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African ‘Youth’ since Independence: Notes on a Bibliographic Overview, 1990–2005

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Abstract

This short bibliography on ‘youth’ is the result of a literature search carried out in 2005 in three library collections in the Netherlands. The references to the general literature on youth, politics and religion were found in the library of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of Leiden University. For African references on this topic, the library of the African Studies Centre in Leiden was very useful. The Royal Tropical Institute’s library in Amsterdam was also used but to a lesser extent. The keywords used for the literature search were ‘youth’, ‘politics’ and ‘religion’ in four different languages: English, French, German and Dutch. This resulted in 270 references addressing the specific topics of youth, politics and religion, which all fall within the scope of the conference.

Résumé

Cette courte bibliographie sur la ‘jeunesse’ est le résultat d’une recherche en 2005 sur la littérature conduite dans trois bibliothèques au Pays Bas. Les références sur la littérature générale sur la jeunesse, la politique et la religion ont été retrouvées dans la bibliothèque de la Faculté des sciences sociales et du comportement de l’Université de Leyde. La bibliothèque du Centre des études africaines de la même université a été très utile. De même que celle de Royal Tropical Institute à Amsterdam, bien qu’à un degré moindre.

Les mots clés de la recherche sur la littérature ont été ‘jeunesse’, ‘politique’ et ‘religion’ dans quatre langues différentes : anglais, français, allemand et hollandais. Ce qui a donné 270 références couvrant les thèmes spécifiques de la jeunesse, la politique et la religion qui sont aussi des thèmes de la conférence.

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Studies on Youth

'Youth' as a category has only been a subject of research in the last two decades. Prior to this, 'youth' was mentioned in ethnology and case-studies as an element that needed to be described in order to understand the main topic, as were labourers, students and women, but it was never the central focus of research as such. A vast amount of research has been done on South African topics, a fact reflected by the large number of references to South Africa, apartheid and its political aftermath.

In their article 'Reflections on Youth', Jean and John Comaroff present a historical overview of the way youth was constructed in the Western context. They remind us of the 'anthropological truism that the way in which young people are perceived, named, and represented betrays a lot about the social and political constitution of a society'.³

The social, political and religious fields of African societies concerning youth are disclosed by several excellent contributions on a range of topics in four different volumes. For a political context, *Vanguard or Vandals, Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa*⁴ offers readings on youth involvement in conflicts and the controversial role they play. The introduction gives an overview of recent academic debates on youth studies and the 'blocked social mobility'⁵ youngsters face.

The paradoxical position of youth is addressed in *Makers and Breakers, Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*⁶ from a cultural/anthropological perspective. *Africa's Young Majority*⁷ offers a range of papers on several fields of study. And for readings on generational conflict, see *The Politics of Age and Gerontocracy in Africa*.⁸

'Youth' cannot be studied without considering Western and African notions of childhood and adulthood, and the crossing of the frontier between the two. Research is also not complete without regarding the position of the youth themselves; or as Honwana and de Boeck put it, 'the complex realities of young people's lives: [are] shaping and being shaped by their social world'.⁹

The framework for research on youth includes meta-concepts such as identity, agency, generation and gender, and, given the focus of this special issue, also the fields of study of religion and politics. However the study of youth from a religious perspective seems primarily to be focused on education or the fundamentals of a specific religion.

Children and youth are extremely difficult to grasp and pin down analytically. (...) They may be targets, students, servants, orphans, street children, combatants, healers, onlookers, political activists, entrepreneurs, artists, or witches, and they often occupy more than one position at once.¹⁰

Who are the Youth?

During the United Nations International Youth Year in 1985, the General Assembly defined youth as those persons who fall between the ages of 15 and 24.¹¹ The limits of this definition are too narrow in an African context because 'in Africa there are many such people [well in their thirties] who have had to delay their entry into adulthood: they feel excluded and powerless, and struggle to survive'.¹² In his chapter entitled, 'Being Young in Africa: The Politics of Despair and Renewal', Abbink limits the category in Africa to the 14-35 age-bracket for practical reasons.¹³ Most Africanists would agree with him. Even though census bureaus use different brackets, he points out that the term 'youth' has a different meaning in a given cultural, social and historical context.

The United Nations table below gives an insight into the number of youth worldwide in the year 2000.

Regional Distribution of Youth in 2000 (in millions)¹⁴

	Total Population	Youth as % of Total	Youth (15-24 years)	As % of World Youth
Asia	3,672	17.8	654	61.5
Africa	793	20.3	161	15.1
Europe	727	13.8	100	9.4
Latin America & the Caribbean	519	19.5	101	9.5
North America	314	13.5	42	4.0
Oceania	31	15.6	5	0.5
Total	6,056	17.6	1,063	100.0

Honwana (2005) points out the contrast between the Western (middle-class) notion of children and childhood as a 'carefree, secure and happy phase of human existence' and the reality of children in many other parts of the world, where young children share the responsibilities of providing food or income, taking care of siblings and (partially) running the household. 'Being a child in this particular context seems to have little to do with age (although people sometimes refer to age limits) but is essentially linked to social roles, expectations and responsibilities. (...) In such a societal context, emphasis is placed on roles rather than on age.'¹⁵ It is in this social role that youth protest gerontocratic rule, social marginalisation, unemployment, etc. A result of this could be their involvement in various degrees of conflict as child soldiers, student protestors or rebels. Creating such a paradoxical situation for themselves, they are the initiate as well as the initiated, the perpetrator and

the victim, the protector and the protected, the maker and the breaker.¹⁶ 'Young people constantly cross the frontier between childhood and adulthood. As they actively create and recreate their roles in the face of changing conditions, they blur that social divide.'¹⁷ And thus "youth" stand for many things at once: for the terrors of the present, the errors of the past, the prospects of a future'.¹⁸

Youth in a Shifting Society

Youth movements or associations are a common feature throughout African history. In the first part of the twentieth century, 'the colonial administration did not recognise the youth of the capital as a special age group with specific needs'. In a study of colonial Brazzaville, Phyllis Mary Martin (1992) shows that youth agency and generational conflict in a changing society are of all times.

The period 1924-1940 saw a spread of youth organizations in Brazzaville, influenced by changing attitudes among liberal whites, changing demographic and economic conditions in the city and the initiatives of young Africans themselves. The administration and the Catholic mission set about organizing different sorts of clubs, hoping to control the "ideas of independence and emancipation" spreading among the young people. The views of African adults on the efforts to discipline their youth are elusive, and so are the views of the young people themselves. They had their own agenda, which was not always identical with that of the leaders of the organizations they joined.¹⁹

Many authors mention the marginalisation of African youth within the context of uncertain social status, increasing unemployment and eroding educational opportunities.

Most African countries became independent during the 1960s, a decade of liberation and decolonisation. Young people were generally seen as the promising generation that held the future in its hands and education would give them an even better chance of reaching prosperity. Young nations had to be built, as Breier (1970) points out in his study on *Sozialund Jugenddienste in Afrika*:

Die nationalen Jugenddienste letzten rekrutierten ihre Freiwilligen aus dem grossen Reservoir der unterprivilegierten Jugend ohne Schul- und Ausbildung. Diesen Jugenddiensten kommt eine wichtige Rolle beim Aufbau der Nation zu.²⁰

[The national youth service last recruited their volunteers from the large reservoir of underprivileged youth without school and training. These youth services have an important role in the construction of the nation.]

The 1980s can be characterised as the decade of the economic decline of nations and rising unemployment, creating a rich ground for social uprisings

that led to conflict in several parts of the continent, for example, the social political upheaval in South Africa.

The informal youth clubs operating in South Africa during the emergency period in the 1980s provided positive direction for youth who had suffered from disruptions in their education and exclusion from the job market. Such clubs are thought to promote 'fine' youth and they play an important bridging role in assisting young people to adapt to adult life.²¹

The establishment of the New World Order after the end of the Cold War gave way to the liberalisation of African national economies that had been caught up in a socialist rhetoric or political isolation. Where does the youth stand in all this? 'The youthful population of Africa has been growing and their integration into society has had enormous economic, cultural, political and social consequences'²² but 'too frequently the needs of children, youth and women are only addressed as an afterthought when it comes to political and economic development initiatives'.²³

The 'promising generation' has become known as the 'lost generation'. Are they really 'lost'? 'The recent rapid growth of the second economy (the informal sector) in many African countries brings opportunities to some African urban youth that are denied to them in the wage and salary sector of the official economy.'²⁴ Some young people seize the opportunities provided to them by the informal economy, but this does not mean that there is a national policy on youth.

In the formal sector, however, they are not really visible yet. 'South Africa's youth make up 29 per cent of the population, yet there is no comprehensive youth policy to attend to their needs.'²⁵ This leads to a situation in which 'urban youth in Africa today must struggle to make a living in a context of cut-throat competition, where the exigencies of daily life demand constant resort to illegal activity and erode the functioning of common morality and ethics. Young people seem to need an exceptional degree of strength of character, innovation and endurance to have any hope for the future.'²⁶ Jeremy Seekings (1996) concludes 'that there was no 'youth crisis' as such, but rather a range of intractable problems within which young people find themselves and that should be addressed in policy'.²⁷

Conflict

An anthropological definition of war offered in *No Peace, No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflicts*²⁸ is: 'All war is long-term struggle organised for political ends, and neither the means nor the ends can be understood without reference to a specific social context'.

The specific social context related to the subject of this special issue is that 'African youth are caught in the chasm between childhood and the

unattainable social, political and economic status that would define them as adults. Deprived of educational opportunities and livelihoods, youth are actively mobilised by politicians and armed groups alike, who recognise that their alliance is valuable and their enmity dangerous'.²⁹

Even when caught in this chasm as McIntyre (2003) calls it, youth are not only victims, they can be actors too. In her article entitled 'The Pain of Agency, the Agency of Pain', Alcinda Honwana takes the active role of the youngster a step further. 'Within this interstitial space,³⁰ child soldiers are not devoid of agency. On the contrary, these young soldiers are agents in their own right, but this agency is of a specific type.' Honwana defines it as *tactical agency*: 'a specific type of agency that is devised to cope with the concrete, immediate conditions of their lives in order to maximise the circumstances created by their military and violent environment. Their actions however, come from a position of weakness'.³¹ This alone does not explain youth's involvement in conflict or violent situations. 'No "natural inclination" of youth to behave violently can explain their presence in socially destructive movements. The breakdown of a socio-political and moral order in the wider society and the degree of governability of a certain type of state are more likely to precipitate this.'³² Honwana and Abbink, amongst others, make it clear that a society is still very fragile when internal armed conflict has ended. As Abbink puts it; 'Images and practices of violence among both perpetrators and victims (especially when young) become part of a new *habitus* of violence – an internalised mental response pattern anchored in behavioural routines – and also a template in the collective memory of a society'.³³

Gender has not been extensively investigated as an element in the study of youth. In the specific situation of child soldiers, where girls are the victims of sexual abuse by the rebel leaders as well as of the child soldiers (mainly boys), gender is involved. In social, religious, and political studies on youth, gender does not seem to be a distinctive element. 'The experience of the female youths should not be ignored because of their lower 'nuisance value'.³⁴

Youth Connected

The above has focused on youth within national borders: 'the condition of young people in Africa is heavily influenced by the interaction between local and global pressures: the fragmentation of local culture, on the one hand, and the influences of global culture, on the other'.³⁵ Given modern means of communication (Internet, e-mail, mobile phone, etc.), globalisation has come closer to African youth. 'In the cyberspace age, juveniles have an enhanced capacity to communicate in, and act effectively on, the world at large.'³⁶ However, the opportunities available to Western and African youth are not the same and are not equally accessible. Nonetheless 'children and youth are

major players in new informal economies and processes of globalisation, as well as in the delineation of alternative local forms of modernity'.³⁷

Religion in Africa is part of daily life one way or the other and new churches are being rapidly established. 'In any event, religious thought and its global resurgence among the young have to be taken seriously. (...) the point is that African youth are greatly attracted by the new religious movements and are joining (in large numbers) a discourse of morality and identity that holds out the promise of regeneration and collective power with transnational resonance.'³⁸

The distinction between religion and youth culture is not always clear-cut. When a religion is adapted and expressed in a certain way, it can become a youth culture, like 'the spread of the Rastafarian movement and its attendant forms of cultural expression to West Africa, and in so doing pinpoints the various mechanisms and processes that have contributed to its diffusion among urban-based West African youth'; and 'the specifically religious character of Rastafarianism in West Africa'.³⁹

'Forty years of post-colonial history has not shown a takeover of power by the young or a substantial improvement in the life of youth in Africa in general. To be young in Africa came to mean being disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginal in the political and economic sense.'⁴⁰

The study of youth is maturing; theories around youth and who and what youth is/are developing. Nevertheless, studies on gender amongst youth as well as on how religion is experienced and is subject to youth agency are lacking.

De Boeck and Honwana speak of the 'fundamental paradox' in their volume. 'How can we understand children and youth in various African contexts as both *makers* and *breakers* of society, while they are simultaneously being *made* and *broken* by that society?'⁴¹ This seems to be the fundamental paradox of the study of youth.

Recent Publications on 'Youth'

Publications written after 2005 continue along the lines of debates similar to those summarised above. More attention is given to youth in a globalising world, with attention to music and arts, to youth and religion, and to religious movements. Studies have continued to explore those 'youth at risk', emphasising their role as victims in conflict. At the same time, the agency of youth is highlighted as providing an important contribution to this field of studies. This is embodied in the introduction of the concept of *navigation*,⁴² where the making of society by youth is emphasised. In 2011, *makers* and *breakers* are thus still seen as two sides of 'youth' in society.

Below, a bibliographic list has been compiled of recent publications dealing with 'youth'. The list should not be seen as complete but rather as tool for future reference.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Youth & Youth Culture in a Globalising World

- Cole, Jennifer and Deborah Durham, 2007, 'Introduction: Age, Regeneration and the Intimate Politics of Globalization', in Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham, eds., *Generations and Globalization: Youth, Age, and Family in the New World Economy*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 1-28.
- Nilan, Pam and Feixa, Carles, eds, 2006, *Global Youth? Hybrid Identities, Plural Worlds*, Abingdon Oxen/New York: Routledge.
- Perullo, Alex, 2005, 'Hooligans and Heroes: Youth Identity and Hip-Hop in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania', *Africa Today*, vol. 51, no. 4, pp. 75-101.

Youth and Conflict: Youth and Agency & Youth at Risk

- Alber, Erdmute, Sjaak van der Geest and Susan Reynolds Whyte, 2008, *Generations in Africa: Connections and Conflicts*, Berlin: Lit Verlag.
- Bourdillon, Michael, 2008, 'Children and Supporting Adults in Child-Led Organisations', in Erdmute Alber, Sjaak van der Geest and Susan Reynolds Whyte, eds., *Generations in Africa: connections and conflicts*, Berlin: Lit Verlag.
- De Bruijn, Mirjam, 2007, 'Agency in and from the Margins: Street Children and Youth in N'djaména, Chad', in Mirjam de Bruijn, Rijk van Dijk, Jan-Bart Gewald, eds., *Strength beyond Structure: Social and Historical Trajectories of Agency in Africa*, Leiden: Brill, pp. 263-284.
- Christiansen, Catrine, Mats Utas and Henrik E. Vigh, eds., 2006, *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood: Social becoming in an African context*, Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute.
- Kelly, Peter, 2006, 'The Entrepreneurial Self and "Youth at Risk": Exploring the Horizons of Identity in the Twenty-first Century', *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, February, pp. 17-32.
- Lindegaard, Marie Rosenkrantz, 2009, 'Coconuts, Gangsters and Rainbow Fighters: How Male Youngsters Navigate Situations of Violence in Cape Town', South Africa. PhD Dissertation, Amsterdam, Universiteit van Amsterdam.
- Riele, Kitty te, 2006, 'Youth "at Risk": Further Marginalizing the Marginalized', *Journal of Education Policy*, vol. 21, no. 2, March, pp. 129-145.
- Sommers, Marc 2006a, 'In the Shadow of Genocide: Rwanda's Youth Challenge.', in Siobhán McEvoy-Levy, ed., *Troublemakers or Peacemakers? Youth and Post-Accord Peacebuilding*, South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Vigh, Henrik, 2006, *Navigating Terrains of War: Youth and Soldiering in Guinea-Bissau*, New York: Berghahn.
- Vigh, Henrik, 2008, 'Crisis and Chronicity: Anthropological Perspectives on Continuous Conflict and Decline', *Ethnos*, vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 5-24.

Youth and the State

- Argenti, Nicolas, 2007, *The Intestines of the State: Youth, Violence, and Belated Histories in the Cameroon Grassfields*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Burgess, Thomas, 2005, 'Introduction to Youth and Citizenship in East Africa', *Africa Today* vol. 51, no. 4, pp. VI-XXIV.
- Durham, Deborah, 2007, 'Empowering Youth: Making Youth Citizens in Botswana', in Jennifer Cole and Deborah Durham, eds, *Generations and Globalization: Youth, Age, and Family in the New World Economy*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 102-131.
- Frank, Kathryn, I., 2006, 'The Potential of Youth Participation in Planning', in *Journal of Planning Literature*, vol. 20, no. 40, May, pp. 351-371.
- Garcia, Marito and Jean Fares, eds, 2008, *Youth in Africa's labor market (Directions in Development)*, Washington DC: World Bank.
- Honwana, Alcinda, 2006, *Child Soldiers in Africa*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Youth and Religion

- Sanni, Amidu, 2007b, 'The Nigerian Muslim Youth and the Sharia Controversy: Issues in Violence Engineering in the Public Sphere', *Journal of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 16, p. 119-133.
- Witte, Marleen de, 2008, 'Spirit Media: *Charismatics, Traditionalists, and Mediation Practices in Ghana*', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam.

Youth and HIV/AIDS

- Dahl, Bianca, 2009, 'The "Failures of Culture": Christianity, Kinship, and Moral Discourses about Orphans during Botswana's AIDS Crisis', in R. Prince, Ph. Denis and R. van Dijk, eds, *Africa Today, Special issue*, vol. 56, no. 1, Fall 2009, pp. 23-43.
- Robson, Elsbeth, Nicola Ansell, Ulli Huber, William Gould and Lorraine van Blerk, eds, 2006, 'Young Caregivers in the Context of the HIV/AIDS Pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa', *Population, Space and Place*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 93-111.
- Skovdal, Morten, 2010, 'Children Caring for Their "Caregivers": Exploring the Caring Arrangements of Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Western Kenya', *AIDS Care*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 69-103.

Youth and Gender

- Pype, Katrien, 2007, 'Fighting Boys, Strong Men and Gorillas: Notes on the Imagination of Masculinities in Kinshasa', *Africa / International African Institute*, vol. 77, no. 2, pp. 250-271.
- Sommers, Marc, 2006b, 'Fearing Africa's Young Men: Male Youth, Conflict, Urbanization and the Case of Rwanda', in Ian Bannon and Maria Correia, eds, *The Other Half of Gender: Men's Issues in Development*, Washington DC: World Bank.

Notes

1. <http://www.ascleiden.nl/Library/The Library, Documentation and Information Department of the African Studies Centre has the most extensive and specialised collection on Africa in the Netherlands in the fields of the social sciences, the humanities and law.>
2. www.kit.nl
3. Jean & John Comaroff, "Children and Youth in a Global Era", in *Makers and Breakers*, p. 19.
4. *Vanguard or Vandals, Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa*, edited by Jon Abbink & Ineke van Kessel, Leiden: Brill Publishers (2005).
5. As Abbink puts it in his introduction to *Vanguard or Vandals*, p. 16.
6. *Makers and Breakers, Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, edited by Alcinda Honwana & Filip de Boeck, Oxford: James Currey (2005).
7. *Africa's Young Majority*, edited by Barbara Trudell, Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies (2002).
8. *The Politics of Age and Gerontocracy in Africa* by Mario I. Aguilar, Trenton N.Y.: Africa World Press (1998).
9. Preface to *Makers and Breakers*, p. ix.
10. De Boeck & Honwana, in *Makers and Breakers*, p. 3.
11. The UN notes that in this definition, children are those persons under the age of 14. It is, however, worth noting that Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines children as persons up to the age of 18. This was intentional, as it was hoped that the Convention would provide protection and rights to as large an age-group as possible, and because there was no similar United Nations Convention on the Rights of Youth. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/nyin/qanda.htm>. See for the UN Youth Agenda <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/nyin/agenda.htm>
12. Jon Abbink, in *Vanguard or Vandals*, p. 6.
13. Jon Abbink, in *Vanguard or Vandals*, p. 6.
14. Source: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/nyin/qanda.htm>
15. Honwana, 'The Pain of Agency, the Agency of Pain', in *Makers and Breakers*, p. 35.
16. De Boeck & Honwana, "Children and Youth in Africa, Agency, Identity and Place", in *Makers & Breakers*, p. 3.
17. Introduction to *Makers & Breakers*, p. 4.
18. Jean & John Comaroff, 'Children and Youth in a Global Era', in *Makers & Breakers*, p. 20.
19. Phyllis Mary Martin, *Organizing Youth in Colonial Brazzaville: The Search for Order and Identity, c. 1900-1940* (1992).
20. H. Breier, 'Sozial- und Jugenddienste in Afrika', *Internationales Afrikaforum*, 1970, 6 (5): 306-310.
21. Valerie Møller, Theresa Mthembu & Robin Richards, 'The Role of Informal Clubs in Youth Development: A South African Case Study' (1994).

22. Mamadou Diouf, *Engaging Postcolonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space* (2003).
23. Jeffrey A. Balch, ed., 'Children of Apartheid: International Action for Southern Africa's Youth' (1993).
24. Janet MacGaffey, 'Solving the Problems of Urban Living: Opportunities for Youth in the Second Economy' (1992).
25. Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert, 'Youth in the New South Africa: Towards Policy Formulation: Main Report of the Co-operative Research Programme, South African Youth' (1994).
26. Janet MacGaffey, 'Solving the Problems of Urban Living: Opportunities for Youth in the Second Economy' (1992).
27. Jeremy Seekings, 'The 'Lost Generation': South Africa's 'Youth Problem' in the Early-1990s (1996).
28. *No Peace, No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflicts: In Memoriam Bernhard Helander*, edited by Paul Richards (2005)
29. Angela McIntyre, 'Rights, Root Causes and Recruitment: The Youth Factor in Africa's Armed Conflicts' (2003).
30. Honwana's explanation is that '(...) the combinations of the two words *child* and *soldier* creates a paradox as these children of war find themselves in an interstitial space between these two conditions.' in *Makers and Breakers*, p. 32.
31. Honwana, in *Makers and Breakers*, p. 49.
32. Abbink, in *Vanguard or Vandals*, p. 14.
33. Abbink in the introduction to *Vanguard or Vandals*, p. 19.
34. Abbink in the introduction to *Vanguard or Vandals*, p. 25.
35. Mamadou Diouf, *Engaging Postcolonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space* (2003).
36. Jean & John Comaroff, in *Makers and Breakers*, p. 21.
37. De Boeck & Honwana, in *Makers and Breakers*, p. 1.
38. Abbink in the introduction to *Vanguard or Vandals*, p. 21.
39. Neil J. Savishinsky, 'Rastafari in the Promised Land: The Spread of a Jamaican Socioreligious Movement among the Youth of West Africa' (1994).
40. Abbink in the introduction to *Vanguard or Vandals*, p. 7.
41. De Boeck & Honwana in the introduction to *Makers and Breakers*, p. 2.
42. Christiansen, Catrine, Mats Utas and Henrik E. Vigh, eds., 2006, *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood: Social becoming in an African context*, Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute.

