and started to enjoy the easy money. Now it is hard for me to abandon this life of secret prostitution. Despite all the adverse consequences such*

as AIDS and other STDs and the social stigma, it is hard for me to just stay there and do nothing (Quoted in Olonisakin and Ismail, 2008, 10).

Twenty-eight-year-old Zahira from Tunisia has been unable to find steady employment after finishing her studies in social communication at the University of Tunis. She comes from a working-class family in the central region of Sidi Bouzid and is eager to work and support herself and her relatives. *"I have had several temporary jobs as a shop assistant and a dispatcher at a call center. . . . The jobs had nothing to do with my training and were not stable enough for me to plan my future,"* said Zahira.

Bongani, a thirty-year-old man from Soweto in South Africa, completed a high school diploma (matric) in 2000.

> *After finishing matric I tried to get a job but it was hard to get a good job. . . . In my first job I worked as a cleaner for a big company for about two years. Then I found another job [where] I had to go door-to-door selling vacuum cleaners. I didn't stay long because the owner of the company was racist; he didn't treat the black employees well. . . . I have not been able to get any proper jobs since then…. I look for temporary jobs in merchandizing and shelf-packing in retail stores and supermarkets like ShopRite. . . . I am not married but I have a child. . . . Without a job it is difficult to organize my life properly.*

Bogani recognizes that his life is not in order. He has become a father but not a husband, and economic constraints prevent him from assuming the position of a fully adult man.

Jonasse, who is 27-years old, picks over the garbage dump in Hulene for things to eat, use, or sell. He searches for things such as plastic, glass and metal to sell to

recycling companies as well as car tires, computer parts, appliances, and other electronics that may be repaired and sold in the nearby market of *Xiquelene*. Jonasse dropped out of primary school in grade six when his father died, and he, his mother, and his four siblings struggled to survive on their own. So he decided to leave home and fend for himself. Unable to find work, he ended up joining a friend who had been eking out a living on the dump. Jonasse has been living off the dump for about ten years. Every morning he gets up very early to wait for the garbage trucks to arrive. If he is late he will miss the chance to make money from unloading the trucks and the opportunity to collect the best items. Jonasse admits that life on the garbage dump is extremely hard. There is a lot of competition and backstabbing among the scavengers; "*you have to rely on yourself and your close friends, and you have to watch out because this is like a jungle.*" His goal is to get a single meal every day. When I asked how he saw the future, Jonasse responded: "*The future? My life is about today and [to] make sure I don't miss a good truck, one that might come with something to eat or something I may be able to sell in the market to be able to eat.*"

Anthropologist Marc Sommers highlights the difficulties faced by young Rwandans trying to achieve financial independence and partake in adult obligations. A 24-year-old Rwandan man said, "*All the guys here can't afford to marry a woman because they can't build a house. Male and female youth are failing to get married.*" (Sommers 2012, 115). A 45-year-old man agreed that "*there are no youth able to marry in my umudugudu [village], even if they are old enough to do so*" (Sommers 2012, 115). Limited access to land and lack of employment opportunities in the countryside drive many to the capital, Kigali, in search of work. But, as a 23-year old woman pointed out, "*male youth in town [Kigali] can end up as thieves and the female youth end up as prostitutes. They can get HIV/AIDS or become pregnant.*" (Sommers 2012, 137). Sommers concludes that the widespread inability of young men and women to attain full adulthood creates a vast array of

social problems, including crime, prostitution, and the spread of HIV/AIDS. These concerns are shared across the continent.

Although none of these young people feels completely helpless, they all recognize the external factors that limit their actions and their ability to thrive and succeed. The educational and employment opportunities available are insufficient to enable the youth to fulfill their basic aspirations, particularly in an economic environment marked by rapid technological innovation and globalization, as well as structural adjustment policies that failed to stimulate economic growth and employment and exacerbated poverty. Education systems have been unable to provide young people with the skills they need to compete in, or even enter, the labor market. There is a mismatch between the education system and the needs of the labor market. But at the heart of the problem, is without a doubt, the unavailability of jobs. In Tunisia, for example, unemployment rates are higher among university graduates.

Rates of unemployment and underemployment in the continent are extremely high among youth. Reliable youth unemployment statistics for Africa are not available. The figures that do exist offer little insight into the impact of unemployment on young people in waithood because most definitions of youth often do not capture the reality. The World Bank and other institutions still use 15-24 to define youth. In Tunisia, massive youth unemployment was the core of the revolution in 2011; in South Africa high youth unemployment has prompted the government… and in Mozambique the food riots of 2010 also stem from lack of jobs and increasing difficulties to make ends meet. Moreover, in all four countries there has been inadequate support for youth entrepreneurships. Existing credit schemes and training programs have proved to be ineffective.

But young people in these countries are not just seating down and waiting for their elders or the government to do something. Instead, young people are working out their own lives and livelihoods on the basis of the resources available to them. They are using their agency and creativity to find solutions for everyday life challenges. In this sense waithood should not be understood as failed transition, a form of deviance, or a pathology from which young people suffer. Waithood, with all its challenges, becomes also a period of experimentation, improvisation and of great creativity on the part of those living it.

Desenrascar a Vida: Coping with Waithood

Liggey, which means work in *Wolof,* the national language of Senegal, is one of the most notable virtues in Senegalese culture. *Liggey* is celebrated as an important marker of adulthood because the ability to work and provide defines a person's self-worth and position in the family. This idea prevails in all four countries I studied. Yet, the majority of young men and women are unable to find work and attain a socially valued status as responsible men and women, as well as the sense of dignity embedded in the notion of *liggey*.

Young Africans adopt a range of survival strategies to cope with waithood. They identify, explore, and try to maximize whatever opportunities arise in a constant effort to improve their daily lives. Their responses to their predicament vary considerably and are linked to their particular structural positions, which affect the resources they can leverage in efforts to lift themselves out of the situations they inhabit. By improvising diverse income-generating activities, some young people manage to sustain themselves and even improve their living conditions, while others continue to flounder as they pursue one *biscato* (odd job) after another.

Young people see themselves being pushed to the margins. Eking out a livelihood in the informal economy becomes their only option. Keeping in mind the linkages between the formal and informal sectors of the economy[6], I share young people's narratives of some of the survival strategies they adopt to make a living. Some are more precarious than others, but they all show youth's resolve to do something to better their lives.

Cross-border trading is a common activity carried out by youth in waithood. In Mozambique young women, especially, travel to neighboring South Africa and Swaziland to buy products for resale in local markets. This activity is known as *mukhero*, a term that refers to the low-level tax evasion practiced by small and middling traders.

Alda, a twenty-eight-year-old mother of two, travels three times a month to the South African city of Durban, where she buys clothes to sell to clients in Maputo. She began trading in 2004 after seeking work in vain. "Life was difficult. I had to feed my children," she explained. "The journey to Durban is very long, about eight hours. We buy bread and juice on the road or prepare a little mangungo [a meal packed at home]." Alda prefers to shop in Durban because she finds the

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[6] Debates about the informal economy have crystallized into three dominant schools of thought: dualism, structuralism, and legalism. Dualist scholars argue that informal units and activities operate independently and have few links with the formal economy (Sethuraman 1976; Tokman 1978). Structuralism, by contrast, recognizes that the informal and formal economies are intrinsically linked. Firms in the formal economy can reduce their costs through informal production and employment relationships with the informal sector (Moser 1978; Portes et al. 1989). The legalist approach focuses on the relationship between informal entrepreneurs and enterprises and the formal regulatory environment and acknowledges that capitalist interests collude with government to set the "rules of the game" (De Soto 1989). Given the heterogeneity of the informal economy, there is some truth in each of these perspectives (Chen 2006).

nearby city of Nelspruit crowded with Mozambicans doing the same business. Normally she travels all day and arrives in Durban in the late afternoon or early evening. "Those who have enough money can sleep in hotels, but those of us who don't sleep in the stalls within the market, or at the bus station. When we wake in the morning, we purchase the goods and then take the mini bus back to Maputo." Alda says that this business is profitable, but it has its problems. Both the South African Rand and the Metical are unstable, making it difficult to make a profit. At the customs office, she says, "we have to pay very high taxes and that forces us to evade taxes, which is a risk we have to face every time we cross the border. . . . Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't."

Young Tunisian men carry on similar trading activities by going to Algeria and Libya and smuggling goods back. Twenty-seven-year old Khaled who lives in the town of Kasserine located a few kilometers of he Algerian border makes a living by traveling to Algeria to buy goods to resell in Kasserine. His niche is young men's modern clothing (sneakers, jeans, tee-shirts and the like). Khaled finds traveling across the border difficult and risky. "*Customs officers can confiscate your merchandise, or people can rob you before you have a chance to sell your products. It is harder for young people doing small.*"

Street vendors constitute an integral component of urban economies. Many young Senegalese in waithood, like many across the continent, find their livelihood working in small street kiosks, and others carry their wares on their heads or in backpacks and sell to people walking by or in cars caught in traffic jams.[7] In Dakar there is a clear distinction between those with fixed stalls inside the market; those who operate from semi-fixed stalls, known as *tabliers*, and use folding tables or wheeled pushcarts inside or outside the market; and *ambulants*,

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[7] See Naomi Schwarz, "Senegal Temporarily Lifts Street-Selling Ban," in REI (2007), available on the http://developingtimes/blogspot.com website.

those who hawk their wares in the streets.[8] The majority of young vendors in Dakar are *tabliers* or *ambulants*, rather than vendors who operate in officially sanctioned off-street markets. Street vending has few barriers to entry and enables people with no other recourse to earn a subsistence living.

After finishing her university degree in cultural studies, Aïcha a 24-year old woman from Tunisia was unable to find full-time employment in her field.
Like many unemployed graduates, she took a couple of temporary jobs for foreign call centres based in Tunisia. She spent three months at a call centre in Tunis for a French telephone company calling clients in France. As she pointed out, workers at these call centres have no contracts and are employed for short periods on a temporary basis; monthly renewals are dependent on the supervisor. They generally work ten-to twelve-hour shifts with a one-hour break for lunch and one or two fifteen-minute breaks to use the restroom. They are under constant surveillance to ensure they make calls continuously, and interact with customers in a polite and persuasive manner, and they are forbidden to let the customers know that they are not in France. Aïcha felt exploited by these companies, which did not pay her a salary commensurable with her qualifications. She was underemployed.

Ntembisa, a 31-year-old man who lives in Soweto, has a high-school degree (matric). He could not continue on to the university because of his lower matric average and had to start working. Ntembisa was able to find a job at a retail store. He worked there for two years but was laid off during a retrenchment in 2005. Since then, despite endless job searches, he has been unable to find permanent employment. He survives on small and irregular earnings from occasional shelf-packing and merchandising jobs in retail stores. Ntembisa

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[8] See Erin Thornton, "Meeting with Street Traders in Dakar," posted on *ONE* in 2010, available on the www.one.org website.

learned to bake while doing a short-term job at a bakery, and he now bakes biscuits at home and sells them in the market.

Pedro, a twenty-five-year-old man from Matola in Mozambique dropped out of school after his father's death. His elder brother, who had been a *chapa* driver for a couple of years, managed to get him a job as a fare collector in the *chapa* company. Pedro has been working with his brother for three years, but he is dissatisfied because of the long hours they have to put in for the little money they make. Jobs are insecure and depend entirely on the *chapa* owner. He explained: *"I am happy because I have something, but we spend the entire day in the chapa and in the end we don't make much money. . . . Most of the money goes to the boss who owns the taxi. We don't have contracts or fixed salaries. Some days are better than others depending on the number of passengers we get."*

Illegal emigration has also been a strategy to deal with waithood. Young Mozambicans migrate to South Africa, while Tunisians cross the border to Libya and to Europe. Likewise, Senegalese youths try to reach Spain by traversing the desert and taking small fishing boats across the Mediterranean Sea. An average of 350 pirogues filled with migrants are intercepted at the Spanish coast every week (Carling 2007). Many perish during this long, dangerous journey, others were apprehended and repatriated and few are able to make it (Lessault and Beauchemin 2009). The majority of young migrants are males and aged twenty and twenty-nine years of age (Bassene 2010) who paid small fortunes to the organizers of the crossing. *"We paid 300,000 Francs CFA (about US$600). My group had about one hundred people, mostly young men and a few young women. There was also a handful of adults. . . . Late at night, we boarded various small boats, which took us to the large pirogue at sea. We did all this after midnight to avoid being caught by the coast guard. . . . In case of trouble, the boat had a huge canvas to hide everybody. We arrived at the coast of Mauritania in the evening, but we had to wait at sea until late at*

night to dock" said 27-year old Abdoulaye, an ambulant in the streets of Dakar that wanted to try is luck in Spain. Abdoulaye never made it to Spain the maritime guard caught them at sea between Mauritania and Morocco.

Young people in waithood are pushed out of the system and forced to survive on the margins of society. Rejected by the state and the formal sector of the economy, they create new spaces and mechanisms for survival and operate in subcultures outside hegemonic structures. They create independent spaces, or "youthscapes" (Maira and Soep 2005) with their own *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi*. Through these activities they try to subvert authority, bypass the encumbrances created by the formal system, and fashion new ways of functioning and maneuvering on their own. These youth spaces foster opportunities and possibilities for *desenrasque, débrouillage,* and for "getting by" through improvisation.

Those in power often view their ways of operating as distasteful, dangerous, and even criminal. It is not surprising that their relationship with the state and the formal sector is marked by tension and mutual distrust. The state enforces laws that delimit and control the spaces of legitimate activity and mark them as outsiders. Police and municipal officers harass and chase vendors off the streets. Employers often refuse to sign contracts, making young people into informal workers in the formal sector, subjected to their superiors' whims and in permanent fear of instant dismissal. Educated youths find themselves without jobs or relegated to the low end of the professional scale. Other expedients are seen as dangerous or outside the law – crime, prostitution and the like.

People in society often fear and recoil from the young men living on the garbage dump, condemn the behavior of *chapa* drivers and pushy street vendors, reproach the smugglers and illegal immigrants. Stanley Cohen's study of youth

subcultures in Great Britain in the 1970s led him to develop the concept of "moral panic," which interprets disturbing societal phenomenon such as fights between youth gangs as a sign of widespread social pathology (Cohen 1972: 27). In Africa, Mamadou Diouf pointed to past and present moral panics surrounding youth. "*Not only are young people losing the prestigious status … but they no longer represent the national priority. . . . Excluded from the arenas of power, work, education, and leisure, young Africans construct places of socialization and new sociabilities whose function is to show their difference, either on the margins of society or at its heart, simultaneously as victims and active agents*" (Diouf 2003: 5). Amidst this marginalization, and in some cases repression, young people in waithood may develop a sense of shared identity and group consciousness. The next section examines some of their reactions against the establishment.

Reacting Against Waithood

Young people are acutely aware of their marginal structural position, and they despise and rebel against the abuse and corruption that they observe as the elites get richer and they become poorer. Young people in Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, and Tunisia felt deeply disconnected from the elites that control power and national politics. They cited unsound economic policies, bad governance and corruption as the major causes of the problems they face. More than an academic degree or professional diploma, personal connections with people at the top, in politics or business, were seen as essential to obtain a job. "*You are not able to make it if you are not well connected. You need to know someone important or have a padrinho [godfather]. . . . If you have the 'vermelho' [Frelimo party membership card], that will open many doors for you. The 'vermelho' operates like a credit card,*" asserted 25-year-old Bento from Inhambane, a coastal city northeast of Maputo. Young South Africans whom I met expressed similar concerns about politics and governance in their country, pointing to the widespread corruption

and nepotism at all levels. They witness politicians and public officials becoming very rich almost overnight. Siniswa, a twenty-two-year-old woman who lives in Alexandra in Johannesburg, declared that *"top politicians are corrupt and so are the ones at the community level. Everyone tries to survive in whatever way they can."* In the same vein, Kevin, a 24-year-old from Troyville asserted, *"our politicians preach support for the poor but they live a life of capitalist luxury."*

In Senegal youths I met were unanimous in saying that President Wade's government was losing popular support and legitimacy because of its corrupt and *clientéliste* politics and its inability to tackle the economic crisis. Malick, a 27-year-old from Rufisque, a port city near Dakar, pointed out that *"there is a crisis of social and moral values in Senegal. Politics here are very dysfunctional, because the core value of politics for Senegalese politicians is money, just money."* Similarly, and perhaps to greater extent, president Ben Ali, his wife Leila and their extended family controlled all major businesses in Tunisia - from information and communication technology through banking to manufacturing, retail, transportation, agriculture, and food processing. They were known among Tunisians as "the Family." These abuses of power and plundering of the country's resources were severely condemned by young people, especially those struggling with waithood.

Young people are reacting against these abuses of power, to high unemployment rates and increases in the cost of living. On 5 February 2008 Maputo was the scene of violent popular demonstrations as thousands of young people took to the streets to protest against the 50 percent rise in the cost of fares for *chapas*, the private minibuses. Protesters erected barricades and burned tires to cut the main access routes to the city center. Soon the protests degenerated into looting. Angry unemployed young men took control of the streets, vandalized shops and cars, and paralyzed the city, expressing their frustration with the country's dismal

economic situation. Two and a half years later, on 1-2 September 2010, thousands of Mozambicans, mainly youths, staged protests over the rise in prices of basic staples such as bread, water, and fuel. It has been reported that text messaging was the main vehicle for mobilizing youths to join the protests. Angry youths confronted the police who tried to disperse the crowds using batons, tear gas and bullets. More than ten people were reported dead and many more injured.

After initially dismissing the protests as isolated disturbances by marginal and disorderly youths, the government complied with popular demands and overturned its decision. At the same time, however, it imposed tight controls on cell phones and text messaging, demanding all mobile phone users to register and provide their identification details and residential address. Commenting on the government's reversal of its price increases, Carlos Serra, a sociologist from University Eduardo Mondlane, declared that the problem was not just bread and other material needs. "We must also consider phenomena such as uncertainty, the search for identity, respect, decency, freedom, the right to speak, freedom to be . . . to envisage a future and so on. Our youth . . . aspire to have a decent life . . . and well-being is something that goes far beyond the stomach."[9]

Shortly after my research visit to Senegal, in June 2011, Thousands of young people, rallying alongside the *Y'en a Marre!* (Enough is enough!) movement to protest a change in the constitution which would 85-year-old president Abdoulaye Wade to win a third term in office and create the post of vice-president, supposedly for his son Karim Wade. They gathered outside the National Assembly, where lawmakers were debating the proposed constitutional amendment, denouncing government corruption, high unemployment, and

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[9] Interview with Celso Ricardo, "Manifestações para além do custo do pão," in *O Pais* (Maputo), available on the opais.sapo.mz website.

other social ills. The demonstrations quickly spread from central Dakar into the suburbs and three major towns. Clouds of tear gas enveloped the streets as police fought the demonstrators with tear gas, rubber bullets, and water cannons. More than one hundred protesters were injured during the two days of rioting. The *Y'en a Marre!* movement was created in 2011 by a group of young Senegalese rappers along with some students and journalists to protest economic hardship and massive unemployment and to demand that their voices be heard. *Y'en a Marre!* Was able to rally a number of other civil society groups, and together they were instrumental in the ousting President Wade in the February 2012 elections through a massive youth mobilization campaign.

In South Africa, Julius Malema the outspoken 30-year-old former president of the ANC Youth League, has been reprimanded by the ANC leadership for bringing the party into disrepute with a series of inflammatory outbursts advocating the empowerment of the masses. Malema garnered attention in 2007 for rallying behind Jacob Zuma, helping him become the head of the ANC and then president of South Africa. Malema spoke out against big business and in favor of the redistribution of resources. He has sided with the poor and the black population, often to the point of opposing some ANC and government policies. But not all young people support him. Sindhi, a twenty-year-old woman who lives on the southwest side of Johannesburg in Ormonde, said: "I don't agree with him. He got up there too quickly, and is very vocal. . . . He believes that he can say just anything to anybody because he supported President Zuma." Although most of the young South Africans I spoke with agreed with Malema's pro-poor positions, many worried that his radical pronouncements could be divisive. As twenty-two year-old Sibusisiwe asserted, "In the new South Africa we are a very diverse group of people, and we have to find a common ground and live well together."

Malema has also been accused of bigotry, alleging that his family trust benefits directly from the multimillion-rand tenders it helps to award, an accusation he vehemently denies. Whatever the case, it is true that the ANC Youth League has been one of the loud voices opposing some of the regime's policies. Workers in the trade union organization, COSATU, are also contesting the privatization of state assets undertaken by the government and have organized several strikes against labour brokers and protesting the high cost of living and low wages. As Zwelinzima Vavi, COSATU's secretary-general, pointed out, "Privatization has never worked in favor of the working class." COSATU joined efforts with the ANC Youth League in the call for the nationalization of state assets.

In North Africa, a 29-day youth uprising in Tunisia led to the ouster of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011. Like the uprisings in London and Paris, the Tunisian revolution was triggered by the death of a young man: the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a twenty-six-year-old unemployed street vendor from the inland town of Sidi Bouzid, following the confiscation of his wares by a municipal police officer. Bouazizi's death symbolized the despair of an entire generation of young men and women grappling with unemployment and bleak future prospects. Thousands of youths came out into the streets and cyberspace to demand jobs, better living conditions, and respect for their dignity. The brutal and disproportionate use of force by the authorities radicalized the protests. Youths chanting "Ben Ali Degagé!" (Ben Ali Go!) called for the president's departure. The Tunisian revolution quickly spread across the Arab world, and a few weeks later young Egyptians took control of Tahrir (Liberation) Square for days of protests that toppled the forty-year reign of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. Conflicts between youth and the state also erupted in Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria. The youth-led armed rebellion in Libya that began in February overthrew Moamar Gaddafi and culminated in his death in October 2011.

Like Africa and the Middle East, the rest of the world has recently experienced a wave of youth uprisings: in Portugal, in March 2011, more than 30,000 young people filled the streets to vent their frustrations about unemployment and the absence of career prospects; In May 2011 young people in Spain, who call themselves the *indignados* (indignant), protested soaring unemployment rates; the *indignados* demonstrations have been more explicitly political than the riots that occurred in England in August 2011; in Chile an estimated 100,000 young people took to the streets of capital to demand a free, quality public education in August 2011; and in the United States many young Americans struggling to find work and pay for their college education joined the Occupy Wall Street movement to protest corporate greed and corporations undue influence over government.

These events illustrate the ways in which young people are rising up against unemployment, socioeconomic marginalization, unsound economic policies, corrupt governments and political exclusion. These are cries for freedom by a generation yearning to make a place for itself in the world. Although national and regional contexts differ and grievances are diverse, young people's anger derives from deepening social inequalities; they are affected by the same ills created by globalization and failed neoliberal policies and widespread corruption. In the cities of Mozambique, Senegal, Tunisia, South Africa, Portugal, Spain, Chile and the United States of America frustrated young people strive to get decent jobs, attain adult status, partake in the fruits of modernity and have a say about their future. The assumption that the state will uphold the social contract with its citizenry and put in place effective institutions and welfare systems is beginning to erode and young people are taking their destinies in their own hands.

Conclusion

This chapter agued that the majority of young Africans are in waithood; because of its pervasiveness and prolonged duration, waithood is becoming a more permanent state, and arguably, gradually replacing conventional adulthood. It also emphasized that waithood is not about geography but essentially about inequality. While the specific reasons for delayed adulthood differ from one context to another, this phenomenon is affecting young people around the globe. The chapter also argued that waithood is creative; young people have not resigned themselves to the hardships of their situation but are using their agency and creativity to fashion new "youthscapes" (Maira and Soep 2005) or subcultures with alternative forms of livelihood and social relationships in the margins of mainstream society. Last but not least, waithood is transformative. The waithood generation possesses a tremendous potential for transformation. Young people today understand that the struggle to overcome their predicament requires societal change. From more or less spontaneous street riots and protests to revolutions that overthrew dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya the waithood generation is taking upon itself to redress the wrongs of contemporary society and remake the world.

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