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The Social and Political Implications of Demographic Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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The Social and Political Implications of Demographic Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Abstract

The cohort of young people born between the early 1980s and early 1990s comprise a demographic bulge in the South African population. The sheer size of this cohort renders it especially important in terms of the changing political, economic and social life of the country. The cohort grew up for the most part after apartheid had ended, entered the labour market at a time of high unemployment, is having children as marriage in in decline, and reached voting age just as the ANC's moral stature began to decline. All of these might be expected to result in distinctive attitudes and behaviours. By diverse criteria, however, the cohort looks much like older (or immediately previous cohorts of) South Africans. This 'generation' does not appear to be particularly distinctive except in terms of its size. Where this cohort is likely to leave its mark is in entrenching some of the social, economic and political changes that, until recently, might have appeared transient.

"Perfect Window" or "Perfect Storm"?

South Africa's 2011 Population Census confirmed that the country's population had broken through the 50-million mark, reaching an estimated 51.8 million people. This entailed growth of 28 percent since 1996, when the population had been 40.6 million (South Africa, 2012a: 14). World Bank data on future growth suggest that population growth will continue to slow, reaching about 55 million in sometime between 2040 and 2050,[1] although South Africa's recent National Development Plan (NDP) worries that fertility rates might not continue to decline and the total population might rise to 60 million by 2030 (South Africa, 2012b: 77).

[1] http://datatopics.worldbank.org/hnp/popestimates

Continuing population growth at the same time as declining fertility rates is typical of Africa, but the age-structure of South Africa's population is distinctive in that the largest cohort is not the youngest, but is the cohort born in the mid- and late 1980s, aged between 20 and 29 at the time of the 2011 census. This cohort is larger, in absolute numbers, than both preceding and following cohorts. This bulge in the age-structure is due to the rapidly declining fertility rate as well as AIDS-related mortality, especially in the late 1990s and early 2000s, among both children and working-age adults.

The existence of this unusually large cohort of young people has already had major implications for the schooling system (through which the cohort passed in the late 1990s and early 2000s), and is now transforming the labour market. The young men and women in this cohort are looking for work, and their consumption preferences are transforming demand. They are trying to raise their status and to find their own homes. They account for a large proportion of both perpetrators and victims of crime and violence, comprise a large proportion of the electorate, and are having – and raising – children of their own.

The effects of this demographic bulge are compounded by urbanisation. Whereas Gauteng's population grew up 57 percent between 1996 and 2011, and the Western Cape's by 47 percent, the other seven provinces combined grew by only 17 percent. The population of the Free State may even have begun to decline (South Africa, 2012a: 14-15). The NDP notes that 'it is likely that almost all of South Africa's net population growth until 2030 (an estimated 8 million) will take place in urban areas, especially in major cities' (South Africa, 2012b: 84).

The demographic data point also to a third important trend: the slowly rising numbers of the elderly, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the total population. Between 1996 and 2011, the proportion of the (growing) total population aged 65 or more rose from 4.8 percent to 5.3 percent. Models predict that this population will grow from about 2.3 million (in 2010) to 5.7 million by 2050.[2]

The 2012 NDP paid careful attention to these demographic trends. The bulge in the working-age population opens a 'window of opportunity' in terms of inclusive economic growth:

[2] http://datatopics.worldbank.org/hnp/popestimates.

> ‘South Africa has arrived at the ‘sweet spot’ of demographic transition. The population has a proportionately high number of working-age people and a proportionately low number of young and old. This means that the dependency ratio – the percentage of those over 64 and under 15 relative to the working-age population – is at a level where there are enough people of working age to support the non-working population (South Africa, 2012b: 78).

The NDP reports that the age-related dependency ratio will have stopped declining by 2020, as the rising number of elderly offset the slowly declining number of children.

In the South African case, however, dependency is much more of a challenge than the age structure alone suggests. ‘The caveat in South Africa’s case is that unemployment and HIV/AIDS have produced many more dependants than would normally be the case’, the NDP notes. ‘Although statistically South Africa is in a position to cash in on a demographic dividend, the challenges of HIV/AIDS and joblessness are a burden on those who are working’. The large working-age population might be a ‘major asset’, but only if ‘the challenge’ of ‘putting this working-age population to work’ is tackled successfully (South Africa, 2012b: 78).

The challenge is, of course, social and political as much as economic. The NPC warns that, if the working-age population is not put to work, then ‘the perfect window could be the perfect storm’ (South Africa, 2012b: 78). Large numbers of unemployed young men are, the NDP suggests, a recipe for ‘social disorder, widespread political unrest and increased crime’ (South Africa, 2012b: 86). As trade union leader Zwelinzima Vavi, among others, has said, unemployed youth represent a ‘ticking time-bomb’ (see IJR, 2012).

Anxieties about the youth

The demographic data feed into a long-standing anxiety in South Africa about the ‘youth’. Young men, especially poor and black young men, have long been a source of anxiety not only for privileged elites but also for very many poor and black people themselves. The image of the ‘youth’ has sometimes had a positive dimension, associated with energy and perhaps a commitment to transforming society for the better. But its negative dimensions have generally predominated: violence and crime, alienation and aggression, irresponsibility and idleness, disaffection and disrespect. If the ‘youth’ do not have

opportunities to become responsible, work-oriented ‘adults’, then the stability of society will be threatened. If they pass their norms and attitudes onto their children, then the strain in the social fabric will worsen further.

In the early 1990s a moral panic erupted over anxiety that the youth might derail the pacted transition to representative democracy (Seekings, 1995: 1996). In the early 2000s, attention shifted to the more ‘ordinary’ experiences of young people (Seekings, 2008). In the late 2000s and 2010s, however, anxiety over the ‘youth’ resurfaced in the media, driven by a concern that disappointment and frustration with the slow pace of social and economic change would threaten South Africa’s fragile democracy. Unemployment, crime, violence and declining social cohesion would feed each other. Widespread, often violent protests over service delivery and governance, and a rising tide of violent strikes, were reminiscent of the tumult of the 1980s.

The usual source of anxiety over the youth is that, during an incomplete ‘transition to adulthood’, youth behaviour is unconstrained by the practical, moral or social constraints or responsibilities that order the lives of adults. More precisely, in a world in which there are many facets to the ‘transition to adulthood’, failure to complete any one of these transitions reduces the likelihood of young people behaving in the ways associated with the completion of other transitions. In this view, for example, if unemployment delays the completion of someone’s transition to the ‘adult’ role of worker, then this makes it less likely that this person will behave in the ways associated with other ‘adult’ roles, such as citizen and community participant, spouse, parent, or household manager. Conversely, a failure to transit successfully into ‘adult’ familial roles might impede the transition into work. The recent comparative literature on ‘transitions to adulthood’ suggests that the duration of transitions from childhood to adulthood have lengthened across much of the global South (Lloyd *et al.,* 2005).

As the comparative literature also concludes, however, youth do become, eventually, adult workers, citizens, community participants, spouses, parents, and household managers. Whilst the precise form of a ‘successful’ transition varies between societies – for example in terms of difference over the balance between individual autonomy and embeddedness in larger households and communities – most young people do make a successful transition (Lloyd *et al.,* 2005). The behaviours, norms and attitudes associated with the ‘youth’ are generally age-specific, giving way to quite different ones as young people enter full-time employment, form independent households, marry and have children, and participate in community activities. Indeed, the kinds of ‘youth’ who are

viewed as social 'problems' may be visible but almost always comprise a small and diminishing proportion of even their generation.

Are there circumstances in which a significant proportion of the young people in an age cohort or generation might permanently fail to complete one or more of these 'transitions' to adulthood? This is the spectre raised by the concept of a 'lost generation', but which rarely (if ever) seems to be realised. One common version of this spectre points to children who were denied or deprived of education, which makes it harder for them to become responsible workers, citizens or family members. In the South African case, the generation of adolescents born in the late 1960s and even early 1970s was, according to some commentators, socialised on violent streets rather than in functional schools, rendering them 'lost' in terms of both economic growth and social order. Empirical research tended to undermine this view (Seekings, 1996). Is the generation born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s different? What happens when an unusually large cohort of young people enter their twenties at a time when employment opportunities for them are scarce, when social relations are in flux, and when political loyalties are eroded and grievances sharpened? In the South African case, has the combination of a demographic bulge and the contemporary economic, social and political context resulted in a situation unlike even past periods of anxiety? Might some combination of background, numbers and context serve to render transitions permanently incomplete, with consequences for the rest of society?

This article explores three key dimensions of the experiences of this generation. My focus is on their experiences in the late 2000s and early 2010s, *after* most of the adolescents involved had exited the schooling system. I therefore focus on entry into the labour market, household formation, and the exercise of citizenship. I argue that the lives of many young people are characterised not so much by a protracted or even incomplete 'transition' but rather by quick immersion into a novel kind of adulthood, characterised by economic, social and political fluidity. This is not to say that this is a universal experience in South Africa: Some young South Africans do experience a 'transitional' phase – often extended – as they move from childhood to the kind of adulthood that was more common among their parents' and previous generations. Nor is it abruptly novel: Immediately preceding cohorts experienced some of the same experiences.

Entry into the Labour Market

The labour market is at the core of the challenge of incorporating this cohort of young people into full citizenship. Exceptionally high rates of unemployment among young people in South Africa are widely seen as an important foundation of many of the country's 'social problems': violence and crime, alcohol and drug abuse, widespread gangs, the decline of marriage, and the fragility of community. It would be surprising if young people's unequal experiences in the labour market did not have enduring consequences for their life chances in many other respects also.

The generation of young South Africans who entered the labour market in the late 2000s and early 2010s had high, but orthodox, aspirations. Adolescents in Cape Town aged 18 in 2002 – i.e. born in 1984 – were asked (as part of the Cape Area Panel Study, CAPS) about their future expectations. Asked what work they expected or planned to be doing at the age of thirty – i.e. twelve years hence – most of the 18-year-old adolescents in poorer neighbourhoods said that they expected to be professionals, businessmen or in other high-earning occupations, with jobs that were well-paid and enjoyable. Some expected to be working three years hence; most of the others said that they would still be studying then. Even in poor or very poor neighbourhoods, between 40 and 50 percent of adolescents put their chances of getting a well-paid job as 'high' or 'very high'. Many other indicators (in CAPS and other surveys) reveal a similar picture of optimism and even a high degree of perceived control over life among young African men and women in post-apartheid South Africa (Bray *et al.*, 2010: 217-23, 296-300). These high aspirations were generally matched by enrolment in school. In 2010, as many as 93 percent of 16 year-olds, 86 percent of 17 year-olds and 71 percent of 18 year-olds attended educational institutions (Hall, 2012: 96). Few South African adolescents leave school at a young age in order to work. Even when adolescents experience difficulties in progressing through school or finding employment after leaving school, expectations often remain high (Bray *et al.*, 2010; Roberts 2011).

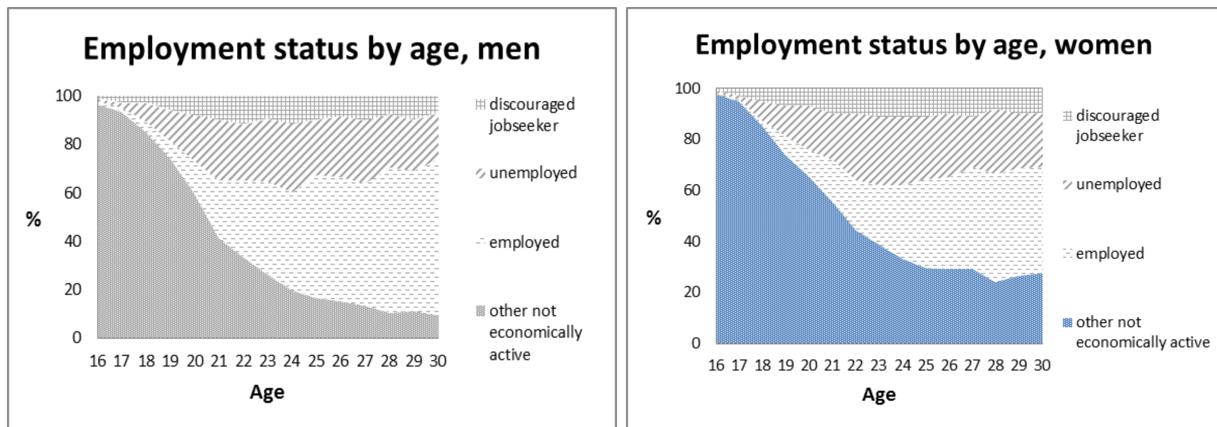
Whilst most young people spend longer than previous generations in school, most learn too little and many leave with limited skills. In the 2011 Annual National Assessment, the average score in Grade 3 numeracy was 28 percent, and in Grade 6 mathematics it was 30 percent. Cross-national educational assessments show that South African schools perform disastrously, especially in mathematics. Performance varies massively between better schools, mostly in rich neighbourhoods, and weaker schools, invariably in poor areas (Van der

Berg, 2007; 2008; Branson and Zuze, 2012). Basic literacy rates have risen over time, but it is unlikely that the same is true of numeracy.[3]

Leaving school with very limited skills was especially important because the demand for low-skilled workers was declining at the same time as massive unemployment. Indeed, unemployment is high despite steady (but underwhelming) economic growth in large part because of the collapse in demand for unskilled and even semi-skilled workers in the formal sector. The data on the skill composition of the workforce is fragmentary, and insufficiently disaggregated between formal and informal, public and private, tradable and non-tradable sectors. But the trend is clear: the demand for unskilled labour in the formal sector, and especially in tradable sectors, has fallen dramatically (Bhorat and Oosthuizen, 2006). The general problems of entering the South African labour market were compounded at the end of the 2000s by the global economic downturn. South Africa's GDP growth slowed down but output never fell. Nonetheless, close to one million jobs were lost in 2009-10, and unemployment rates rose sharply (Yu, 2012).

The magnitude of the employment crisis facing young men and women in South Africa is evident in Figures 1 and 2. In 2010, almost all sixteen and seventeen year-olds were still in school, and were therefore classified as 'other not economically active'. By the age of 21 (for men) or 22 (for women), more than one half of young people were in the labour market. By their late 20s, only about 10 percent of young men, and about 25 percent of young women, were *neither* working *nor* wanting work. But, many young people who had left school and wanted work could not find any. Six out of every ten young people in their early 20s who had not completed secondary school and wanted work were unemployed. The corresponding proportion for young people in their late 20s was about 50 percent. Young people who had completed secondary school or (especially) had some tertiary education were much more likely to find work. By their late 20s, young people who completed secondary school have an unemployment rate one-third lower, and young people with some tertiary education have a rate two-thirds lower, than their less educated peers.

[3] Unfortunately there are (as far as I am aware) no good and comparable data on the numeracy of successive age cohorts at the same age, so we cannot determine whether the cohort born between the early 1980s and early 1990s was any more or less numerate than its predecessors were at the same age.



Figures 1 and 2: Employment status by age, men and women[4]

Unemployment rates are higher among women than men, but the difference is modest due to the dramatic feminisation of employment. Working women in their mid and late-twenties were, on average, earning much the same as their male peers, and the proportion of young women that had *ever* worked was only a little lower than for young men.

In previous work, we identified three broad clusters of classes in South African society at the end of the twentieth century (Seekings and Nattrass, 2005). One in seven households was in what we called the upper classes. About 38 percent of households fell into a 'middle' set of classes, comprising the lower-middle class and formally-employed working classes. Almost one half (48 percent) of all households fell into a lower tier of classes, comprising the more marginal sections of the working population, together with what we called the 'underclass' (comprising households effectively shut out of the labour market). Some of the young men and women who entered the labour market in the late 2000s found stable employment and entered the upper or middle clusters of classes. Many, however, swelled the lower cluster of marginal classes, either unemployed or with precarious and poorly-paid work in the informal sector or in the most marginal corners of the formal sector (such as domestic and agricultural work). These young people are 'outsiders', typically lacking social capital (i.e. useful connections through kin, friends or neighbours), cultural capital (including both knowledge of how labour markets work and the conventional aesthetic markers of success) and financial capital, as well as educational credentials. They struggle to find employment; if they find work,

[4] Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the second quarter of 2010.

they often struggle to retain it, and if they lose it, they struggle to find new employment.

Our in-depth interviews with these individuals provide a depressing picture, with considerable evidence of depression and passivity. Only a minority of jobless adolescents are actually looking for work at any one time. It is usually assumed that not looking reflects the perception that looking is futile, i.e. that the 'discouraged' unemployed have been discouraged from active search because of its futility. But it seems that this discouragement is often fuelled by psychological depression, which saps initiative.

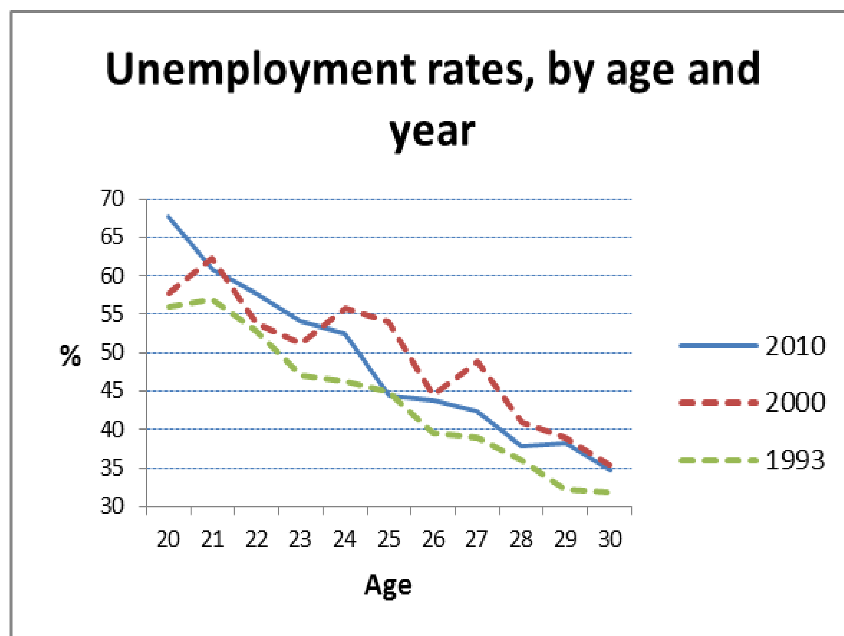


Figure 3: Unemployment rates, by age and year

Is the experience of this generation very different to the experience of previous generations? Figure 3 shows unemployment rates for young people from the ages of 20 to 30, in each of 1993, 2000 and 2010.[5] The rates by age in 2000 and 2010 were higher than in 1993, but the differences are not large, and the rates in 2010 were, at least from the age of 24, a little lower than in 2000. Chronic unemployment and underemployment have been problems since the 1970s.

[5] LFS February 2000 and 1993 PSLSD (Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development) survey, own calculations.

The transformations of families and care

Young South Africans are shaped by their familial backgrounds, and in turn shape the next generation through shaping the kinds of families in which their children grow up. In many parts of the developing world families are undergoing profound change, but these processes are especially dramatic in the South African context. Declining numbers of children grow up with regular contact with their fathers or even living in households where there is a stable or enduring adult male presence. Marriage has declined rapidly, and unmarried chronic cohabitation has only partially taken its marriage. Extended family ties have weakened, especially on the paternal side, with the decline of patrilineal culture. Many households are characterised by fluidity (Ross, 1996; 2003; Seekings, 2008).

The fullest data on the backgrounds of the generation born in the 1980s and early 1990s is from CAPS. The CAPS data cover only young men and women living in Cape Town, and a major metropolitan area should not be taken as representative of the country as a whole. Nonetheless, the CAPS data reveal important features of the national experience, not least because many young people in Cape Town grew up in poor, rural areas of the Eastern Cape before migrating to the city.

Among adolescents born in the mid-1980s and living in Cape Town in 2002, three-quarters had always lived with their mothers but less than one half had lived with their fathers for their entire lives. Children from poor families were least likely to have co-resided with their parents, whilst children from rich families were most likely to have done so. Physical separation need not mean a complete absence of contact between parents and children, however. Many fathers continue to play a role in the lives of their children, even when they live apart (Richter and Morrell, 2006; Bray *et al*., 2010). Overall, however, paternal absence is associated with reduced contact and weaker relationships between children and their fathers. Some physically absent, emotionally distant fathers do fulfil their material roles as providers, but many absent fathers fail to play even this role. Some adolescents growing up apart from either or both parents form close attachments to other kin (and even non-kin), calling them 'mother' or 'father'. Whilst almost all adolescents have mother-figures in their lives, a significant proportion of young men and women grow up without any regular father-figure (Bray *et al*., 2010). How much this matters, or for what, is not clear. There have been few South African studies that trace the enduring consequences of parental presence and behaviour on young people in later life. One study of male perpetrators of violence, using CAPS data, found a

significant positive bivariate relationship between paternal absence during childhood and perpetrating violence against strangers in later life. The relationship ceases to be statistically significant when one controls for other characteristics of the childhood home, such as the prevalence of drinking or drugs or the young adult's own drinking practices (Seekings and Thaler, 2010). In short, it seems likely that the kind of environment in which a child grows up and in which he (or she) later lives seems more important than the fact of paternal presence or absence in itself.

The declining presence of fathers might not itself be associated with subsequent pathologies, but it is unlikely that relationships between kin will stop evolving and even less likely that they will revert to the kinds of relationships that existed in the past. This has important consequences for society as a whole in that current trends in patterns of care and obligation are likely to become permanent. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of kinship in the early 2000s is its diminishing salience and reach. Kinship was famously defined by the anthropologist Meyer Fortes as 'binding', creating 'inescapable moral claims and obligations' (Fortes, 1969: 242). In South Africa, kinship has ceased to be binding, and the obligations considered inescapable in the past are now often negotiable. Across much of South Africa, claims on paternal kin have declined dramatically, and maternal kin recognise a narrower range of responsibilities than in the past. Obligations between a mother and her children seem to have remained generally sacrosanct, but support between siblings is often conditional, and support between more distant kin even more so. The elderly are generally financially independent, on account of the old age pension, and children are almost always cared for by kin. But the claims made by working-age adults on kin can and often are denied, and are at least open to negotiation (Harper and Seekings, 2010). The rise of chronic unemployment has clearly played a major part in this transformation of norms. The generation born in the 1980s and early 1990s will play a crucial role in determining whether the norms associated with diminished responsibility become entrenched and hegemonic. The evidence points in different directions. On the one hand, there are plenty of young people who contest the diminution of kinship obligations, and who support a range of kin, if and when they can. On the other hand, both quantitative and qualitative research suggests that the radius of responsibility is generally shrinking.

At the core of the transformation of kinship is the decline of marriage. By the age of 25, only 10 percent of young people are (or have ever been) married; another 9 percent are currently cohabiting without being married. By the age of 30, these proportions have risen to 25 percent and 15 percent respectively. Even

at the age of 30, therefore, only a minority of young men and women are married or cohabiting.[6] In 1996, only 36 percent of women aged 30-34 had never married. By 2007 this proportion had risen to 46 percent. The equivalent figures for men were 41 percent and 53 percent. In other words, the proportion of men and women who were married at this age fell by, on average, 1 percentage point per year. Any increase in cohabitation had failed to offset the decline in marriage (Moore, 2011).

There are numerous probable factors in the decline of marriage. A growing minority of young people believe that marriage is an out-dated institution. Among some young women marriage is associated with abuse. It has also become increasingly accepted to have children outside marriage. Bridewealth is expensive. Unemployed men struggle to provide at all, whilst many women are educated, working, and economically and culturally independent of male breadwinners (Hunter, 2010). Unemployment is associated with delays in marriage and independent household formation (Klasen and Woolard, 2009). More than a quarter of all 30 year-olds are living with one or both parents, and only just over half are the heads of their own households (or are the partners of the household head).[7] Whilst young employed people live in separate, small households, young unemployed people tend to live in large households.

The decline of marriage does *not* mean that young men and women have no children. Rather, they have children outside of marriage, and often outside of any cohabiting relationship. The median age of first birth among African women is 22 (Moore, 2011). By the age of 30, almost all young women have had children, and most of these mothers live with their children.[8] There are no national data on the proportion of men who are fathers by age (see Posel and Devey 2006, for a discussion of the dearth of data on fathers). It is likely that a majority of young men have fathered children by the age of 30, but only a minority actually live with any of their children. These data are reflected in data on children. Of the current generation of children, only one in three lives with both parents, with another 40 percent living with their mother but not their father. One quarter live with neither parent; only a minority of these are orphans (Meintjes and Hall, 2012: 83). Paternal presence is the exception rather than the rule. It is not clear whether, or how much, any of this matters. But regardless of their consequences, it is difficult to see these trends being reversed.

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[6] LFS 2nd qtr 2010. Elena Moore points out to me that surveys might underestimate the extent of partial cohabitation among men and women who have separate residences but in practice spend a lot of time together.

[7] General Household Survey 2009, own calculations.

[8] National Income Dynamics Study, wave 1 (2008), own calculations.

Political attitudes and behaviour

The 'youth' were widely considered central to the township revolt of the 1980s and to political instability in the early 1990s. A generation later, (now former) ANC Youth League president Julius Malema came to personify the threat supposedly posed by restless, frustrated young men. Malema's appeal was generally attributed to the combination of the age-specific frustrations of his youthful constituency, the pall cast on democracy by persistent unemployment and inadequate public services, and the declining moral legitimacy of the ANC itself. In this view, young people have brought with them their usual proclivity for rash action, and have arrived at a political context marred by widespread disappointment and general disillusionment.

The 1980s cohort of young men and women became adults in a political system with apparently strong institutions of representative democracy. Elections are free, fair and regular. The constitution provides for some separation of powers between the executive, legislature and judiciary, and the judiciary has imposed constraints and obligations on the government in terms of the Bill of Rights and other constitutional provisions. South Africa has a set of somewhat independent and sometimes effective statutory watchdogs, as well as an energetic press.

In practice, however, many of the checks and balances in the constitutional architecture of democracy are weakened by the dominance of the African National Congress (ANC). Power is highly centralised within the ANC, and the ANC's leaders have been effective in co-opting dissidents and neutralising defectors. The result is that it is difficult for citizens to hold the government to account. The ANC-led government must be unique in the world in that it has won four successive national elections despite being judged by a majority of the electorate to have performed poorly on the most important issues facing the country, i.e. unemployment followed by crime.

Many young people are outsiders in (or from) the labour market. They often live in neighbourhoods where there are few employment opportunities and know few people who can help to find them work elsewhere. They typically lack strong educational qualifications and work experience. And they often lack the cultural capital entailed in a good understanding of what might help them find work, what kinds of work are realistically available, and even how to perform satisfactorily in any work they do get. At some point in their early twenties, as the prospect of returning to school and acquiring magical qualifications recedes, most must realise that they are unlikely ever to achieve their aspirations for success. Their current lack of success is demeaning as well as debilitating; many

experience prejudice or stigma from friends and family. The government has not done well in terms of addressing these issues. A pervasive culture of crass consumerism might be expected to amplify the grievances of the excluded.

This might seem a setting that is conducive to an alienation from democratic politics. We might expect to find that young people have turned away from elections and, perhaps mobilised by demagogues such as Malema, turned to direct action. This does not appear to have been the case.

Using data from a series of cross-sectional studies of political opinion, Mattes (2011) finds that young people are no less interested in politics, they do not discuss politics any less, and they do not read newspapers any less often than older generations. They are less likely to vote, or to attend community meetings, but it is not clear that either voting or community activism rates among young South Africans are low by global standards. Political participation might not be at the high level of 1994, but it is likely that it was the moment of democratisation that was exceptional. Mattes also finds that young people might have been slightly more likely than older adults to participate in protests in the early 2000s, but any age differential had disappeared by the mid-2000s. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, using a second series of cross-sectional studies of public opinion, also finds little evidence that young people are politically distinct. Young people are only slightly more likely than older adults to report that they participate in protests or demonstrations, and there has been no clear trend over time in participation in protests or demonstrations (IJR, 2012: 25). Young people are marginally less respectful of the law than older adults, but the difference is very modest, and the trend over time seems to have been one of *rising*, not falling, respect for the law. Age makes no difference to confidence in public institutions or trust in political leaders (IJR, 2012: 22-4).

Mattes does find that 'as far as democracy goes, the post-*apartheid* generation remain as "lukewarm" as their parents and grandparents. … Whatever advantages might have accrued from the new political experiences of freedom, liberty and self-government seem to have been neutralized by the disadvantages of enduring unemployment, poverty and corruption' (Mattes, 2011: 19). This is worrying given that, among South Africans in general, commitment to democratic norms is worryingly narrow and shallow in post-apartheid South Africa. As Mattes writes, 'South Africans – of all races – pay minimal lip service to the idea of democracy, and that significant minorities would be willing to countenance one party rule or strong man dictatorship especially if these regimes would promise economic development (or may simply believe erringly that those regimes are consistent with democracy)' (Mattes, 2011: 3;

see further Mattes, 2001). Intolerance is widespread (Gibson & Gouws, 2003), and South Africans exhibit 'the highest levels of xenophobia measured anywhere in the world' (Mattes, 2011: 3; Mattes *et al*., 2000). Violence, including against women, is pervasive. Hopes that the generation of young men and women who came of age *after* apartheid – the 'born frees' – would have a stronger and more positive commitment to democracy have been disappointed. In their attitudes towards democracy, young people exhibit the same diversity as older generations, and their attitudes seem to be shaped by their experiences (of, for example, corruption, unemployment or poverty. Age or generation themselves seem to have little effect.

Social attitudes have the same pattern. A culture of consumerism seems hegemonic even among poor young people (Schenk and Seekings, 2013). Attitudes towards race are changing, with rising levels of reported inter-racial contact (although less so among the poor). Young people are a little more open to some inter-racial interactions than older people, but there is still widespread disapproval of inter-racial marriage, and there do not seem to be significant differences between young and older people in terms of their attitudes on most aspects of racial integration (IJR, 2012: 42-5). Whether attitudes among young people are reassuring or worrying, they tend to mirror similar attitudes among older people.

Might very high rates of unemployment among young men fuel South Africa's very high rates of violence and crime, even if they have little observable effect on political behaviour? Our interviews in poor neighbourhoods of Cape Town find general popular support for the view that unemployment is linked to violence. The unemployed are said to have time on their hands, and unemployed men are also said to hit their girlfriends out of anger and frustration with their own marginalisation, especially if women make them feel like failures for not providing. This popular explanation mirrors analyses of a crisis of masculinity, with respect to the 1980s by Campbell (1992), and more recently by Wood and Jewkes (2001), Bruce (2010) and Barolsky *et al*. (2008). In these accounts, unemployment and the consequent inability to perform the role of male breadwinner undermines the status of young men, who seek status in other ways through sexual success and inter-personal violence.

More systematic research provides mixed findings on the relationship between unemployment, violence and crime. At the aggregate level, Demombynes and Özler (2005) matched district-level data on crime with social and economic data, and found positive and significant correlations between unemployment rates and armed robbery and murder (but not rape). At the micro level, Leoschut

and Bonora (2007: 93-95) found in interviews that young criminal offenders frequently mentioned a lack of employment opportunities and poverty as reasons to commit crimes. They also found, however, that young offenders, when pushed, revealed that many of the financial rewards of their crimes were spent on material status symbols such as brand name clothing and cellular phones, rather than basic necessities (see also CSVR, 2008a, 2008b). In a second study comparing youth offenders and non-offenders, Burton, Leoschut and Bonora (2009: 31) found no significant difference between offenders and non-offenders in the level of employment among members of their households.

Our analysis of data from CAPS suggests that unemployment plays some role in some forms of violence, but perhaps not as much as the popular view suggests. We found no significant direct relationship between being unemployed and the perpetration of violence against strangers over the following three years, although some other measures of poverty did have a positive effect. It is other factors – notably drinking – as well as some aspects of current poverty that have the most marked effects on violence against either strangers or girlfriends or family members (Seekings and Thaler, 2010). Drinking is a consistent predictor of most forms of violence (see also Burton *et al*., 2009; Jewkes *et al*., 2006). One reason why the relationship between unemployment and violence is not stronger is that the relationship between unemployment and drinking is not strong. Drinking heavily, and often, requires resources that the unemployed lack. Poverty inhibits drinking, and therefore had indirect inhibiting effects on violence (offsetting other, more direct and probably positive effects). Many young men with work (and some money) are violent (Seekings and Thaler, 2010).

Conclusion

Most studies of young people see 'youth' as a transitional stage between adolescence and adulthood. Empirical studies of young people across the contemporary global South find that the duration of transitions to adulthood has extended, as young people take longer to form independent households, find permanent employment, marry, have children, and so on. In South Africa, as in many other societies, these transitions also appear to have been extended. By or at the age of 30, only one in four young people is (or has ever been) married. Whilst more than one half of the 30 year-old population claims to vote, fewer attend civic meetings and very few engage in protest demonstrations. Whilst most young people have worked by the age of 30, only just over one half are currently working at that age. In short, there are many young 30 year-olds who

are not workers, are not married, are not household heads (or the partners thereof), and do not vote or otherwise engage in politics. Among men of this age, many are not fathers and only a minority lives with their children. If we think of youth in terms of a transition to an orthodox form of adulthood, then a large number of young men and women in South Africa have not completed this transition even in their early 30s.

It is not clear, however, that it makes sense to think of these experiences in terms of an extended transition to some full adulthood to be achieved in future. Many of the characteristics of 'youth' in South Africa might not be markers of transition as much as the characteristics of a new form of adulthood. Many young people in their 20s are already living the kind of life that they will probably lead for the rest of their lives: precarious, intermittent employment; raising children outside of marriage or even cohabitation, in complex, multi-generational households; engaging fluidly with both formal and informal politics, guided by norms and beliefs that indicate very uneven adherence to democracy and the rule of law. In terms of their attitudes and behaviours, most young South Africans may be as adult as they will ever be by their early and mid-20s.

The men and women born between the early 1980s and early 1990s do not seem to be especially pro- or anti-democratic, nor are they distinctively violent or attracted to direct action. They are not the pioneers of the decline of marriage and the rise of more fluid and contingent relationships. Above all, perhaps, they are following in their predecessors' footsteps in terms of intermittent and precarious employment. They are not unimportant, however. The size of the cohort born between the early 1980s and early 1990s means that their experiences of politics, violence, marriage, parenthood and employment are very likely to become entrenched and even more hegemonic than at present.

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