Understanding youth: towards a psychology of youth poverty and development in sub-Saharan African cities.

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Abstract

Youth is commonly conceptualised as a period of transition in which young people strive to meet the social markers of adulthood, such as getting work, starting families and being recognised as full and productive citizens. Here we extend our analysis of youth to capture the developmental needs of young people in this process of 'becoming'. In doing so we explore the literature on developmental psychology and youth well-being that has been well explored in the Global North, but less so in the Global South. From this, we highlight that development studies must look more broadly at the developmental processes occurring through youth of *building foundations, building blocks, building support structures and building dreams*. Young people's current and future outcomes cannot be understood fully without understanding these processes, which are critical behavioural drivers. We then move on to explore the literature on urban youth in Sub-Saharan Africa to assess whether or not these four critical developmental processes are accessible to young people in Sub-Saharan Africa's towns and cities. The literature recognises the difficulties urban youth in Sub-Saharan Africa face in navigating these pathways and the subsequent 'transitional limbo' they themselves in. Urban areas characterised by weak job creation, informality and tough competition offer few social and economic opportunities to young people. We draw upon our earlier review of literature from developmental psychology to explore the implications of this on young people's development. At such a formative stage in the life cycle it leads to crises in personal identity formation and prevents the development of important internal developmental assets (like self-confidence and self-belief) that young people need to thrive and flourish. Urban poverty and processes of urban social change have also eroded the social support systems necessary to nurture these vital assets. Together these dampen and constrain young people's ability to envision, strive for and plan to meet opportunities today and into the future.

Keywords

Acknowledgements

I. Introduction

> *The fullest representations of humanity show people to be curious, vital and self-motivated. At their best they are agentic and inspired, striving to learn; extend themselves; master new skills; and apply their talents responsibly…Yet it is also clear that the human spirit can be diminished or crushed and that individuals sometimes reject growth and responsibility.*
> (Ryan and Deci 2000: 68)

Research across the globe reveals the difficulties young people face in the increasingly complex transition to adulthood. Rich insight is given into the pressures created through global and local processes, including shrinking labour markets, poor quality educational systems and social upheaval, amongst others. The existing development studies literature tends to focus on the current outcomes of these for youth – and to some extent, futures – without looking further back to see their implications on the broader developmental processes occurring throughout adolescence and youth. This is a critical gap given that 'youth' is such a formative stage in life; it is a period when the psycho-social foundations young people will need throughout the rest of their lives are established. With the exception of Henley's (2010) exploration of resilience in youth, the development studies literature has neglected this critical aspect. Here I seek to fill this gap to reframe our understanding of youth poverty to capture its wider implications on young people's social and psychological development. We do so in the particular context of towns and cities in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In doing so I draw upon a variety of literatures to highlight four critical dimensions of young people's development that the discipline needs to pay greater attention to: *building foundations*, *building blocks*, *building support structures* and *building dreams*. It is only through understanding these dimensions of the youth experience that we can recognise that internal, as well as external, assets and resources are critical to young people's ability to succeed and gain a fuller understanding of the differences in outcomes that Ryan and Deci (2000) eloquently explain above. For young people, poverty prevents the development of these key inner attributes that they need.

These issues have been explored in the psychological literature, but predominantly in Western contexts. Here we review this literature to see what development studies can learn. In terms of *building foundations* we look at how a sense of 'self' and personal identity develops throughout adolescence and youth. We then explore the *building blocks* necessary for young people to make a healthy and successful transition to adulthood, such as self-esteem and self-confidence. We look at how these are developed, highlighting the importance of *building support structures* that nurture these processes and developmental assets. Finally, we will see how the accumulation of these factors – the development of a coherent sense of self, a range of core developmental assets and warm and supportive institutions and relationships – combine to influence young people's ability or inability to *build dreams*, developing hopes and aspirations for the future that they then strive to meet. As such, this is an important factor driving young people's behaviours. To finish, we extend these findings to a discussion of youth poverty in urban Sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting how urban environments characterised by structural under- and unemployment, poverty and hardship, and social instability can have such devastating repercussions on these developmental processes for young people.

II. Navigating youth: young people's transitions in the Global South

There is a diverse and far-reaching literature on young people's transition to adulthood highlighting similarities and differences in young people's experiences across many parts of the world, and how

these may differ by country, gender, age, educational or occupational status or socioeconomic group, amongst others. Central to the transition literature is recognition of youth-hood as a *process* tracked by different social markers, rather than a stage demarcated by age boundaries. The research focuses on the *navigational capacity* of young people as they try to find and negotiate the opportunities and challenges they face on the pathway to meeting the five 'key transitions' of learning, work, health, family and citizenship (Valentine 2003; World Bank 2005; Worth 2009; Camfield 2011; Honwana 2012). These changes take place at a critical stage in the life-cycle. 'Youth' is also a period when identities are formed (Furlong 2009), spheres of influence and engagement shift away from parents and family members towards peer networks, the media and the social, economic and cultural environments in which they live (Harter 1999; Wuermli et al 2012; Juarez et al 2013).

The literature on youth in the Global South has explored young people's lived experiences and how they cope with and respond to difficult situations (Hansen 2005; Camfield 2011; Mabala 2011; Locke and Lintelo 2013; Thieme 2013). It highlights the transitional limbo young people find themselves in when they are unable to reach these social markers of adulthood as a result of challenging labour markets, high levels of poverty, and poor quality schooling (Hansen 2005; Valentine 2003; Jeffrey and McDowell 2004; Mains 2007). Anthropological literature, in particular, highlights the uncertainty, boredom, frustrations and dangers that accompany the long periods young people spend 'waiting' for opportunities to arise (Hansen 2005; Grant 2006; Sommers 2006; Mains 2007; Ralph 2008; Langevang and Gough 2009; Jeffrey and Young 2012; Locke and Lintelo 2012; Honwana 2012). It highlights the immobility of youth in time and place: unable to move towards adulthood and unable to achieve or aspire to any significant forms of social or economic mobility (Gough 2008).

There is another important literature when it comes to understanding youth transitions and preparedness for adulthood that has yet to be incorporated into the youth literature in development studies, or in studies of young people in the Global South more generally. This is the literature on developmental psychology that explores concepts such as the construction of 'the self' and how adolescents and young people develop the competencies and attributes that will provide the foundations to their future capabilities and resilience. We now go on to explore processes of psychosocial development before looking at how this, in conjunction with social, economic and cultural influences, shapes young people's potential to formulate and navigate hopes and aspirations for the future.

III. 'Youth' as a period of self-identification and developing key competencies

Analyses of young people must go beyond their material conditions and resources to equally – if not more so – focus on their subjective well-being: how they consider themselves and their situations today, and how they consider their opportunities for tomorrow (Hossain and McGregor 2011). The idea of 'agency' has always been at the core of development studies, but the foundations of or ingredients that strengthen or enhance people's agency has predominantly been viewed along a spectrum of assets: human, financial, social, physical and natural capital. Less encapsulated in definitions of these assets have been the psychosocial dimensions of agency (Klein 2014). Literature on well-being has incorporated these dimensions into analyses more effectively than studies of poverty. This places greater emphasis on cognitive and subjective experiences, extending analyses beyond wealth and materiality to include the social, psychological and spiritual needs of individuals (Chambers 1997).

There are two perspectives of well-being. One is the hedonic approach that focuses on happiness and defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance. The other is the eudaimonic approach, and this is more pertinent to our discussion here. It focuses on meaning and self-realisation, defining well-being in terms of the degree to which an individual is fully-functioning and their human potential actualised (Ryan and Deci 2001). This perspective understands well-being as situated in a range of objectively valid needs rooted in human nature and cultural values (Ryan and Deci 2001). Understanding well-being, therefore, requires understanding cultural values in any given context and the environments that transmit and nurture these values in young people. This is critical given youth is such a formative period in the life cycle. We need to understand whether young people are embedded in environments that help to transmit these values and nurture the key developmental competencies that they need to navigate youth-hood and prepare for adulthood.

As such, our analysis here extends beyond the individual to see whether young people are exposed to the environments and relationships that they need to acquire age-appropriate cognitive, inter-personal and coping skills (Cowen 1991). Of course, people place emphasis on different competencies and capabilities across the life-course (Ryan and Deci 2001; White 2008). Young people who are still forming their personal identities focus more on self-knowledge, competence and self-acceptance. Adults, meanwhile, tend to focus on positive coping with change (Ryan and Deci 2001). Understanding how these attributes emerge as individual's sense of 'self' is developed is critical to our understanding of young people's needs and challenges.

Building foundations: The development of the 'self'

Childhood, adolescence and youth-hood are periods critical to the development of an individual's personal identity. This does not occur in isolation, as Harter (1999) comprehensively explores. Self-perceptions and actions are influenced by the environments and relationships surrounding adolescents and young people, and their cognitive, social and emotional processes work together in constructing shifting pathways for the 'self' throughout this period (Harter 1999). Individuals build multiple 'selves' during early adolescence, which they spend trying to piece these into a consistent self-theory. This finally occurs in late adolescence when young people have developed the necessary cognitive skills (Harter 1999).

The cognitive and social construction of a coherent sense of self is the ultimate personal developmental goal (Damon and Gregory 1997; Harter 1999). This determines decision-making processes and actions, motivations and behaviours, and happiness and satisfaction given the importance of acting according with one's intrinsic values or, 'from the heart' (Klein 2014). While these values are shaped throughout young people's 'socialisation' by a variety of actors (including parents and guardians, extended family and kinship networks, the broader community and the education system, amongst others), as they reach 'youth-hood', young people have internalised them and 'own' their beliefs, values and moral standards, attributing them less to the sources that they originally derived from (Harter 1999). This makes the concept of autonomy central to motivating agency, giving individuals the ability to choose their ends and goals and act in accordance with their values and interests (Klein 2014). Autonomy therefore helps the emergence of other attributes necessary for supporting and promoting agency, including self-confidence, power and self-efficacy (Narayan et al 2009).

As these processes suggest, culture and context are central to the construction of identity and self-representation. Values may be held individually, but are located within broader normative frameworks

and ideologies (White 2008). Culture shapes how people see the world and their place in it, and gives meaning to personal and collective experiences (Eckersley 2009). As a result, some argue that culture-free theories or measures of eudaimonic well-being are unattainable since well-being is contingent on culturally-rooted moral visions (Christopher 1999).

Differences in values, norms and ideologies across cultures leads to variations in notions of 'the self' and autonomy. One of the major binary differences in this respect is across individualist and collectivist cultures, the latter where perceptions of individuality are fundamentally shaped by the relatedness of individuals to one another (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Historically in most cultures, an individual's subjective impression has been subordinated to that of the larger collective in terms of family, kin group or nation (Christopher 1999; Hoff and Sen 2005). Hoff and Sen (2005), explore how the extended family system (or kin system) developed as an institution to provide and share mutual assistance across near and distant family and relatives. Actors are socialised into following rules through collectively-held and enforced aims, beliefs and sanctions, making action 'social' in the extent to which it is learned from and reinforced by others (Suh et al 1998; Devine et al 2006). This makes social norms a major driver of action (and well-being) in collectivist cultures. A study of life satisfaction across 61 individualist and collectivist cultures, in contrast, finds that in individualist countries it is emotions, rather than norms that motivate life satisfaction (Suh et al 1998). For those in collectivist cultures, inter-personal, inter-generational and inter-group relations take priority over independence when it comes to satisfaction and well-being (Devine et al 2006).

Being motivated by wider social norms and obligations is not, as commonly misunderstood, at odds with the concept of autonomy. Chirkov et al (2003) explore the nature of autonomy across two individualist and two collectivist cultures, finding that despite these cultural differences, the concept of autonomy is equally important to individuals' motivations, actions and well-being in both. A mistaken conflation of concepts of autonomy and independence is at the root of such criticism. A person is autonomous when their behaviour is willingly enacted and when he or she fully endorses their actions and/or the values instilled in them. In contrast, independence is a position in which an individual is dependent on themselves – not necessarily that they are acting according to their will and value system as autonomy dictates (Chirkov et al 2003). While autonomy is a universal psychological need, its expression is always contextual and distinct from concepts of dependence (Devine et al 2006).

In psychology, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emerged from explorations into the socio-cultural conditions that facilitate and constrain self-motivation and self-regulation (Ryan and Deci 2000). Autonomy is highlighted as one of the three critical needs alongside competence and connectedness. This highlights that as well as focusing on people's assets and capabilities, research must also explore the conditions that foster or undermine human potential. Regardless of culture and context, this theory advances that where these three pillars exist, environments enable individuals to thrive and advance their well-being; where they do not exist leads to diminished motivation and well-being (Ryan and Deci 2000). The following two sections explore issues of competence and connectedness in more detail. These issues have been identified as critical to young people's well-being in Western countries, but have yet been central to our analysis of young people in development studies.

Building blocks: The emergence of developmental assets

The previous section has illustrated the ways in which well-being and satisfaction are contingent upon developing an inner sense of self aligned with cultural norms, values and obligations, and having the autonomy to make decisions and take action on this basis. To reach these ends of autonomy and

well-being young people must draw upon a range of other developmental assets or competencies. These developmental assets are core to young people's human agency, providing the 'toolbox' they need in decision-making and goal-setting and in determining young people's effort levels, perseverance, resilience and vulnerability to stress and depression (Bandura 1998). Longitudinal research in the United States has shed important insight into these developmental assets and investigated the social, political, economic and cultural environments that both nurture and constrain their development (Leffert et al 1998; Scales 1999; Scales et al 2000; Scales et al 2001). Henley (2010) highlights the importance of psychosocial programmes for young people in order to promote resilient life trajectories via strengthening their mental and social competencies.

Leffert et al (1998) outline the 40 developmental assets that together promote both the short- and long-term well-being of young people. There are 20 internal assets, which are the values, attributes and competencies young people develop over time as a result of observation and positive socialisation (Leffert et al 1998). Research in the U.S evidences a compound effect in which the more of these developmental assets a young person has, the more and better 'thriving' outcomes they display along a variety of outcomes such as school achievement, happiness, physical health and leadership outcomes (Leffert et al 1998; Scales et al 2000). A range of 'social competency assets' covers young people's planning and decision-making ability. Other categories of developmental assets include interpersonal confidence – having empathy and demonstrating sensitivity and friendship skills – and cultural competence, where young people are confidence with people from different cultural, ethnic or racial backgrounds. Resistance skills – their ability to resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations – and skills for peaceful conflict resolution are also key. Paramount, too, are 'positive identity assets'. Here young people's ability to feel in control over things that happen to themselves is central. Other developmental assets in this category include self-esteem and self-confidence, a sense of purpose and optimism over personal futures (Leffert et al 1998; Scales 2000; Scales 2001). A belief in personal efficacy, or self-belief, is placed central to human agency and action in psychology. This is based on the idea that unless individuals believe they can produce the desired effects or outcomes, they have little incentive to act (Bandura 1998).

Acknowledging these developmental assets is critical to understanding young people's development and well-being. We also have to recognise the implications of poverty on these. Poverty dampens well-being not only through making people unable to satisfy their basic needs, but also through blocking access to different competencies and preventing them from pursuing their interests and accessing or maintaining the relationships critical to building and consolidating on these assets (Ryan and Deci 2001). It is here that a further 20 external developmental assets are important, associated with the presence or absence of various ecological supports, namely the health- and well-being-promoting aspects of the environment around young people in families, schools, or communities, as we turn to next (Leffert et al 1998; Scales et al 2000; 2001).

Building support structures: The importance of relationships

The importance of 'connectedness' speaks to the importance of the right environment for nurturing self-development, reaching autonomy and developing a full range of developmental competencies. Relationships and support systems are critical, with warm and supportive environments being critical for people to become motivated agents that flourish (Ryan and Deci 2001; Scales et al 2000; Henley 2010). The external assets outlined are pertinent here. These constitute the various ecological support systems that surround young people and come under four categories: support; boundary setting; empowerment and constructive use of time (Scales et al 2000). Across all of these is the

central premise that warm, trusting and supportive relationships are required to nurture the developmental assets that are so critical to youth development and well-being. Where these exist there are correlations with happiness and well-being; where they do not exist leads to loneliness, dissatisfaction, reduced self-esteem, shame and reduced well-being (Harter 1999;Ryan and Deci 2000).

In childhood and early adolescence parents are the main influence on developmental assets and outcomes. Parental approval, involvement, acceptance and affection are critical to determining self-esteem (Harter 1999). On reaching early adolescence and youth-hood a greater variety of actors start to play a role in this socialisation process, when peer groups and the wider community start to play a critical role in self-worth and self-esteem too (Harter 1999; Scales 2000; Scales et al 2011). Despite adult connections being consistently associated with positive outcomes for young people (such as higher self-esteem, greater academic engagement and performance, reduced delinquency, lessened substance abuse, better mental health and better social skills), research in the U.S shows that few social norms encourage adults to engage positively with young people outside their families on an intentional, frequent and deep basis (Scales et al 2001). The repercussions of this are striking in terms of a lack of support for young people in the U.S: only around two-thirds report consistent love and care from home, only about half feel 'connected to their school or contribute to their communities, only about 40 percent come from a 'caring' community, only a quarter have good adult role models and only one-fifth feels valued by the community (Scales et al 2001). All of these factors limit the development of the internal assets so critical to young people's short- and long-term development.

Negative stereotypes of young people are one factor limiting community support for young people. These limit the extent to which young people are allowed to participate and influence young people's own self perceptions when they are internalised: it becomes a form of structural violence when belonging to a marginalised part of the population shapes the self-perceptions of those within it (Evans 2008; Small et al 2010). Being included and participating in community activities and decision-making is an important ingredient in becoming bonded to the community and its socialising systems, through which community norms and values are transmitted to younger members (Leffert et al 1998; Evans 2008). Wider social networks, role models and intergenerational giudenace are all critical to guiding young people to adulthood and if these do not exist it is isolating impact for young people (Damon and Gregory 1997).

It has profound implications on young people, making it harder for them "to feel accepted, loved and secure; to know who they are, where they belong, what they want from life, and what is expected of them: in short, to feel their lives have meaning" (Eckersley 2009: 359).

Building dreams: Young people, hopes and the capacity to aspire

The previous sections have discussed the importance of personal identity and autonomy and the importance of a range of developmental assets incubated through nurturing social support systems to 'thriving' outcomes for young people. One such thriving outcome is the ability to develop hopes and aspirations for the future. This is another dimension central to human agency and combines the preferences individuals hold, their expectations, and the constraints they envision in the future (Bandura 1998; Appadurai 2004; Bernard et al 2008; Ibrahim 2011; Klein 2014). Hope and a future orientation are also key factors in young people's resilience (Henley 2010). Poverty and social exclusion are not just a question of lacking employment or income, but also about lacking a sense of being and a capacity to aspire (Pieterse 2006). Greater attention needs to be given to psychological agency in this respect (Klein 2014Hopes and aspirations are perhaps even more important for young

people, because their thoughts and actions are geared towards their futures and this shapes their present worlds (Ansell et al 2014). This returns to the earlier discussion of the importance of self-efficacy. Among the mechanisms of human agency, none is more pervading than an individual's belief that they can produce their desired efforts through their choices, strategies, and investments (Bandura 1998). Goals, plans, hopes, dreams: all of these are critical motivating factors to action.

The importance of hope is slowly beginning to make its way into conceptualisations of poverty and livelihoods (and calls for action), but there remains a tendency for this to be pushed to the margins. Duflo (2013) argues that hope is a critical ingredient in the fight against poverty, helping people to overcome poverty traps by transforming their motivations and behaviours. The ability to imagine a future that is different and better must not be underestimated. In a large cross-country study of poverty escapes, Narayan et al (2009) find that aspirations for the future have a statistically significant impact on a household's ability to move out of poverty. Likewise, in Mali, Klein (2014) finds that internal motivation and self-belief are critical in the ability to overcome hardship and better negotiate their lives, across a variety of backgrounds, enabling individuals to formulate hopes and aspirations, even where they lack means (Klein 2014). Appadurai (2004) highlights that it is only through this capacity to aspire that individuals can find the internal and material resources they need to contest and alter the conditions of their own poverty. These examples show that studies of poverty are starting to pay greater attention to the psychology of poverty, recognising that critical dimensions of agency are related to self-understanding as well as dictated by structures or opportunities in the environment surrounding individuals (Klein 2014). This is critical in identifying the internal constraints to escaping poverty so that efforts can be made to overcome the behavioural traps they may result in (Dalton et al 2015).

Aspirations are not just important as an end, but also as a means to an end, playing an important protective role. In the US, the same literature researching the impact of a variety of developmental assets evidenced the role these play in protecting young people getting involved in risky behaviours such as alcohol and drug abuse or early sexual intercourse (Leffert et al 1998; Scales et al 2000). In Uganda, Banks and Sulaiman (2012) develop a conceptualisation of young people in which the developmental outcomes of individual youth are strongly shaped by their capacity to aspire. They outline three 'aspirational pathways' for young people that can promote their well-being or lead them down more risky paths. Those young people who have both the capacity to aspire and the resources and institutional support that they need to envision reaching them have a stronger possibility of making a safe and healthy transition to adulthood. For the other two pathways there is a stronger likelihood of their developmental progress being hindered because they are drawn into risky behaviours. First are those youth who have some capacity to aspire but cannot envision fulfilling them because of material poverty and a lack of emotional and material support. Also endangered are those who experience such hardship that they cannot aspire at all (Banks and Sulaiman 2012). Their findings speak to the influence of an 'aspirations gap': the difference between potentiality and actuality, or, between what people aspire to and how their lives play out in reality. This aspirations gap becomes and important measure of well-being, and its size and plausibility determines and individuals motivations and effort levels (Ray 2006; Copestake and Camfield 2010; Ibrahim 2011). Research more specifically into youth aspirations highlights that we have to distinguish between the things that young people *hope* to achieve and what they *expect* to achieve, as these are not interchangeable (Jones and Schneider 2009).

The consequences of an inability to hope also helps to highlight why the capacity to aspire is so important. Poverty dampens aspirations. Not only through material limitations such as limited

incomes, less influential contacts, and limited access to relevant information (Dalton et al 2015), but also through creating binding internal constraints. We must look beyond the external constraints that the poor face with the potential effect these constraints may have on the internal logic governing their choices (Bernard et al 2008). Poverty may lead individuals to believe that efforts and investments cannot 'make a difference', thereby incentivising them to limit investment and effort and focus on day-to-day needs rather than thinking about the future (Ray 2006; Bernard et al 2008; Copestake and Camfield 2010; Bannerjee and Duflo 2011; Ibrahim 2011; Duflo 2013 Dalton et al 2015). As a result, it can bring anxiety and depression and act as a 'cognitive tax' on individuals' psychological and social resources (World Bank 2015). This can lead to a self-sustaining trap in which, through stifling dreams, the condition of poverty means that individuals lack the aspirational resources they need to contest and alter the conditions of their poverty (Ray 2006). This makes aspirations failure a consequence, rather than a cause, of poverty (Dalton et al 2015). Where aspirations are lacking, generating a capacity to envision a better future should become an integral part of poverty interventions (Narayan et al 2009; Dalton et al 2015).

While internal factors are critical to enabling and promoting people's ability to develop aspirations, we also have to account for the role of external factors in this. For young people, in particular the backdrops of modernisation, urbanisation and globalisation against which aspirations are formed are noteworthy. Globalisation has connected young people to lifestyles across the globe, heightening aspirations in the process. In Australia, Eckersley (2009) explores how young people suffer disproportionately from mental health issues, despite other health outcomes improving across the board. This can be explained by social changes in the worlds of work, family and education and by cultural changes such as materialism and individualism and the emergence of a 'youth culture' that isolates young people from adults and increases peer influence. Other external factors include increasing media use and global connectedness and a decline in religion (Eckersley 2009).

Like the concept of autonomy, aspirations are individually-experienced and culturally-embedded (Rao and Walton 2004; Appadurai 2004; Ray 2006; Bernard et al 2008; Ibrahim 2011; Camfield et al 2013). They are formed through interactions and relationships and located in a larger map of local beliefs and ideas around work, life, marriage, family and respectability, amongst others (Appadurai 2004). A demonstration effect is also important contributor. Aspirations do not occur in social isolation but are conditioned by the experiences of those in the same social group or geographic neighbourhood (Ray 2006). This in part reflects the fact that they have limited access to information further afield, and partly that people choose to formulate their aspirations based upon locally-rooted realities. The local opportunity context provides the basis for an 'aspirations window', a frame for aspirations drawn from the lives, achievements or ideals of those within it (Ray 2006). The breadth and depth of any aspirations window is dependent on the social and economic state of any community: the greater the extent of perceived social and economic mobility, the broader this aspirations window will be (Ray 2006). There must be a diversity of people who can demonstrate a diverse chain of observed, local steps between the poor and rich, making the dream of mobility viable (Ray 2006). The fact that the capacity to aspire is nurtured by the possibility of real-world conjectures and refutations gives the wealthy, well-resourced and well-connected a strong advantage (Appadurai 2004). In contrast the poor have a weaker navigational capacity to achieve them because they have limited opportunities to explore the linkages between means and ends (Appadurai 2004; Bernard et al 2008).

IV. Discussion

We will now explore the ways in which these needs are inaccessible to young people in the Global South, focusing particularly on young people in Sub-Saharan Africa, where this life stage has traditionally been of central importance (Burton and Burgess 2010; Klouwenberg and Butter 2011; Honwana 2012) and on those living in urban areas. Higher rates of youth under- and unemployment, the rapid social change that accompanies urbanisation and the fact that towns and cities are attractive for young migrants, all make urban areas interesting and relevant sites of analysis.

Cities may attract youth for the perceived opportunities that they offer, but we must contextualise these perceptions against the realities of urban life across the continent. In his rich ethnographic work, Simone (2004: 428) portrays the "intensifying immiseration of African urban populations". Weak links between urbanisation and economic growth means that growth has not led to significant job creation (Turok 2013). With urban populations increasing and formal employment sectors shrinking, livelihoods opportunities have been restricted to 'making do' in an increasingly informal and economically insecure world (Nel 2007; Simone 2001; Potts 2013). Urban youth are forced to search for social and material advancement in a context of uncertainty, competition, economic hardship and instability (Jeffrey and MacDowell 2004; Langevang and Gough 2009). The literature gives vivid illustrations and analysis of the challenges urban youth face as a result of this, and here we look at its implications on young people's ability to build the foundations, developmental assets and support networks they need to hope for a better future.

Despite conceptualisations of 'youth-hood' as a period in which young people are navigating key transitions, it is widely acknowledged that youth are no longer experiencing 'neat' or linear trajectories from school, to work, to marriage and family formation all over the world (Valentine 2003; Jeffrey and MacDowell 2004; Grant and Furstenberg Jr. 2007; Worth 2009; Honwana 2012). Many of these problems are rooted in the problems young people face accessing decent employment. Problems securing stable or decent work are not unique to Africa's urban youth, but pose an additional threat to young people since their future livelihoods and status as adults and respected members of the community are highly dependent on their ability to secure respectable work. Youth unemployment rates are generally higher than those of adults. In Nairobi, for example, the average unemployment rate of 21 per cent in 2008 increased to 42 per cent among young people (15 to 24 years) (Hendriks 2011). Where young people can secure work it is generally characterised by being informal, unskilled, low-returns and of an exploitative or stigmatising nature (Hansen 2005; Chant and Jones 2009; Locke and Lloyd-Sherlock 2011; Mains 2007).

Extended periods of time between school drop out and work create severe delays in young people's ability to move into their own homes, form stable relationships and start families (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004; Hansen 2005; Burgess and Burton 2010; Klouwenberg and Butter 2011). Difficulties securing regular incomes lead many young men to see marriage as largely unattainable and something to fear (Seekings 2008; Hansen 2010; Banks and Sulaiman 2012; Honwana 2012). In Lusaka, Zambia, young men working as street vendors are overwhelmingly unmarried because of their inability to establish their own households on such meagre wages (Hansen 2010). The experiences of urban youth in Uganda, Zimbabwe, Senegal and Ethiopia are similar (Grant 2006; Mains 2007; Banks and Sulaiman 2012). With marriage a critical stage for reaching social promotion, this has implications on young people's ability to build the support networks and contacts that they need to progress (Johnson-Hanks 2002; Hansen 2005; Burgess and Burton 2010). Even where young people are able to marry and start families, research in Kenya reveals they find themselves amongst the most vulnerable urban households due to their lower asset bases, limited social

connections and political relations, limited leadership and technical skills and less access to credit and savings associations (Hendriks 2011).

As one account of the implications of this predicament in Zambia eloquently highlights, "…young people are not so much a "lost generation" as they are a segment of the population of whom many in fact might never become adult in a normative social and cultural sense" (Hansen 2005: 4-5). It is not unreasonable to suggest the devastating implications this situation has on young people's self-belief, self-identity and hopes for the future. The constrained opportunity landscape young people face devastates young people's confidence and aspirations. Mains (2007) highlights uses the phrase 'waiting' to highlight the physical and social immobility of unemployed youth in urban Ethiopia, and the frustrations that emerge from a belief that they are 'getting nowhere'. One group of young men, for example, joked that the only change in their lives involved following the contours of the shade from one side of the street to the other as time passed (Mains 2007).

Prolonged periods of unemployment also erode social support systems at the household and community-level. Work is critical to self-identity and acceptance across Africa, not only as an end in itself, but also – given a culture of collective obligations – as a means of fulfilling obligations to the household and wider kinship network. Acceptance of individuals is strongly rooted in a responsibility towards other people in the family and community, making work 'moral' when returns are socially-consumed rather than individually-accumulated (Bryceson 2010b). These cultural obligations are internalised, making the ability to contribute to the household a strong value for young people and one that weighs heavily on them when they cannot fulfil it. An inability to make household contributions can lead to young people being viewed negatively as 'dependents'; in Uganda, as a result of this, young people felt they did not get the love and care that they required from their parents (Banks and Sulaiman 2013). Their extended dependency can be a source of friction within the household, extending financial burdens on the household and limiting opportunities for young people to carve out their own space while under the control and authority of their parents (Valentine 2003; Grant 2006).

Long periods of under- and unemployment do not only lead to problems with identity, self-worth and confidence for young people. They are also destructive in generating stereotypes of young people and in reducing their claim to rights in social space (Bryceson 2010; 2010b). As labour markets in Africa's towns and cities have deteriorated, community support systems have eroded. As the previous section highlighted, the household and community are key institutions in young people's development. Research in Zimbabwe highlights that adult 'mentors' inside and outside the household are critical for material and emotional support, but are often limited (Grant 2006). In South Africa, Seekings (2006) finds that as well as material poverty, a lack of 'inner resources' in terms of social support from parents, teachers and other community members acts as a key constraint for young people. Parents adapt their control of young people according to the environment they are situated in. In South Africa, in environments characterised by material hardship, violence or drug and alcohol abuse, research finds that parental control and subordination take precedence over empathy and encouragement (Shelmardine 2008), again constraining the formation of young people's developmental assets. Despite this being an effort to make sure that youth can manage the dangers of the environment (Shelmardine 2008), we have seen the importance of nurturing relationships on helping young people build self-confidence, independence, self-control and other key developmental assets.

At the community-level, 'waiting' youth populations are associated with consumption and dependence and subject to stigmatisation as 'loiterers' or 'criminals'. This reduces their chances of achieving social recognition as adults, limiting opportunities for their participation in community activities and decision-

making (Evans 2006; Ralph 2008; Langevang and Gough 2009; Banks and Sulaiman 2012; Jeffrey and Young 2012). In extreme cases this can be seen as a disarticulation of young people from civil society; in Senegal, for example, the government has a defined category of youth called *encombrements humains* (social obstructions) who are peripheral to society and characterised by an affinity for loitering and deviance (Ralph 2008). Sommers (2003) highlights the paradox that urban youth in Africa are a demographic majority that sees itself as an outcast minority. Some authors refer to urban youth as a 'subaltern population' that has not been afforded the autonomy, knowledge and respect endowed to adults and who find themselves on the margins of the city (Di Nunzio 2012; Jeffrey and MacDowell 2004).

Understanding young people's support systems also requires looking at the processes of social change that have accompanied urbanisation and widespread urban poverty. Jeffrey and MacDowell (2004) highlights how it is leading to growing family instability and reducing the household support available to young people. Much of the literature on urban Africa discusses the breakdown of social and family cohesion that has accompanied urbanisation. Large proportions of children and young people are brought up in environments characterised by a high prevalence of single-parent families, orphans and foster children, and 'irresponsible fathers' (Datta 2007; Mabala 2011). This 'irresponsibility' is a result of men retreating from traditional masculine roles – such as providing for the social and economic needs of children and the household – when they are unable to fulfil them as a result of under- or unemployment (Datta 2007). In Lima, Peru, economic crises have fuelled a breakdown of social relationships within the family, leading to separation, divorce and violence (Anderson 2007). These breakdowns are a source of considerable anxiety for young people, as well as leading them to reject their parents as models in the ways they want to live themselves (Anderson 2007).

The quality of family and social networks are important attributes for young people able to move forwards (Locke and Lloyd-Sherlock 2011). In Ghana and the Gambia, young people's success in labour markets is due to their family's social networks rather than their education (Chant and Jones 2007). For many urban youth, however, the right relationships and support structures simply do not exist. Family networks and community institutions are overloaded to breaking point by poverty and unemployment, making young people take on financial responsibilities for themselves and siblings (Frederiksen and Munive 2010; Locke and Lloyd-Sherlock 2011). An absence of family support makes other forms of relationships even more important, but large groups of lower class young men and women in Africa's cities make their way without patronage, constraining their aspirations and future possibilities (Frederiksen and Munive 2010).

Urbanisation and the economic crises that have accompanied it have aggravated the breakdown of gerontocrocies across the continent, creating new meanings of citizenship that are no longer closely associated with the nation-state, clans or tribes (Burgess and Burton 2010). The traditional inter-generational bargains in which established rules on the transfer of resources and responsibilities were clearly delineated under systems of gerontocracy have gradually eroded (Durham 2000; Collard 2000; Burgess and Burton 2010; Frederiksen and Munive 2010). As young people went to school, migrated, worked for wages and started to become 'self-made', they began to re-evaluate their roles, rights and duties in society and gained the analytical distance necessary to question the validity of the gerontocratic discourse and its assumption that age should automatically endow elders with knowledge, wealth and power (Burgess and Burton 2010). Consequently, the city is often perceived as a place of moral decay and the main site of a 'youth crisis' in which young people become disconnected from the cultures and traditions that previously regulated their behaviour (Sommers

2010; Porter et al 2010). This further exacerbates the erosion of support from young people at the community-level.

Finding themselves in such difficult positions, young people are easily exploited (Garcia and Fares 2008; Honwana 2012). Spending long periods of time waiting for opportunities to cross their path, many are willing to work for almost nothing in the hope that doing a small job will lead to another opportunity in the future (Langevang and Gough 2009). This hardship and difficulty can create different conceptions of what 'success' in cities implies for youth: many urban youth simply mean the ability to survive and stay afloat (Sommers 2003). Long-term social and economic goals are not only difficult for young people to achieve, but even to recognise and identify (Di Nunzio 2012). In such a difficult social and economic context, much of the literature on urban youth in Africa highlights that using your wits, or having 'street smartness' is one of the most valuable assets young people can develop (Di Nunzio 2012; Thieme 2013). In Lusaka, research has highlighted street knowledge, stamina, ingenuity and innovation as critical attributes urban youth are forced to acquire (Hansen 2010). We can see this as a form of *tactical* agency that youth devise to cope with the concrete, immediate conditions of their lives so they can maximise the circumstances of living and working in such an environment (Honwara and de Boeck 2005). Where such opportunities do not exist, such hardship can also lead to criminality. The literature frequently highlights the criminalisation of youth throughout Africa's towns and cities, expressed through parents, community leaders and youth themselves (Sommers 2003; Frederiksen and Munive 2010; Hossain and McGregor 2011; Banks and Sulaiman 2012). This criminalisation indicates a point and which social breakdown and social exclusion begin to occur and has devastating repercussions for young people whose ability to respond to and access opportunities is strongly contingent on the skills and resources they draw upon from wider society (Hansen 2005; Hossain and McGregor 2011).

The deterioration of social and economic opportunities and institutional support has been accompanied by other changes that have heightened the expectations of the continent's youth. The concept of modernity itself is closely tied to an urban identity, especially for young people (Durham 2000), and this has been to catastrophic effect when heightened expectations and an urban educational advantage have been accompanied by a decrease in available work opportunities. Across the continent young people are better educated than their parents, bringing with it a belief in progress and increased familial and personal ambitions (Hansen 2005; Jeffrey and McDowell 2004; Mains 2007; Death et al 2015; Banks 2016). Yet for many young people, not only is this expected progress not realised, they cannot even expect to achieve some of the benefits that their parents' generation enjoyed (Hansen 2005; Mains 2007, Chant and jones 2007; Woodman 2009). Perceptions of 'modernity' also influence aspirations. Urban worlds in Africa are characterised by the appropriation of globally-circulating images about how lifestyles *should* be, and this connects young people to global ideas and practices (Hahn 2010; Langevang and Gough 2009). But while people are being included at the global level through mass media and the movement of goods and services, this is met with exclusion at the local city-level, fuelling contradictions between livelihoods and desires and leading to frustration and disenchantment (Hansen 2005; Langevang and Gough 2009). Globalisation may have opened young people's eyes to new possibilities, but the opportunities they can access are not the same as they see available in other parts of the world (Durham 2000; Grant 2006; Jeffrey and MacDowell 2004; Di Nunzio 2012). In Thailand, Camfield et al (2013) highlight how these processes have generated new forms of consumption and led to an expansion in aspirations beyond those which can be fulfilled. This has a detrimental impact on well-being and is particularly acute for young people (Camfield et al 2013).

V. Conclusions

Looking at the internal assets and attributes that help young people to flourish draws attention to a much overlooked aspect of youth poverty. This is the fact that the experience of poverty for youth extends beyond a lack of material resources to a range of critical internal assets. We have seen the importance of young people's ability to build a coherent self-identity and a range of critical developmental assets such as self-confidence, independence, self-efficacy, and communication skills amongst others. Both of these require the right form of ecological supports to develop, namely warm and supportive relationships in the household and stretching out to teachers and non-family adults in the community. Where all of these are present, young people's motivations and actions are inspired by their capacity to aspire. Research in the U.S, in particular, has evidenced the importance of these four critical ingredients (Leffert et al 1998; Scales 1999; Scales et al 2000; Scales et al 2001). Where they exist – and the more that exist – the greater the 'thriving' outcomes are for youth. Where they do not exist can lead to vulnerability, shame, depression and anxiety and risky behaviours.

Development studies has yet to reconcile the importance of these developmental and psychosocial needs in its conceptualisation of youth. Hansen (2005) highlights two interactive urban socio-spatial practices that we must understand: a structural dimension affected by global and local political and economic processes, and an experiential dimension, constructed by social and cultural processes. Existing literature focuses more on the experiential dimensions of youth poverty than its structural ones. Yet an analysis of young people's experiences in towns and cities of urban sub-Saharan Africa highlights that the tough urban environment makes it difficult for young people to meet these psychosocial needs and erodes the traditional institutions and forms of social support they require.

Multiple factors and process limit the development of these critical attributes. Today's youth generation face a much longer and more complex transition to adulthood (Honwana 2012). Urbanisation has led to new forms of livelihood and the processes of social change that have accompanied this have eroded traditional gerontocratic norms and values and led to intergenerational tensions. Widespread poverty limits the material and emotional support young people receive at the household-level. It places pressure on them to be financially independent and, in alignment with cultural norms and values, to be contributors to the household, too. The problems young people face securing decent work, therefore, does not just adversely impact them in terms of limited incomes and delaying their ability to get married and start a family. It also impacts on them *socially*. Unable to reach these social markers of adulthood mean that young people are not awarded the respect given to adults. That they are considered dependent and cannot contribute to household needs brings shame and unhappiness to young men and women across the continent. This is exacerbated by widespread negative stereotypes of urban youth, based on the assumption that if they are not working, the only means through which they can meet their basic needs is through crime. Together, these factors reduce the support that they receive from the community-level and limit the participation of youth in community activities and decision-making. If we look at the importance of support structures to building all four of these pillars of success, the implications of this is catastrophic. All of these factors work together to dampen the hopes and aspirations of urban youth and make it difficult for them to realise the internal assets they need to build resilience and beat adversity.

This has critical implications for our understanding of youth poverty and vulnerability and for efforts to overcome it. Understanding young people's experiences of urban poverty requires us to move away from a focus on individual outcomes and pay greater attention to environmental influences on vulnerability and opportunity. Yes, young people are living in material poverty and employment is at the centre of their concerns. But the *experience* of poverty has even further reaching repercussions,

reducing the institutional support they receive at this critical life-stage, constraining their capacity to aspire to a better future and leaving them without the developmental assets and competencies that they need to draw upon throughout their adult lives. This analysis must be set against a background of local cultures and traditions that so heavily shape expectations of youth, as well as their aspirations and trajectories. Of course, issues of psychosocial development alone cannot illustrate the full depth and experience of youth vulnerability and opportunity, but it is a critical part of the story that we must incorporate more fully into our analysis of youth.

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