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Generational connections and conflicts
in Africa: an introduction

Generation is one of the most powerful analytical tools for studying society because it implies relations in time. Whether we think of intergenerational links within families or across historical periods, generation is about connections and contrasts—and often conflicts—in a temporal perspective. Anthropologists working in Africa saw the significance of generation early on, in part because of their focus on reciprocity and process in kinship and social structure. In the post-colonial period other issues came to the fore and the interest in generation receded. While it was implied in many gender studies, it did not re-emerge as an explicit analytical or empirical issue until the end of the 1990s. It was then that youth in Africa appeared as a major topic of political and scholarly concern. AIDS orphans, child soldiers, disaffected and marginalized young men, and sexually active teenage girls represented the dangers and tribulations of an historical generation at a troubled conjuncture of Africa's history. While there was sometimes a tendency to focus on youth (or old people) exclusively, there has been a growing recognition of the relational nature of these categories which makes it necessary to focus on generation and generational relations.

This book is a contribution to that renewed appreciation of the fruitfulness of generation. Building on an earlier exploration of the intertwined but only partly shared lives of grandparents and grandchildren (Geissler et al. 2004), we offer a set of African perspectives on issues in intergenerational relations.[1] Our contributors are

firmly relational, even when they adopt the perspective of one generation. They take up specific issues of current concern placing them in historical perspective and building on the analytical interests that have characterized anthropological work in Africa. The breadth of their vision is evident in the four inter-related themes around which the book is organized. The first is reciprocity between generations of kin, a classic topic that takes on new dimensions in today's rural and urban communities. The second theme is the differential uses of the past in navigating the present. Generation as a factor in politics is a third theme, too often ignored by anthropologists focusing primarily on the marginalization of youth. Finally we address the old-fashioned theme of virtue as it is contested in intergenerational relations.

Generation in the passive and active voice

The term 'generation' has an active and a passive meaning. The passive one (being generated) is the most common, also in social science. The Oxford English Dictionary sums up: 'That which is generated: Offspring, progeny; descendants, posterity; the offspring of the same parent or parents, regarded as a single degree or step in the descent of a person or family from an ancestor; the whole body of individuals born about the same period; also, the time covered by the lives of these.' That 'preference' for the passive version in the social sciences is of course related to our view of people as members of a culture or society. People do not choose their culture; they are born into it, and inherit its language, habits, norms, and beliefs. Instead of seeing, living and imagining social relations as something that individual persons make and unmake, use or suffer from, the relations appear to be there before anything else, as if there is a flow of life that precedes individual entity. That is to say, relations make persons; people come into being through their relations with others. In contrast to views of reasoning acting individuals, the passive notion of generation reminds us that not only relationships but also social forms and historical forces are prior to persons. Our British structural-functionalist ancestors would have argued here that it is structure that determines social behaviour. In contrast to views of reasoning acting individuals, the passive notion of generation reminds us that not only relationships but also social forms and historical forces are prior to persons.

Yet these relations are fluid and emergent from the actions of people. So, while we are dealing in this book with 'generations' as groups

and categories of people *belonging to* a certain period of time, social category, or position in descent line with specific rules and conventions, we should keep in mind the active version of 'generation' as well: the act of generating, creativity, agency. Members of a generation are not surrendered to their cultural and societal position, but are able to use that position to bring about new ideas and practices and pursue their own interests within the historical circumstances in which they live.

In anthropological studies in Africa, the active voice of generation seems to be growing louder, as inter-subjectivity, relatedness, cultural creativity and agency replace social structure and continuity as research concerns. However it is not our intention to introduce generation by simply opposing older and newer studies. We believe there are important continuities and therefore we briefly review three analytical definitions of generation that are enduring tools in the anthropological study of generations.

Three concepts of generation

The most common conceptualization of generation within African anthropology has been as a *genealogical relation of kinship*. The links between parents, children, and children's children in the narrow descriptive and broader classificatory sense have been a mainstay of British social anthropologists. They fixed upon descent, filiation and succession, which meant that they appreciated the continuity across generations, and the ways in which it was ensured (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950). Even the French structuralist alliance theory was based on a concept of genealogical generation in that alliance through the exchange of women is not possible without a chain of following generations, concretized in the relation of children to their mother's brother.

But the fascination was not just for rules and structures, rights and obligations. From at least the publication of Radcliffe-Brown's 1924 seminal paper on the mother's brother in South Africa, the study of generational relations was about attitudes and sentiments as well. The quality of relations between generations was brilliantly analysed by Meyer Fortes, who contrasted the ambiguity and tension inherent in relations between adjacent generations with the warmth and informality between alternate generations. The giving away of children to foster parents, as conceptionalized in the work of Esther Goody (1982 and 1984), was a well-meaning attempt to offer them better futures. Even the relations between ancestors and their living sons are described in terms of dispositions such as submission and pietas (Fortes 1970 [1961]). The close-grained studies of the emotional qualities (amity, respect) and everyday practices (eating, working, dwelling, speaking, exchange and

sharing) that characterized intergenerational relations laid the foundation for later studies of relatedness. Carsten (2000:17) recognizes the value of these studies in showing how relatedness was constructed, but criticizes the separation into domestic and politico-jural domains that prioritized the latter as most important for analysing the cohesion of society. Several of the chapters in this book overcome that dichotomous domain thinking by showing how domestic concerns with food (Nyambedha, Kyaddondo) and space (Prince, Van Dongen) articulate political and historical forces affecting social cohesion.

In classic studies of geneaological generations, the interest in succession and in the politico-jural domain meant that conflict was very much on the agenda – conflict between generations concerning allocation of resources and within a generation over rights to succeed to office and property. Tensions over access to land and cattle, control over marriage through bridewealth, and rights to labour were analysed in terms of lineage fission, witchcraft accusations, and ritual authority. These concerns with political and economic aspects of generational relations were further developed by neo-Marxist and more materialist anthropologists. They showed how the senior generation maintained power through controlling the exchange of women (Meillasoux 1981) and how this fit with the division of labour and access to resources (Goody 1976). But the interest was certainly not only in the stable reproduction of generational relations. By the 1930s and 1940s work in central and southern Africa, some under the aegis of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, documented radical shifts as sons earning cash from labour migration became less dependent on their fathers. In some cases the older generation was even said to be becoming economically dependent on the younger (Mair 1969:103).

Overlapping the conceptualization of generation as genealogical relationship, was a second notion of generation as a *principle for structuring society*, beyond the specific links of kinship. In this sense, generation is similar to age. They are basic and seemingly universal modes of categorizing and grouping members of society. Both form criteria for classification based on biological position and progression through a life course. Both are ways of socializing time as an aspect of relationships and political-jural status. Chronological age, or birth order, places individuals on a lineal scale that corresponds more or less to biological aging. Maturational age, life stages, or age grades are socially marked and recognized milestones or phases that do not always correspond to chronological age. Generation is a relational term that refers to familial reproduction but by extension may denote categories of seniors and juniors in society at large. Age, life-stage, and generation form a family of structuring principles that can be analytically

distinguished, but that are often conflated and used as near synonyms for one another.

Heinrich Schurtz' book from 1902, 'Altersklassen und Männerbünde', can be regarded as the beginning of anthropological interest in age and generations. Schurtz was interested in the structuring potential of age sets as formal institutions and in the political implications of age-based status. He saw east African pastoral societies as prototypical of a type of organization, in which men (not women) were members of distinct groups in a hierarchical structure that determined responsibilities and rights and that cross-cut and contrasted with kinship ties. Much of the African ethnographic work followed his lead in underlining the political importance of age sets, that is, groups of men who passed together up a ladder of age-grades. However the editors of a collection on East African age organizations argued that gerontocracy was based on control of resources within the family domain, not on status in the age set system (Baxter and Almagor 1978:19).

The concern with political and jural rights in relation to age and generation was taken up by Eisenstadt (1956) in his ambitious attempt to theorize age groups in 'universalistic' (non-kinship based) and 'particularistic' (kinship based) societies (most examples of which were taken from African ethnography). His argument, endorsed by Fortes in a key essay on age, generation and social structure (1984), was that citizenship in the broader society might be achieved through age-heterogenous relations, primarily those of the family, or through age-homogeneous ones, such as those institutionalized in schools, military units, and other specialized organizations. Thus, Fortes and Eisenstadt came back to Schurtz's earlier attempt to establish age and generation as concepts that structure all kinds of societies worldwide.

The notion of age set or generation set, distinct from kinship relations, approaches the third concept of generation important for our purposes. That is the idea of *historical generation* or *generation as cohort*. It was Karl Mannheim who systematized this conceptualization in his famous essay 'The problem of generations' (1952 [1927]). Not social organization or kinship, but the history of thought styles inspired his thinking about generation. He was concerned with the 'location' of age cohorts within history; people born in the same period of time share common experiences, potienials and 'destinies'. Mannheim noted that while cultural heritage is continuously transmitted, each new generation of youth makes 'fresh contact' (ibid.: 293) with cultural inheritance on the basis of its different historical location. Within cohorts, 'generation units' represent sub-categories who 'work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways' (ibid: 304). Thus the analysis of historical generations shows how change occurs unevenly,

since differences and conflicts are found both within generations and between them.

Mannheim's concept of historical generation was mentioned only sporadically by anthropologists (Fortes 1984; Spencer 1990) until recently. But a growing interest in contemporary youth in Africa (Abbink and Van Kessel 2005; Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Christiansen et al. 2006) brought to the fore the historical circumstances of a particular cohort. Mannheim was found illuminating for analysing the difficult positions of young people (Cole 2004; Vigh 2006) and for addressing the issues of generations and globalization in a way that brought together forces of history and the intimacy of family relationships (Cole and Durham 2007).

Many of the contributors to our volume refer to Mannheim's concept of historical generation. It is evident, however, that they focus on different aspects of historical conditions. Claudia Roth refers to economic generations: the principal difference between older and younger people in her analysis is that the latter were born into another economic situation. Pierre-Yves Le Meur and Alice Bellagamba are dealing with political generations in their respective case studies, while Ruth Prince, Koen Stroeken, and Data Dea are more concerned with something like 'the spirit of the times.'

Reciprocity

The most important quality of intergenerational relationships is reciprocity. By this we mean a sense of mutual dependence expressed in give and take over time. Direct exchange of equivalents between genealogical generations does occur, but by and large exchange is indirect or generalized. Reciprocity is the better term because it captures both the sharing and transmission of resources and also mutual expressions of care and regard. Two characteristics of reciprocity emerge clearly in our contributions: it involves the transmission of (material and immaterial) resources and it is imbued with assumptions about morality.

The flow of resources is central in the analysis of relations between generations. Food, housing, land, livestock, labour, money, come immediately to mind, but other resources such as social co ntacts, knowledge, control of supernatural powers, and time spent nursing and nurturing are also part of the reciprocity between grandparents, parents and children. The early interest in lineality and succession focused on resources because their flow indicated patterns of social structure. Neo-Marxists appreciated that control of the means of production and reproduction defined power hierarchies between generations. In a shift away from political economy as well as biological assumptions about

kinship, the 'relatedness' approach emphasized the sharing of food, residence and bodily care as practices that generate a sense of mutuality and belonging. Our contributors move back to some of the earlier concerns in showing how lack of material resources and new but restricted means of accessing them affect patterns of reciprocity. The emphasis on resources fits well with the current focus on the consequences of economic globalization. But it is certainly not new in Africanist anthropology; the consequences of labour migration and the articulation of local with national and international economies has long been a theme in the study of generational relations. Monica Wilson's (1977) monograph on changing generational relations among the Nyakyusa-Ngonde people is a superb example.

Morality permeates the discussion of intergenerational relations. Perhaps because the transmission of resources is intertwined with the flow of life and fertility, expressions of sentiment and moral considerations pervade the way people talk about relations between generations. The value of the family and deference to parents are even enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981). Article 29 declares that the individual has the duty: 'to preserve the harmonious development of the family and to work for the cohesion and respect of the family; to respect his parents at all times, to maintain them in case of need.' The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child from 1989 sets out the rights of children and the obligations of adults to protect and support them. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990) covers the same rights but adds a section on 'the responsibilities of the child' (article 31), which includes: 'the duty to work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times, and to assist them in case of need.'

The 'intergenerational contract', that is the implicit expectation that parents will care for their children until they can care for themselves, and that children will support their parents when they can no longer support themselves, is a moral obligation. The rhythm of reciprocity is measured by life stages: childhood, puberty, marriage, parenthood, grandparenthood, or other phases set off by cultural punctuation. These too are saturated with moral expectations about what is appropriate between generations: paying school fees or bridewealth for children, helping young people into an occupation, providing shelter, food, and health care for the elderly. In Europe there is a flow of resources from old to young within the family, and from young to old in state pension schemes (Kohli and Szydlik 2000). There are only a few African states (mostly in southern Africa) providing pensions for all senior citizens; older people must depend on the goodness and compunction of their children when they are not able to provide for themselves. But even in

Europe, moral notions of obligation, solidarity, and justice underwrite reciprocity.

The other side of generational reciprocity is conflict, which is almost inevitable. As Wilson (1977:85) writes: 'Generation conflict is not something that emerged with an industrialized society. It was taken for granted in many pre-literate societies which devised a variety of institutions to control it.' What our contributors show is the emergence of contentions for which there are no obvious control mechanisms, such as conflicts over urban property in Van Dongen's chapter on South Africa. The ambiguities and uncertainties of these situations are explored in the chapters to follow.

Ambivalence characterizes parents' views of young children's ability to earn their own money in David Kyaddondo's study from rural eastern Uganda. Self-earned money makes children independent and less controllable by the older generation. Older people express their frustration over this lack of control and complain about the immorality and disrespect of today's younger generation. At the same time, parents—especially mothers—welcome the contributions made by working children to their own upkeep and that of the household. Giving money to one's mother shows deference but it also puts the child in a stronger negotiating position and underlines the inability or failure of fathers to provide sufficiently.

An opposite problem is explored by Claudia Roth in the city of Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso. In this urban environment many adult children fail to find gainful occupations and establish themselves independently. They continue to depend on their parents at a stage in their lives when they should be developing the resources with which to support their parents in their old age. This inversion of the intergenerational contract is a source of discomfort and frustration for both parents and children. Complaints and conflicts arise; both parties acknowledge a sense of moral failure. The 'inversion' of reciprocity affects the very concept of intergenerational rights and duties. One result is mutual ambivalence about the younger generation's transition to social adulthood. Another is the inability of the older generation to proceed to the phase of elderhood.

Misunderstanding between grandmothers and orphaned grandchildren in a poor and AIDS-stricken area of western Kenya is the theme of Erick Otieno Nyambedha's essay. The sharing of food between grandmother and grandchild was an important practice of relatedness in Luo society. The special foods provided by grandmothers were reciprocated by assistance in the home and garden. But the general commodification of life, impoverishment, schooling, and above all the depredations of HIV/AIDS have disrupted patterns of reciprocity.

Grandmothers now have to be mothers as well to AIDS orphans. They have never before lived so closely with their grandchildren yet paradoxically they feel profoundly separated from the world of 'children of today.'

Valentina Mazzucato investigates how Ghanaian migrants in The Netherlands attempt to fulfil the implicit contract to reciprocate their parents' care by remitting money to them back home. She shows the moral onus that many feel and their struggles and sometimes failures to carry the burden. Yet reciprocity is considered by some to be conditional upon parents having done their part and thus deserving support. Mazzucato brings to light conflicts of interest and ambition between the younger and older generation. She also describes the considerable diversity in kinds and extent of resource flows from the migrants to their parents: from setting them up in business, to providing housing, to occasional assistance for emergency medical expenses. Ghanaian migrants in The Netherlands confront a stark contrast between the Ghanaian pattern of elderly care with its informal and improvisational character and that of the host country with its emphasis on pensions and planning for an old age independent of one's children.

Past and present

Generational relations imply a specific historical experience and differing positions regarding the past and the present. Mannheim's concept of historical generation has been used to explore these contrasts, especially as regards youth. He wrote of age cohorts, not of generations in the sense of genealogical kinship and procreation. But one of the recurring aspects of generational concerns in Africa is the intertwining of kinship morality and contentions about the past and the present. When historical generations or particular age grades compare the past and the present they often do so in terms of the way children, parents, and grandparents relate with one another. In these discussions, discourses of complaint and neglect are common, mostly but not only voiced by the older generation. In certain cases, as our contributors show, the past is not only remembered as a better time; it is also seen as a source of tradition highly relevant to the present.

Complaints by the older generation that life was better when they were young, even if – and sometimes because – life was much harder then, are certainly not new. Cicero (106-43 BC), the Roman politician and philosopher and author of *De Senectute* (About Old Age) remarked that in the olden days people respected the older generation, implying that they did not in his time. Throughout the ages his complaint has been repeated or criticized by countless others including Machiavelli,

Montaigne, Cervantes and, more recently, Tönnies in his nostalgic concept of *Gemeinschaft*. Indeed: *O tempora, o mores!* (Alas for the times and the manners). Schapera (1940:265-66) wrote more than half a century ago about Botswana society:

> Nowadays, in fact, complaints about the behaviour of the children have become very common. It is said that they are cheeky and ill mannered, showing little respect for their parents and still less for other elderly people; … they have no morals in matters of sex, and their promiscuity is ruining the tribe, and filling it with bastards; they have lost all discipline and think only of their own pleasure.

Ingstad (2004) from whom this quotation is taken reports that the older generation in Botswana today launches similar complaints, as do many of the contributions to this volume. What makes the idealisation of the past and complaints about the present age such a common phenomenon?

It seems to us that elders' expressions of dissatisfaction should be seen as a struggle over respect and reputation; their complaints reveal what is at stake in the so-called generation conflict. The rivalry between young and old is expressed in the older people's insistence that they lived honourable and admirable lives in a morally superior era. This assertion is a way of countering the experience of being marginalised today, through the workings of historical forces or personal neglect and mistreatment from their children and grandchildren. Several anthropologists have argued that this 'complaint discourse' is effective; it enables older people in various African societies to ensure respect and support from the younger generation (Rosenberg 1997; Cattell 1997; Sagner 2002).

The contributors to this volume do not confirm this conclusion. Idealising the past and complaining about the present is rather a reflection of discord between generations; it aggravates rivalry and enhances alienation. Criticising the present day is counter productive and deprives the older people of the respect and recognition they hoped to win (cf. Van der Geest 2007).

There is another way of idealising the past that is less about complaint and more about the positive uses of the past. This is the objectification and valuation of tradition, as practices, knowledge, and beliefs from the past that take on significance in contrast with those of the present. There is a close link between tradition and modernity. If modernity is defined in part as a break with the past, then it is opposed to tradition. But as some of our contributors show, tradition may also be asserted by modernists as a way of opposing forces in the present or as a way of manoeuvering to achieve very current goals. It might seem logical

that the senior generation would be more focused on tradition, would even see themselves as the bearers of tradition. That is not necessarily the case. Seniors and juniors position themselves differently in relation to tradition. In several of the cases reported here, it is the younger generation that takes up the banner of tradition in the name of a past that they idealize as a way out of present difficulties to a better future. Tradition becomes a way of opposing the generation of their parents, who are construed as having betrayed it.

Gertud Boden studied the recent history of Khwe (San or 'Bushmen' related) people in West Caprivi, northeast Namibia. She combines Mannheim's concept of the historical generation with concerns about marriage and the transmission of resources to show 'how history enters the family sphere.' She links changes in marriage arrangements and bride service to the larger political and economic scene including labour migration to the mines, recruitment into the South African Defense Forces during the struggle for Namibian independence, and finally 'freedom' under the Namibian state and the experience of unemployment and discrimination (in part because of complicity with South Africa and Apartheid). The senior generation complains about the uselessness of today's youth; they offer nothing to their parents-in-law. Yet seniors also realize they cannot give young people what they need. 'Tradition' is evoked by parents and grandparents of today's youth as a basis for criticizing the (selfish) individualism promoted by national law and schooling. For young people, especially those working with NGOs that support Khwe as indigenous people, tradition has another value in a sphere of identity politics. For both young and old, tradition is about reading past and present in terms of one another, but they do so from different positions and to different purposes.

From western Kenya, Ruth Prince shows how fundamental the notion of generation is to Luo cosmology unfolding the contrast between growth, understood as direction and movement from generation to generation, and the 'mess' of stagnation that is the opposite of generation in its full sense. In dealing with the loss and death of today, people appeal to tradition as a set of rules and practices of kinship relations in everyday life. This self-conscious use of Luo tradition is not new, but as in the Khwe case, the significance of tradition depends on generational position. Prince compares its meaning for the historical generation of men working in towns in the 1960s and the later one of young people 'stuck' in the rural areas in the 1990s. For the older generation, tradition was a way of maintaining links to their rural kin as they pursued modernity in the wider world. In contrast to these 'old-fashioned modernists', young people in the 1990s, unemployed in a rural world shadowed by AIDS, are 'late modern traditionalists' who seek direction for the future in the tradition of

the past. 'Let us live off breaking rules so that we live,' is the traditionalist phrase that neatly captures the modernist trope of rupture with a bad past.

The struggle for life in the face of the AIDS epidemic is also the context for the mobilization of tradition in Swaziland, described by Ria Reis. She details the 2001 resurrection of part of an age set system that reinvented a national generation of young women. The kingdom of Swaziland had a system of age sets that cut across kinship and locality, and fit with conceptions of maturational age and life stage. One aspect of this system was *umcwasho*, the celebration of chastity by a cohort of young maidens, whom no man might touch for the prescribed duration of the *umcwasho* period. The institution had been defunct for more than two decades, and had in any case only been performed a few times since it became a national institution in 1935. The age and generation aspects of *umcwasho* made it singularly relevant as Swaziland took its unenviable place as the country with the highest HIV prevalence in the world. Young women in the age group 15-19 were most vulnerable and they were often infected by older men, some of whom belonged to the generation of their fathers. *Umcwasho* gave these young women more power and authority over their own lives vis-à-vis men of the older generation. On a broader scale it used 'tradition' to respond to a national threat by inventing an age set of young women to be safeguarded for the regeneration of Swazi society.

Nowhere among our case studies is the relationship between the generations so openly hostile and the contrast between past and present so contentious as in the South African study by Els van Dongen. She held conversations with elders who were in old-age homes or attending day-care centres in Cape Town. They had survived the oppression of the Apartheid regime and were now facing another enemy, within their own house: the younger generation. In a context of poverty they struggle to maintain control over their resources in the form of houses and pensions, and they lament the lack of care from the younger generation. Their accusations of violence and theft perpetrated upon them by the young are set in the wider political context of the past decades. By 'doing memory' they engage in a moral activity: judging the behaviour of the younger generation. They tell of 'social illness' caused by modernity. But the younger generation is undertaking a new start, and that means a 'radical break with the past', ignoring and silencing the memories of their seniors. Each party attempts to delegitimise the other by its construal of past and present. Van Dongen's account is not unredeemably bleak. It contains an important contrast between two groups within the senior generation. The bitterness of those who have taken refuge in old-age homes contrasts with the determination of other elders to stay in their own houses and help

sustain their children and grandchildren. And against the silencing of memory and deafness to the laments of the elderly runs another trend towards the politicization of the situation of 'state pensioners' through media representation and the commodification of their histories by those who would use their stories.

Politics

Gerontocracy was an important theme of the classic social anthropology of African societies (Bradbury 1969, Evans-Pritchard 1940). From East African pastoral societies (Spencer 2004 [1965]) to West African agricultural ones (Meillasoux 1981) scholars showed how the control of resources allowed older men to marry multiple wives, often very young ones, while young men had to wait until their fathers paid bridewealth for them. But gerontocracy was not only rooted in economic resources the old had accumulated during their long life. The old also possessed knowledge of cultural and religious traditions that placed them in a position of power vis-à-vis the younger generation (Aguilar 1998:24).

It should further be noted that studies of gerontocracy were not necessarily focused on older men, but on intergenerational relations and the power imbalance that upheld the dominance of older men over women and younger men. The paradoxes of economic and social transformation were elegantly unfolded in Parkin's small monograph on the Giriama of coastal Kenya, in which he showed how elders as witnesses 'uphold the gerontocratic ideal and yet subscribe to the capitalistic spirit which in the long term threatens to destroy the ideal that age is the prerequisite of authority' (Parkin 1972:101).

Spencer (1976) emphasized the importance of seeing gerontocracy in terms of the organization of the wider society and not just as an aspect of relations between opposed age sets. A later generation of anthropologists saw 'wider society' in national and even international terms, as opposed to the delimited tribal societies studied by their predecessors. While some were concerned with the conflation of age and patronage and how these made Africa 'work' in post-colonial states (Chabal and Daloz 1999), others focused on youth as a category in itself, marginalized in a situation that offered no way forward into meaningful adulthood. Our contributors take up the concern with young people but they do so by emphasizing the relations between this category and the more senior one. They place these relations between historical generations in a national political context, emphasizing the dialectic of dependence and autonomy, and the ways in which global flows of resources, discourses, and cultural forms affect the shifting character of intergenerational relations.

Conflicts over dependence and autonomy are built into intergenerational relationships. This was a major theme in the transmission of resources and control of marriage within the domain of kinship, and it was also prominent in analyses of age set systems where privileges were accorded progressively by age-grade. But while a younger generation might push for greater autonomy before their elders were prepared to grant it, seniors were ultimately committed to supporting the autonomy of their dependents, as we saw in the discussion of the intergenerational contract. Within families, elders hope to live into old-age cared for by their children. But the tension between autonomy and dependence has a different character in national politics, where patronage and generational relationships are conflated. Institutional mechanisms for containing the impatience of youth, rewards for dependency, or motivations to relinquish power are often weak or lacking. A key issue explored by our contributors is the fit between transmission of resources in the family realm and generational power in the national political realm. By taking a longer historical perspective than is often the case in studies of youth in Africa, they are able to show why the older pattern of gerontocracy is blurring.

Globalization, or local appropriation of forces and resources seen as exogenous, informs the analysis of intergenerational politics in several ways. Although the importance of wage labour for strengthening the autonomy of the younger generation has been appreciated for a long time, the particular constellation of political power, generation, and migration must be worked out in each case. Opportunities for migration change, as does its organization. In some situations, patrons who are members of the senior generation act as facilitators for those wishing to migrate or to gain paid employment near home. A job may be contingent on dependence rather than a guarantee of autonomy.

Donors and NGOs, including faith-based organizations, often promote a rhetoric of youth empowerment, part of a global discourse of development and human rights. As Durham (2007) argues for youth in Botswana, programmes for empowering youth envision an autonomous agent and citizen dependent on, or interdependent with, the nation or government, even though young people in reality continue to be dependent upon their seniors for all kinds of support. The question is to what extent projects for youth, in their avowed recognition of youth as citizens, impact on political relations between generations.

The global flow of youth culture is often seen as providing ways in which marginalized young people can 'articulate and identify with the force of subjugating powers' (Weiss 2005:118). Their painful position in the gap between aspirations and opportunities is expressed in music, dress, and talk. But when hip-hop songs turn their cutting edges to

national politics, they are more explicitly directed at the generational power hierarchy. As Lovell (2006:246) concludes from her analysis of youth and politics in Togo, it is necessary to reformulate how the political sphere is constituted if we are to grasp the significance of young people's expressions of rebellion.

Pierre-Yves Le Meur analyses the emergence of 'youth' as a category in the political history of a village in central Benin. He examines the productive tension between autonomy and dependence in a setting characterized by patron-client relations. Local elections in 1974 were a pivotal event that reconfigured hierarchies and categorised political relations as intergenerational. Older notables were not allowed to stand for election so they pushed youth forward. As their patrons they mobilised money and social networks, while young people played their usual role as mobilisers of labour for projects. But LeMeur shows that the patronage pattern seems to be weakening in this part of Benin, partly due to new patterns of labour migration that do not depend on patronage, and partly due to the rise of charismatic protestant churches that create a community as against clientage ties. Access to land and natural resources is not monopolized by patrons or senior kinsmen. Elders' control of youth labour is diminishing and autochthonous youth are even becoming brokers for immigrants.

Alice Bellagamba compares two generations of young people who confronted their elders in the struggle for power in Gambia. Disillusioned youth were jubilant over the coup of 1994 in which they saw hope for redemption from the hopelessness and corruption they blamed on the ruling elder generation. Ironically those elders were the very men who as youth had struggled for independence and democracy in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Using Mannheim's concept of historical generation, Bellagamba shows how the superficial similarity of youth mobilization and accession to power belies important differences in intergenerational relations. The youthful generation that led the country after independence gained support in the rural areas by affirming local social hierarchies based on clientelism, gender and age, as was the case in Benin. But a weakening national economy, deteriorating living conditions and rapid urbanization meant that the promises of independence did not materialize. There was collapse and despair in both urban and rural areas. The senior generation was unable to meet the needs of the younger one, and lost their respect. Young people increasingly adopted individualistic rhetoric of personal success rather than collective progress. And real success came to be equated with emigration to Europe or America.

While Bellagamba's perspective was historical, Michael Bourdillon gives an insider's view of contemporary intergenerational relations in an NGO for working children (mostly teenagers) in Zimbabwe. In line with

the ideology of child participation, adult facilitators try to give child members of the organization training and space to make decisions, speak for themselves, and manage their own affairs. This approach constrasts with the widespread assumption that children are dependent on adults and must fit into the worlds adults have created. The reality of intergenerational relations is complicated by differences within the two generations: donors are more highly ideological than the adults who actually work with the children; child leaders are more active and articulate than the children who form the main body of the organization. Bourdillon shows the paradox whereby it is the adults (especially the donors) who insist on children's control. At the same time, adults (including the author) feel an obligation to exercise residual control in order to insure the children's safety and welfare. It is difficult to discuss this need for adult control openly given the strong commitment to decision making by the children.

Weaving together Margaret Mead's old concept of 'generation gap' with an analysis of Tanzanian hip hop music, Koen Stroeken's chapter shows how generation can be mobilized in an incipient politics of identity, just as gender and ethnicity have been in other places and times. This active version of generation is informed by a linear dialectic of progress rather than the cyclical reciprocity that characterizes other understandings of generations. The political critique so ironically formulated in the rappers' music carries urgency and optimism in its orientation towards a new future. At the same time there is an underlying sense of tragedy in the loss of the certainties of the past. In its condemnation of the corrupt and compromised generation in power, hip hop music invokes the figure of the alternate grandparental generation with which it identifies. The 'new generation' sees itself as revelatory like the oldest one, and invites the parental generation to learn from it. In prefiguring the future, members of the new generation ask their parents to mend their ways and share in a movement of global significance.

Virtue

Virtue as moral excellence manifested in practice and recognized in the characters of social actors can be a matter of contention between generations. Just as we speak of ethnocentrism or androcentrism, we might use the term generationcentrism to draw attention to the ways in which morality and virtue are spoken of from a particular generational position. The refrains of complaint about the present compared to the past are a prime example of generationcentrism. Even though conceptions about the morality of reciprocity between generations are shared to a large extent, there are almost always differing perceptions of moral

adequacy in specific situations linked to differences in generational position. Assumptions about social value and morality are discussed in all the contributions to this volume. But we would like to point to two aspects of virtue that are problematized in several of the chapters, as matters of contention: sexual and reproductive integrity and wisdom or social sense.

Of course, sexuality and reproduction are at the very heart of generation in several of its senses. It is almost a given that they are issues of supreme importance and often conflict in intergenerational relations. One of the meanings of the old-fashioned word virtue is chastity; control of the sexual behaviour of young people, especially girls, is nearly always a worry of parents and it can become a critical matter for a whole nation, as the example of *umcwasho* in Swaziland illustrates. But virtue is not only about abstinence. It is also about the performance of discretion; in many African societies this means avoiding sexuality as a topic in interactions between adjacent genealogical generations. Valentine's Day in Ghana provides the occasion for unpacking the virtues of discretion in Astrid Bochow's chapter.

Virtue is also about the responsible undertaking of reproduction in the right circumstances, as Mette Ringsted shows. The old notion of life-stages implied a morality of social maturation, where virtuous accomplishment was recognized for each phase. Criticisms of the simple assumption that transitions work mechanically according to some kind of social programme are well-taken (Johnson-Hanks 2002). But this should not distract us from the task of trying to understand the different moral considerations at stake in expectations about life stages. It may be that people do not pass up the ladder of life in an inevitable progression. But there are still common ideals about virtuous parenthood and all the other morally meaningful relationships that go with it.

The other aspect of virtue is more diffuse and comprehensive: the sense, wisdom, or faith that guides the good life. On the one hand, this is the essence of the ethos that one generation passes to the next in the course of socialization. On the other, it is always generationcentric because of differences in historical experience. Our contributors describe situations in which children find their parents lacking in virtue, as well as the common ones where parents judge their children to fall short. The discourse of religious renewal practiced by young people provides a language for criticizing the moral shortcomings of senior generations, as shown in the chapter by Data Dea. Here virtue is about practice: fasting, monogamy, proper performance of ritual. But virtue can also be conceived as a capacity of the person to distinguish the good, to accept and give advice, to understand the social implications of action. Ringsted's analysis of teenage pregnancy turns not so much on the

condemnation of youth sexuality, as on the lack of sense (*akili*) shown by young mothers slipping around on the rungs of life-stages. Wisdom should be the virtue, indeed the gift of the elderly, passed on by them to younger generations. But just as parents found teenage mothers lacking in sense, young people in Ghana found their elders lacking in the kind of wisdom that might be an enduring virtue, according to Sjaak van der Geest. Perhaps the situation he describes is actually the most common of all intergenerational conversations about virtue: no open conflict, no high decibel arguments, just a polite and mutual lack of interest based on a sense of irrelevance.

Data Dea looks at the upsurge of religious zeal in contemporary Ethiopia from a generational perspective. A sharp shift in politics (the end of the Socialist regime) produces a new generation that competes with the old one for political power and moral authority. Dea shows that the youth's religious enthusiasm leads to a rupture with the senior generation only under certain circumstances. In both the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the many new Protestant Evangelical churches, young people are working for internal reform, often assuming more and more influence over church elders. They do this on the basis of a programme of virtue that advocates more rigid observance of ritual rules and a more ascetic lifestyle. More frequent and livelier religious events and more conspicuous ritual dress are associated with a new religious militancy that overshadows the historical peaceful co-existence of different religions in Ethiopia. Connection to the global community of believers strengthens young people in their opposition to their parents. They criticize them for being 'just cultural' rather than truly religious in the virtuous manner of the energized young people.

The lack of sexual virtue among the young is the focal point of Astrid Bochow's study of 'romantic love' dreams among young people in urban Ghana. Starting with the excitement and (according to the older people) promiscuity of Valentine's Day, the author argues that the domain of love and sexuality is extremely sensitive in intergenerational relations. Fear of parents and secrecy about romantic relationships make it impossible for young people to talk with their parents about love affairs. Bochow shows the difference in generational perspectives on these matters. Parents complain about immorality and their concerns are reinforced by the campaigning of the Pentecostal churches. Parents also fear pre-marital pregnancy and try to control the gift-giving that accompanies love relations. Young people too fear pregnancy, and to some extent accept the charge of immorality. But they also admire the alternative pattern of parent-child openness about romantic relationships that they see as Western. They claim that they will be more open with their own children. From their point of view, the issue is not so much

their own virtue but the nature of their relationships to their parents. In fact, pre- and extra-marital sex are probably nothing new in southern Ghana. What is new is the sexualization of the public sphere through public discussions of virtue and the threat posed by such phenomena as Valentine's Day.

Mette Line Ringsted takes up the issue of life-course transition in her examination of teenage motherhood in northeast Tanzania. She shows how problematic the notion of life-stage can be when children bear children and do not accept the change of status to mother and adulthood. This has implications for her relatives in the parental and grandparental generation. (The fathers of the babies are usually not involved.) To be an adult, a whole person (*mtu mzima*) is to be recognized as having social sense (*akili*)—the wisdom to make morally acceptable decisions and bear responsibility. Teenage mothers are evaluated and criticized not only for having gotten pregnant in the wrong circumstances. They are also seen to be lacking the virtue of 'social sense' that is necessary for being a mature person. When mothers are made grandmothers by their teenage daughters, they may end up becoming de facto mothers for the babies, if their daughters do not have the sense to take on the responsibility. When girls leave their babies with older relatives or fail to support their small children, the senior generations blame them for a lack of sense. That *akili* is a *social* virtue is clear from the fact that its insufficiency is consequential for people connected across several generations, including the very newest one.

Wisdom is the virtue addressed by Sjaak van der Geest in his essay on relations between old people and their descendents in Kwahu, Ghana. Wisdom too is imagined as a social virtue in that it should be shared with the younger generation, not only with genealogical grandchildren, but also with the historical generations whose shorter lives have been lived under different conditions. Van der Geest uses the concept of generativity, that is the drive for continuity outliving the self, to unpack Kwahu ideas about success and virtue. Virtue is the other side of success, and together these two qualities facilitate generativity. Wisdom as a virtue is often equated with knowledge about how to solve problems. Yet in spite of praises for the wisdom of the elders, few young people actually sought wisdom from their elders. Van der Geest suggests that conditions of life today have made that kind of wisdom outdated. Instead he suggests that wisdom may be understood as reflexivity about the illusionary character of life and as expertise in uncertainty. This type of wisdom is not limited to elders and is rare as an intergenerational gift in any society.

Spectacles

The grandfather on the cover of this book looks at us through a pair of spectacles, his eyes a bit indistinct. His grandson stares attentively at the camera. Then the old man playfully puts his glasses on the boy, whose expression shifts to acceptance and inattention. An ordinary pair, a common enough game, but the photo captures something important. The enduring connections between generations are there of course; despite war, AIDS, and economic deterioration, perhaps because of those disruptive forces, intergenerational relations remain massively important in Africa. The transmission of particular ways of perceiving the world continues; as we have seen there are even occasional attempts to revitalize tradition in an effort to find a vision for the future. But putting on someone else's glasses most often yields a fuzzy or distorted view. The irony of generational connection is that viewing the world through the eyes of the other generation remains an illusion; the irony of generational conflict is that opposing interests may be based on misunderstanding one another's perspective.

The chapters to follow are about differences in eyesight — not only contrasts in worldviews, but differing experiences in lifeworlds that nevertheless overlap and intertwine. If those distinctive historical positions bring generations into conflict, they also present the possibility of learning from one another—from children, as well as from parents and grandparents.

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