Developmental spaces? Developmental Psychology and urban geographies of youth in sub-Saharan Africa

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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ABSTRACT

While urban geographies play a critical role in shaping youth development, existing literature has focused primarily on the ways in which young people use, navigate and shape cities. This has overlooked the depth and complexity of Africa's urban youth crisis. This paper introduces a new analytic framework, based on principles of Developmental Psychology, outlining the four critical psychosocial processes of *building foundations, building blocks, building support structures* and *building aspirations* that young people must draw upon as they navigate their futures. It then explores the ways in which the city and its economic, social and political landscapes have undermined these across the African continent. Cities shape poverty and hardship, but also transform social norms and practices in ways that constrain, undermine or erode these developmental processes. Where social support and socioeconomic status cannot protect young people in tough economic contexts, city life is detrimental to young people's psychosocial well-being, development and long-term futures.

1. Introduction

Urbanisation and growing youth populations are central to shaping Africa's developmental future. The intractable challenge of youth under and unemployment has made urban youth a major research focus across Sub-Saharan African cities. A diverse literature, ripe with tensions and contradictions and spanning multiple disciplines, emphasises the opportunities and vulnerabilities cities present to young people. This explores the ways that young people use, navigate and shape cities across the continent. Big cities are both a 'main stage' for young lives, attracting large numbers of young migrants (Hansen 2015), and the site of deprivation and frustrated ambition for African youth. The limiting nature of the city's social, economic and political landscapes leaves many young people in a transitional limbo on an uncertain journey to adulthood (Di Nunzio 2012; Hansen 2005; Jeffrey 2010; Mains 2007). Yet research simultaneously highlights the dynamism and creativity urban youth display in navigating their lives and transforming city spaces (Evans 2008; Jeffrey 2012; Philo and Smith 2003; Skelton and Gough 2013; Valentine 2003; Worth 2009).

Here we propose a new analytic framework, rooted in the principles of Developmental Psychology, to resituate and explore these contradictory findings. By introducing this new disciplinary perspective on young lives, we can deepen our understanding of the processes of psychosocial development that young people undergo at this critical period in the lifecycle, and of how these are influenced by the economic, social and political processes playing out in towns and cities across sub-Saharan Africa. Doing so highlights that urban geographies shape processes of youth development as much as the

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ways in which urban youth shape cities. With the latter having taken precedence in existing youth geographies research across the continent, bringing in Developmental Psychology to our analysis highlights the benefits of shifting the focus of our analysis of young lives to extend and complement existing knowledge and debates in this new direction. By doing so, this paper reveals the depth of impact that the economic, social and political processes accompanying urbanisation have had on young people's psychosocial development across the continent and highlights the ways in which both the structural forces and agentic experiences of city life are internally mediated and absorbed in ways that constrain young people's psychosocial well-being and development.

Some may view the results of this process as fatalistic. For those familiar with accounts of youth-hood in Africa that highlight the incapacitating periods of 'waithood', 'time-pass', or 'transitional limbo' that characterise growing up (Finn and Oldfield 2015; Mains 2007; Banks and Sulaiman 2012), this may be unsurprising. But understanding the ways in which city life constrains processes of youth development is not to prevent young people from exercising their agency, nor is it to leave the resourcefulness and ingenuity that many urban youth display unrecognised. It is through such strategies and actions that young people live with, respond to and even potentially resist difficult urban realities. While an increasing focus on resourcefulness and resilience has shed important light onto these aspects of youth agency (c.f. Crivello and Morrow 2019), it has also moved the focus to the individual, diverting our attention from the contexts of crushing poverty and social exclusion that influence young people's ability to navigate their journeys to adulthood (Burman 2017). Bringing Developmental Psychology together with geographical studies of urban youth-hood, therefore, brings strength by allowing us to reconcile these two perspectives, exploring young people's attempts to navigate and direct their lives, at the same time as assessing these against the multiple obstacles they confront while growing up in the city. Experiencing rapid economic, social and cultural change, cities are a particularly relevant site of analysis in this respect.

The article proceeds as follows. In Section 2 I draw upon Developmental Psychology to conceptualise youth development as a four-fold process of *building foundations, building blocks, building support structures* and *building dreams*. These comprise the competencies necessary for 'healthy' development and the social environments needed to cultivate these. Section 3 then explores a broader literature from Geography, Anthropology and Development Studies to investigate the ways in which the economic, social and political landscapes of city life are shaping these processes across diverse African cities. Doing so brings complexity to questions of 'what to do' about urban youth and offers a conceptual way forward for a literature that has not advanced greatly theoretically, despite regular and enlightening empirical insights (Smith and Mills 2019; Valentine 2019).

2. Youth in transition: identifying key developmental processes in youth-hood

Developmental Psychology is a relatively new perspective to bring to bear within Geography and Development Studies, yet this offers important potential on both sides. The field of Developmental Psychology has been criticised for its universalistic and Western-centric focus (Burman 2017), with critics highlighting the need to move towards a more global science of human development that can be advanced through greater insight from young people's lives and experiences in diverse parts of the world (Marfo 2011).[1] A burgeoning literature on urban youth in disciplines of Geography, Anthropology and Development Studies offers clear potential here.

The nature of the developmental processes we are interested in is also indicative of the benefits of a cross-disciplinary perspective that explores the edges and overlaps between these disciplines (Penn 2014). Developmental Psychology recognises that psychosocial processes of youth development are both biological *and* socially constructed (Rogoff 2003; Burman 2017), making these two aspects inseparable. Rogoff (2003: 64) highlights, for example, that 'cultural differences are generally variations on themes of universal import … .rather than all-or-none differences'. The social construction of youth development highlights the benefits of cross-disciplinary study in the field, opening scope for pursuing culturally-specific understandings of human development at the same time as learning

across cultures (Marfo 2011). In fact, this is critical if we are to do justice to the diversity of situations young people from different backgrounds and different environments experience growing up, even within, let alone across, countries and continents. Likewise, while many of the concepts raised by Developmental Psychology are also central to geographical and cross-disciplinary studies of young lives – in understanding the social construction of 'youth' in different settings (c.f. Honwana 2012;), in understanding developmental outcomes among young people (c.f. Crivello and Morrow 2019) and in exploring potential solutions and/ or futures (c.f. Worth 2009; Ansell et al. 2014), amongst others – it has yet to be centrally located within our understandings of patterns and processes of youth development in disciplines of Geography or Development Studies, as this paper seeks to do.

Before moving on it is worth dwelling here on the limitations of Developmental Psychology in this quest. As just discussed, in outlining this framework I am not trying to create a prescriptive or universalistic neuroscientific model of youth development, nor to transfer concepts from a Western-centric discipline uncritically. Yet the biological construction of processes of youth development does hint towards a level of universality of developmental processes that sits uneasily against the huge diversity in the cultures and environments surrounding young people and in their experiences of growing up. While the four-fold framework we present shortly constructs a 'model' of these biological processes of human development, the intention of bringing in a broader array of social science disciplines is to interrogate and nuance the concept of universality in this respect. This makes our ability to analyse these biological processes within particular economic, social and political contexts to see how they are shaped and nurtured key to overcoming the main limitation of Developmental Psychology and the model proposed here, that is, its implied universality.

Social variation across diverse contexts means that the four developmental process outlined here will likely come together in different ways, to different ends, in different places, and among different groups and communities. We make no suggestion that these four processes could, or should, lead to a single goal of human development. In my conclusions I explain how this new direction set out here will benefit from critical investigation across different contexts to explore such variation and difference more systematically. For now, we move onto the proposed framework. The first three components of the framework outlined relate to the three critical needs in human development that emerge throughout youth-hood. Together, these three foundational pillars – autonomy, competence and connectedness – facilitate self-motivation and enable individuals to thrive and advance their well-being; conversely, their absence is associated with diminished motivation and well-being (Ryan and Deci 2001). The fourth component, aspiration, is likewise recognised to be one of the most powerful mechanisms of human agency (Bandura 1998). The following subsections outline these components in more detail.

2.1. Building foundations: realising autonomy

Developmental Psychology highlights the concept of autonomy – the idea that behaviour is willingly enacted on the basis of an individual's values and beliefs – as the ultimate developmental goal at the centre of human functioning (Damon and Gregory 1997; Harter 1999; Klein 2014). Once young people have nurtured the cognitive skills necessary to internalise external influences (on acceptable actions and behaviours, for example) into a consistent self-theory and personal values, their transition to autonomy is complete (Harter 1999). This autonomy inspires their motivations, decision-making processes, actions and satisfaction levels, as well as provides the foundation for self-identity and other attributes associated with this (like self-confidence, as we see shortly) (Bandura 1998). The idea of personal self-rule and self-realisation, therefore, is central to the concept of autonomy (Sutterlüty and Tisdall 2019).

Yet different socialisation processes shape how children and young people learn, shape different developmental constructs (like that of 'the self') and shape what attributes are valued in any given society (Penn 2014; Burman 2017; Kjorholt and Penn 2019). One key difference here, for example,

is between the individualistic and collectivist notions of 'the self' underpinning autonomy in different parts of the world. Individualistic notions – broadly associated with the global North – are characterised by self-interest (Rogoff 2003). In contrast, those in collectivist societies grow up in social environments marked by interdependency and a subservience of the individual to that of the collective. Does this mean that there is no such thing as a universal concept of autonomy? It does not. Critical here is the fact that while autonomy may differ in shape and form across both contexts, it remains equally important in both individualistic and collective societies (Chirkov et al. 2003; Rogoff 2003). Regardless of the *type* of values, practices or traditions internalised and acted upon by an agent, in choosing to value and enact these shared practices or behaviours, an individual uses his or her autonomy, no matter how much their actions and judgements are shaped by broader normative frameworks and relations (Penn 2014). Autonomy is not, therefore, synonymous with independence, but constitutes a critical foundation to human development, no matter how much an individual's actions and judgements are shaped by broader normative frameworks and relations (Markus and Kitayama 1991). This again highlights the biologically and socially constructed aspects of youth development, with the socialisation processes surrounding individuals driving the exact shape and nature of their autonomy.

The centrality of autonomy to psychological well-being and human flourishing lies in an individual's ability to live up to their values and sense of identity (Klein 2014). Where individuals are unable to fulfil or live up to their internalised values this is detrimental to their sense of identity. The impact of this is magnified by its impact on the perceptions of the broader collective, who may view such an individual as unable or unwilling to fulfil collectively valued benchmarks and behaviours (von Wartensee, Hlabse, and Folloni 2018). Thus, we must uncover and explore local understandings of the developmental constructs and valued attributes that are associated with youth- and adulthood in the context under study, as it is these collectively-held constructs and attributes that tend to shape personal identity and therefore drive individuals' motivations, actions and aspirations. Once we have identified the core developmental constructs that people value around youth development in any particular context, we can begin to explore the extent to which individuals can live up to these within the context of their own personal circumstances and against the influence of the broader social, economic, and political environment that they are situated in.

2.2. Building blocks: accumulating diverse developmental assets

If autonomy provides the driving force of motivation and action, these are mobilised by young people through them drawing upon a toolbox of developmental assets. Diversity in these assets is critical to the effective realisation of agency and reaching positive outcomes (Bandura 1998). Studies of youth development in the global North have long recognised the need for diverse developmental assets in making successful and 'healthy' transitions (Leffert et al. 1998; Scales et al. 2000; Scales et al. 2001). Research evidences a compound effect: the more developmental assets a young person has, the more and better outcomes they display across educational, workforce and livelihoods outcomes (Leffert et al. 1998; Scales et al. 2000). Conversely, a deficiency of developmental assets is linked to outcomes such as vulnerability to stress or depression (Bandura 1998).

Leffert et al. (1998) outline 40 developmental assets promoting the short- and long-term well-being of young people. Of these, 20 are *internal*, comprising the values, attributes and competencies young people develop through positive socialisation processes. These constitute the 'building blocks' young people draw upon in their transition to adulthood. They include 'social competency assets' (e.g. planning and decision-making ability), 'interpersonal confidence' (e.g. empathy; sensitivity; friendship skills), 'cultural competence' (e.g. confidence with people from diverse backgrounds), 'resistance skills' (e.g. towards peer pressure) and skills for conflict resolution. 'Positive identity assets' (e.g. self-esteem; confidence) here are central, too, allowing young people to feel control over things that happen to them and giving purpose and optimism to their lives (Leffert et al. 1998; Scales et al. 2000; Scales et al. 2001).

Such building blocks may differ – or differ in value – across context, but are intrinsic to human potential across diverse contexts. Their global relevance was recently tested in a study across 31 countries, which found that the link between developmental assets and positive educational, work-force and livelihoods outcomes holds globally (Scales, Roehlkepartain, and Shramko 2016). Less optimistically, the same study found developmental assets to be 'barely adequate' for young people globally (Scales, Roehlkepartain, and Shramko 2016). 'Positive identity' assets and 'constructive use of time' were found to be in particular deficit, illustrating low self-esteem and a sense of 'drifting' for young people from many different walks of life.

For their value to be realised in enabling young people to realise their agency, these developmental assets must be relevant to time and place. Rapid social and economic change, therefore, can be to devastating effect on developmental assets, in effect eroding the value of developmental assets that have been long depended on. This is vividly illustrated by Katz (2004) in rural Sudan, for example, who highlights how rapid economic change created increasingly inhospitable grounds in which to grow up, making traditionally valued assets redundant and leaving parents and caretakers unable to prepare children and young people with the skills and knowledge they need for the future they are likely to face. This also highlights the role of people and social systems in nurturing developmental assets, as we turn to next.

2.3. Building support structures: cultivating supportive relationships and networks

We have seen that processes of human development are inseparable from the people, institutions, norms and practices that surround individuals (Harter 1999; Ryan and Deci 2001). The remaining 20 developmental assets mentioned above are *external*, representing the ecological support systems that help young people to develop these assets and positive outcomes (Scales et al. 2000). These make a supportive and 'connected' environment critical to nurturing autonomy and a full range of developmental assets.

Dominant ecologies change in relative importance across the lifecycle, though of course these may vary by social context and individual circumstances, including in differences in socialisation by gender (c.f. Katz 2001). The home tends to be the most influential support system throughout childhood and adolescence. Parental involvement, acceptance and affection here are critical to building the developmental assets young people rely upon as they become increasingly independent (Harter 1999). A study of educational outcomes among slum children in Kolkata, for example, found performance to depend upon a household's social composition rather than their income or assets; that is, whether the child lives with family and whether his or her parents talk to each other (Basu 2013).

Spheres of influence broaden as identities are formed and as schools, peer groups, mentors, role models and the wider community start playing important socialisation roles (Harter 1999; Scales et al. 2001; Boyden et al. 2019). This broader participation in community activities becomes critical to bonding young people to a community's socialising systems and values (Leffert et al. 1998), thus shaping their emergent autonomy. 'Soft' support in the form of advice, encouragement and affection from communities beyond the household is also critical to building important developmental assets such as self-confidence and resilience (Boyden et al. 2019). Yet despite the importance of these broader socialising systems, young people globally highlight communities as the places they are least likely to experience developmental relationships (Scales, Roehlkepartain, and Shramko 2016). Limited support from communities can be internalised, limiting or distorting young people's self-perceptions and self-belief. This makes understanding the societal changes that are undermining these important socialisation processes an important research priority.

2.4. Building dreams: cultivating aspirations

The fourth dimension of our model for understanding young people's psychosocial well-being and development is the capacity to aspire. This is one of the most powerful mechanisms of human agency

through instilling in individuals the belief that they can produce their desired efforts through their choices and investments (Bandura 1998). This is particularly powerful for young people whose thoughts and actions are geared towards their futures (Ansell et al. 2014). In a linkage that plays out in both the global North (Leffert et al. 1998; Scales et al. 2001) and the global South (Ray 2006), aspirations also play an important protective role against risk-taking behaviours by nurturing resistance skills. Hope for the future helps young people to resist bad influences and follow 'healthier' developmental paths.

Research in the global South has emphasised the centrality of aspirations to human agency and positive developmental outcomes, highlighting their role in strengthening the internal and material resources individuals need to contest and alter the conditions of their poverty (Appadurai 2004; Burman 2008; Klein 2014). The *Young Lives* study following the lives of 12,000 children from birth into young adulthood across Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam, for example, highlights the central role aspirations play in shaping young people's effort levels (Boyden et al. 2019). Yet at the same time, it also highlights that the contextual supports that help to realise these aspirations are often lacking (Boyden et al. 2019).

It is here that we begin to see a dark side to aspiration for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, across diverse geographies. This is the 'aspirations gap' that often exists between what young people aspire to and how their lives play out in reality (Ray 2006). Aspirations may occur locally, but it is impossible to overlook that they do so in vastly reconfigured global spaces that increase young people's desires and awareness of what is available to young people in global spaces, making them acutely aware of what they lack in comparison (Katz 2004). Such an aspirations gap is not limited to young people in the global South. Similar findings with disadvantaged young people in Australia (Zipin, Brennan, and Gale 2015) highlights that it is not geography, but marginality, that determines these dangers: young people in areas that are 'left behind' locally, nationally and globally are most at risk.

Zipin, Brennan, and Gale (2015) propose a helpful three-fold framework of aspirations that differentiates between aspirations and aspirations gaps and offers a meaningful way forward for aspirations for marginalised youth. It is in *doxic* aspirations where an aspirations gap is most likely to occur. These are the habituated – often global – aspirations reflecting neoliberal logic around upwards mobility. They constitute a form of structural violence for young people from marginalised areas, for whom achieving these is dependent on economic, social and cultural resources that are often out of reach (Zipin, Brennan, and Gale 2015). In contrast, *habituated* aspirations are situated, indicating possibilities within the limits of an individual's socio-structural positioning. Their third construct highlights the role of youth agency in spaces where scope for habituated aspirations is restricted. They refer to *reimagined* aspirations, recognising space for young people to imagine what constructive change could look like – even within constrained spaces – and asking how they can become agents of this change.

Across all four dimensions of this framework, poverty becomes a vicious circle in young people's development. There are with clear linkages between poverty and limited developmental assets, connectedness, and the capacity to aspire. Poverty leads individuals to believe that effort alone cannot make a difference, incentivising them to focus on day-to-day needs while limiting future investments (Ray 2006; Dalton, Ghosal, and Mani 2015). Likewise, decreased social connectedness has been identified as an important aspect to living in poverty and contributes to its persistence (Samuel et al. 2017). Yet with its Northern-centric focus, Developmental Psychology has had little to say about the effects of poverty on young people's development globally (Penn 2014). Integrating Developmental Psychology into our exploration of youth poverty in the global South is thus an important advancement, allowing us to investigate the ways in which particular environments, in particular places, enhance or constrain processes of psychosocial development for young people. I next investigate a diverse literature across sub-Saharan African cities to highlight the depth and complexity of these effects. In doing so we see the devastating repercussions of urban environments characterised

by structural under- and unemployment, poverty, and social instability on the developmental well-being of young people.

3. Developmental spaces? Urban geographies of psychosocial development in sub-Saharan African cities.

3.1. Urban economies: informality and insecurity undermines all four developmental processes

Youth under- and unemployment is a pressing priority across sub-Saharan Africa. The precarious economies of urban centres offer particularly acute employment challenges for youth populations (Resnick and Thurlow 2015). The multiplicity of employment challenges facing urban youth across the continent include a dependence on low-returns or stigmatising casual work and their adverse integration into hierarchical informal work opportunities (Hansen 2005; Locke and Lloyd Sherlock 2011). While self-employment is viewed favourably in these environments by many youth, capital is hard to accumulate and sustain, competition fierce, and business failure rife (Banks 2016; Dolan and Rajak 2016). This informality and insecurity influences all four developmental processes. First, it undermines autonomy by making young people unable to live up to the norms and obligations they value. Second, while alternative competencies have emerged in lieu of positive developmental assets, and while these may offer short-term benefits in difficult contexts, they may also simultaneously undermine young people's longer-term prospects. Together these factors erode the third and fourth developmental processes by undermining social support and dampening aspirations for urban youth.

With employment so critical to social identity in African cities (Bryceson 2010), livelihood insecurity influences every dimension of young people's transition to adulthood. As such, it is corrosive to self-worth and personal identity. It delays their ability to support themselves and the broader household, move into their own homes, form stable relationships and start families – all vital social markers of adulthood (Valentine 2003; Jeffrey and MacDowell 2004; Hansen 2005; Worth 2009; Burgess and Burton 2010; Boyden et al. 2019). Facing higher cultural expectations of financial independence and seeing little hope in the future for marriage, young men confront particular risk in this respect (Honwana 2012; Finn 2017).

An inability to fulfil these internalised norms and expectations is destructive to developmental assets like self-esteem. Furthermore, an inability to meet these societal expectations is also damaging to societal perceptions of young people, undermining the support networks that could help to counteract this. In contrast to the pride felt by young people who assist their families through work (Boyden et al. 2019), out-of-school and out-of-work youth are viewed as 'dependants' and a drain on household resources, burdening young people's sense of self-worth and creating friction within households (Valentine 2003). In Uganda, being called 'dependent' by parents was internalised by young people as demonstrative of a lack of love and care for them (Banks and Sulaiman 2012), highlighting the destructive impact this has on positive identity assets. Intergenerational tensions are deepened when youth populations are seen as unwilling to fulfil cultural functions of 'moral work', where returns are socially- rather than individually accumulated (Bryceson 2010). At scale and over time, the erosion of social support networks has spread beyond the household to broader communities and social institutions, severely impacting upon young people's rights to social space, as we explore shortly.

The resourcefulness and creativity necessary for negotiating hollowed-out labour markets amidst fierce competition are emphasised in almost all empirical studies of urban African youth. Thieme's (2013) 'hustle' in Nairobi and Di Nunzio's (2012) 'street smartness' in Addis Abbaba are just two examples of the way in which creativity is a prized developmental asset, a form of 'tactical agency' that helps young people to cope with the hardship of living and working in tough environments (Honwana and de Boeck 2005). Yet these assets are distinctly different to the developmental assets

we saw in Section 2 that are born through positive socialisation and nurturing environments. Consequently, critical differences also exist in outcomes. Positive developmental assets may amplify each other to promote 'thriving' solutions, but in contrast, this creativity is a second-best solution oriented towards managing daily hardships. It may help young people to make ends meet, but these efforts remain constrained by the more powerful structural forces of job scarcity and insecurity. Resourcefulness is a prized asset, yes, but it may also simply represent young people's ability to survive (Jeffrey 2012). In Freetown, Finn and Oldfield (2015), use the concept of 'straining' to illustrate young people's constrained agency in this way.

Harsh economies offer few opportunities for young people to fulfil the socially conditioned responsibilities that they have internalised and value, dampening their self-identity and worth. New competencies have emerged for staying afloat, but this rarely offers stability or long-term opportunities and can further undermine broader support networks, as we see next.

3.2. Urban social and political ecologies: young people are experiencing deteriorating social support and exclusionary processes

While we have seen that supportive environments play critical nurturing and protective roles, multiple factors contribute to deteriorating support for urban youth at different levels: within households and communities and between youth and the State.

3.2.1. Young people in the household: reshaping roles, responsibilities and relationships

Urban life has reshaped roles, responsibilities and relationships within the household, threatening to erode ecological support in adolescence and early youth-hood. Young people are expected to become financially independent after finishing school, when household resources are redirected to other financial needs. Households in poverty can ill-afford the extended dependency of young members, creating multiple traumas for young people that include reduced emotional support from household members and the shame or stigma they may place on themselves when they are unable to fulfil the roles expected of them.

Tensions are aggravated in this context when young people feel parents have failed to provide them with the resources and capabilities they need to reach financial independence. Urban youth in Ghana lament that families have not 'set them up for life' with the education, social connections or capital they need to become financially independent (Langevang and Gough 2009). In Arusha, Tanzania, this also distresses parents, who feel let down that education has not fulfilled its promise to equip young people with labour market-relevant skills or knowledge (Banks 2016). The rules of the game in preparing young people for adulthood have irrevocably changed with urbanisation and parents are limited in their ability to adapt to this.

The economic crises accompanying urbanisation have also increased family instability (Jeffrey and MacDowell 2004). Migration leaves many young people living away from extended families and parental support systems are changing in urban areas. Long working days, multiple jobs, and an increased dependence on multiple incomes have resulted in smaller family units and fewer caregivers (Evans et al. 2008). The financial constraints preventing young men from marriage have increased premarital childbirth and prevented paternal recognition across African cities, leading to many children being brought up in single-parent families (Calves 2000).

3.2.2. Young people in the community: negative stereotypes limit support and participation for young people

Studies of urban youth also highlight diminishing ecological support from communities. Despite being highlighted as critical for 'moving forwards' in urban Zambia (Locke and Lloyd Sherlock 2011) and more important than education in accessing labour market opportunities in Ghana and The Gambia (Chant and Jones 2005), the social ecologies surrounding urban youth across

the continent rarely provide role models, supportive environments or opportunities for young people to participate in community activities and decision-making.

Long-term employment insecurities result in destructive stereotypes that erode community support systems and reduce young people's claim to rights in social space (Langevang and Gough 2009; Bryceson 2010). Stereotypes of youth as criminals are rooted in beliefs that where jobs are scarce, crime (including prostitution, for young women) is the only viable route through which young people can support themselves. This criminalisation of youth throughout urban Africa is evident among parents, community leaders and even youth themselves (Sommers 2010). With access to opportunities contingent upon the social resources they draw upon from wider society (Hansen 2005), this indicates a point at which their social exclusion begins to occur.

Urbanisation has also generated intergenerational tension at the community-level, with urban life creating new meanings of citizenship for young people removed from traditional affiliations of nation-state, clans or tribes (Burgess and Burton 2010). The changes accompanying urbanisation – including better education, working for an income, increased financial autonomy and individual consumption – have given youth the analytical distance to re-evaluate their societal roles, rights and duties and to question the validity of the gerontocratic discourse, especially in insecure labour markets where the benefits of observing gerontocratic rules are disintegrating (Burgess and Burton 2010). Urban youth are therefore seen as increasingly disconnected from the cultures and traditions that previously regulated their behaviour, creating a sense of 'moral decay' (Sommers 2010). As communities attempt to regulate young peoples' movements and behaviours in response, intergenerational tensions are further exacerbated (Van Blerk 2013).

We also see that the social and economic forces accompanying urbanisation have eroded the social ecologies so critical to nurturing young people's psychosocial development. Supportive and protective relationships are frequently absent in households, families and communities that are overloaded by poverty (Frederiksen and Munive 2010; Locke and Lloyd Sherlock 2011). Moreover, while peer support networks may fill some of this vacuum, perceptions of young people as criminals extend to young people themselves. In Arusha, young people self-select themselves out of socialising beyond school for fear of being 'led astray' by bad groups (Banks 2016).

3.2.3. Young people and the state: exclusionary processes are exacerbated by urban management and state control

The State and its strategies of urban development also have adverse impacts on young people's lives and, in terms of psychosocial development, their identity and legitimacy. Risk factors include the illegality of informality and collective responses to exclusion or discrimination.

Informal work is risky and expensive. Potts (2008) traces an increasingly negative trend in the way the African state perceives, discourages and vilifies informal street trading. Young people are disproportionately hit because of their reliance on informal opportunities and because of stereotypes of young people as criminals that expose them to greater law enforcement. In Kigali, Finn (2017) explores how regimented spatial control and the illegality of informal enterprise and employment exclude the majority of youth who cannot comply with formal regulations. Reports of police seizing goods, extending fines and breaking up groups of young people are commonplace. In Arusha, young men sell homemade handicrafts for lower profits through intermediaries rather than risk seizure by police and young motorcycle-taxi drivers are regularly stopped, fined, or have motorcycles seized (Banks 2016). That these practices penalise the prized developmental asset young people rely upon for income-generation – their resourcefulness and ingenuity – is particularly devastating.

These interactions and exclusions generate frustration that can lead to political dissent. Young people are recognised as a group that responds to and exercises resistance against these conditions (Jeffrey 2012). In Lusaka, Hansen (2010) details long-standing antagonism between the state and young vendors over access to markets and public space. In Nairobi, Thieme (2013) details the revolution young waste collectors threatened if plans to modernise solid waste management processes excluded them. Riots rooted in young people's employment frustrations have also been recorded

in Uganda (Goodfellow 2013), Guinea (Philipps 2013) and Kenya (Dolan and Rajak 2016), amongst others. Such resistance aggravates fears of an urban 'youth crisis'. Hostilities towards young people are exacerbated in a self-reinforcing cycle of exclusion from urban citizenship (Hansen 2010; Dolan and Rajak 2016). In Cape Town, for example, strategies to 'clean up the city' aimed to reduce young people's visible presence, pushing them into a marginalised 'street life' in the poorer city margins (Van Blerk 2013). Urban management and state control, therefore, have created further exclusionary processes for young people, exacerbating livelihoods insecurity and further eroding support and opportunities for community participation. A lack of legitimacy at scale has devastating implications on identity. Where young people try to resist these conditions, however, it often comes at the cost of further vilification and exclusion from urban space and citizenship.

3.3. Youth aspirations and futures in a global world

The previous sections illustrate the multiple ways in which demographic shifts, the structural constraints of urban economies, and the poverty and social change that have accompanied urbanisation all constrain young people's psychosocial development. Alongside the material constraints raised by urban poverty, it erodes the internal assets and the support that can protect young people or build their resilience. Self-identity and self-worth are tested when young people find themselves unable to fulfil social norms and values, and this translates at scale into questions of legitimacy from the social and political ecologies that surround them. Large numbers of Africa's urban youth subsequently find themselves unable to move or aspire towards any significant social or economic mobility.

The uncertainty, boredom and frustrations that accompany quashed aspirations are highlighted across diverse city contexts, highlighting the devastating implications of this on young people's self-belief, self-confidence, and future aspirations (Langevang and Gough 2009; Sommers 2010; Honwana 2012). Feeling progress and hoping for a better future is critical to well-being. Yet instead, young men in Arusha lament that the city is 'driving youth crazy' (Banks 2016). In Ethiopia, urban youth are acutely aware of how the social and economic change around them contrasts so strikingly with their own sense of stagnation (Crivello and van der Gaag 2016).

At the same time as economic malaise has reduced social and economic opportunities and institutional support for young people, insights into diverse global realities have heightened young people's expectations. African youth are chasing modernity and global aspirations as well as their immediate needs (Langevang and Gough 2009; Resnick and Thurlow 2015). Despite holding an educational advantage in comparison with their parents' generation, urban youth remain unable to attain many of the advantages that their parents enjoyed, such as better access to wage labour (Chant and Jones 2005; Hansen 2005; Di Nunzio 2012).

Inequalities within and across cities are internalised, dampening young people's aspirations. Young people in Lusaka describe the city as somewhere that 'you do not need to be told whether you are poor or rich' (Hansen 2005: 3). Likewise, for large numbers of Addis Ababa's youth, the benefits of city living are visible, yet inaccessible. For them, urban life is about scratching a living rather than enjoying the cafes, entertainment or nice clothes visible throughout the city (Di Nunzio 2012). Globalisation has opened young peoples' eyes to new possibilities, but the opportunities available to them are at odds with these. When global images and ideals are met locally with social and economic exclusion it fuels a contradiction between the ways of living young people aspire to and their lived reality; this aspirations gap generates frustration and disenchantment (Hansen 2005; Langevang and Gough 2009). In the Ethiopian city of Jimma, Mains, Hadley, and Tessema (2013) highlight the repercussions of these multiple constraints on psychosocial well-being. Amidst persistent unemployment, young men struggle to negotiate the boredom and shame that accompany their overabundant and unproductive time. They are acutely impacted by their inability to fulfil the roles and responsibilities that society places on them. This highlights the importance of temporal narratives and the capacity to aspire: without seeing themselves as moving towards a worthy future,

mental health suffers and stimulants have become an intermediating coping strategy (Mains, Hadley, and Tessema (2013)).

This hopelessness is evident in almost all empirical studies of urban youth across Sub-Saharan Africa. Young people struggle to place themselves in a future-oriented narrative amidst the persistent structural unemployment and social and political exclusion they experience. Young people are lacking economies that provide opportunities to aspire to; lacking social ecologies to nurture and support them through hardship; and lacking role models that can provide more clearly defined aspirations and strategies for achieving them. As a result, life for many feels stagnant and futures feel hopeless. This new disciplinary perspective highlights the fact that dampened aspirations are only the top and outward-facing layer of Africa's urban youth crisis. Moreover, dampened aspirations only just scratch the surface of the ways in which the economic, social and political processes occurring across African cities have had such a detrimental impact on young people's psychosocial development.

Zipin, Brennan, and Gale's (2015) 'reimagined aspirations' may offer a less fatalistic narrative, looking at young people's capacity for action in imagining, articulating and pursuing alternative futures within these constraints. There are many examples of this in dynamic urban landscapes. In the deteriorating economy of urban Burkino Faso, for example, young men are beginning to re-evaluate the importance of marriage (Calves, Kobiane, and Martel 2007). Letting go of the importance they place on marriage means removing the mental burden associated with failing to live up to it. Yet removing this pressure does not immediately change the broader social context that continues to place importance on this social marker, and the same young men simultaneously allay fears around delayed marriage and their inability to leave the parental home (Calves, Kobiane, and Martel 2007). From this, we can question whether these 'reimaginings' are a genuine reflection of changed values or an adjustment made to the social ideal that these young men make as a coping strategy. While we must recognise the important role such 'reimaginings' offer, they also need to be checked against the local social and economic realities that mean that they are unlikely to guarantee possibilities for a 'good life' for large numbers of young people in the near future (Zipin, Brennan, and Gale 2015).

4. Conclusions

Despite clear recognition of youth-hood as a process of 'becoming', research in the global South has a tendency to focus on current and future outcomes without looking back to see the influence of past experiences in shaping or constraining the key developmental processes that occur throughout adolescence and into youth-hood. Introducing Developmental Psychology into our understanding of urban youth geographies looks beyond the outcomes associated with poverty and disadvantage at this critical stage in the lifecycle to highlight the depth, complexity and severity of the urban youth experience in sub-Saharan African cities. The dynamic social, economic and political processes that are unfolding alongside urbanisation are constraining, undermining or eroding young people's psychosocial development in almost every dimension. Understanding how urban geographies shape processes of youth development, it becomes clear, deserves as much attention as the ways in which young people shape cities.

Conceptualising youth development as a four-fold process of *building foundations, building blocks, building support structures* and *building dreams* we have explored the assets and competencies young people must draw upon in a 'healthy' developmental process and the social environments needed to cultivate these. While the framework focuses on the biological aspects of human development that take place at this stage in the lifecycle, local and context-specific analysis is necessary to assess this against the deep social underpinnings that accompany and shape these. Doing so in diverse city contexts across sub-Saharan Africa highlights that the city's social, economic and political forces do not only offer limited opportunities for urban youth. These social and economic outcomes are internalised by young people in multiple and destructive ways. They erode self-worth and identity as well as the support and legitimacy given to young people by their households,

communities and the state. Yes, young people are living in material poverty and employment is at the centre of their concerns. Yet the experience of urban poverty has even further reaching repercussions, reducing the institutional support they receive at this critical life-stage, leaving them without the developmental assets and competencies they need to draw upon throughout their adult lives and constraining their capacity to aspire to a better future. Looking back to understand how local and global influences have impacted upon key developmental processes for young people is as important as trying to identify and understand their predicament and frustrated ambitions today.

Highlighting the devastating repercussions of city spaces that cannot provide social and economic opportunities to their young people has somewhat fatalistic consequences. It is not the intention of this new framing to overshadow the agency that young people exercise in trying to survive and thrive in the city. The immense creativity young people deploy; the ways in which young people change perceptions and constructions of key milestones of adulthood; the attempts young people make to build and expand social networks within and across groups, gangs or generations; the ways in which young people form or cling onto their aspirations: each one of these can be attributed to a pillar of this framework and can be seen as acts of resilience or response to the fragility of socioeconomic life. Research must continue to explore and celebrate these.

Despite these considerable and creative efforts, however, these structural issues are not problems young people can easily face up to – let alone solve – individually or collectively. In fact, we have seen that these acts of creativity or resistance often come at the cost of a deepening legitimacy crisis or further social exclusion for young people. So while these acts must continue to be highlighted, explored and applauded, their limits must also be recognised. Introducing Developmental Psychology into our conceptualisation of this period in the lifecycle enables this. This framing recognises these limits not only in the day-to-day economic returns to livelihoods, but also in the constraints they place on young people's ability to build and nurture the internal attributes and skills they require or to build the social and political legitimacy that is crucial to individual and collective outcomes in the short and long-term.

The analysis here is an important new direction for understanding and researching youth geographies in the global South. I have highlighted the city's role as a *developmental space*, investigating and unravelling the ways in which the city and its dynamic social, economic and political landscapes shape and constrain the psychosocial developmental processes that young people must undergo. It is an agenda deeply embedded in the economic, social and political contexts that young people are navigating and highlights the need for a much greater focus on psychosocial development and support at this critical developmental period in the lifecycle.

With adolescence and youth-hood a critical policy window for enhancing human development (Boyden et al. 2019), this new framing also has important policy implications. In line with Crivello and Morrow (2019), it highlights the importance of moving a narrow policy spotlight away from individual young people to encompass and address the structural conditions that are so damaging to their short-term outcomes and their long-term human development. In traditional policy responses it highlights the importance of making up for deficits in positive developmental assets by focusing on investments that nurture softer psychosocial skills, as well as trying to expand access to hard skills and assets. Creative thinking around how to build intergenerational support, nurture more supportive social environments and transform large-scale negative stereotypes of urban youth is also critical. There are also important implications for education. Transforming educational systems to reflect the realities of local labour markets is imperative, but so too is assisting urban youth to create and work towards future visions: for themselves as individuals and collectively, for more inclusive and just cities.

There are significant issues that we have been unable to address here. Gendered experiences of psychosocial development are notable, including the additional risks or expectations young men and women face, or the different levels of support and investment allocated to them within and beyond the household. Gender becomes more prominent in shaping expectations, roles and conduct at this stage in the lifecycle, raising different opportunities and constraints so that trajectories become

increasingly divergent as young people age (Boyden et al. 2019). Likewise, critical empirical investigation across different contexts will further advance this new research agenda. What do the concepts couched within these four pillars look like in specific contexts and how are they changing? In what ways do certain landscapes or geographies shape or constrain these developmental goals? The question of 'developmental spaces' can of course spread beyond urban spaces to explore how social, economic, political or technological changes, in particular times and places, are shaping or constraining young people's psychosocial development. Exploring these questions will further extend our understanding of the ways in which urban geographies shape or constrain these critical developmental processes – and of the implications of this for young people today, and into the future.

Note

1. We use the Developmental Psychology definition of 'human development' throughout that sees human development as a lifelong process based on the acquisition and growth of the physical, cognitive, social and emotional competencies required to engage fully in family and society (Boyden et al. 2019).

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

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