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## Cities of youth: Post-millennial cases of mobility and sociality

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WIDER Working Paper 2014/001

## **Cities of youth**

Post-millennial cases of mobility and sociality

Karen Tranberg Hansen\*

January 2014

**Abstract:** With a focus on cities in eastern and southern Africa, this paper draws on recent scholarship and my own research in Lusaka, Zambia, to analyse pathways for, and challenges to, greater social mobility for youth against the background of economic, political, and spatial processes that are affecting urban livelihoods in the region, facilitating or hindering youth social mobility. The paper describes several forms of sociality that brings young women and men together around music, religion, and recreation, including sex. The solidarities and networks that result from such interactions help young people situate themselves in relation to others at the present and in relationship to the future, shaping the urban dynamic in the process.

**Keywords:** youth, urban space, social mobility, sociality, sexual relations

**JEL classification:** O15, O17, O55

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## 1 Introduction

Africa's cities are a main stage for young lives in the present and will remain so in the future. This is so for demographic reasons which include first, the continent's fast urbanization rate and predictions of continued future high growth rates, second, the high proportion of the total population who are young, and third, average longevity that is considerably lower than in the north. This dramatic temporality creates a distinct urban youth dynamic. Drawing on recent scholarship and my own research in Lusaka, Zambia's capital, this paper identifies some of the far-reaching ramifications of this unique temporal triangulation for youth mobility and youth engagement with urban space both in a material and an aspirational sense.

Popular media and policy makers often view youth in Africa as a problem, as a population segment experiencing crisis and prone either to violence or inactivity, although recent scholarship is beginning to cast important light on young people's constructive engagement in different realms of activity (e.g. Frederiksen 2010; Honwana 2012). This paper demonstrates how young African urban women and men are engaged in efforts to build livelihoods and creating spaces of sociality in which they establish strategic interpersonal relationships, connections, and networks of solidarity. In effect, young urban Africans are well aware of being-in-the-world and act upon it at the same time as they negotiate their everyday world through practices they craft from local resources (Hansen 2008: 5). I make three interrelated arguments that revolve around the importance of the city, the distinctiveness of the present, and the salience of sociality. My goal is to demonstrate how urban space enables social interaction beyond the home and to show that such activities in turn shape the urban environment in which young people live and move.

To demonstrate this argument, I approach African urban youth in the here and now (Bucholtz 2002). Today in Africa, youth is not so much a 'lost generation' (Cruise O'Brien 1996) as it is a population segment whom adulthood easily eludes. The term the lost generation captured the failure of the nationalist project when the adverse effects of political crisis and economic decline restricted many young people's education, work, and political participation. Today's realities differ considerably as I discuss in more detail shortly. Briefly, young people enjoy better educational access and are in many countries exposed to the ideals of participatory democracy. Yet their formal economic options are restrained. Several scholars have argued that youth find themselves waiting (Honwana 2012; Mains 2012). Honwana captures this condition well with the title of her recent book, *The Time of Youth*, which she characterizes as waithood. But given the short average longevity in much of Africa compared to the north, I suggest the term 'forever youth' as a more fitting descriptor for today's urban youth experiences in much of Africa. I do so for want of a better term and in order to provoke us to understand the youth dynamic in the present. The term captures the importance of exploring what young people in fact are doing to get on with life. That is, their future is now, and they confront their circumstances in unique and creative ways, which in turn are shaping many features of urban life in Africa in the present. Of course, there are exceptions to this characterization as in the case of the young Tanzanian miners, discussed by Bryceson (2013), who are forced by the unique circumstances of mining camps to assume adult responsibilities.

Turn-of-the millennium politico-economic changes have unsettled the linearity of the stage-wise unfolding of the life cycle once characteristic of social science youth analysis (France 2007). Assumptions associated with the growth of industrialized society in the north viewed youth as a transitional stage between education and work in a life course with three phases: childhood, adulthood, and old age. In this view, youth is a transitional category characterized by immaturity and dependence. Yet, stages of the life course differ both historically and culturally (Mintz 2008).

In the present, the notion of stages are unsettled by globally reaching politico-economically transformations that almost everywhere are changing the transition from education to school as the straightforward road to adulthood. Instead we find a variety of models for youth, many scripts, sometimes running parallel with one another, while at other times different paradigms may dominate. In short, there are several pathways for getting on with life, which young people are crafting from diverse resources available to them. Some succeed in the short term, while others experience obstacles. The scholarship on which I draw views youth as a culturally constructed, context dependent experience. Thus youth identity is agentive, flexible, and situational (Bucholtz 2002: 533). The youth experience is significantly gendered, and it defines itself and is defined by others in generational terms in relation to adults. Almost everywhere, youth are enmeshed in unequal power relationships related to age and gender. And youth counts itself, and is counted by institutions and bureaucracy, in biological age terms that differ widely.<sup>1</sup>

Stimulated by my own study of young people in Lusaka, Zambia's capital, at the beginning of this millennium (Hansen 2008) and continued research periods with focus on a variety of topics throughout the past decade, I draw on recent works to explore what urban youth do about their own situation by showcasing studies of socio-economic mobility and sociality. As I discuss in the pages that follow, young Africans follow a variety of pathways towards economic participation and social life. Not all are successful, but many are, demonstrating both stamina and ingenuity. Almost everywhere, young people mobilize networks of solidarity, turning space into sociality that marks the urban social and cultural fabric. Identifying trends and themes in recent works I describe interaction that bring young people together around a variety of activities, among them, music, religion, and several types of recreational encounters, including sex. My discussion draws by and large on published scholarship from eastern and southern Africa. Except for Zimbabwe, the countries within this region have experienced relatively stable political regimes for several years. Some of these regimes remain authoritative and repressive. The countries within this region sadly lie within 'the HIV/AIDS belt', in which HIV/AIDS is affecting a high proportion of the population and constituting a leading cause of death. This raises the troubling question of how young people live 'when death abounds' (Mususa 2012).

Throughout this paper and reflecting my professional specialization, I have relied on anthropological research first; works in geography probably rank second in my coverage. I also use some works in public health and social medicine. My discussion is not meant to be exhaustive but selective by identifying what I consider to be important trends and observations in scholarship on youth and the city in Africa. Above all, except when referring to general observations, I draw on recent scholarship, that is, works published since the turn of the millennium. Much of this scholarship approaches both youth and the city constructively with a keen eye towards understanding youth efforts to get on with their lives as well as towards the city's ever changing connections to the countryside and the world beyond. Although I have tried to include works on youth from across the socio-economic spectrum, perhaps due to the invisibility of the affluent population in urban public space and problems of accessibility, the vast majority of the published works continue to focus on the urban poor.

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<sup>1</sup> There are differences, for example, between youth definitions used by the UN, the African Union, and the ILO. The UNU-WIDER project has adopted the broad age span from the African Union, which defines youth as ranging from 15-35 years of age.

## 2 The city, the present, and sociality

Urban settings provide the backdrop for a distinctive youth dynamic because of their scale, size, density, and heterogeneity. To be sure, young rural Africans interact around music, church, and pursue social and sexual relations of various types. But their access pales in comparison with the diversity of urban options and the scale of the urban built environment. Africa's big cities host government institutions and a vast bureaucratic apparatus, institutions of higher learning, commercial headquarters, and international agencies and NGOs. Although rural youth may pursue the performing arts, cities are where the main action is and where the local meets the global most dramatically. Last but not least, continued rural-urban migration coupled with natural urban population increase over the last few decades is contributing to widespread economic informalization almost everywhere across urban Africa.

The recent conjuncture of unprecedented urban growth with neoliberal economic policies has profound socio-spatial consequences that are influencing the actions of urban youth and their aspirations. Young people experience a different everyday world than that so deeply restrained by the structural adjustment programmes of a bygone era.<sup>2</sup> Today's youth have better access to education than their parents' generation and are exposed to a democratic political rhetoric that makes them keen on participation. Although socio-economic developments in most of the countries in this region have improved since the turn of the millennium, youth unemployment is widespread and formal politics remain gerontocratic and clientilistic in many countries. As a result, young people wait.

Urban space across the region has been radically transformed in many ways since the liberalization of many economies and the involvement of foreign investment interests in anything from infrastructure, to office buildings, hotels, sports stadiums, to open air markets, requiring changes in zoning rules and prompting population shifts. In many countries open-air markets near central business districts are being demolished or upgraded to yield space for higher income activities. Everywhere, there are new shopping malls, most of them featuring South African franchises and 'China shops' (Dobler 2009). Current urban planning policies tend to prioritize high cost business developments over low cost housing. Although several countries in the region have experienced positive GNP growth during the recent economic crisis in the north, their large urban populations have not benefitted much.

Across urban Africa, the gulf between the tiny group of the very wealthy and the great mass of the very poor is increasing. Cape Town, for example, is South Africa's most racially segregated and socially unequal city (Besteman 2008). Here, as elsewhere in urban areas in the region, the very rich live in gated neighbourhoods while the poor live in settlements characterized by crowding and lack of infrastructure. Urban households tend to be large, containing immediate kin and attached relatives with children and young people frequently moving between households. Many young people cannot afford to rent rooms or houses but remain dependent members of households, subject to the authority of others; and some, who have become orphans due to disease and death of parents and guardians, at an early age become effective heads of households consisting of younger siblings and perhaps a grandparent. As I demonstrate shortly,

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<sup>2</sup> The 1980s and 1990s were characterized by neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes aimed at fiscal restraint while encouraging foreign investment and private enterprise under the aegis of market forces. The increased poverty rates these programmes helped to generate in many countries have been addressed in the most recent World Bank development approach in so-called Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes (PRSP) that seek to improve education and health and create economic growth in selected sectors with investment potential. The PRSP approach is tied up with political and economic decentralization.

to get on with life in the shadow of death requires not only resources and social relations but also youth drive and energy (Bajaj 2008).

Cities are not neutral backdrops to the lives of their young residents. Urban settings are stages linked economically, socially, and culturally; socially to countries across the African continent and worlds beyond it, providing resources and imaginaries young women and men make use of in their efforts to fulfil everyday needs and desires as they plan for, or hope about, their futures. Sociality resulting from diverse types of interaction is salient to their efforts to get on with their lives at the same time as some young people work around the cultural norms and institutions that are circumscribing their lives and activities.

### 3 Socioeconomic mobility

Employment for young people is everywhere a problem in Africa, much like in the north, but unlike the north, many countries in the South never had much of a formal employment scene to begin with. Although many countries now provide free primary school education, not all school age children go to school because of lack of school places and widespread poverty coupled with complicated household situations where parents or guardians have passed away. Paradoxically, in spite of expanding access to education, in several countries, twenty-first century socioeconomic developments in Africa's rapidly growing urban areas still reproduce illiteracy among sections of the very poor at the same time as young people from affluent backgrounds obtain post-graduate education in the world's top institutions (Bourgouin 2012). Local secondary school education that in the immediate post-independence decades assured jobs to many graduates no longer provides a direct line to employment. Likewise, university degrees in many countries do not guarantee well-paid positions. Against this depressing backdrop, it is not surprising that informality is the organizational logic that drives much urban economic activity with young women and men pressing on the informal job scene. Meanwhile those who do not make it may 'get stuck in the compound' (Hansen 2005).<sup>3</sup>

Recent scholarship has detailed some of the trials and tribulations of young people who do not find jobs from remarkably different perspectives. In a study entitled *Stuck: Rwandan Youth and the Struggle for Adulthood*, Sommers (2012) ranges over a wide field, both rural and urban. In Kigali, he describes young women and men who have migrated to the capital because of lack of options in their home areas. In bleak terms, the author depicts poor young men who feel isolated and without opportunities, and young women who turn to prostitution. 'Male youth with little hope of becoming men, female youth trapped in prostitution', he notes, 'and the grinding lives that so many youth led do not inspire cautious sexual behaviour' (Sommers 2012: 200). The pervasiveness of fatalistic behaviour described in this study and young people's awareness of doom (Sommers 2012: 180) may have to do with the poverty focus of the work and the Rwandan background of political upheaval and authoritarian government policies.

The scenario depicted by Sommers differs considerably from that presented in the somewhat similarly entitled work undertaken in Jimma, a provincial town in Ethiopia, *Hope is Cut: Youth, Unemployment, and the Future in Urban Ethiopia* (Mains 2012) in which the author takes us into the lives of young people, revealing a diversity of possible life courses that are not encompassed by Sommers' focus on crisis, perhaps in part due to different research methodologies. Sommers' work was conducted by several interviewers in different locations whereas Mains' longitudinal research provides detailed observations based on his enduring interaction with several young people. The actors are mainly young men, secondary school graduates, who come from better-

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<sup>3</sup> The colloquial term compound refers in Zambia to informal urban settlement.

off backgrounds than the Kigali youth and tend to have access to some resources from familial or friendly networks. His focus is on the importance of employment and work within their lives. Most of these young men decline jobs they consider to be culturally degrading. As a result they wait, sometimes continuing university studies. They wait, talking with their friends while chewing khat, in the process establishing mutually beneficial relationships that facilitate exchange relationships (Mains 2012: 113-130). They discuss a variety of pathways to mobility, some of them including local and international migration. Because it provides access to not only material goods but also social networks, employment is critical for these young men's hopes for the future (Mains 2012: 89). Work in this case, 'is not simply a means of accessing income but of situating oneself in relation to others, in both the present and the future' (Mains 2012: 96). And friendship, notes Mains 'without some form of economic exchange is almost inconceivable' (Mains 2012: 121). As I show later, a very similar observation can be made with reference to the role of economic exchange in sexual relations.

Young people in Zambia refer to waiting as 'just sitting'. But in Lusaka, sitting does not necessarily entail idleness but rather the search for opportunities. Depending on socioeconomic background, youth may pursue post-graduate education at university or business schools; there are vocational trading schools, and many NGOs offer practical training courses. Some young people combine education and training with informal work as a way of earning money for consumption. Some young women and men who establish themselves as entrepreneurs do quite well and especially enjoy being their own bosses. At the very base of Lusaka's street economy, all these options are actively pursued, some youth viewing work as an end, others as a means, like twenty-one year old Ronnie who sold DVDs on the street in front of one of Lusaka's largest market complexes, copies mostly, of popular Nigerian, Ghanaian, Indian, South African, and American productions. He had spent less than one year in Lusaka, arriving straight out of school (grade 11) from the northern province and initially staying with an uncle. Unmarried, he shared two rented rooms with a friend in one of Lusaka's oldest and poorest settlements. When I met him in 2010, Ronnie had sold DVDs for around three months for a vendor of socks and belts in another location, receiving a small monthly wage, food, and transport money as well as a daily bonus, depending on sales. Prior to this, he walked around the market complex, selling plastic shopping bags. His uncle had provided start-up money. But Ronnie's real vocation was music. 'I am a composer', he said, writing Zambian 'traditional' songs. He explained that he had come to Lusaka to record music with a group with whom he already had produced eight songs and one video. In short, Ronnie considered his job as a street vendor to be temporary and his desires for the future did not relate to the street economy (Hansen and Nchito 2013: 64).

Alongside the employment dynamics just depicted, new figures of success are emerging to inspire aspirations, as we have just seen. They include but are not restricted to popular musicians both male and female, and pastors, again both male and female, as well as sport stars especially football players, and various types of professionals.

#### **4 Music scene**

The lively popular music scene across the cities of the region not only provides jobs but also recreational space for leisure and pleasure. The music scene creates a cultural space that reaches far beyond the individual city and country, yet is also intertwined with the experiences of everyday life in ways that resonate with their time and place. Music permeates urban space transmitted from radio stations and CDs in homes, and is played in shops, markets, private cars, and busses. There is a nightclub scene ranging from taverns in the townships to sleek city bars. Around election times, NGOs recruit popular musicians for live performances to rally young



people to vote. NGOs concerned with HIV/AIDS frequently hire musicians to perform at events like World AIDS Day, attracting thousands of young people.

Most of the recent works about music focus on genres/styles and the contents of lyrics rather than on the livelihoods of performers and the interaction that arises around music events and venues. In the first half of the 2000s in Lusaka, many different music styles were performed in English and local languages. You could hear rumba and zoukous from the Congo, kwaito from South Africa, Afro-pop from Nigeria, Zam-ragga, hip-hop, and rap. Observing the top-ten charts for two months in 2004, I found the treacherous path toward adulthood to be an important theme. The top ten lyrics depicted young people as creators of their own problems and authors of their own solutions. Some music hits admonished young people about the dangers of indulgence, including sex, and consumption (Hansen 2008: 117-19). Drawing on music mostly between 2005 and 2010 in her research on Zambia's Copperbelt, Mususa found popular lyrics to urge young people to keep on trying; and to attempt not one but different paths to explore and open up the world. In an argument resonating with Mains she concluded that 'the possibilities for what the future may bring emerge from the environment and people's engagement with it and each other' (Mususa 2012: 319).

Urban grooves music based on hip-hop emerged in Zimbabwe when the ruling party ZANU-PF demanded the arts to produce anti-Euro-American propaganda. Performing in local languages, the artists expressed resistance to Western cultural imperialism, but they also subverted the government's control of social memory. The young artists addressed uncomfortable topics of everyday survival, challenging widespread intergenerational and gender relations, including normative notions of sexuality. The urban grooves music initially created employment for aspiring artists but was banned in 2007, seven years after it first emerged, because it was considered subversive (Manase 2009; Mate 2012). Popular lyrics and individual performers and groups have been banned for political reasons in other countries, including Zambia and Senegal.

In South Africa during apartheid, rap music expressed a form of resistance. Its initial popularity offered the possibility of earning a living. The music provided young people with a voice and, argues Kunzler (2011: 31), turned rappers into agents of social change. Most rappers were male as were the production structures, as is the case with most popular music the world over. Today's popular music scene in South African urban settings also includes kwaito and house music, both of which are selling better than rap. Among the kwaito stars a material culture of success appears to be developing, where success materializes into emblematic objects as extensions of star status along with a particular body culture.

The interplay between music and urban locality is illustrated in a lively analysis of Bullet ya Koako, the most popular band in Opuwo, a small town in northern Namibia, that has become noted across the country and the wider region. Using keyboards and synthesizers to rework the existing genre of praise songs, Bullet ya Kaoko fuses kwaito moves with warrior dance steps while weaving Herero polyphony into a jive-like beat. The lyrics, music, and dance address the challenges of everyday urban life and its uncertainties at the same time as they evoke a sense of belonging that challenges both the old and the new. In this way the local particularities of a small town influence the music people in the streets are listening to and the music in turn shapes their own experience (van Wolputte and Bleckmann 2012: 413-36). Achieving local and national celebrity status, this small town band represented Namibia with their deeply locally inflected music at the 2012 Football World Cup in South Africa.

## 5 Religious space

Gospel music appears to be selling especially well in South Africa (Kunzler 2011: 40), and in Zambia, gospel is listened to widely and even performed in some nightclubs (Hansen 2008: 117). Religion, as these examples demonstrate, is a pervasive force, affecting everyday lives in many ways, in religious settings as well as beyond them. In eastern and southern Africa, Christianity is widespread and Zambia, for example, was declared a 'Christian nation' in the early 1990s. While Islam is a force to be reckoned with in Tanzania and Kenya and less so in South Africa, the proportion of Islamic believers elsewhere in the region is small. Providing spiritual nodes of being and belonging, religious movements may help construct new visions of identity and community, promising young people 'a future that already exists' (Diouf 2003:7). Judging from recent scholarship, growing numbers of young people are joining religious movements, including Islamic groups, mainline churches, and increasingly, Pentecostal churches (Becker and Geissler 2007; Bochow and van Dijk 2012).

The growing popularity of Pentecostal Christianity across Africa creates space for young people to congregate for religious sociality, job openings, and potentially influences widespread gender ideologies, reshaping normative notions of male superiority and female subordination. Several recent works examine changing constructions of masculinity influenced by Pentecostal notions of companionate marriage and gender equality. Most of the works are church-based, and only rarely do scholars explore how Pentecostal believers organize their everyday lives when away from church space. It is important to explore the significance of religiosity beyond the church, argues Haynes in a study of the prosperity gospel on the Zambian Copperbelt. Believers are embedded in social relationships that include non-church members in networks of exchange that are an important dimension of urban sociality in Zambia (Haynes 2012).

Pentecostal churches are hierarchically organized. Even then, in the face of declining civil service and public sector employment, becoming a pastor constitutes an alternate career path. Van Dijk (1992) noted quite a while ago that young born-again pastors in Malawi not only created new urban space for social mobility but also distanced themselves from their seniors. Although her recent research focuses on Kumasi in Ghana, Lauterbach's (2010: 273) observations about the intergenerational relationship between the young and senior pastors will resonate beyond the country. She noted that young pastors do not wait until they become senior by age until they build up their positions. Pastorship, she explains, 'is a life trajectory or a career that involves skillful navigation between being protected and being promoted by a senior pastor and making enough space to be able to grow' (Lauterbach 2010: 274-75). Setting up their own churches, they escape the dependency on senior pastors. Drawing on diverse social networks and resources, they skilfully create space to 'become someone', by reinventing status and power in their local setting.

The young people whose involvement with mainline and Pentecostal churches I studied in Lusaka in 2003 came to church for many reasons. Churches have extensive social involvements, including educational programmes and clinics, HIV/AIDS prevention programmes, lay activity, programmes for couples, women, children, and increasingly a variety of youth activities. Many churches offer skills training of various kinds and programmes for orphans and street children (Hansen 2008: 113-17). Some of the Pentecostal churches that are supported by large churches in the United States, Nigeria, and Brazil, have IT facilities and instrument rooms for practice at the church site that attract youth, enhancing the significance of religious sociality.

Pentecostal faith, for one, appears to offer a strategy for urban living that may have special appeal to young people in their formative age. The churches encourage morality, responsibility, discipline, and hard work. The blueprint for family living stresses monogamy, marriage as a

precursor to child bearing and puts the husband in charge of households as the chief provider. I found in Lusaka that Pentecostal faith helped young men fashion, at least temporarily, a construction of masculinity that differed from the aggressive, sexually active version so prevalent in urban Zambia. They subordinated this dominant version to a notion of manhood as disciplined, careful, hardworking, and not 'indulging', that is, not drinking, smoking, taking drugs, and pursuing casual sex (Hansen 2008: 115). Van Klinken (2012) made similar observations among young men attending a long-established Pentecostal church in Lusaka with a largely middle-class following. On being born again, they renounced their prior life as 'bad boys', giving up the 'manly norms' of drinking and womanizing. In the process, these men considered themselves better men than they were before their conversion and better than their former peers. Their male identity, the author claims, is not damaged but rather reshaped and reaffirmed (Van Klinken 2012: 220-21).

While Pentecostalism remains hierarchical and male dominated, within it here is room for some redefinition of patriarchy and gender roles. As there are new notions of manhood available, likewise there are new images of what it means to be a woman. In a study of young single professional women with tertiary education and management careers in the Gauteng area (greater Johannesburg), Frahm-Arp (2012) engages with the dilemma these Pentecostal women encounter. They dream about the social ideal and symbol of social and economic success, consisting of a nuclear family of husband, wife, and two to three children. But the social and religious worlds in which they live exert a set of contradictory pressures they find difficult to balance. One is that men want sex and children; and the second is that women want to marry first. The pressures make them struggle to find suitable husbands to marry (Frahm-Arp 2012: 370). Pentecostal churches provide social space in which singleness is an accepted state. And church interaction encourages the women to keep alive their dream of marriage, nuclear family, and fulfilling normative gender roles while pursuing their personal economic plans.

Tensions around gender and sexuality are marked in Pentecostal settings. In Cape Town's low-income areas, Pentecostal youth struggle to reconcile the call for sexual abstinence with other notions of intimate life. In such settings, religious teachings about sexuality 'sit uneasily with the social and cultural realities that structure the lives of most urban youth' (Burchardt 2012:669). Young people negotiate Pentecostal sexual morality by shifting dating practices and sexual intercourse across different spaces and times, alternating between Sunday services, workshop settings, and township streets (2012: 674). Importantly, the author stresses a point that rarely is mentioned in other works on Pentecostalism carried out exclusively in church settings. At issue is church membership, which fluctuates considerably, in the Cape Town context probably reflecting the insecure economic situation, frequent changes of young people's residence as well as their on and off interest in church community life (2012:674).

There is a widespread moral double standard across the gender divide. In spite of discourses about abstinence, having multiple partners demonstrates the virility of men in the eyes of their peers (Burchardt 2010:65). On Makerere University's campus Pentecostal promotion of sexual abstinence clashes with sexual practices among women students who experience pressure from peers to pursue a lifestyle of tangible and visible means. When young campus men cannot deliver the mobile phones, shopping trips, clothes, dinner, and nightlife, young women turn their attention to older, financially stable, successful, and often, married men. Some young women who declare their born-again conversion use Pentecostalism's insistence on abstinence as a strategy to avoid sex, promising sex in the future by extracting money in a practice referred to as 'de-toothing'. The strategy creates a risky sexual dynamic because of the implicit understanding of reciprocity connected with gift-giving (Sadgrove 2007:123-26).

## 6 Sexual practices

In popular and religious discourse, sexual activity is often conflated with adulthood. But on the ground in Africa today, sexuality reaches the core of constructions of both youth and gender identities. Young Africans' ideal of sexual relations combines notions of romantic love with emotional attachments and sexual exclusivity. Both young women and young men engage in casual sex but on different terms (Burchardt 2011: 678). Because nearly half of all new cases of HIV/AIDS worldwide occur among young people between the ages of 15-25 years, young people's intimate lives demand our attention. The gendered nature of the disease and women's particular vulnerabilities make young women in the 15-25 year age range infected at much higher rates than young men of the same age group (McIlwaine and Datta 2004: 483). For this, we blame unequal gender relations combined with socio-economic pressures to make a living. The result is sex for money and/or a variety of material goods.

Intimate relationships are often accompanied by gifts and exchange, and the transactional nature of sexual behaviour has prompted an extensive literature. As Sadgrove (2007:121) cautiously comments: 'it is difficult for the outside observer to quantify the proportion of sexual relationships that exist as a series of transactions, and those which sexual intimacy is motivated by a broader set of emotional, physical, social and relational concerns'. A constructive approach to exploring this entangled topic is to suggest, as I did earlier, that money and love do not inevitably exclude one another. Hunter (2002; 2009) has made this argument forcefully for South Africa.

Ideals of love are bound up with desires for material goods. Among like-age young people in a study in Durban, gift-giving was important in shaping sexual relationships. Young people associated money with prostitution but did not view gifts in that way. They rather saw gifts as a regular part of dating experiences, a natural part of a relationship that did or did not involve sexual coercion (Kaufman and Stavrou 2004: 378). In Johannesburg, young women hoped for relationships of financial independence and freedom to make decisions about sexuality, yet a study found that most of them were in relationships marked by partner violence, infidelity, and lack of condom use. The women also acknowledged the importance of financial support when they enter intimate relationships although their desire is for emotional intimacy and love (Pellitor et al. 2012: 487). The disconnection between expectations and lived reality is striking and young women's economic insecurity makes them vulnerable.

Observations about transactional sex among low-income youth in Dar es Salaam parallel these findings. Sex was exchanged for money or material goods in all types of relationships, including from committed partners. Rather than seeing themselves as exploited victims, the young women talked about extracting material support from partners as an active strategy to initiate, maintain, and terminate relationships, labelling it 'skinning the goat' (Maganja et al. 2007). On a South African university campus in the Western Cape, sugar daddies and 'ministers of finance' were a common presence involving richer male students, sugar daddies, and employed men from off campus. Although economic motivations were uppermost, women considered a range of other resources to be important in transactional sexual relations, which they did not necessarily view as exploitative, but occasionally as equitable. Such transactional sexual encounters were not only about money but also involved other exchanges, benefitting both men and women (Shefer et al. 2012: 442).

Among young urban professionals attitudes to sex are more relaxed, perhaps because they are fairly securely positioned economically. Among them we may see shifts in attitudes to gender and sexuality that lessen the hold of existing gerontocratic and patriarchal power structures. Such a shift is beginning to be noted in South Africa where the 1996 Constitution and Bill of Rights are

destabilizing long-held expressions of sexuality. Even then as I discuss shortly, this does not represent a complete break with the past, and violent masculinities have according to one observer become more violent than in the past (Walker 2005: 226-27). Young professionals born and raised in Nairobi and working as IT specialists, accountants, and junior NGO staff were financially independent from relatives with the freedom to enjoy their own life. They preferred to delay marriage until they reached the 30s, because they wanted to work on their careers, or did not want the responsibility of married life. Discussing how these young professionals used media as tools to envision new types of intimate relations, Spronk explores how Western romantic films, locally produced magazines, and church counselling classes exposed these young professionals to a variety of love scripts (Spronk 2009a). Their careers were important markers of their self-identification as were 'fashionable dressing, going out and progressive attitudes' (Spronk 2009b: 504). Although they represent a minority group, these young professionals are easily recognizable in the urban landscape. They are cosmopolitans, argues the author, but with a Kenyan flavour of which they are proud.

## **7 Space, place, and social relations**

How do young urban African women and men experience their situation? The secondary school students in Lusaka who in the early part of this millennium wrote essays for me on what it meant to be a young person in Zambia's capital explained that being in the city was where life was happening, in real terms as well as in their imagination. Everywhere in their narratives were the icons of modern life: shopping malls, institutions of learning, electricity, television, cars, and discos along with the architecture of government, its institutions, international agencies, and commercial firms. They also took note of the big urban markets and the crowded low-income residential areas where they would rather not live, if they had a choice. The young women were more cautious in their urban enthusiasm than the young men, expressing concerns about their freedom to move in urban public space (Hansen 2008).

Where do young people socialize? The vast majority who reside in crowded quarters in low-income residential areas get together away from home in streets, neighbourhood markets, pool halls, and local drinking venues. Such areas frequently are located at some distance from the central business districts. When they have the means to travel into the city, they may go to shopping malls to meet friends, hang out in the food courts, and window shop. The big public markets in most African cities also attract youth both for business and social activity. Because of the overall lack of places for peer sociality in the low-income residential areas, streets are central to young people's dating landscape. Cramped living conditions at home limit places for sexual play, and young lovers seek recourse to backyard shacks, paths between buildings, and open areas between the townships. In the late 1980s, when I consulted court records from one of Lusaka's low-income townships about claims for compensation ('damages') in cases of premarital pregnancy, I commonly found pregnant young women explaining that they had met their partner in the street (Hansen 1997: 147-156).

Place and personhood are intimately interconnected and influence experiences of place attachment. Young people's experience of 'where they are' and 'how they live' in Lusaka, that is, in the low-income areas, mediates their understanding of what they might become, and what it takes to move beyond their present circumstances (Hansen 2005:12; 2008:107-09). The dynamic interconnections between conditions of place, relationships, and personhood have been explored in a variety of other urban settings, focusing for example on the tensions in intergenerational relationships between young peri-urban women in Zimbabwe and their mothers due to socioeconomic transformations during the first decades after independence in 1980 (Adams 2009).

Specific parts of cities characterized by precarious livelihoods readily acquire negative place associations. For example, young men in South Africa's urban areas are frequently depicted as violent, if not criminals, and gangsters. Yet growing up on the Cape Flats in Cape Town, not all young men fit these images. Studying young male high school students at close range, Lindegaard (2009: 19; 230) demonstrates that they managed to lead normal lives not characterized by crime and violence in spite of the miserable conditions in which they frequently grew up. Some of these young men developed routes that took them away from criminal pathways and were able to make plans for the future even in the face of changes in society around them.

Although not all young men in the Cape Flats end up in gangs, many consider joining a group because of its importance in navigating the streets of the township. Such groups provide their members with protection in a dangerous environment. Jensen (2006) analysed the reconfiguration of backstreet urban space on the Cape Flats where young coloured men congregate to navigate the terrains of violence. The confinement resulting from their activities produced a sense of territoriality specific to the young men's everyday life worlds and their relations to state institutions. In such groups, place and personhood came together in producing a particular violent masculine identity and criminal livelihood. In the popular discourse of space and social relations, such spaces are equated with and treated as gang territory (Jensen 2006: 288-89).

## 8 Trans-local spaces

Sociality is not always or necessarily space-and place-associated but rather global in scope. This is evident from the emergence of sites of interaction around popular culture such as music and media use. The case of sport provides an excellent example. The power of sport to bring people together, including youth, has been well-documented in terms of playing but less so in terms of viewing. Throughout the cities of the region in recent years, venues for electronic viewership of sport have proliferated, extending from the townships, to video clubs, upscale bars, and special theatre showings. Collective viewing occurs in private households in the townships as well and in video parlours in township markets that charge a small fee for viewers of sport, blue movies, and Indian and Nigerian films, among others.<sup>4</sup>

A recent study of collective football viewing describes such venues as trans-local 'stadiums' (Akindes 2011). Football, the most popular sport in Africa by far, provides a recreational outlet for young men and increasingly, young women (Hansen forthcoming). The international migration it has fuelled has landed African players on football teams across the world. It is not surprising that football playing is part of many young men's imaginary. What is more, football viewing on television is generating a new form of fandom that is primarily urban, creating a palpable experience in African urban space. During important games, the streets are empty. Urban residents are glued to the television set at home, with neighbours and friends, or at a bar or special venue. 'The collective convergence', observes Akindes (2011:2180), 'of a whole city or nation is visual and audible'. When in February 2012 the Zambian 'chipolopolo boys' won the Africa Cup of Nations over the Ivory Coast, they were met on their return in the international airport by a thunderous welcome, song, and dance by jubilant fans, who lined up alongside the streets into the city. The fans were dressed in creative costumes and their faces painted in the national colours while vuvuzelas and car horns were sounding loudly as the open vehicle with the winning team, proudly displaying the Africa Cup trophy, wound its way into the city.

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<sup>4</sup> I have seen such parlours in markets in Lusaka but have not come across any scholarship analysing the significance neither of their operation as an income source nor of their consumption.

Trans-local stadiums and their accompanying fandom enable the temporary creation of a localized collective sociality, which is neither unique to Africa nor specific to youth. Still, such a localized collective sociality matters importantly to African urban youth, permitting them an embedded platform for participation that is both local and global, giving them the experience of being-in-the-world rather than confined, for example, to a generator operated TV in a low-income settlement without electricity.

Because of its collective aspect, this kind of trans-national sociality differs from the interaction created through mobile telephony, which is connecting Africans at faster rates than anywhere else (Hansen forthcoming). The active mobile phone users include young entrepreneurs, accessing social networks for resources, and young lovers making dates. There is also Internet dating, which in Ghana is enabling urban youth to meet, chat, and form distance relationships with people from across the world, crafting desired lifestyles, and forming identities (Fair et al. 2009). The Internet no doubt is involving urban youth across the continent who have the skills and means to engage in trans-local identity and relationship quests, the ramifications of which invite our attention as scholars. Taken together, the relations young people craft in the process of pursuing their ambitions contribute to the creation of a virtual space that is simultaneously local and global.

## **8 Conclusion**

As this paper has demonstrated from eastern and southern Africa, cities are where the action is for young people. This is so because of the unique temporal triangulation (high urbanization rates, marked youth bulge, and low life expectancy) that make African urban youth a high profile issue and because of the size, scale, density, and heterogeneity of urban areas. The recent regional scholarship I have drawn on reveals several crucial observations that may contribute to qualify some of the conventional wisdom about urban youth. Importantly, young people are not idling, passively waiting for things to happen, even if they describe themselves, as in Zambia, as ‘just sitting’. While waiting, they craft interpersonal relationships that are important to their everyday existence and to their future. When addressing the urban youth dynamic, scholars and policy makers must take into account the new experiences of young people that the last two decades of political and economic transformations, with their changes in markets, employment, and household arrangements, have helped set into motion.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that the time of urban youth is now, which is why it may make sense to characterize them, provocatively as I suggested at the outset, as ‘forever youth’. In effect, their future has already begun. The term ‘forever youth’ reckons with the simultaneity of different youth scripts and trajectories, some operating alongside each other while others are in conflict with dominant notions of gender and personhood or contest them. Above all in this paper, the term ‘forever youth’ has helped me showcase youth interaction in the here and now related to efforts at creating livelihoods as well as to spaces of sociality where young women and men establish interpersonal relationships, connections, and networks of solidarity.

Such observations have consequences in many domains of urban life from sexual and gender relations that introduce new ideas of love and family structure in an expanding engagement with religion and media to self-identification as a born-again, a designer who is the boss of a small enterprise, to an identity as a young IT professional with global exposure. Such youth identities are agentive and situational. Alongside new ideas remain difficulties many young men experience in establishing independent households and women in finding the right marriage partners, which in turn encourage intermittent sexual relations, and the prolongation of youth is likely to affect

the age and rate of marriage as well as the birth rate. Meanwhile, some young women find new options to pursue single lives, at least for a while.

Overall, the scholarship on which I have drawn opens windows onto ongoing shifts in the cultural norms and practices that guided an older generation, even though hierarchically structured gender relations continue to shape male to female interaction among young people and between them and their seniors within the home, in the streets, and in public settings. Social and economic resources play in here as young urbanites in well-paid positions find more freedom to pursue their individual desires than the very poor whom economic and household adversity may propel into risky activities. Above all, the recent works demonstrate the significance of social relations and sociality for young people's trajectories. Young people's efforts at crafting sociality are not confined by the boundaries of households and residential areas but also take place within the city and beyond, connecting them, as in life-style and consumption pursuits, and in electronic sport viewing, with people and worlds far away from home.

Recent worldwide politico-economic changes have significantly changed the urban life options of today's youth compared to their parents' generation. New success figures give evidence of how changes in economy, functioning of markets, and social fabric are converging to produce emerging opportunity structures (Banegas and Warnier 2001). This paper has introduced the young Pentecostal pastor who becomes someone of importance in his local setting by establishing himself as head of a new church, away from the demands of senior pastors. Then there are the musicians, including aspiring ones as Ronnie is Lusaka whose desire is to compose, rather than to work as a street vendor. And although most are likely to remain where they are, many young people practice sports as an important part of their recreation, which has opened up avenues to local stardom and international celebrity status and plays an important role in activating young people's imagination about lives in the future. Meanwhile, young successful business professionals from affluent backgrounds across the continent in middle and senior management positions pursue cosmopolitan lifestyles within new emerging social hierarchies with global reach. There is no doubt that new opportunity structures will emerge over the short and longer term as young urban people in Africa with drive and energy bring their skills and resources to bear on getting on with their lives.

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