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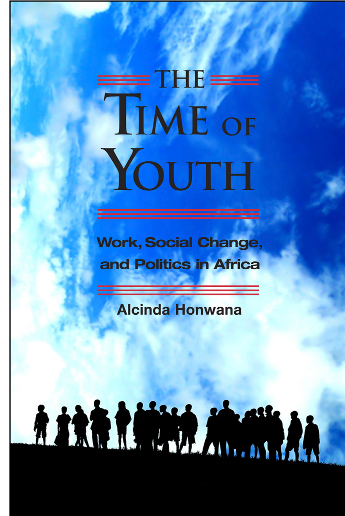
The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change, and Politics in Africa

Alcinda M. Honwana



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Chapter 1

Youth

In 1963 Bob Dylan wrote "The Times They Are a-Changin'," a song that prefigured the youth uprisings of 1968 in Europe and the United States.[1] Half a century later, in August 2011, thousands of British youths from the most impoverished boroughs of London and other cities took to the streets to protest the killing of Mark Duggan, a twenty-nine-year-old black British man, in Tottenham, North London. In addition to burning police cars, they took advantage of the chaos to loot and destroy shops. They stole electronics and fashion statements such as Nike sneakers, Hugo Boss clothing, television sets, mobile phones, computers, and iPods—all desirable symbols of a consumer culture from which many young people, especially the unemployed and disadvantaged, felt excluded. As Ken Livingstone, former mayor of London, observed, this is the first generation of youth who expect to be worse off than their parents. Young people in these neighborhoods feel deprived. They feel they have no stake in British society, and they are prepared to do anything because they have nothing to lose.

Though unexpected, the riots in Britain were not isolated incidents. In October 2005 young people in Paris suburbs took to the streets burning buildings and cars. The protests were sparked by the deaths of Bouna Traoré, age fifteen, and Zyed Benna, age seventeen, of Mauritanian and Tunisian descent respectively, whose immigrant fathers worked as dustmen in the streets of Paris. The young men died of electrocution in a power station they entered while fleeing from the police. In the economically marginalized Paris *banlieues* (suburbs) populated by mostly North African immigrant families, the relationship between young people and the police was already very tense. Police brutality was routine, and youths would flee when a police car approached even if they had not committed any offense. Nicolas Sarkozy, then minister of the interior, was quoted as saying publicly that he wanted "to rid the town of hooligans," "to clean the *racaille* [scum] of the suburbs with *Kärcher*" [a brand of high-pressure water washer] (Canet et al. 2009). In such a climate of mistrust, residents were appalled by the government's declaration that the police had done nothing wrong, and the riots took a

turn for the worse, spreading to other French cities. Thousands of vehicles were burned, at least one person was killed, and about three thousand protesters were arrested.

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

In September 2010 I was in Maputo when thousands of Mozambican youths staged riots against the government to protest the rise in prices of basic staples such as bread, water, and fuel. Angry youths blocked the streets of the capital, burned tires, and confronted the police who tried to disperse the crowds. The police used batons and tear gas and fired bullets at the young protesters, causing numerous injuries and more than ten deaths. In June 2011, shortly after I visited Senegal, hundreds of young people, rallying alongside the Y'en a Marre! (Enough Is Enough!) Movement, clashed with police. They were denouncing the eighty-five-year-old president's push to change the constitution to enable him to win a third term and create the post of vice-president, supposedly for his son. Thousands of protesters gathered outside the National Assembly, where lawmakers were debating the proposed constitutional amendment, protesting government corruption, high unemployment, and other social ills. Clouds of tear gas enveloped the square as police fought the demonstrators with rubber bullets and water cannons. The demonstrations quickly spread from central Dakar into the suburbs and three major towns in the interior. More than a hundred protesters were injured during the two days of rioting.

These events illustrate what is happening around the world: young people, in rich and poor countries alike, share the same concerns and aspirations and are beginning to assert their rights as citizens. They are rising up against unemployment, socioeconomic marginalization, unsound economic policies, corrupt governments, political exclusion, and lack of respect for their rights. These are cries for freedom by a generation yearning to make a place for itself in the world. In the cities of Senegal, Britain, Egypt, Tunisia, France, and Mozambique, frustrated young people strive to receive a good education, find decent jobs, attain adult status, and partake in the fruits and symbols of global capitalist consumption. The idea of a utopia full of freedoms and opportunities is beginning to erode, as is the assumption that the state will uphold the social contract with its citizenry and put in place effective institutions and welfare systems.

Youth are a critical indicator of the state of a nation, of its politics, economy, and social and cultural life. Studying youth involves not only studying the lives of young people themselves, in all their diversity, but also understanding the social, political, economic, and cultural concerns of adults. The two generations are entangled in complex processes of construction and reconstruction, the making and remaking of society (Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Griffin 1993).

This book focuses on young people in Africa, where the marginalization of youth appears to be most serious. But the examples already cited suggest that the issue is global and that the African experience has broader relevance. The book is based primarily on interviews conducted with youths over eighteen years of age in four countries: Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, and Tunisia. It explores young people's everyday activities and coping strategies in the face of inadequate education, massive unemployment, poverty, and HIV/AIDS.

Youth in Waithood

The majority of African youths are today grappling with a lack of jobs and deficient education. After they leave school with few skills they are unable to obtain work and become independent—to build, buy, or rent a house for themselves, support their relatives, get married, establish families, and gain social recognition as adults. These attributes of adulthood are becoming increasingly unattainable by the majority of young people in Africa. They are forced to live in a liminal, neither-here-nor-there state; they are no longer children who require care, yet they are not yet considered mature social adults.[2] They lead a precarious existence; their efforts are

centered on trying to survive each and every day. Young Mozambicans used the Portuguese term *desenrascar a vida* (eke out a living); young Senegalese and Tunisians employed the French term *débrouillage* (making do); and young South Africans spoke about "just getting by." All these expressions vividly convey the extemporaneous nature of these young people's lives.

Waithood, a portmanteau term of "wait" and "-hood," is the best way to describe this period of suspension between childhood and adulthood. It represents a prolonged adolescence or an involuntary delay in reaching adulthood, in which young people are unable to find employment, get married, and establish their own families. I became interested in exploring waithood because many of my young interlocutors in these countries repeatedly expressed the sense of being "on hold" or "stuck" (Sommers 2012) in a situation with bleak future prospects. Mohamed,[3] a twenty-eight-year-old Tunisian man, pointed out, "I finished my studies but can't find a job; I can't help my parents and marry my girlfriend." Twenty-four-year-old Tandu, from South Africa, commented, "I survive on odd jobs to try and make ends meet." These narratives make it clear that, in order to understand the predicament of youth in Africa today, it is fundamental to examine their waithood experience and their struggle to become independent adults.

The notion of waithood was first used by Navtej Dhillon and Tarik Yousef (2007) and Diane Singerman (2007) in their work on youth in the Middle East and North Africa. Waithood suggests the multifaceted nature of the transition, which goes beyond securing a job and extends to other aspects of life, such as access to learning opportunities, household formation, and civic participation. Young people in waithood are increasingly unable to become social adults and full-fledged citizens. While the notion of waithood might give a sense of passively lingering, I want to push this concept further to show that young people in waithood are not really inactively "waiting" for their situation to change. Despite the challenges, youth in waithood are dynamic and using their creativity to invent new forms of being and interacting with society. Waithood accounts for a multiplicity of young people's experiences, ranging from daily survival strategies such as street vending and cross-border trade to involvement in gangs and criminal activities.

Waithood represents the contradictions of modernity, in which young people's opportunities and expectations are simultaneously broadened and constrained. They are enlarged by the new technologies of information and communication that make young people more globally integrated. Youth relate to local social structures and cultural patterns, but they are also connected to global culture via mobile telephones, cyberspace, television, and advertising. At the same time, they are also constrained by lack of access to basic resources due to unsound socioeconomic policies, epidemics, and

political repression. There is no doubt that this situation also stems from bad governance and the social and economic policies espoused by international financial institutions that were imposed on Africa and other countries in the global South. The structural adjustment programs (later known as the poverty reduction strategy programs) deeply weakened the state's ability to determine national socioeconomic policies and priorities and to uphold the social contract. As various scholars observed, structural adjustment policies were against state investments in health, education, transport, and telecommunications. They favored the removal of trade barriers that protected local producers, the relaxation of tax regimes as well as the privatization of agriculture, land, and food production and distribution (Manji 1998; Manji et al. 2011). The result was the increase of socioeconomic disparities and the "gradual transformation of citizens into consumers. Power and influence over social policy were increasingly determined by wealth. But those who had no means to participate in consumer society—the pauperised, the landless, the jobless, the never-employed— . . . were left effectively disenfranchised" (Manji 2011).

Indeed, young people grappling with waithood constitute the majority of the jobless disenfranchised population. Meanwhile, neoliberal frameworks encourage them to become ardent globalized consumers; governments try to impress on them patriotism and nationalist ideologies; religious institutions attempt to instill in them the ideal of being a "good Muslim" or "good Christian"; and their parents and relatives talk about the importance of education for employment and social prestige (Singerman 2007). It is in these contradictory situations that young people try to make sense of their lives.

Nevertheless, waithood does not affect every young African man or woman in the same way. Some have become adults too soon, as child soldiers, child laborers, or surrogate parents to younger siblings after their parents died. Others can never attain the economic autonomy that allows them to partake on the social responsibilities of adulthood. At ten, a child soldier is an adult; at thirty, an unemployed and unmarried man is still a youth. But many children who assume adult roles at a tender age are later pushed back into waithood as they grow up and try to attain their independence. Moreover, waithood manifests itself differently among a small group of elite youths who are generally able to afford a good education in private schools and abroad and are often well connected to networks of the powerful that facilitate their access to secure jobs. Some privileged youths may choose to avoid the responsibilities of adulthood, as some may continue to live with and depend on their parents, and hop from job to job. For the vast majority of young Africans, however, waithood is involuntary. Rather than being a

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

Waithood is also a reality in other parts of the world. In the United States and the UK terms such as *twixters, kidults, adultolescents,*[4] and *thresholders* (Apter 2001) have been used to describe youths who are in limbo between childhood and adulthood, stuck in what some scholars called "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2004). Expressions like the "boomerang" or "yo-yo" generation have been used to describe college graduates who return home and continue to depend on their parents. In Japan *freeters* (furita)[5] and *parasaito shinguru* (parasite singles) refer to the growing number of young people who are having difficulties joining the labor force and forming their own families (Miyamoto 2002, 2004; Kosugi 2006). In Italy, *bamboccioni* (big dummy boys) is a sarcastic term that indicates the growing number of young men in their mid-twenties and thirties who are still unmarried and living with their parents.[6] While the specific reasons for delayed adulthood differ from one context to another, this phenomenon appears to be affecting young people around the globe. It is this global "waithood generation," which is increasingly unable to succeed in the job market, and feels completely marginalized and with no prospects for the future, that is coming out to the streets to say "enough is enough!" They are protesting massive unemployment, corporate greed, and corrupt governments and are demanding jobs, freedom, and better futures.

This book presents five fundamental arguments. First, the majority of young Africans are in waithood; because of its pervasiveness and prolonged duration, waithood is becoming a more permanent state and, arguably, gradually replacing conventional adulthood. Second, waithood is not about geography but essentially about inequality. The experiences of youth transitions to adulthood in the West show that underprivileged and working-class youths in Europe and North America experience conditions very similar to those of poor and marginalized youths in Africa, in the same way that the condition of privileged young Africans corresponds to that of their Western counterparts. The current crisis of the middle class all over the world resulting from the economic downturn is steadily expanding the numbers of those experiencing waithood, as well-educated, middle-class youth everywhere are increasingly unable to find stable employment. Third, the experiences of youth in waithood in the global South, particularly Africa, are crucial to understanding youth in today's world. Not only have they

been most acutely affected by the failures of neoliberalism and national politics, but also they embody, in a very sharp way, the contradictions of the modern world. Fourth, waithood is creative; young people have not resigned themselves to the hardships of their situation but are using their agency and creativity to fashion new "youthscapes" (Maira and Soep 2005) or subcultures with alternative forms of livelihood and social relationships in the margins of mainstream society. Fifth, waithood is transformative. The waithood generation possesses a tremendous potential for transformation. Young people today understand that the struggle to overcome their predicament requires radical social change. No longer defined by political parties' ideology yet rejecting being cast as apathetic, they are engaging in civil society organizations and using popular culture as well as new technologies of information, communication, and social networking to confront the status quo. From more or less spontaneous street riots and protests in the streets of Maputo, Dakar, Madrid, London, New York, and Santiago, to revolutions that overthrew dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya the waithood generation is taking it upon itself to redress the wrongs of contemporary society and remake the world.

This book contributes to the growing body of literature that examines youths' experiences and their outlook on life in the context of the global economic downturn. It addresses the richly textured everyday experiences of young Africans in waithood: their vulnerabilities and anxieties, their hopes and dreams, their possibilities and constraints, their resolve and their bubbling creativity. It explores how young people are facing more globally the challenges confronting them by drawing upon and reshaping existing practices and by inventing new ones. They take inspiration from events, experiences, and exchanges that occur both within and beyond their immediate vicinity, both in cyberspace and in the nonvirtual world, creating an interlocking web that links local, national, and global realities (Nayak 2003; Herrera and Bayat 2010).

Exploring the Countries

While there are similarities in the way waithood is manifested in all four countries, each country presents its specificities, which derive from its particular political, economic, social, and cultural histories. This section explores such specificities in each of the countries.

Mozambique has a population of twenty-three million, of which 64 percent are under the age of thirty-five; 38 percent live in urban areas.[7] A former Portuguese colony, Mozambique won its independence in 1975 following a ten-year struggle led by the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO,

in Portuguese), which is now the ruling party. In the 1980s the country was engulfed in a civil war when the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO, in Portuguese) challenged FRELIMO's socialist approach. Supported by former Portuguese interests and officials of the apartheid regime in South Africa, RENAMO waged a sixteen-year war that destabilized the country and worsened its already unstable social and economic situation. The war ended with a peace accord in 1992, and the first elections were held in 1994. FRELIMO won the elections and established a democratic government.

At independence Mozambique was considered one of the world's poorest countries, but in the late 1980s the government embarked on a series of macroeconomic reforms that, combined with assistance from international donors, led to a dramatic rise in the country's growth rate. In spite of these gains, Mozambique remains dependent on foreign assistance for more than half of its annual budget, and the majority of the population still lives below the poverty line. Despite 8.3 percent GDP growth in 2010, the gap between rich and poor and the cost of living have increased substantially. In February 2008 and September 2010 ordinary Mozambicans, especially youth, came out into the streets to protest the rising prices of fuel, water, electricity, and bread, forcing the government to lower the prices. Subsistence agriculture continues to employ the vast majority of the country's work force, and agricultural productivity is low.[8] Many young people migrate from rural areas to the cities. The unemployment rate was estimated to be 21 percent in 2004 and is much higher among youth, although exact figures are not available.

Located at the southern end of Africa, South Africa had a population of about forty-nine million in July 2011, and 67 percent are below thirty-five years of age.[9] The majority of the population (62 percent) resides in urban areas. Just half of the people live below the poverty line. Dutch settlers (whose descendants were called Boers) arrived in South Africa in 1652 and established a stopover point on the spice route between the Netherlands and the Far East, founding the city of Cape Town. After the British seized the Cape of Good Hope area in 1806, many of the Dutch settlers trekked north to found their own republics. The discovery of diamonds and gold spurred immigration and intensified the subjugation of the native inhabitants. After the Boers were defeated in the Boer War (1899–1902), the British and the Afrikaners, as the Boers then became known, ruled together beginning in 1910 under the Union of South Africa, which became a republic in 1961 after a whites-only referendum. In 1948 the National Party was voted into power and instituted a policy of apartheid—the "separate development" of the races—that favored the white minority. The African National Congress (ANC) led the opposition to apartheid, and many top ANC leaders,

such as Nelson Mandela, spent decades in South Africa's prisons. Internal protests and insurgency, as well as boycotts by some Western nations and institutions, led to the regime's eventual willingness to negotiate a peaceful transition to majority rule.[10]

South Africa emerged from its long history of apartheid with the democratic elections of 1994, in which Nelson Mandela was elected president and the ANC was chosen to lead the government of the new South African Republic. Mandela was succeeded by Thabo Mbeki and then Jacob Zuma, as the ANC continued to win general elections. South Africa is struggling to address the legacy of apartheid, especially inequalities in housing, education, and healthcare. South Africa is not as impoverished as many sub-Saharan nations; it is an emerging market with an abundant supply of natural resources and well-developed financial, legal, communications, energy, and transport systems. Economic growth was robust from 2004 to 2007 as South Africa reaped the benefits of macroeconomic stability and a global commodities boom, but growth began to slow in late 2007 because of the electricity crisis and the impact of the global financial crisis on commodity prices and demand. Unemployment remains high, close to 30 percent in 2010. Racial disparities are marked: youth unemployment reached 53.4 percent for black Africans, in contrast to only 14.5 percent for whites. Daunting economic problems remain from the apartheid era, including widespread poverty, inadequate housing and infrastructure, and a shortage of public transit, reflecting the continuing economic marginality of most black people. The government largely maintains the pro-business policies of the past and is facing growing pressure to deliver basic services to low-income areas and to increase job opportunities. More than a quarter of South Africa's population currently receives social grants to cover their basic needs.[11]

Senegal is located in West Africa, and its capital, Dakar, is at the westernmost point on the continent. In 2011 its population was estimated at 13.7 million; 58 percent live in rural areas. The fifteen to thirty-five age group constituted about 35 percent of the total population in 2006. In terms of religion, the vast majority is Muslim at 94 percent. The French colonies of Senegal and the French Sudan were merged in 1959 and granted their independence as the Mali Federation in 1960. The union broke up after only a few months. The Socialist Party ruled the country for forty years until President Abdoulaye Wade was elected in 2000. Since his reelection in 2007 he has shown an increasingly autocratic governing style, amending the constitution over a dozen times to increase executive power and weaken the opposition.[12] In June 2011, protests by youth and civil society groups led to the overturn of a constitutional amendment aimed at easing the

president's victory at the polls and establishing the post of vice-president, which could go to his son.

Dakar is the country's economic center and offers the overwhelming majority of nonagricultural employment. The interior is much less developed, creating serious regional economic imbalances. Senegal relies heavily on donor assistance. The country's key export-oriented industries are phosphate mining, fertilizer production, and commercial fishing; it is also working on iron ore and oil exploration projects. In 1994 the government undertook an ambitious economic reform program with the support of the international donor community, which resulted in GDP growth averaging over 5 percent annually during the period from 1995 to 2007. But unemployment soared to 48 percent in 2007,[13] with youth unemployment reaching 30 percent in 2009.[14] The rate of job creation has long been inadequate to absorb young people and continues to prompt illegal migrants to leave Senegal in search of work in Europe.[15]

Tunisia is located in North Africa between Algeria and Libya. It has a population of ten million; 53 percent of the population is under the age of thirty. Most people (87 percent) are Muslim; a few are Christian or Jewish. Two-thirds of its population lives in urban areas.[16] The French invaded Tunisia in 1881 and established it as a protectorate. The country gained its independence in 1956, and Habib Bourguiba, its first president, established a one-party state. He ruled the country for thirty-one years, repressing Islamic fundamentalism and establishing rights for women unmatched by any other Arab nation.[17] Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, a former minister of the interior and prime minister, led a bloodless coup against Bourguiba and became president in 1987. Until January 2011, Ben Ali and his Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) party exerted near-total control over parliament, state and local governments, and most political activity, and the family of Ben Ali and his wife controlled most entrepreneurial activities. On January 14, 2011, Ben Ali fled the country for Saudi Arabia following weeks of mounting antigovernment protests. His departure was greeted by widespread euphoria. Since then, however, disputes over reform priorities, political instability, economic crisis, labor unrest, tensions between the privileged coastal region and relatively impoverished interior, and lingering insecurity continue, while the flow of refugees from Libya creates pressing humanitarian needs.

Tunisia has a diverse economy, with important mining, tourism, and manufacturing sectors. Governmental control of economic affairs, while still heavy, has gradually lessened over the past decade with increasing privatization. Tunisia cultivated strong ties with the European Union, its largest trading partner, as well as the United States. Unemployment rates

have increased substantially in the last decade, reaching 14 percent in 2010; youth unemployment, including among university graduates, was 30 percent by March 2011. Despite many political and economic characteristics shared across the region, Tunisia exhibits a number of unique attributes; it has a relatively small territory and a sizable and highly educated middle class. Migration to Europe, especially France and Italy, has been steady for many years, although in the last few years migration flows decreased substantially.

Defining Youth

Youth is commonly defined as the period between childhood and adulthood, taking into account both chronological age and the biological process of maturation. But, as many authors have pointed out, age categories are not natural; they constitute cultural systems with particular sets of meanings and values. Age categories are embedded in personal relationships, institutional structures, social practices, politics, laws, and public policies (Mintz 2008; Sukarieh and Tannock 2008). The relationship between social position and age is not only complex but also contested, because age divisions involve power relations. In fact, age classifications produce a particular social order to which each individual is bound. Pierre Bourdieu argues that "youth and age are not self-evident data but are socially constructed, in the struggle between the young and the old" and explains that age is "socially manipulated and manipulable. . . . Talking about 'the young' as a social unit, a constituted group, with common interests, relating these interests to a biologically defined age is, in itself, an obvious manipulation" (1993, 95). Youth is also a time of growth, of searching for meanings and belonging; a stage of molding characters, interests, and goals; a process of constructing and reconfiguring identities; a creative period with both risks and possibilities.

Far from constituting a universal category, youth is the historical offspring of modernity. According to Jean and John Comaroff, "modernity . . . casts 'youth' as both the essential precondition and the indefinite postponement of maturity" (2005, 20). In modern capitalist society, youth has been a site of self-conscious social and cultural reproduction through education—the space in which society seeks to attain its potential, in which it invests in its human capital, and in which, says Michel Foucault, society "hides its dreams" (1976, 81). Youth is generally an intense period marked by great energy, enthusiasm, and creativity—thence the expression "you're as young as you feel," which is popular among older adults (Fussell 2007).

In the industrialized world, age thresholds have standardized the life course into three main phases: education, representing childhood and

dependence; work, marking adulthood and independence; and rest, corresponding to retirement and old age (France 2007). Implicit in this model are social and cultural assumptions about physical development, maturity, responsibility, and independence (Mintz 2008). In this view, youth is simply a transitional phase from education to work, from immaturity to maturity, or from childhood to adulthood. These assumptions, however, are subjected to alterations due to socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions. In many European countries and in North America, for example, old age is undergoing redefinition as adults' life expectancy rises and policymakers, worried about burdensome pension obligations, consider raising the age of retirement. In 2010 changes to extend the retirement age proposed by the French government were met with riots; the protests came not only from older workers but also from youth, who feared that if the older generation did not retire they would be less able to secure decent jobs.

Age categories have shifted profoundly from one historical period to another. Youth acquires distinct meanings in different places and times (Nayak 2003; Bayat and Herrera 2010) and must be understood as a situated and mutable social category. The boundaries between what constitutes youth and what constitutes adulthood are continuously being redefined. Gender and class also play pivotal roles in differentiating youth. In Sierra Leone a young person who is educated and employed is often perceived as a social adult (Wai 2008), and *youth* is often used as a derogatory term applied to uneducated, unemployed young people, who are sometimes labeled *lumpen* (Abdullah 1998). The West African expression *youthman* illustrates the gendered character of youth. Youthman has no feminine form but subsumes young, unmarried women, indicating women's peripheral status. Gender has a profound influence on the length of youth; girls are often married young, assuming adult roles as wives and mothers (Okwany 2008), while men can remain youths up to and beyond the age of thirty (Whyte 2006). These class and gendered dimensions of youth become central to the spaces that they create for socioeconomic, cultural, and political action (Wai 2008). Moreover, definitions based on age ranges do not account for situations in which AIDS orphans are forced to head households and become caregivers at a tender age (Poku 2006; Campbell et al. 2009).

In 1985 the United Nations established the International Year of the Youth and defined youth as all those between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five (United Nations 2007). The World Bank's definition of youth includes those between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four (World Bank 2007). The African Union defines youth as those aged fifteen to thirty-five (African Union 2006, 3). In many countries in the global South the age bracket defining youth is much broader than it is in the global North, starting well

below fifteen and extending to thirty-five years of age. The fluidity of the age categories defining youth reflects its social and cultural nature, which is context-specific (Tyyskä 2005). The strict age definitions adopted by international bodies are not helpful to understand youth as a socially constructed category. Social scientists working in Africa have tended to define youth not as a particular age range but as a social category characterized by particular cultural views about roles, rights, and responsibilities (Durham 2000; De Boeck and Honwana 2005). Some scholars have suggested that age stratification approaches should be replaced by an analysis that focuses on social processes and how an individual's life may evolve through time (Johnson-Hanks 2002; Cole and Durham 2008). Youth is understood to be a process, a social shifter (Durham 2000). It is not only a transitional phase, but it also constitutes a here-and-now moment with particular experiences, practices, and concerns. This book understands youth as defined by social expectations and responsibilities and considers all those who have not yet been able to attain social adulthood, despite their age, as youth.

Demographically, Africa is a youthful continent. In 2006, about 44 percent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa was under fifteen years of age, making it the youngest region of the world. Although the AIDS epidemic has ravaged families and communities across the continent, it has not had a major effect on overall population size and its age structure because of extremely high fertility rates (Ashford 2007). Between 2010 and 2015 the number of youth living in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to increase by 19.4 million (Taiwo and Moyo 2011). Demographers estimate that fertility rates will begin to decline in the coming decades and that this will be the largest youth cohort in the continent's history (Barker 2005). We are, indeed, living in the age of youth.

Young Africans' lives are amazingly varied, reflecting the cultural diversity and uneven economic development that characterize the continent. Their differing socioeconomic conditions and cultural backgrounds affect their life chances and outlooks. On average, today's youth are better educated than their parents. While many still fall far below global averages, some have qualifications that compare favorably with those of their counterparts in the global North. They are better connected with the rest of the world than earlier generations of Africans, navigating the "communications highway" and gradually overcoming social and cultural factors that once limited their access to information and the world beyond their locality. E-mail, text messaging, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and mobile telecommunications are their privileged modes of communication, as they are of youth worldwide (Bayat and Herrera 2010). As a result, African youth are more determined to find ways to close the gap between the limited opportunities before them

and what they now perceive to be possible in the global arena. They seek to create better and more meaningful lives for themselves, not merely to live out their days within the constraints of the situations they now inhabit.

Studies of African Youth

Studies of youth in Africa are relatively recent. While in the 1940s and 1950s anthropologists such as Edward Evans-Pritchard (1940), Meyer Fortes (1945), and Audrey Richards (1956) studied youth initiations, they examined the subject from the perspective of how the elder generation transmitted culture to the younger generation. In the 1960s, and building on Van Gennep's (1960) work on rites of passage, Victor Turner (1969) developed the concept of liminality—a condition in the midst of the initiation process in which the young person is no longer who he or she was but not yet who he or she will become. The notion of liminality allowed researchers to focus on youth themselves and remains relevant to understanding the social positions of young people today. However, earlier anthropological studies downplayed intergenerational tensions in "traditional" societies, and it was only in the 1970s and 1980s that scholars such as Pierre-Philippe Rey (1973), Jean La Fontaine (1977), and Claude Meillassoux (1981) began to expose the tensions over power and knowledge between the young and the elders.

In the late 1980s, youth started to become a major topic of scholarly concern in Africa. Some scholars focused on the notion of generation as "key to understanding the construction of social knowledge and power relations" (Aguilar 1998, 6; see also Burgess 2005). Publications such as *The Politics of Age and Gerontocracy in Africa* (Aguilar 1998); a 2005 special issue of *Africa Today* focusing on youth and citizenship in East Africa edited by Tony Burgess; *Rethinking Age in Africa* (Aguilar 2007); and *Generations in Africa: Connections and Conflicts*, edited by Erdmute Alber et al. (2008), used the notion of generations to analyze the difficult predicaments of youth (Cole 2004; Vigh 2006) and to address the relationship of youth with globalization (Cole and Durham 2007). The notion of generational change became instrumental for examining young people as citizens who both conform to and challenge the standards imposed on them by traditional hierarchies, national politics, and global forces (Burgess 2005; Abbink and van Kessel 2005; Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Christiansen et al. 2006).

Postcolonial studies of youth also focused on activism and social movements, highlighting young people's politics and resistance against colonialism, apartheid, and other forms of domination (Mbembe 1985; Last 1991; Bayart et al. 1992; Kakwenzire 1996; Diouf 1996; Momoh 2000;

Marks 2001; Obadare 2010; see also Toulabor 1995; Bundy 1987; Seekings and Everatt 1993; Toungara 1995; Kurimoto and Simonse 1998; Argenti 1998, 2007; Collignon and Diouf 2001; Reynolds 2008). They also addressed young people's involvement in religious movements and popular culture (Meyer 1995; Ssewakiryanga 1999; Gondola 1999; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000; Saavedra-Casco 2006; Suriano 2006; Ntarangwi 2009; Weiss 2009; Guadeloupe and Geschiere 2008; van Dijk 2008). Others looked at young people's cultural production in art, music, theater, and fashion, as well as everyday practices in which young people act as cultural agents in their own right.

The tribulations of young Africans at this difficult juncture in the continent's history have taken center stage in many studies highlighting "youth at risk" or "youth in trouble." As Jon Abbink (2005) asserted, to be young in contemporary Africa has come to mean being disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginal, both economically and politically. Young Africans are severely affected by violent conflicts, prompting social scientists to examine the complex issues surrounding youth participation in wars and other forms of violence as child soldiers, protection racketeers, and criminal gangs (La Hausse 1990; Richards 1996; Bazenguissa-Ganga 1996; Abdullah and Bangura 1997; Abdullah 1998; Utas 2003; Shepler 2005; Honwana 1999, 2006; Shaw 2007; Coulter 2009). Rather than seeing young people caught up in violence as passive victims, these studies portray them as active, though not autonomous, social agents. Another important theme is the exclusion of youth from labor markets and the formal economy. Some studies focused on young people's education and training, involvement in urbanization, and quest for jobs and livelihoods, as well as their engagement in the informal economy (Ly 1988; El Kenz 1996; Okojie 2003; Chigunta 2007; Chimanikire 2009; Agbu 2009; Ndjio 2008; Jenkins 2008; Kinyanjui 2008). This set of studies on youth violence and socioeconomic marginalization underlines key debates about structure versus agency, greed and grievance, old wars and new wars. At the same time, they raise new issues about the social and economic consequences of neoliberal structural adjustment policies in Africa.

The spread of HIV/AIDS, STDs, and other epidemics represents a significant risk to young Africans (Poku and Whiteside 2004; Poku 2006; Campbell et al. 2009; Mwiturubani et al. 2009). While epidemiological and biomedical approaches were initially central to the analysis, anthropological and sociological approaches gained traction as the focus was broadened to encompass the social and cultural contexts in which individuals are exposed to and affected by disease. Gender relations, sexuality, intimacy, and marital relations also became important domains of social inquiry (Biaya 2001;

Nyamnjoh 2005; Nyanzi et al. 2005; Manuel 2008; Thomas and Cole 2009; Masvawure 2010; Groes-Green 2011; Hunter 2007, 2010).

Some researchers have examined the impact of globalization on young people's lives, emphasizing the way globalization processes are mediated by age and generation (Cole and Durham 2007; see also Weiss 2009). Globalization has also been examined in the context of young people's lives in time and space. Cole and Durham (2008) underline the importance of temporality in young people's lives by elucidating the ways in which they perceive the future. In *Makers and Breakers* Filip De Boeck and I stressed young people's active and creative roles in fashioning novel practices in their societies and not merely imitating Western cultural practices (De Boeck and Howana 2005). Rather than living in the shadow of globalization, young people in Africa draw from global and local realities to articulate and manage their "'local' lives" (Pilkington 2004; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006). Concepts of hybridity and creolization have not helped to understand young Africans' relationship with the global world. Brad Weiss points out very clearly that the consumption practices of young men in Arusha's barbershops are not a mixture of global and local but fully grounded in Tanzanian realities (Weiss 2009). As Henrietta Moore reminds us, "The plural, unpredictable nature of processes of change and transformation means that analytical frameworks can no longer depend on binaries: local/global, inside/outside, micro/macro" (Moore 2011, 3). The critical issue is the way relations of power influence and structure social interactions. Indeed, many young people feel marginalized in relation to dominant power structures and hegemonic ideologies. While they comprehend their position on the margins of mainstream society, they do not define it as their permanent condition; that is why they engage in social change.

Current studies on African youth recognize the diversity of experience as well as the agency and creativity of young people as they try to overcome serious everyday challenges. In societies undergoing globalization and modernization, young people are under increasing pressure to cope with and to adapt to change in all aspects of life (Bendit and Hahn-Bleibtreu 2008). These challenges are forcing researchers to rethink their conceptual frameworks and devise new approaches to explore the lived experiences of young people today. The present situation of African youth in waithood poses fundamental challenges to existing understandings of youth transitions to adulthood and their engagement in social change more globally. By focusing on young people's experiences of waithood, this book aims at opening new avenues for understanding and conceptualizing youth in the context of failed neoliberal policies and global socioeconomic and political crisis.

The book comprises eight chapters. This introductory chapter is followed by Chapter 2, an in-depth examination of waithood, a twilight zone in which young people are expected to be mature but are not yet socially recognized as full adults. While focusing on the diversity of young people's pathways toward adulthood in Africa, Chapter 2 examines waithood as both a challenging and a creative stage in young people's lives. The chapter also discusses youth transitions to adulthood in the developed world and identifies some similarities in young people's transitional experiences more globally. It recognizes the changing nature of adulthood as a destination of youth transitions and suggests that waithood is critical to understanding the predicament of this generation.

Chapter 3 analyzes young people's aspirations and the challenges they face in waithood. It examines the structural conditions that affect their lives and analyzes problems in the education systems and the labor markets that make it difficult for young people to find employment and sustainable livelihoods. The chapter is critical of the neoliberal economic policies espoused by international financial institutions, especially structural adjustment reforms in Africa, that have not generated much-needed employment or reduced poverty.

Chapter 4 examines the coping mechanisms and survival strategies adopted by young men and women in waithood. It focuses on some of the particular activities they undertake, exploring some of the constraints they are confronted with and the successes they achieve. Examples include the cross-border trading activities of young Mozambicans and Tunisians, the temporary shelf-packing and merchandising jobs held by young South Africans, and the dangerous journeys undertaken by Senegalese and Tunisian youths who attempt to migrate to Europe. Through these case studies and stories of lived experience, we discover that young Africans are active agents in reshaping their lives and their societies.

Chapter 5 explores issues of intimacy, looking at sexuality, courtship, and marriage. Sexual relationships among young people in waithood take new forms that reflect their particular circumstances. Sexuality and courtship constitute important sites of identity formation and the negotiation of notions of manhood and womanhood, and formerly unquestioned gender norms and identities are altered to fit young people's unprecedented social positions. These new emerging patterns of sexuality, courtship, and marriage are challenging dominant notions of masculinity and femininity in these societies.

Chapter 6 examines young people's rejection of old-fashioned party politics. But young people in waithood are not apathetic; they are politically

engaged mainly in civil society associations outside mainstream structures, using music and popular culture as well as the new cyber-social networks as ways of contesting the status quo. This rejection of "old-style" politics is also apparent in the West and other world regions where young people face the same crisis of joblessness leading to restricted futures. Globally, the younger generation is responding to the crisis by coming out to the streets to voice their protests in new forms of civic and political participation. It appears that the "waithood generation" is asserting itself and creating new geographies of political intervention and citizenship.

Chapter 7 looks at young people's engagement in social change that significantly alters the course of history and enacts profound social and political transformations. In the 1960s and the 1970s in Mozambique young people led the struggle for independence from Portuguese colonialism, and the youth uprisings in Soweto contributed to the demise of apartheid in South Africa. Recently a youth-led revolution in Tunisia ended twenty-three years of dictatorship and inspired youth uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East. This chapter examines in detail the Tunisian revolution from the factors that triggered the protests to its actors. It also considers the challenges facing youth during the post–Ben Ali transition to democracy. Theories about generations and social change are examined to understand the role being played today by this waithood generation.

The concluding chapter looks at global waithood and interrogates still-unfolding worldwide developments in which the waithood generation appears to be playing a critical role. This generation is reshaping and reinterpreting itself politically and is engaged in a range of collective protests against unemployment, corrupt politics, and corporate greediness. Where these developments will lead is anyone's guess, but it appears that the waithood generation may have an impact comparable to that of the generation of 1968 (Berman 1996) that carried out the youth uprisings in Europe and North America.