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PERSPECTIVES

Political analysis and commentary from Africa



MOVERS AND SHAKERS?

YOUTH AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN AFRICA

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Editorial

Youth and Political Change in Africa

In response to the youth-led Arab Spring in 2011, African youth have received renewed attention from policymakers, economists and the media alike. Africa is the world's youngest continent, with people under the age of 35 constituting about 65 percent of the population, according to the African Union. Unfortunately, much writing on the topic mobilises binary images that label youth as either an asset – “the demographic dividend”, “the continent's most valuable resource” – or a liability: a “demographic time bomb”. Such discourse does not only gloss over the complex realities and different contexts African youths find themselves in, it also tends to ignore the agency that young Africans have and fails to ask what it is that they want and to what extent they are able to realise their aspirations.

Even though the continent may be “rising”, as four African countries rank among the ten fastest growing economies of 2013, it is clear that speed is not everything and that the majority of African youth continues to face difficult socio-economic conditions. In the words of Alcinda Honwana, many young Africans find themselves in a state of “waithood” deprived of the opportunity to become economically independent adults by the lack of decent jobs, bad governance and unfavourable international trade relations.

Despite these challenging conditions, young Africans evidently are not just sitting around. They try to make ends meet with whatever work they can find and many have become politically active, either in street protests or through more formal engagement – countering the perception of apathetic youth.

Against this backdrop, this edition of *Perspectives* seeks to shed light on a number of related questions. What frustrations are causing the youth to turn to the streets? How do they

mobilise today? Are conventional politics and parties able to attract young people or do they seek alternative ways to engage? How does their political participation manifest? Have they been successful? Are the youth a political force?

Judging from these reflections on protest movements such as Occupy Nigeria and Senegal's *Y'en a marre* (Enough is enough!), and to some extent on the struggle by the Egyptian youth after the fall of President Hosni Mubarak, it seems that transforming the often reactive expressions of youth discontent into pro-active, programmatic and sustained political action that can influence national politics is one of the greatest challenges. On the other hand, where the youth have become part of the formal party political system (as in Kenya) or have been for some time (South Africa), they have yet to show that they stand for a different kind of politics with a greater vision than the old guard's pursuit of wealth and patronage.

What appears common to all young people when they decide to engage in politics is that breaking through the hierarchical and patrimonial governance order that has historically precluded their participation in decision-making in most communities in the continent (and indeed the world) is a slow and gradual process.

By providing these and other insights on youth politics and youth in politics from various countries across the continent, we hope to help expand the debate on Africa's youth beyond questions of economic outlook and risk management.

Layla Al-Zubaidi
Regional Director

Jochen Luckscheiter
Programme Manager

Youth in Africa: A Political Force?

Introduction

In the last few years, Africa has witnessed an upsurge of youth protests about socio-economic and political conditions, some of which gathered enough force to overturn ruling regimes. These uprisings have generated new reflections about the condition of youth, their political activism and engagement in processes of social and political change. The majority of young Africans are today grappling with a difficult transition into adulthood. After they leave school with few skills they are unable to obtain work and become independent – get a house for themselves, support their relatives, get married, establish families and gain social recognition as adults. These attributes of adulthood are becoming increasingly unattainable for the majority of young people in Africa.

I use the notion *waithood*, a portmanteau term of “wait” and “-hood”, meaning “waiting for adulthood”, to refer to this period of suspension between childhood and adulthood.¹ On the one hand, young people in waithood are no longer children in need of care, but on the other, they are still unable to become independent adults. While chronological age defines them as adults, socially they are not recognised as such. Rather than defining youth on the basis of age categories (for example, 15–24 or 15–34²), this paper understands youth as a social construction defined by societal expectations and responsibilities; thus, it considers all those who have not yet been able to attain social adulthood, despite their age, as youth.

This paper examines young people’s strategies for coping with waithood and carving out forms of livelihoods to sustain themselves. It argues that waithood does not result from a failed transition on the part of the youth themselves but rather from a breakdown in the socio-economic system supposed to provide them with better opportunities. Their daily struggles for survival and emancipation bring them into the streets to protest against their conditions

and to challenge the status quo. Indeed, young Africans are again being increasingly recognised as active agents of social and political change.

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Waithood

The notion of waithood encompasses the multifaceted nature of the transition to adulthood. It goes beyond securing a job and is extended to various aspects of social life and civic participation. While waithood may suggest a sense of passively “waiting”, my research demonstrates that young people in waithood are not inactively lingering and waiting for their situation to change. Despite the challenges they face, youth in waithood are dynamic and use their agency and creativity to invent new forms of being and interacting with society.³ 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.

Waithood 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 – cyberspace, mobile telephones, television and advertising – that make young people more globally integrated. At the same time, young women and men in Africa relate to local socio-economic structures and cultural patterns and are often constrained by a lack of access to good education and secure employment as well as by political instability and repression and epidemics such as HIV/AIDS.



Alcinda Honwana

Alcinda is a visiting professor of international development at the Open University, UK. She has carried out extensive research in Mozambique in the area of children and youth and conflict. Her field research also took her to Angola, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Columbia, South Africa, DRC and Tunisia. Alcinda’s latest works include *Youth and Revolution in Tunisia* (forthcoming June 2013) and *The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change and Politics in Africa* (2012). In 2007, she was awarded the prestigious Prince Claus Chair for Development and Equity in the Netherlands.

There is no doubt that waithood stems from bad governance and from social and economic policies, such as structural adjustment programmes that have deeply weakened African states' ability to determine national socio-economic policies and priorities and to uphold the social contract with their citizenry. But pervasive corruption and the absence of civil liberties further compounds the problem.

Experiencing and Coping with Waithood

Liggey, which means “work” in *Wolof*⁴, is one of the most notable virtues in many African cultures. *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 and community. Yet the majority of young women and men are today unable to find work and attain a socially valued status as independent and responsible adults, as well as the sense of dignity embedded in the notion of *liggey*.

During my research in Mozambique I interviewed Joel, a 28-year-old man, who explained: “At the age of 18, our fathers would go to South Africa as labour migrants to work in the mines . . . [and] come home with enough money to pay *lobola* [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 labour 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, African societies no longer endow 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. 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. For educated youths, the mismatch between the education system and the needs of the labour market forces them to survive in an oversaturated informal economy or as informal labour in the formal sector.⁵

Young women and men 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 labour alongside household chores, marriage and motherhood are still the most important markers of adulthood. Yet their ability to attain this adult social status often depends on men's moving beyond waithood.⁶

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Waithood involves a long process of negotiating personal identity and financial independence in circumstances of deep socio-economic crisis. Narratives from various young women and men point to the impact of structural conditions on their lives and highlight their inescapable socio-economic vulnerability. From having to resort to improvised forms of livelihood in the informal economy to involvement in illegal and sometimes criminal endeavours, young people in waithood struggle to make a living. The young people I interviewed during my research in several African countries used particular expressions to describe their situation: the Mozambicans used the Portuguese term “*desenrascar a vida*” (eke out a living); the Senegalese and Tunisians employed the French term “*débrouillage*” (making do); and the South Africans spoke about “just getting by”. All these expressions vividly convey the extemporaneous nature of their lives.

Young people recognise the factors that limit their actions and their ability to thrive and succeed. And they no longer trust the state's ability and willingness to find solutions to their problems. Young women and men are using their creativity and agency to create their own spaces for action, or “youthscapes”⁷, in which they try to subvert

authority, bypass the encumbrances created by the state, and fashion new ways of functioning and manoeuvring on their own. These youth spaces foster opportunities and possibilities for *desenrascar a vida*, *débrouillage*, and for “getting by” through improvisation.

In this sense, waithood should not be understood as failed transition to adulthood, nor as a form of deviance or a pathology from which young people suffer.⁸ Waithood, with all its challenges, constitutes also a period of experimentation, improvisation and great creativity as young Africans adopt a range of survival strategies to cope with the daily challenges in their lives. Amidst their socio-economic and political marginalisation, young people in waithood are able to develop a sense of shared identity and consciousness that leads them to challenge the establishment and fight for their rights.

Waithood, Citizenship and Social Change

Young Africans have showed strong awareness of the broader socio-economic and political environments that affect their lives. They are acutely conscious of their marginal structural position, and they despise and rebel against the abuses and corruption that they observe as the elites in power get richer and they become poorer.⁹ These youths are not a “lost generation” nor are they completely apathetic about what is going on in their societies.¹⁰ Young people I spoke to in various African countries feel deeply disconnected from those who control power and national politics. They are dismayed by the growing lack of fairness and equity in the distribution of resources and are coming out to the streets to express their discontent and anger.

The Tunisian uprising in December 2010 began with massive street demonstrations led by young men and women to protest high unemployment, poor living conditions, denial of civil liberties and lack of prospects for the future. This movement’s success inspired young people across the continent and beyond, showing that change is possible and stimulating political protests.¹¹ In a matter of weeks, Egyptian and Libyan youth, too, joined with other groups to remove their rulers.

While these events are well known, other protest movements in sub-Saharan Africa received less attention. In Senegal, in June 2011, young people – rallied by the *Y'en a marre* (“Enough is enough!”) movement – prevented the approval of

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constitutional amendments that favoured the sitting president and led a national campaign to encourage young people to participate in the election that voted the president out of office. In Mozambique, in February 2008 and again in September 2010, young people rioted to protest the high cost of living and forced the government to accede to their demands. Youth protests have also taken place in Sudan, Angola, Uganda, Nigeria and Burkina Faso, to mention just a few.

These are cries for freedom from a generation yearning to make a place for itself in the world. There is no doubt that young people are a critical indicator of the state of a nation, of its politics, economy and social and cultural life. 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 globalisation and failed neo-liberal policies, by corruption and bad governance as well as a lack of civil liberties. As globalised communications raise their expectations, local conditions and public policies push those aspirations out of reach.

Strikingly, in the aftermath of the uprisings, young people appear to be returning to the periphery of formal politics and are struggling to find a political role for themselves. This tendency is particularly evident where sudden regime change created a political vacuum and opened the space for new political actors to emerge. However, the reality is that established political parties (and religious forces, in cases of Tunisia and Egypt) quickly seized the political space and blocked the emergence of young people and alternative forces, reverting to “politics as usual”. Moreover, young people refused to be co-opted into formal parties and have not established new ones. They often prefer to continue their political actions in

the streets and through civil society associations, refraining from participation in the partisan manoeuvring that has preoccupied those involved in formal party politics.

Why are young people not taking a more active role in formal politics once the “new era” of democracy begins? How can they break through the obstacles created by existing political parties? What roles are they playing in post-protest political transitions? To what extent are they able to push for

fundamental socio-economic and political change from outside mainstream politics? Will street protests remain their main mechanism to exert pressure on those in power? These are some of the questions that merit further research and analysis as this wave of youth protests and political activism continues to unfold. But there is no doubt that this waithood generation is already standing up for itself and trying to redress the wrongs of contemporary society.

Endnotes

- 1 The term “waithood” was first used by Diane Singerman (2007) and Navtej Dhillon and Tarik Yousef (2009) in their work on youth in the Middle East and North Africa. See: Singerman D, “The economic imperatives of marriage: Emerging practices and identities among youth in the Middle East”, *Working Paper 6*, Washington DC, and Dubai: Wolfensohn Centre for Development and Dubai School of Government, 2007; Navtej D and Yousef T (eds.) *Generation in waiting: The unfulfilled promise of young people in the Middle East*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009.
- 2 The United Nations and the World Bank define youth as all those between the ages of 15 and 25 years old (United Nations 2007; World Bank 2007). The African Union and many African nations define youth as those aged 15 to 35 (African Union 2006). See: United Nations, *World youth report 2007: Young people’s transition to adulthood: progress and challenges*, New York: United Nations, 2007; World Bank, *World development report: Development and the next generation*, Washington DC: World Bank, 2007; African Union, *African Youth Charter*, Addis Ababa: African Union, 2006.
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- 4 *Wolof* is a West African language spoken in Senegal, Gambia and Mauritania.
- 5 Chen M, “Rethinking the informal economy: Linkages with the formal economy and the formal regulatory environment”, in Guha-Khasnobis B, Kanbur R and Ostrom E (eds.), *Linking the Formal and Informal Economy: Concepts and Policies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 75-92.
- 6 Singerman, *op. cit.*; Calvès AE, Kobiane JF and Martel E, “Changing transitions to adulthood in urban Burkina Faso”, *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 38(2), 2007, pp. 265-83.
- 7 Sunaina M and Soep E (eds.), *Youthscapes: The popular, the national, the global*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.
- 8 Jones G, *Youth*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.
- 9 Honwana, *op. cit.*;
- 10 Diouf M, “Engaging postcolonial cultures: African youth and public space”, *African Studies Review* 46(2), 2003, pp. 1-12.
- 11 Honwana A, *Youth and Revolution in Tunisia*. London: Zed Books, (forthcoming July 2013).

Interview

Youth and the Future of the Occupy Nigeria Movement

In January 2012, Nigerians took to the streets in the biggest protests to convulse the West African nation in several years. The Occupy Nigeria protests were triggered by the government's removal of fuel subsidies, which it argued were wasteful and served the interests of a few corrupt oil marketers more than those of ordinary Nigerians. The protests forced the government to partially reinstate the subsidies and begin an investigation into widespread corruption in the oil industry. Although the street protests petered out after the government made concessions, many Occupy activists are still engaged on social media, calling for an end to corruption and taking the government to task on issues of accountability and transparency. One of them, Azeenarh Mohammed, discusses the future of the Occupy Nigeria movement, as well as the role of young people in the debate around good governance.

HBS: The Occupy Nigeria protests have been described as a flash in the pan. Would you say this was the case?

Azeenarh: I think we all realised that Occupy Nigeria was a reactive movement. It came about as a result of what the government had done. When government semi-addressed what happened, the whole movement just died down. When Occupy came out to protest, it did not have a set of demands that spelled out what young Nigerians actually stand for. Until we have a proactive movement that seeks to positively affect Nigeria, we can only continue to count the unity of young Nigerians under one voice and platform as the main success of the protest.

HBS: Do you see a more proactive movement coming about in the near future?

Azeenarh: Yes, and I think it is already starting slowly. There has been an awakening, and more awareness and participation from young Nigerians since January 2012. They have come to the realisation that what they say actually does count and that, if they take enough interest and make an

effort to participate, they can influence things. Young people are also studying the budget, critiquing it and suggesting alternate ways forward. Government might not necessarily be taking action on those things now, but they are beginning to take those voices into account.

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HBS: Are there any examples where youth activism has been able to achieve visible results?

Azeenarh: Besides the investigations into the oil subsidy regime that were triggered by the Occupy protests, I think a good example is the poisoning scandal that occurred in Northern Nigeria in January this year: children as young as six years old were employed to dig and crush rock in the search for gold, using mercury and other toxic chemicals. Even children who were not directly involved with the work got affected as their parents or the wind carried the chemicals around the village. They played with it and some kids are now mentally dead, others have irreparable nerve damage and many others died. A lot of people had been talking about it, especially at international level, but they had not involved young Nigerians. When some youth started tweeting and took interest in it, thousands of other young people followed and started calling, texting and emailing their representatives, their ministers and other public officials. The inconvenience of receiving so many calls, text messages and emails forced them into action. After eight months of inaction, it took only two days of youth mobilising and demanding action for the money to be released to remediate the whole town of Bagega. We learned firsthand then



Azeenarh Mohammed

Azeenarh is a lawyer-turned-blogger with a keen interest in economics, governance, equality and social and environmental justice. She is the project manager for the Gender Democracy Programme at the Heinrich Böll Foundation office in Nigeria.

that when you show the youth what to do to bring about change, chances are that their exuberance will drive them to do it.

HBS: There are those who have pointed out that the whole Occupy-inspired movement in Nigeria is made up of youths in urban centres. To what extent are young people in the rural areas involved?

Azeenarh: I think the youths outside of the cities in Nigeria are also participating in these struggles, but it is just harder for media to keep up with them because they are so far away. Even as urban-based activists, we don't have very easy communication channels with rural youths. But social media makes it a lot easier than it was in the past. Did you hear about the tweet from Babura? That's about the remotest village in the north of Nigeria, and still someone from there tweeted, "We have occupied Babura!"

HBS: Beyond the interventions on social media, what factors could possibly trigger the proactive movement you advocate?

Azeenarh: I honestly don't know what could trigger it, but the truth is that it is going to happen surely. After the last Occupy protests, networks were formed and people are constantly in touch. Every single day, I am invited – and I am sure various other young people are invited – to different meetings with different agendas. The thread that connects all of these is that they are always looking for a way forward. Young people are sitting down; they are plotting and planning. They are not just commenting; plans are being put in motion. I don't know which one of them is going to come first, and what will be the catalyst.

HBS: Part of the weakness of the Occupy protests was the lack of demands beyond the fuel subsidy question. What do you think should be the broader demands going forward?

Azeenarh: What we want is to have a say in how our country is governed, how our resources

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are managed and how our future is shaped. During the first protest, we hadn't fully developed our demands around these issues and also didn't really have a foot in the door leading to the negotiating table. What we were sure of was what we didn't want and we weren't afraid to say it. But now the youth movement is growing, evolving, and the government is beginning to understand that these young people are organised and that their demands are practical, reasonable and implementable. For example, as part of the Green Deal Nigeria initiative, we have formulated ideas around the future Nigeria that we want: energy for everyone, jobs in renewable energy and a better, more sustainable agriculture sector that gives our small farmers a chance! As government heard of this, they invited us to see how these ideas could be incorporated into the national development vision for 2020.

HBS: Looking ahead to the 2015 elections, how do young people get involved?

Azeenarh: As generating change is more difficult from outside of government, young people have understood that they have to get to the trenches and get their hands dirty to see the Nigeria that they dream of. Everyone is watching the existing parties closely before making a choice because our constitution makes independent candidacy impossible. But there is a definite interest in participating in governance from 2015 as is evidenced by an increasing number of young people taking up positions in parties and government.

Senegal:

Youth Vs the Old Guard

On 23 June 2011, a large coalition of Senegalese civil society organisations and opposition parties led a protest march to challenge then president Abdoulaye Wade on yet another move to change the country's constitution through a bill proposed to the national assembly. One of the provisions that angered the citizens would, if adopted, allow any presidential candidate to win the position in the first round, even with less than 25 percent of the vote.

Despite violent repression, the organisers of the march emerged as the winners against Wade and his regime. The presidency retracted the bill and the June 23 Movement (M23) was born. In its composition and immediate impact, M23 was a first for Senegalese politics, and probably for francophone Africa. Through peaceful demonstration, ordinary citizens had demonstrated people's power and their ability to control their destiny.

In the following months, M23 managed to garner so much support that it was instrumental in the electoral defeat of Wade. Among the key players in this large coalition, composed of political parties and civil society organisations, one movement in particular carried the voice of the youth: *Y'en a marre* (We are fed up).

Interestingly enough, before the young people got "fed up" with the president and his regime, they had been his main supporters, both when he was in opposition and in the first years of his presidency. With Wade as the opposition leader, the youth shouted endlessly "*Sopi, Sopi*" (change, change) until they got change by voting for him en masse in the historic 2000 election. At last Wade was in power and the Senegalese youth could dream.

They could dream because Wade, armed with a sense of rhetoric rarely equalled in modern Senegalese politics, wooed his young followers with one often repeated symbolic sentence: "*Dis moi quelle jeunesse tu as et je te dirais quel pays tu*

seras" (Tell me what type of youth you have and I'll tell you what your country will be like).

The move was a strategic one in a country where two thirds of the population is below the age of 25. Wade promised them everything from job creation to easier access to loans and housing.

At political rallies and in the media, Wade the aspiring president would endlessly repeat "his" statement. He claimed to have coined it, saying it reflected his faith in the youth as the main catalysts of the change he was advocating at the national level. At the end, be it his own or not, the sentence was credited to him, in Senegal at least.

A shrewd politician, he knew very well what he could gain if such a message made its way to the country's millions of young people. He desperately needed their vote to win the presidency, as it was clear he could not count on the elderly segment of the population whose loyalties were solidly entrenched in the ruling Socialist Party, which had led the country to independence.

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As a scholar and former university professor, Wade also knew what the youth represented in Senegal, not only in terms of demographics, but also in terms of political engagement. This is a country in which, as far back as colonial times, the youth in schools and universities were highly involved in politics. Independence did not change the situation. Leopold Sedar Senghor, Senegal's first president, faced a memorable challenge in 1968, when university students put the country



Hamadou Tidiane Sy

Tidiane is the founder and director of the Higher School of Journalism, Communication and Digital Media in Dakar, Senegal. He is also the founder of the award-winning West African regional news website, Ouestaf.com. Tidiane has worked as a correspondent for numerous high-profile international news organisations for nearly two decades.

into turmoil, seriously threatening the stability of his regime. No serious politician could ignore them.

Considering all this, many still wonder why, in 2011 – a year before the 2012 presidential election – Abdoulaye Wade decided to openly oppose his country's young men and women in what was finally a fatal move for him. These young people had said no to a third term for him very early on. Yet, despite several calls and peaceful demonstrations, the former president refused to heed the message of the disappointed youth who were now openly and loudly saying “enough is enough “ or “we are fed up”: “*Y'en a marre*”.

Many believe the stubbornness of the ageing president could only be explained by his desire to prepare the presidential seat for his son Karim Wade, who could not win a national election by himself.

Millions of young Senegalese were extremely angry at the president, accusing him of favouring his son over all the young people who had supported him before he came to power – while this same son had been comfortably settled in Paris. Many of these disgruntled people joined *Y'en a marre*.

Created a couple of months before Dakar hosted the 2011 World Social Forum, *Y'en a marre* was initiated by a group of rap artists and their friends to react against the country's state of affairs. According to its leaders, citizens who felt concerned and who needed change were not happy with the country's governance style and felt they “had to do something”.

The idea was to express the anger and frustrations of disgruntled young people in the urban areas who had no job prospects and had to deal with power shortages and an eroding educational system on a daily basis. All of this, plus rampant corruption and the arrogant impunity of political leaders, plus a general sense of social unease throughout the country fuelled the movement.

The supporters of *Y'en a marre* were even more upset that this was all taking place while the country's political leadership – epitomised by the son of the very president they had elected to change their lives – was leading a lavish life. The country had not changed in the desired direction. Corruption, nepotism, favouritism and partisan politics grew to proportions never seen in Senegal. Against this background, *Y'en a marre* quickly rose from a simple rallying cry in the underprivileged suburbs of Dakar to become the name of a nation-

wide social movement. From its hip-hop roots, it flourished into a real melting-pot where all sorts of youth would find a platform to voice their concerns: students, unemployed young people, young workers from the informal sector, the cohorts of rural migrants filling the cities' streets, young graduates with no hope for the future, young migrant workers repatriated from Western countries, etc.

The 2012 election played an important role in strengthening the movement. Political tensions around the “third term factor” piled up and added to the social discontent. It gave more legitimacy and more substance to the “enough is enough” agenda. The country's mobilisation against a third term was massive, as this was perceived as a real

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move backwards for a country that has always boasted solid democratic credentials. It allowed the movement to join forces with other civil society organisations and created sympathies for it beyond its geographical and social origins.

Despite the fact that the constitutional court declared it legal for Wade to run, the national campaign against the third term became a fight between the legitimacy of the citizens and the force of state institutions.

In the end, Wade was defeated on 25 March 2012, putting the youth at the centre of the political stage. After having largely contributed to Wade's victory in 2000, here they were again, this time contributing to his defeat. With other key actors, they clearly appeared to be the country's kingmakers.

It was no wonder that the new president, Macky Sall, who grew up under the tutelage of Abdoulaye Wade, and who is much younger, would also try to please the youth. Walking in the footsteps of his mentor, he promised to create 500 000 new jobs in five years if he was elected.

His pledge to fight corruption also gained him some support, including from the youth who wanted to see the country's resources back in state coffers.

However, the initial sympathy for him may soon fade away as cases drag against alleged embezzlers of state funds and with some of the dignitaries of the previous regime shifting their allegiances to join the new government.

All this leaves the country with a sense of déjà-vu as the youth are still waiting to see the actual achievement of the ambitious programme proposed by Sall, both in terms of job creation and better governance.

Looking ahead, it is not clear yet whether *Y'en a marre* will have much leverage to influence current policies or to prompt the current government to deliver on its promises. The leaders of the movement say they are adopting a “critical stand” and “keeping an eye” on government.

In fact, many of them, particularly the young rap musicians who largely contributed to its popularity, have gone back to their normal business, leaving only a very few leaders to continue the struggle. Furthermore, the movement remains an informal grouping, with no legal existence; *Y'en a marre* is still waiting to be recognised as an association by the authorities.

Meanwhile, the movement revealed it has rejected offers of prominent positions in the new government or in government bodies, in order to remain active within civil society and to remain the vigilant watchdog it was at its beginnings. This may be a noble and principled approach, but how efficient it is as a long-term strategy for the movement remains to be seen.

After having been part of the struggle, the youth and civil society have left all the political reins to the same old politicians, some of whom have been in power since the time of Senghor. This gives little room for a real change in the political landscape and how politics is conducted in Senegal, however much the country loves to claim its “democratic maturity”.

Furthermore, the issues of “legitimacy” (or illegitimacy) and “longevity in power” that made the fight of *Y'en a marre* against Wade a popular cause cannot yet be put against the new government. Thus the massive spontaneous support the movement had in 2011–12 has already started to fade.

However, the big challenge for *Y'en a marre* and the youth is not really on the political front where they have already proved their ability to mobilise and make things happen. The real question is

The real question is whether the movement, rather than being re-active and opposed to certain issues, can proactively contribute to radical change.

whether the movement, rather than being re-active and opposed to certain issues, can proactively contribute to radical change and become a real social or political force capable of proposing and driving profound changes.

Their offer to contribute to the emergence of a “new type of Senegalese citizen” so far remains an empty slogan: a lack of civic education and discipline, corruption, and many other social flaws are still common characteristics of Senegalese society. So far, no convincing programme of action that outlines the essential steps needed for radical change has been put on the table – not by *Y'en a marre*, nor by anyone else.

Nevertheless, the 2011–12 civic engagement has left behind some important lessons that other groups can learn from. The power portrayed by the young and determined citizens has opened the eyes of other youth. More initiatives and organisations are being launched by young people with the clear desire to take more control of government action.

For example, in the aftermath of the 2012 election, a group of young computer experts developed “Mackymetre”, an online platform dedicated to monitoring and rating the government.

This unprecedented tool, made possible by the youth’s appropriation of new technology, enables any interested visitor to compare electoral pledges with actual achievements, to rate ministers, and to follow government action on a daily basis. Two main challenges remain. Professional politicians can easily pay agents or mobilise supporters to invade the platform and influence the ratings and votes, as they did earlier with the popular radio phone-in programmes. And despite all its potential, Mackymetre remains a tool for the literate urban elite who can afford access to the Internet.

In the end a crucial question remains: will the youth gain enough strength and generate enough impact to get rid of old-style politics and politicians? It is still too early for a definite answer.

South African Youth: A Threat to be Feared or a Future to be Cherished?

South Africa's future is at a crossroads. At the centre of the intersection lies the huge challenge to bolster youth participation in the economy and to develop young people for future political leadership.

It is true that a country's future is mirrored in its youth. Thus anyone pondering the future prospects of a nation should look no further than the state of youth in the economy and in politics. A nation that fails to create economic opportunities for its youth is guaranteed to experience upheavals in the future. The state of youth in politics can provide a glimpse into what could possibly be tomorrow's leadership. However, a corrupt political culture combined with a lack of economic opportunities for youth is a toxic mix that can drive a nation into a state of chaos. Such a prospect is not so distant for South Africa.

Youth in the Economy: Demographic Dividend or Time Bomb?

South Africa has a youthful population. Only 7 percent of the population is older than 60 years, while about one third of the population is younger than 15 years old.¹ This means that more than 60 percent of the population is between the age of 16 and 59 years. This is the demographic dividend that South Africa should be benefiting from. Alas, it is not!

The majority of the unemployed are young people. More than 70 percent of the unemployed are between the ages of 15 and 24.² According to the National Treasury, about 42 percent of young people under the age of 30 are unemployed, compared with less than 17 percent of adults over 30 years of age. Only 1 in 8 working-age adults under 25 years of age have a job, compared with 40 percent in most emerging economies.³ The National Planning Commission has also revealed that "almost all of the job losses in 2009/10 were experienced by those under the age of 30, and with less than a grade 12 education".⁴

The correlation between unemployment and

levels of education is not coincidental. More than 86 percent of unemployed youth do not have further or tertiary education, and two-thirds of them have never worked.⁵ These are the youth who swell the South African reservoir of joblessness.

The proliferation of post-apartheid youth institutions and policies has not succeeded in instilling a spirit of creative self-reliance among South African youth.

A dysfunctional public education system and the failure of our economy to create jobs condemn millions of youth to a life of hopelessness. South Africa's education system is a machine that produces ill-prepared job seekers in an economy that requires a critical mass of entrepreneurs. Evidence across the world suggests that self-employment in small-scale enterprises is a sure way towards economic emancipation. The proliferation of post-apartheid youth institutions and policies has not succeeded in instilling a spirit of creative self-reliance among South African youth.

Proposals to rescue youth from the crunching jaws of poverty are shot down, with no alternatives put on the table. Such is the fate of the National Treasury's youth wage-subsidy proposal. Politicians engage in tit-for-tat games while the youth wallow in hopelessness. It will not be long before this youthful energy finds expression in social upheaval and other destructive activities. Thus the demographic dividend might as well be a time bomb waiting to explode.

Youth in Politics: The Myth of Youth Apathy

South Africa has a long history of youth activism in politics, and the involvement of youth in the



Brutus Malada

Brutus holds a master's degree in education from the University of Johannesburg. He is currently a senior research fellow at the Centre for Politics and Research. Before this, Brutus was a policy specialist at the National Youth Development Agency of South Africa. He is also a member of the Midrand Group, a loose association of young aspiring intellectuals based in Johannesburg.

struggle for liberation is well documented. Many young people sacrificed their lives in the quest for freedom. However, post-1994 concerns about youth apathy have been growing. The youth have been projected as a lost generation of entertainment-mongers who have no interest in politics.

Yet youth participation in democratic processes – and in governance in general – is essential to building a successful democracy. Using participation in elections as a measure of interest in politics provides an easy response to claims of youth apathy. In the wave of the 2009 national and provincial elections, more than 1.2 million youth (between 18 and 29 years old) stampeded to register as new voters. Indeed, the high voter turnout (up to 18 million people) in the elections owes a great deal to youth participation.⁶

But youth apathy is not a uniquely South African challenge: old democracies experience it, too. For example, in the 2000 presidential elections in the United States, only 42 percent of eligible young people between the ages of 18 to 24 voted. In South Africa's 2009 elections, only 43 percent of eligible voters between the ages of 18 and 35 cast their ballots.⁷

Active citizenship in a democracy is not just about voting every five years. It is about taking responsibility and exercising one's democratic right to hold public representatives accountable. For the youth, this means pushing youth issues beyond the ritual commemorations of the Soweto uprisings led by high school students in 1976 every June 16. Questions regarding the quality of education, the high rate of youth unemployment, youth culture, and HIV and AIDS ought to form the content of youth participation in politics.

The never-ending service delivery protests also debunk the myth of youth apathy. A 2012 reconciliation barometer survey of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation has shown that "the average (m) age of South Africans who indicate that they always or often participate in peaceful demonstrations and strikes was 35–36 years old. Thus young people are often "involved in, if not instigators of, protest activity."⁸ They are as concerned about service delivery as they are about economic freedom in their lifetime.

Youth participation in parliamentary politics is also promising. About 15 percent (59 out of 400) of South Africa's parliamentarians were 30 years or younger when they were elected to parliament in

2009. This is an indication of a generation that is engaged in politics, although their influence and the quality of their engagement is debatable.

Future Leaders: Tyrants or Democrats?

The responsibility of today's youth for future leadership is a certainty. However, there is a monumental crisis of youth leadership in South Africa today. Nowhere is this crisis more acutely expressed than in politics. Today, few political parties, including the ruling party, can say justifiably that their current crop of youth leaders exemplifies what their heirs should be. The recent decision by the ANC to disband its youth league's executive is testimony to this. Imagining South Africa in the hands of present-day youth leaders conjures up an uninspired future.

The state of the youth wings of political parties – supposedly the breeding grounds for future political leaders – is not inspiring either. They are a microcosm of the general state of the political parties, characterised by poor leadership and factionalism. A culture of intolerance in debates, bullying, personality cults and an allergy to intellectualism are as evident in youth formations as they are characteristic of the main political parties.

This culture is not good for the development of future leadership. It may bequeath the nation tyrants rather than democrats, fools rather than intellectuals, immoral rather than virtuous leadership. It is important for South Africans to reflect deeply about the implications of the current state of politics for posterity. Only the reversal of this dominant political culture will restore confidence about South Africa's future leaders.

Indeed, the African continent is replete with examples of the grave consequences of bad leadership. Strikingly, almost all countries that have experienced a diminished quality of leadership manifest similar symptoms. Such countries are characterised by self-centeredness in politics, inhumanness in business and disintegration of the social fabric. Often this occurs in a context of civil society disengagement, where ordinary citizens abandon the space of governance to professional politicians.

The decline in the quality of youth leadership manifests itself in the poor contributions that youth leaders make to public discourse. Shooting from the hip has become in vogue as a style of engagement. Some, like the African National Congress Youth

The role of ordinary young South Africans in ordinary communities must not be underestimated. It is they who can and will have to hold local leaders accountable.

League (ANCYL) leaders, rely on the strength of their voices and insults to drown out their interlocutors. Before his expulsion from the ANC, former ANCYL leader Julius Malema had perfected this art. It was no longer the merit of arguments that counted, but the elasticity of his arrogance. The louder a youth leader shouts, the more electrified the audience. This reflects a collective psyche in need of urgent therapy. Only then can the youth hope to be taken seriously when they exhort society to address their issues.

The prevailing youth leadership culture, characterised by plunder and slander, ill-discipline, disrespect and arrogance is not ideal for the development of the calibre of leadership that South Africa will need in the near future. The longer the culture of wealth accumulation, conspicuous consumption, crass materialism and sheer corruption prevails, the deeper the future of the country will be drowned.

It is this form of politics that renders Susan and Henry Giroux' observation about youth in the US relevant to South Africa today: "Rather than being cherished as a symbol of the future, youth are now seen as a threat to be feared and a problem to be contained."⁹ The key question that ought to preoccupy the minds of young South Africans – especially youth leaders – must be this: What must we do in order to not be viewed by our society as a threat to be feared and a problem to be contained?

While it is the responsibility of the youth to

change public perceptions about themselves, and to raise confidence about the future of South Africa, the poor quality of youth leadership in South Africa today reflects a general decline in the standards of leadership in wider society. Beyond celebrated struggle heroes – who have already departed – it is becoming difficult to find inspirational leaders in South Africa today.

The role of ordinary young South Africans in ordinary communities must not be underestimated. It is they who can and will have to hold local leaders accountable. It is they who should fight for the protection of their rights. It is they who should demand the delivery of books to local schools on time.

What, then, are the key issues that must galvanise the work of youth formations in South Africa?

It must begin with a frank acknowledgement that policies alone do not and will not change the everyday life of the youth. Creating a bridge between policy objectives and practical outcomes constitutes the overarching need of young South Africans.

A further strategic task is in the realm of economics. Until the majority of young South Africans have been rescued from the jaws of joblessness and poverty, their worth as human beings will remain an elusive dream. Practical ways to better their current and future conditions must be found, including addressing the critical question of education. Education must unleash young people's entrepreneurial energies, in order for them to create work for themselves. But the environment must be an enabling one, and that is the fundamental role of the state.

The youth themselves must awaken to the harsh reality that their own social conditions and their very future are at stake. Such consciousness must goad them into action. Only then will the youth reclaim their space in society as symbolic of a future to be cherished rather than a threat to be feared.

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Interview

The Politics of Gender in South African Youth Politics

A feisty woman with a throaty laugh and ready smile, Vuyiswa Tulelo has been credited with stabilising the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) at a difficult time when – under the presidency of controversial Julius Malema, who would be expelled from the ANC in April 2012 – many felt it had turned into a bling-obsessed, brawling boys’ club.

The rising political star took some time out to speak to Wits politics professor Shireen Hassim about changing attitudes towards women in South African youth politics.

Student activism is a tough space because you have to prove yourself, not just in organisational terms but in intellectual terms. You have to fight in the space of ideas.

Hassim: You became involved in politics at a young age, just as you were entering high school in Kimberley in 1992. You joined the students in their protest against matric fees. What accounts for your activism?

Tulelo: I knew about justice from a young age. My father worked for [diamond mining company] De Beers and he would tell us about how black and white workers had different locker rooms. Once, when I went Christmas shopping at Foschini with my mother and sister, we saw a little white girl playing on a mannequin. My sister went to play on a mannequin too, but the shop assistant immediately stopped her. It felt like a deep injustice: that memory has never left me.

Then when I went to study at Wits University, I saw clearly that race and gender still defined

inequalities. I applied for law and had to do an aptitude test. The white man who administered the tests said to me, “Look, there’s nothing in the results of this test that says we can’t admit you, but I have picked up that you wouldn’t cope. Most women students can’t cope with the workload.” So then I went to study politics and, to my amazement, one of the male politics lecturers says in class, “The money I earn at Wits is just enough to pay for my wife’s make-up.” I thought, even these liberated men cannot stand to see liberation in the home.

Hassim: You were one of a very small minority of women activists in the Student Representative Council and the South African Students Congress (SASCO). Did you have to fight to be taken seriously? It seems difficult to imagine when I see how confident and articulate you are!

Tulelo: You know, there are deep gender dynamics in meetings. When a man says something, everyone thinks it’s a brilliant idea. When a woman suggests something, there are ten questions that follow. Then a man will say exactly what the woman first said, and everyone will clap! Student activism is a tough space because you have to prove yourself, not just in organisational terms but in intellectual terms. You have to fight in the space of ideas. And if a woman had ideas, the men would quickly form a coalition against her.

Then there are ways that the men would exclude women. They would send us out to buy food, and by the time we got back the agenda had been mostly covered – and by the time we had cleared up the food, there was nothing left to discuss

The men had these tactics, these ways of putting women in their place. They would first propose love to you. Then they would try to break down how you look, and compare you to other women on campus. There was always a struggle to be treated as an equal, as someone who had opinions on the issues students were facing.

Vytjie Mentor [a senior ANC politician], who



Vuyiswa Tulelo

Vuyiswa was born in Kimberley in the Northern Cape, was secretary-general of the ANC Youth League for two terms and is currently the consul-general of South Africa in Chicago. From 1995 to 1997, Vuyiswa was the leader of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) in the Northern Cape. She led the Wits Student Representative Council from 1999 to 2000, and was elected vice-president of the International Union of Socialist Youth.

had a huge influence on me, said that this is what we have: a system within a system. We have to challenge the gender inequalities.

Hassim: Did men students see you as a threat when you started to challenge these dynamics?

Tulelo: Oh, definitely! They quickly learned that I was not going to have relationships with them or in fact with anyone in the ANC! I wore takkies and jeans and I had a lot to say about politics and I was clearly not one of the crowd of young women who hung around the ANC Youth League and SASCO – you know, that was very much the “in crowd” to hang with. The men wanted me to be a little bit softer, but I would not be the politician I am today if I had paid attention to lipstick and stilettos. I had an attitude and a career.

I did find very quickly that there was a group of women who saw me as giving voice to something that they had also been thinking and feeling. I had lots of backing from the women students.

I do think things are a little different for young women activists now. They should not have to tone down their femininity in order to be taken seriously; they shouldn't need to kick down those doors anymore. On the other hand, I sometimes say to young women comrades, “If I am arguing for women's right to contraception, do I really need my cleavage to be a distraction?”

Hassim: Do you think there have been changes in attitude to young women as political leaders?

Tulelo: Absolutely. By the time I was elected secretary-general of the Youth League, a whole generation of feminist activists – Febe Potgieter and Nomfanelo Kota, among others – had made an impact on the organisation. So when I came in raising issues of the importance of providing childcare for conferences, it was no longer seen as a women's issue. It was an organisational issue.

Really, women have become more assertive. We saw that it was important that, if we wanted to be treated as equal, we had to change the conversation drastically. You began to see changes, first as women would approach men at conferences and say, “I'm available tonight.” Suddenly the men had to think twice because they knew these women had political ambitions. Before, the men would refer to particular women as “their branch”. Now they became aware that if they accepted advances it could have political implications! Women could play the same games as men. Women were no longer objects for men. They could be equal partners.

Hassim: And yet many would say the ANC Youth League was a very masculine space and the typical Youth League comrade is a pointy-shoed, blinged-up young man.

Women have become more assertive. We saw that it was important that, if we wanted to be treated as equal, we had to change the conversation drastically.

Tulelo: It just isn't true that the ANC Youth League is predominantly a male space. Between 1990 and 2011, the demographic of membership had changed completely. By the time of the Nasrec conference in 2011 [when Malema's disciplinary hearing took place], there were large numbers of young women in branches – something like 60 percent of branches were represented by women. They were still in the minority in leadership but asserted themselves much more in conferences. In 1998, the Youth League adopted a sexual harassment policy, which was the first gender-friendly policy document since the League's inception. This was followed by various gender policies until 2008, when it adopted the Young Women's Assembly as a tool to provide a free and safe space for young women in the Youth League to raise their issues. I think it helped that I was secretary-general.

Hassim: You did not stand for president?

Tulelo: I was urged by many to go for president. Then I was approached to be deputy-president, but I knew I didn't want that. It was a way of sidelining me. The deputy-president position is the one dealing with international affairs, so I would be travelling constantly, and it would not really be a promotion. So for me, secretary-general or nothing!

Hassim: You had a particular leadership role in keeping the Youth League grounded.

Tulelo: Look, the Youth League faced a dilemma. On the one hand, the Youth League had this scruffy image. On the other, we wanted to show that you could be successful even if you came from outside the elite circles, and that you could have a role to play in the big debates. Juju's [Julius Malema's] posture sought to prove and encourage everybody



Shireen Hassim

Shireen is a professor of political studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. She is the author of *Women's Organizations and Democracy in South Africa: Contesting Authority* (2006), which won the 2007 American Political Science Association's Victoria Shuck Award for best book on women and politics. She has published widely in the areas of social justice, social policy and gender, and representative politics.

Policy formulation is no longer the issue. We have to be irritants in the ears of the implementers of policy.

and anybody that leadership in the Youth League is not hereditary but is earned. We wanted to show that you could develop the best of the best out of nothing. But somehow that sensible side of our work got lost. It was a pity that it was reduced to a bling dialogue and not the space to harness the best of the best, regardless of their connections. It became dog eat dog.

Hassim: Do you think that young women feel like they have a home in the ANC Women's League?

Tulelo: We tried to develop good relations between the two structures. The ANC Women's League even had a desk for young women, and under the leadership of Bathabile Dlamini and Thandi Modise, we had champions. But changes in the leadership of the Women's League have taken us backwards.

Now the Women's League has been reduced to being a bargaining council for quotas. It is only about which women will be ministers and not at

all about the issues of addressing women's needs. They stood aside and watched as [opposition leader] Helen Zille basically stole the gender equality agenda in the local government elections.

It is not a space for feminism.

Hassim: Going back to the Youth League, which has the major task now of rebuilding itself. What do you see as the key challenges facing it?

Tulelo: Well, policy formulation is no longer the issue. We have to be irritants in the ears of the implementers of policy. We need to ask, for example, when the housing policy is rolled out: how many child-headed households are being housed? How are the skills of young people being built when contracts are handed out? We need to show that lack of jobs is a problem for all young people and not only black people. And we need to open up a conversation about gender, because one thing we have learnt from the Oscar Pistorius case [the South African sprint runner charged with murdering his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp] is that abuse affects young women across the race spectrum. It doesn't matter what colour you are or how rich you are, women seem to stay in relationships of abuse for the same kinds of reasons.

Hassim: Are you hopeful?

Tulelo: Of course. Always!

Youth and Politics in Kenya: Vanguards or Vandals?

The role of the youth in Kenyan politics has returned to the centre of public debate with the March 2013 general elections. Political party nominations included a good number of young leaders, and some were elected to county assemblies in various parts of the country as well as to the national assembly and the senate. The most notable examples are 19-year-old Mr Munge Kibiwott, who was elected as the Parkerra ward representative in Baringo County and the new member of parliament for Buuri, 26-year-old Mr Boniface Kinoti.

Historically, young people did not participate in decision-making processes because of the hierarchical and patrimonial governance order in most communities. Allocation of leadership responsibilities followed age, wealth and lineage. Breaking some of these cultural barriers is a key achievement for the youth in Kenya in recent history.

Largely due to their demographic dominance – people between the ages of 18 and 35 years account for over 30 percent of Kenya’s population – the youth were able to define politics and public discourse ahead of the elections. With youth unemployment at more than 75 percent, job creation dominated the agenda.

Since the language, paraphernalia and media channels used during political campaigns are increasingly designed to attract and influence young voters, older people can no longer be relied upon to effectively manage political functions and activities. This is why young people began to occupy key positions in political parties and other interest groups. The youth are breaking through cultural inhibitions against their involvement in decision-making processes by making themselves the subjects and instruments of contemporary politics.

This article examines the origins, motivation and potential impact of what appears to be a growing youth influence in national politics.

At different times in Kenya’s history, the youth have played important roles in driving political change.

Agents of Change

At different times in Kenya’s history, the youth have played important roles in driving political change. For example, the contribution of the student movement to the struggles for political pluralism and restoration of human rights and freedoms during the late 1980s and early 1990s is well documented. The more recent transition from the 40-year rule of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) also highlights the role of young people. Ahead of the 2002 polls, crowds attending rallies countrywide put pressure on the opposition leaders to unite. Invariably, the majority of people in these crowds were young. As such, it is no exaggeration to say that the youth of Kenya created the pressure that led to opposition unity in 2002, which resulted in the end of the KANU regime. As “stakeholders” in the more liberal and open policy processes that followed the change of government, young people have contributed to institutional reforms in the governance, justice, law and order sector, as well as in public finance management and in developing the governmental agenda.

...and Instruments of Party Politics

It is also important to note that a 2009 report by the non-governmental organisation Youth Agenda indicated that young people were responsible for more than half of all the cases of violence that followed the 2007 general elections. The report confirmed that youth participation in politics in the multi-party era is still conflated with the strong



George Omondi Okong'o

George is the executive secretary of the African Research and Resource Forum. He is also a PhD Fellow in Public Policy at the United Nations University/ Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, Netherlands. George was secretary-general of the Students Organisation of Nairobi University and the Kenya National Students' Union before he was suspended from the University of Nairobi and went to further his studies at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. He has been founder, trainer and beneficiary of various youth leadership development programmes in Africa. Recently, George was appointed secretary to a task force of the African Union that is considering the establishment of an African Research and Innovation Council.

ethnic identities that underlie Kenya's political party spectrum. Although the recent elections passed peacefully, the youth would certainly have been, and are likely to remain for the foreseeable future, a main actor in outbreaks of politically motivated violence.

Youth involvement in political violence has been widely analysed, including the activities of gangs such as Mungiki, Kamjesh, Sungusungu and Baghdad, which were deployed by various politicians across the country to block their rivals from accessing "their" zones of influence. The gangs violently disrupted political events of the "enemies" and offered private security to their benefactors. This is over and above the politicians' common use of young people as "shouting vessels" to drown out their opponents at shared platforms such as joint political rallies.

In the past, the privileged young people of Kenya's upper and middle classes have been largely apolitical, compared to their poorer peers who are often mobilised by politicians.

These activities have a history. Under KANU rule, regime stalwarts and President Moi's supporters could openly declare their links to such criminal gangs, as the security and justice systems were under the party's control. Even though the opposition also used political gangs, the groups supporting KANU's course were stronger and remained active for longer periods.

The governance reforms and general enhancement of accountability under Mwai Kibaki's presidency since 2002 made it difficult for politicians to support violent youth groups openly and with impunity. The gangs also fizzled out as a result of peace programmes run by local and international NGOs, which sought to re-direct youth energies from violent politics to meaningful activities in society, as well as improved access to start-up finance provided by the state and micro-finance institutions for youth-led business initiatives.

Apart from their mobilisation for political violence, youth participation in party politics in

the post-KANU era has always been more evident during elections. For example, all major parties had identifiable youth components in the 2007 general elections. Mwai Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU) had *Vijana na Kibaki* while the Orange Democratic Party (ODM) put together the Young Orange Democrats. ODM-K – a breakaway part of the ODM – entered into a partnership with the *Vijana Progressive Alliance (VIPA)*. This is a change from the first multi-party elections in 1992 when KANU was the only party that maintained a youth grouping, *Youth for KANU (YK'92)*. This trend attests to the growing importance that parties attach to the contribution of young people to their political campaigns and, at least on the surface, appears to be a positive development.

Shifting Landscape

Kenya is among the world's most unequal countries and, as in most parts of Africa, individual and group fortunes are tied to their presence on the political grid and access to state resources. Huge inequalities exist between youth in different regions, while rampant urban poverty has blurred the rural-urban divide. In the past, the privileged young people of Kenya's upper and middle classes have been largely apolitical, compared to their poorer peers who are often mobilised by politicians for rallies and other political activities. However, there are signs that this is bound to change.

Some of the small number of young people whose income places them among the country's top earners have opted to challenge older politicians. Worryingly, however, some seem to follow the ways of the politicians they compete with, raising funds for their political activities through unlawful means. A few have even been linked to the illegal drugs trade. And in most cases, their underlying motivations for political engagement are as bad as their means: namely, self-preservation and wealth accumulation – very much like the older generation.

There are signs of change in the rural areas too. The devolved system of government in Kenya's current constitution brings the authorities responsible for development closer to the youth. It will be easier for youth groups to reach the newly elected county governments than it was to get their message to central authorities in Nairobi, the capital city. Furthermore, devolved government will strengthen local identities for the people in county jurisdictions and promote popular ownership of

local governance. Since the public administrative system will not appear far removed from them, their methods may become more co-operative than adversarial. However, as national politics remains highly polarised and ethnic/ regional schisms deepen, the county governance system may pose a threat to the development of a nationwide youth voice. In the new context of devolved governance amidst ethno-regional polarisation, the aggregation of youth voices for a clear expression at the national level is paramount.

New Ways of Engagement

Internet services are accessible and affordable to the vast majority of Kenyan youth. For this reason, web technologies have become unifying platforms for political youth activists across socio-economic divides. No politician can now ignore the “web constituencies” either nationally or in sub-national jurisdictions. Nearly all of the major civil society street demonstrations in Kenya in the recent past have been organised through online platforms. With this new frontier of civic engagement, the youth can now participate in politics without worrying about financial inhibitions or the hostilities that lead to violence and other forms of physical restraint.

However, there is also a dark side to this new forum. Lately, some politicians have engaged young people as “mouthpieces” in social media and other web platforms. The patterns of association remain ethnic and internet platforms are also used to spread ethnic hatred and to deepen ethnic polarisation. The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) has issued several public warnings to culprits and legal action will be taken against perpetrators to avoid potential ethnic strife in the country. But even the threat of prosecution does not seem to deter hate-mongers on the Internet and it appears that these engagements are following the general trajectory of politics in society.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above that individual politicians and political groups will have little choice but to continue adopting the language of youth in political discourse. Young people have not stumbled into their participation in politics and public affairs but have taken deliberate steps to alter conditions and overcome barriers. The harnessing of technological

Youth participation in politics can only have a positive impact if young people take markedly different paths from those of ethnicity, self-preservation and corruption.

advancements such as social media has played a significant role in recent years. However, youth participation in politics can only have a positive impact if young people take markedly different paths from those of ethnicity, self-preservation and corruption – the hallmarks of Kenya’s “politics as usual”.

Clearly, the youth are potentially a very strong political force in Kenya today. But they need not to be left to their own devices. The fact that Kenya’s well-educated middle class youth have become vehicles for spreading ethnic hatred over the web emphasises that leadership training, mentorship and inspiration are essential to harness the political energies of young people to the right social course. These need to be appropriately designed and respond to the challenges facing young people in leadership or those with leadership potential. A lot of emphasis should be placed on enabling young people to understand their political environment, especially the country’s political history and its relationship to the present and the future. Eventually, such processes should help establish a new value system among young leaders who, for their part, will need to show that their worldview differs from that of most current leaders.

Finally, the youth of Kenya will have to organise themselves more than they have done so far. Both state-championed (like the National Youth Council) and non-state youth organisations will need to be strengthened to bolster the legitimacy of their representation of young people. This will be even more crucial in the context of ethnic/ regional polarisation and devolved governance. The responsibility lies with the youth themselves – but a lot is also expected of the wider society, especially local communities, the private sector, religious groups and the education system.

Elections

Politicians Went Sheng to Woo Kenyan Youths

When a Mugumo fig tree fell down in President Mwai Kibaki's backyard in Nyeri County, Central Kenya, just three weeks before the country's presidential elections, the local elders said it carried a strong message of a change in leadership in favour of younger leaders.

In hindsight it seems an easy prediction. In the end, the 51-year-old Uhuru Kenyatta won the presidential race ahead of 68-year-old Raila Odinga. Kenyatta won 50.07 percent of the vote and Odinga garnered 43.3 percent.

But before the country's 4 March vote, Titus Ngugi, a 60-year-old resident from Nyeri County was convinced that it predicted the election results.

"A Mugumo tree is sacred among the Kikuyu. Our ancestors used to worship under it. When it falls, it communicates a strong message," he had said, adding that among the Kikuyu ethnic group it symbolised the ascent of young leaders.

After the results were announced on 9 March, he said: "A margin of over (one million) votes is a validation that the fig tree did not fall for nothing. It was a sign that the time had come for younger politicians to take over."

The elections, while characterised by tension and fears of a repeat of the post-election violence that rocked this East African nation in 2007–2008, was also a scramble for the youth vote.

Government statistics indicated that 60 percent of the 14 million registered voters were youths, and politicians realised that they could not afford to ignore them.

In fact, many of the candidates tried to adopt Sheng, a modified language spoken by young people in Kenya, in order to make inroads into this bloc of voters.

"Sheng is not just a language, it is an identity for youths, and politicians know that it is the easiest and quickest way to connect with them," Kelvin Okoth, executive officer at Go Sheng, a social

enterprise that uses Sheng to celebrate Kenya and build national unity, said.

Among the slogans developed by the enterprise was "*Kura Yangu Sura Yangu*", which means "My Vote, My Future".

"Politicians were simply trying to create an emotional connection with youths. It's just like the reggae culture you may have to adopt certain things in order to identify with it," Peter Otondo, a political analyst, said.

Mike Mbuvi, popularly known as "Sonko", Sheng for "rich man", joined the crop of young leaders when he became the Makadara Constituency's member of parliament in the country's 2010 by-elections when he was 35.

Many of the candidates tried to adopt Sheng, a modified language spoken by young people in Kenya, in order to make inroads into this bloc of voters.

"Youths call him Sonko because of his wealth, and he saw the wisdom of running with the name," Otondo said.

On a ballot, only people's legal names are used. So Mbuvi legally changed his name. He is now known as Mike Mbuvi Sonko.

But it is not merely his nickname that guaranteed his popularity. "You will never see Sonko without his trademark gold rings, necklace and trendy hairstyles, which include him shaving his head and having the word peace sprayed on it," Otondo added.

Sonko was even kicked out of parliament in 2011 for wearing sunglasses and earrings. He was

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Joyce Chimbi

Joyce is a journalist and researcher. She has worked as a journalist covering gender and youth, development and health for the last seven years. Her primary goal is to bring the African story closer to the world. She has a BA in Language and Literary Studies from Moi University (2007) and an MA degree in Gender and Development Studies from the University of Nairobi (2012).

Elections

Zimbabwe's Politics:

Out with the Old, In with the New

As Zimbabwe's young politicians increase their demands to be allowed to play a greater role in the running of the country, analysts say that this could signal a change in youth voter apathy in the upcoming elections.

"Young people are beginning to see politics differently," Tinaye Juru, a political analyst working in Bulawayo, said.

"We are seeing a shift from (the youth) accepting being called tomorrow's leaders to asking 'Why wait till tomorrow when we can do this today?'" Juru said.

Elections in this southern African nation are expected sometime after June now that the country's 16 March referendum has been completed.

And many feel this election could be an opportunity for young people to enter active politics as legislators – that is, if their political parties yield to growing demands to include them more actively.

Historically, young politicians here have been confined to campaigning for senior party officials.

Youth participation in Zimbabwe's elections is low, according to the international rights and democracy NGO Freedom House. A June 2012 report by the organisation, titled "Change and 'New' Politics in Zimbabwe", noted that there are "disproportionately low levels of voter registration in the two age categories of 18 to 25 years and 26 to 35 years old."

In a country where, according to the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, up to 60 percent of the population is under 35, this is a matter of great concern.

There has already been an outcry within the Movement for Democratic Change led by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC-T) against senior party officials who have not performed well. The party's Youth Assembly, its youth wing, has demanded that the MDC-T hold its own primary elections to select candidates to contest seats for parliament in the upcoming elections.

Previously, sitting candidates within the party did not face any internal contest for their seats in the legislature and simply sought re-election. But the MDC-T Youth Assembly has said that the youth could do a better job for the party and their country and suggested a youth quota for parliament.

Historically, young politicians here have been confined to campaigning for senior party officials.

Clifford Hlatshwayo, the MDC-T Youth Assembly national secretary for information, said: "We want seats set aside for youths. This is the only way that will prepare us (young people) for the future, if we are to rule this country."

The same situation exists within the MDC led by Welshman Ncube, a breakaway faction of the original MDC. Aspiring candidates in its youth league are being frustrated by officials who have dismissed them as "nuisances", one youth wing member said on the condition of anonymity.

"We were asked, along with other aspiring candidates, by the party to submit our nomination papers for the primaries. But, curiously, our submission papers went missing," he said.

While on the other hand, President Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF), has been accused of suppressing the younger generation and preventing them from rising within the party's ranks.

A senior Zanu-PF youth league official in Bulawayo, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that it was tough to break through the party's glass ceiling, as those who did not fight in the war of liberation were not highly rated by the party's senior members. Between 1964 and 1979, Zimbabweans

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Ignatius Banda

Ignatius is a Zimbabwean freelance journalist based in Bulawayo, the country's second largest city. He has worked for the Voice of America's Studio7 for Zimbabwe, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Inter Press Service, Gemini News Service, among others. He is inspired by people stories that explore the human condition.

one of the front-runners for the Nairobi County Senate seat in the 2013 general elections and he won the post by a huge margin, many say, thanks to his youth appeal.

Member of Parliament Rachel Shebesh also branded herself with a Sheng slogan. She opted for “*Manzi wa Nai*” – Sheng for “young woman from Nairobi.” A fashion- and interior-designer by profession, the 41-year-old has been labelled a sex symbol by the local media. Her adoption of the youth slang may have won her the Nairobi County Women’s Representative Seat in the recent election.

Even presidential candidate Peter Kenneth caused a buzz when he became the first politician to use a Sheng slogan – “*Tunawesmake*”, “we can make it” – in his campaign. But while Kenneth may have focused his campaign around young people, it did not win him the election. He conceded defeat, placing fourth in the presidential poll.

Daniel Pius Kioko, a student of medicine and surgery at the University of Nairobi, and a first time voter, said before the elections that he wanted to vote for those who identified with the youth.

“I will vote for a future that empowers the youth by providing capital and low-interest rates on loans,” he said.

“Unlike the older generation, youths are not beholden to the bitter past that defines this country. They don’t know it; they don’t even care about it.”

He voted in Machakos County, Eastern Province, but said that it is still too soon to see if the candidates he voted for would empower youth like him.

“In terms of my expectations, I think it is still too early to call,” Kioko said, adding that he was waiting to see how politicians implemented their election promises.

Daniel Njoroge, 22, a first time voter in Nairobi County, Nairobi Province, said, “the future looks

much brighter than before.”

He too voted for those who identified with the youth. “I want to live in a country that empowers young people to be self-employed,” he said.

Young people played a considerable role in this election, according to Vincent Kimosop, chief executive officer of local NGO International Institute for Legislative Affairs.

“Based on the demographics, this election was won by the youth vote. The youth understood that this country holds a brighter future for them because of the constitution,” he said.

Kimosop based his opinion on the fact that voter turnout was 86 percent – the highest in Kenya’s democratic history – and that the youth accounted for a majority of those voters. However, detailed information on who voted will only be released in the coming months after an audit has been done.

“Based on the trends we have seen, we cannot ignore that the youth may have voted in large numbers but along ethnic lines,” he said.

Ethnic conflict surfaced in Kenya after the disputed presidential vote in December 2007, when an estimated 1 300 people were killed and at least 600 000 displaced. In the years since the violence, numerous NGOs and government organisations have attempted to bridge the country’s ethnic divide.

The country’s president-elect also attempted to do so by choosing William Ruto as a running mate. Kenyatta is Kikuyu, and Ruto is Kalenjin. The two communities have shared a bitter, violent and painful past. However, both men are wanted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes perpetrated in the 2007–2008 post-election violence.

Otondo, the political analyst, said that young people, unlike the older generation, would support anyone who identified with them.

“Unlike the older generation, youths are not beholden to the bitter past that defines this country. They don’t know it; they don’t even care about it,” Otondo said.

This article was produced by the Inter Press Service (IPS) Africa (www.ipsnews.net/africa).

fought for independent rule from the then Rhodesian government of Ian Smith.

“There are still old people in the party who think that, if you challenge them in the primary elections, you are undermining them,” he said.

“In the end, we just sit back and do our best to campaign for the party. Even the younger MPs in the party do not take kindly to criticism and are quick to claim we are (acting on behalf of) one faction or another (when we oppose them), and it's become something that we do not discuss.”

Philemon Ncube, a priest and political analyst in Bulawayo, said that political parties needed to

“There are still old people in the party who think that, if you challenge them in the primary elections, you are undermining them.”

do more to ensure that the youth were able to lead. “No mechanisms have been put in place by all political parties to encourage leadership renewal and this will make it difficult for youths to break into the ranks.”

But not all young people have welcomed the idea of being governed by their peers.

“Young people have seen the benefits of public office from parliamentarians who are always demanding ridiculous perks from the (treasury),” Nathan Molife, a 22-year-old student at the National University of Science and Technology, said.

“Their motives have become marred by our politics where many believe no politician should be poor, never mind the level of poverty the people live in. Maybe I will vote for a younger MP, maybe I

won't. I don't know,” Molife said, showing mistrust in politicians in general.

According to a 2012 survey by Afrobarometer, an African research organisation, a suspicion of politicians over the years has become the major reason for voter apathy in Zimbabwe.

According to the Zimbabwe Election Support Network, a mere 18 percent of young people of voting age have completed the registration process.

And only an estimated 43 percent of registered young people voted in the disputed March 2008 election. According to international rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, Mugabe had perpetrated widespread violence against political opponents in the run-up to and after the country's 2008 presidential elections. Mugabe was declared the winner.

Analysts said, however, that if young voters remained apathetic this year, it could set back attempts to actively engage the youth in the democratic process as candidates.

“It would be fairly easy for young people to vote for one of their own, but if these same people do not register to exercise their (right to vote), it is difficult to see how the ambitions of creating a new breed of legislators will be realised,” Juru said.

Tymon Ndlovu of the National Youth Development Trust, an NGO based in Bulawayo, said that it was of concern that, in the excitement to take up positions as legislators, female faces are missing.

“Local politics remains male-dominated despite all the talk about equal representation. But I believe these elections would be an opportunity to see aspiring young female politicians coming out. But it's obvious this is not happening,” he said.

This article was produced by the Inter Press Service (IPS) Africa (www.ipsnews.net/africa).

Interview

“We know the world is not run in our interest”

In 2011, Cairo's Tahrir Square became the epicentre of a massive popular uprising that led to the ouster of Egyptian autocrat Hosni Mubarak. The majority of the protesters were young men and women who gathered peacefully to demand political freedoms and participation, and an end to corruption and the state of emergency.

Today, many of the drivers of the so-called “youth revolution” find themselves excluded from a formal and stalled political process that is dominated by conservative parties. However, the continuation of military rule, widespread police brutality and a crackdown on political activists brought young people back to the streets. Prominent activist Alaa Abdel Fattah brings us up to date.



Alaa Abdel Fattah

Alaa is an Egyptian political activist and pioneer of the Arab blogosphere. The blog aggregator “*Manalaa*”, which he co-founded with his wife Manal Hassan, won the Special Reporters Without Borders Award. He has been detained several times, both under the Mubarak regime and after his fall. For several years, Alaa worked for a software development company in Pretoria, South Africa, before returning to Cairo with the start of the Egyptian revolution. He is one of the revolution's most prominent voices and currently stands accused on several charges.

The right to live. To get rid of torture and police brutality. Justice for all the people who died. These are the top issues.

HBS: The second anniversary of the Egyptian revolution has recently passed. How did you feel on that day?

Fattah: To me, the anniversary of the revolution is in itself a moment of mobilisation. But what I mostly feel is anxiety because there is no way of telling beforehand how many people will turn out. It is the ultimate test of whether the revolution will continue. Will people respond to chants against the regime or not?

January 2012 saw more people hit the street than those who toppled Mubarak in the original uprising. Therefore it was one of the happiest days in my life. It was a celebratory, joyful event. I knew the military wouldn't last that day.

This year it was more confused. Enough people hit the street to ease my anxiety, but it was not the same presence of people as in 2012. Then, by the end of the day, we received reports of violence in Suez and by the next day we had 40 people dead between Suez and Port Said. A new revolutionary wave started: 2013 therefore felt powerful, but at the same time the mood was gloomier. But it is certain that the revolution still goes on.

HBS: Where is the revolutionary youth from Tahrir Square now?

Fattah: Nobody left. Except for the mainstream Islamists who have now become the new regime, all the people from Tahrir Square are still in the struggle.

HBS: ...or in prison.

Fattah: Even those who are in prison are still in the struggle. You remain in the struggle when you are in prison, and you remain in it when you die. Activists who die become icons, martyrs, but in a very positive way.

HBS: What are the main issues for youth today?

Fattah: The right to live. To get rid of torture and police brutality. Justice for all the people who died. These are the top issues. Jobs and wages rank secondary. For slightly older people, the energy crisis and rampant corruption are big concerns. But for the youth it is mainly dignity. The case of young Khaled Said, who died in Alexandria in 2010 after he was arrested by the police, and the massive “We are all Khaled Said” campaign inspired all this. It was one of the big pre-revolutionary sparks. The youth is also struggling against imposed moral and conservative norms since the Muslim Brotherhood has taken over power.

HBS: Is it true that a lot of young people were attacked and tortured this anniversary?

Fattah: Yes, even children. The average age for revolutionaries keeps getting lower. The social background becomes more varied, too. Street children have joined full force, but also school

children. And the police are cracking down hard on both.

HBS: Why do you think the age is getting lower?

Fattah: Each group has different motivations. For the school children of both middle and working class background, the celebration of the “grand revolution”, even by state media and the military, must have made the future look rosy. But suddenly they see their schools becoming even more rundown and their parents less confident about the future. So their dreams are being stolen.

For the street kids, the revolution in Tahrir Square was when the rest of us joined their world, and when the police, their mortal enemy, were driven away. They're in constant search for that moment of safety and freedom, but also you hear them talk about having a death that's meaningful.

Many kids and youth also have relatives who died or were injured. That serves as a mobilisation factor, too.

HBS: Who do you see responsible for these violent crackdowns on young people?

Fattah: It is President Morsi's government, the ruling Muslim Brotherhood party. But brutal force is also the only mode of operation that the police are familiar with. And the more politics are blocked, the more revolutionaries resort to riots. Crackdowns in the street have therefore become more of a default policy. Current government policy is also to issue absurd charges against young activists in order to jail us.

HBS: Can you give examples? Do these charges mostly relate to state security?

Fattah: No, it's more colourful than that... I'm currently facing four different criminal charges. I'm accused of murder and stealing military weapons in the context of the Maspiro massacre [during which 28 peaceful protesters who intended to stage a sit-in in front of the Maspiro television building were killed by security forces], my sister and I are standing accused of burning the election headquarters of former presidential candidate Ahmad Shafik; I'm accused of incitement and rioting with criminal intent to destroy the Muslim Brotherhood's headquarters in Cairo, and – based on two tweets – I'm charged with insulting the judiciary. So I'm basically a murderer and arsonist, and we're facing three regimes rallying against us at once: the Muslim Brotherhood, the military and the judiciary.

HBS: Are more young people faced with such accusations?

Fattah: Yes, it's part of a wider crackdown. The most prominent case is currently that of comedian Bassem Youssef [a national figure whose satirical shows first featured the revolution on YouTube and then TV. He is prominent across the Arab world, but now he faces serious charges of insult and defamation]. But the crackdown is more effective against the lesser-known ones from the smaller cities. Although we have a big legal support operation and we try to campaign for all and attract media attention, it is hard to keep up because we are talking about over a thousand arrests and prosecutions, hundreds with serious injuries, and around 60 dead in clashes with police of Islamist cadres over the past five months.

And the more politics are blocked, the more revolutionaries resort to riots. Crackdowns in the street have therefore become more of a default policy.

HBS: What about young women? Are they still active, and is the crackdown on them equally harsh?

Fattah: They're everywhere, in every struggle – especially the human rights oriented ones. The crackdown on women is less frequent, but there are also tens of young women arrested or charged. No women died in clashes recently, but some have also gotten injured. The main problem is organised sexual assault on protesters and activists. My guess is they want to show that they can be equally brutal with women. The issue is complicated, because detainees of both sexes are sexually abused by the police, but the sexual assaults in Tahrir Square were done by civilians. Their organised nature makes us suspect they are orchestrated by the authorities, but we never managed to capture the perpetrators.

HBS: Are young people attracted to formal politics and parties at all? How do they articulate their issues politically?

Fattah: Initially, there was little interest in parties and more interest in grand political figures, those who ran as presidential candidates. After presidential elections, which was the first act of formal electoral politics that attracted the attention

of revolutionary youth, each candidate founded a party and many of the kids joined them. I'm talking about Mohamed ElBaradei, Hamdeen Sabahi and Abu El-Fotouh. But these are attempts to build radical organisations, not just parties that run in elections, and they are still very haphazard.

HBS: Before the presidential elections, you commented on Facebook, "I can't believe that some of my friends want to vote for a president [Shafik] who wants to put me in prison." A commenter responded, "But the other guy [Morsi] wants to put you to hell." Is this how the young revolutionaries feel today, that the Muslim Brotherhood is worse than the old regime?

Fattah: Well, young people love to fight about this. I still believe that Shafik, as a man of the old regime, would have been a serious defeat for the revolution. And we would have had to go through an Islamist phase anyway, so why delay it? Morsi's first four months weren't too bad, but then he decided to go "Mubarak" on us. The Muslim Brotherhood is actually quite weak and exposed now, and they won't last long. So I don't harbour regrets.

HBS: Why did President Morsi "go Mubarak" on the revolutionary youth?

Fattah: He didn't want to confront the old regime. He thought that minor reforms were possible without upsetting the power balance. But it has proven to be not true. So he had the choice of siding with the people to form large coalitions and change the power balance. This would have meant big risks, including confronting the military, upsetting the US, Israel and big capital, and most importantly delaying the Muslim Brotherhood's own project of Islamising the nation. The other choice was to inherit the regime with its tools of oppression and its unjust policies, but ensuring that he can deploy his own people everywhere. He opted for the latter option.

However, while the police can still kill and torture, their capacity to instil fear stopped being effective in January 2011. People are fighting back, and victims talk. For men to talk about being raped by the police on live national television is a big deal. It's a major shift.

HBS: How did young people overcome their fear in the first place?

Fattah: I don't believe that fear is really a factor for youth. Young people are usually fearless. Give them a car and watch them lose regard for their own safety... But no one wants to face torture or

death with no hope. Only crazy people like me hope for revolution years in advance. The Tunisian revolution helped us overcome despair. It gave us hope. That was the decisive spark. But our battle began long before. Your first battle is scary, but the subsequent ones aren't. We had multiple test-runs in the decade before. The biggest one was the textile workers' uprising in El-Mahalla El-Kubra in 2008. The authorities had to bring troops from nine cities to crush it. Since then we knew that all it takes is an uprising in several cities at once. Tunisia did it for us; since then it's been unstoppable. What the state had been trying to do was to rob us of hope.

I don't believe that fear is really a factor for youth. Young people are usually fearless. But no one wants to face torture or death with no hope.

HBS: But how do young people keep their hopes up?

Fattah: That is the tricky part: how to keep people optimistic and hopeful. When you have mobilisation without hope, you get riots of smaller numbers of people, lower age groups, and more men than women. And more will die than dream to live in a better reality. It is grim and scary. It keeps power in check, but you can't be sure it will lead anywhere.

HBS: How do you mobilise young people, and how do you support their activism?

Fattah: Mobilisation tools and modes differ from sector to sector, whether you are talking about labour strikes, human rights activism, street protests or service delivery protests. But when it comes to youth specifically, the good thing is that they are already mobilised. So what you have to do mainly is to unify and amplify efforts.

What people like me try to do is, first, to narrate the meanings behind the anger and the violence and to come up with political expression for them. For that, I use my own voice, through writing on blogs and in newspapers, or I appear on TV. I constantly hunt for their voices online, and I also participate in every action and meet everyone. We also help young people organise so they can talk directly.

In a second step, we try to find plans that sustain the hope. We organise structures that can bring back broader sets of people to the street. It's easy to set up a Facebook event, but making sure that there is accumulative impact is difficult. That means we have to provide a lot of formal training and teach-ins for young activists. What we try to achieve is to make them leave Tahrir Square and engage with a local community instead, with the truly voiceless ones.

HBF: Is young leadership developing in the revolution?

Fattah: Although we don't have national leaders, we have leadership. You can't have a factory strike or effective street battles without leadership. But this is leadership that organically evolves, and we are talking about very localised leaders. What we lack are unifying ideas. One thing we learned, especially from Syria, is that you need unity for a successful revolution. At least you need to ensure that differences remain purely political.

HBF: Are many of these local leaders young? Do they lack experience?

Fattah: Most leaders lack experience, but that is not always related to their age. The age depends on the sector. The leaders of labour action or service delivery protests would typically be between 30 and 40 years old. Street activism is very young, while political parties are unfortunately dominated by very old men. Leaders in parties are never female, never poor, never from outside of Cairo, and obviously never young. There is a total disconnect between the parties and the street.

HBS: You lived for some years in South Africa before you returned to Egypt when the revolution started. Is there anything that you learned from South Africa for the Egyptian revolution?

Fattah: Yes, absolutely. One of the most important lessons came to my mind when most Egyptian activists were stuck in an elitist debate about how to write a constitution, as if it was the key to everything. My experiences from South Africa taught me how easily reality can fall short of the constitution. I therefore advocate for a popular process through which people can make sense of their rights and participate in their formulation.

But I also learned a lot about counter-revolution from South Africa. In my first year, I found it scary

how little of Steve Biko I could feel, how young people didn't aspire to great ideals. But then I also learned how you can win without toppling the whole system at once. I learned to have great respect for the little wins you make. To understand, for example, what the victory against the South African pass law meant while inequality was still rife – that helped me live through the past three years of hell. It makes me rejoice in the fact that we can now do concerts in the street without a police crackdown.

Lastly, I learned about violence. Currently, we have a split in the revolution between those who romanticise revolutionary violence and those who treat non-violence as if it was sacred. I learned in South Africa that at a certain point violence becomes necessary, but that even if we win, we'll pay its price in post-revolutionary times. Therefore I advocate against organised violence, but I also try to delegitimise any attempt to equalise our use of force with that of the state. A gun against guns is bad, a rock against guns is good, but a flower against guns doesn't really work. That is what troubles the regime: analysis and our arguing that we can be ethical even as we act against the law. This scares them more than the actual unlawful act.

HBF: What do young people in sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa have in common?

Fattah: We need jobs, education, food. We feel pain when the police beat us. We know the world is not run in our interest. We also, I believe, have much in common when it comes to our motivations: our will to sacrifice, how much we value dignity, and how much we are willing to do for the right to dream. Like all North Africans, I don't know much about the rest of the continent. But I think that African social movements address issues that we tend to ignore: for example, issues around land rights and agriculture.

Also, as our activism is urban, we are leaving half the country behind. That half keeps voting against the revolution, even though we can clearly see that the rural population suffers even more than urban slum dwellers, let alone well-off city kids like me. Even though my father's family consists of farmers, their politics are a mystery to me: they are either supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood or the military. It seems they seek stability over all else.

ROBIN RHODE

Rhode was raised in Johannesburg and graduated from the South Africa School of Film, Television and Dramatic Arts, Johannesburg, in 2000.

Coming of age in a newly post-apartheid South Africa, Rhode was exposed to new forms of creative expression motivated by the spirit of the individual rather than dictated by a political or social agenda. The growing influence of hip-hop, film, and popular sports on youth culture as well as the community's reliance on storytelling in the form of colourful murals encouraged the development of Rhode's hybrid street-based aesthetic.

Melding individual expressionism with broader socio-economic concerns, Rhode's work reveals a mastery of illusion, a rich range of historical and contemporary references, and an innate skill for blending high and low art forms. Rhode lives and works in Berlin, Germany.



About the artwork

Title: School of Fish, 2012 (Detail)

Dimension: 60cm x 39,8cm

Technique/ Material: 9 plexiglass alu-dibond mounted colour photographs

Courtesy of Lehmann Maupin, New York/ Hong Kong

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This publication can be ordered from our Africa offices:

Regional Office Southern Africa

33 Church Street

Cape Town, 8000

South Africa

T: +27 – 21 – 4616266

E: info@za.boell.org

I: www.za.boell.org

Regional Office East & Horn of Africa

Forest Rd, PO Box 10799-00100 GPO

Nairobi, Kenya

T: +254 – 20 – 3750329

E: info@ke.boell.org

I: www.ke.boell.org

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Nigeria Office

Rukayat Plaza

93 Obafemi Awolowo Way

Jabi District, Abuja

T: +234– 80– 99905176

E: info@ng.boell.org

I: www.ng.boell.org

Green Deal Nigeria Portal: www.greendealnigeria.org