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by Aleida Mendes Borges

Abstract

All over Africa young people face serious economic, social and emotional challenges in their everyday lives as the generation hardest hit by the failures of neoliberalism (Honwana 2012). In the absence of political role models, this so-called ‘waithood generation’, has rejected traditionally understood notions of political participation associated with representative democracy and are taking the role of active citizens moving away from the ‘myopic obsession’ over voting and party systems.

In Cabo Verde in particular, where politics are characterised by vertical relations of everyday political life and citizen-state interactions, this paper analyses young people as a window to understanding broader socio-political and economic transformations and explore the ways in which these processes of change shape and are being shaped by the young. It highlights how despite all the challenges they face, youth are actively participating in political, social and economic developments and, in the process, constructing their own identities. Thus, departing from orthodox approaches to democracy, this paper considers dissent as central to politics, (Rancière 2011) and questions the viability of the current state of democracy and governance globally. Africa being the ‘youngest continent in the world’ with a median population of around 20 years old (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2012), what are the implications of these acts of social disobedience and dissent for representative democracy?

Keywords: Political Participation, Youth, Democracy,

“Democracy as a form of government is threatened by democracy as a form of social and political life, and so the former must repress the latter” (Rancière 2011, 5).

The current crises of the African state and the democratic system coincide with a simultaneous crisis in representation and political leadership (Manji and Fletcher 2013). These also coincide with a crisis of the Western economic and political system, resulting in a lack of trust in government institutions. Consequently, many studies have claimed that, particularly among youth, there is a generalised lack of interest in political participation (Forbrig 2005; Farthing 2010; Adsett 2003; Bennett 2008; Bessant 2016). While concerns about the perceived lack of political participation go back many decades, the focus has been overly biased towards researching rich nations, with well-established democratic systems, leaving the experiences of young people in poorer countries mostly unaccounted for (Philipps 2018). This research gap in the study of youth in Africa reinforces the silencing which citizens of poor countries are continuously subjected to, and undermines their agency and constant efforts to bring about societal transformation in their localised contexts. (Diouf 2003; Honwana 2005; A. M. Honwana 2012).

Recent political events point to a revival of the African youth and their increased engagement in challenging the political *modus operandi* on the continent. From the 15+2 in Angola, to the student protests in South Africa and the youth protests in Senegal and Cabo Verde, young people are enacting new spaces for political participation by becoming social actors constituting new political spaces (Honwana 2012; Rancière 2011; Bessant 2016). They demonstrate not only the fallacy of both the passive ‘youth in waitness’ and the ‘youth in crisis’ narratives which emphasise youth’s marginalisation and exclusion but also defy all expectations by creating new ‘geographies of citizenship’ (Rancière 2011; Neocosmos 2014; Honwana 2012) by bringing about new modalities of social engagement and action. They are doing so by taking advantage of mediums such as social media interaction to build an online civic space, public acts of civil disobedience and the creation and dissemination of ideas through local associations. Such initiatives aim at responding to localised, societal challenges often disregarded by the State such as gang violence, poverty alleviation, inequality, childcare provision and the promotion of vocational training.

Therefore, despite the relatively low levels of youth engagement in state-centred ‘institutional politics’ evidenced by the lack of commitment to voting at elections and interacting with political parties (Simões and Campos 2016; Forbrig 2005; Bessant 2016), critics argue that youth today, more than any other generation, have fought to develop vast arenas for political involvement outside institutional settings and are very aware of the impact politics has in their lives.

The dichotomous approach to youth political participation, which limits the understanding of the phenomena to either participation or apathy (Bessant 2016; Farthing 2010; Adsett 2003), fails to recognise the importance of youth agency in enacting new approaches to the political. This epistemological approach follows a traditional, adult-centred worldview, which tries to integrate youth into existing systems of governance, through the neutralisation of dissent, which for the most part clashes with the expectations of youth and results in strong opposition expressed through many artistic as well as other informal mediums. Hence, when research findings prematurely announce the disengagement of young people from politics, we may be looking at the wrong things (Wallace 2003). A more holistic approach to the understanding of youth political engagement and participation is required to acknowledge the agency of young Africans today in challenging the *status quo* and bringing about societal transformation, while operating outside traditional mediums of political participation.

For academics, practitioners and policy-makers interested in the future of democratic systems in Africa, particularly in small insular states, Cabo Verde offers an interesting perspective on the challenges of ‘consolidating democracy’ in the context of a Creole, post-colonial society, with no experience of civil war or armed struggle for independence, where therefore, the absence of conflict or violent contestation of elections does not necessarily imply the consolidation of democracy or democratic values within society. This paper argues that there is scope to better research and understand the challenges faced by young African citizens, today, in their localised communities and to emphasise them not as victims of a terrible globalised system of exploitation and corrupt governments, but as agents of societal transformation who are simultaneously shaping and being shaped by their social world (Honwana 2005; Honwana 2012). However, in order to achieve this, there is the need for an epistemological revolution (Sousa 2017) which departs from traditional paradigms of what

constitutes ‘the political’, how it is understood and which tools enable a better understanding of it.

Youth in Africa: ‘makers or breakers’¹ of society?

Youth as a social category has been both under-studied and under-theorised in the social sciences, as well as misunderstood and stereotyped in public discourse (Honwana 2005). This lack of understanding stems from the fact that the concept of youth is considered difficult to pin down analytically and was defined as ambiguous from the start, thus lacking conceptual clarity (Philipps 2018; Honwana 2015).

For Bourdieu youth is just a word (Bourdieu 1993, cited in Philipps 2018), with different meanings in different contexts. These different meanings are historically situated and constitute cultural constructions (Ariès, 1962, James and Prout, 1990). From a Foucauldian perspective, youth is not a neutral, descriptive concept, but rather a conceptual tool to develop the topography of power (Philipps 2018). As an anthropological category of sociocultural analysis, youth is approached as a heterogeneous, contested, social, and historically charged concept that varies from one sociocultural context to the other as well as marked by changing meanings attached to it within the same sociocultural space and time (Orock 2013). Thus, “whether used across different societies and times or in the same society and time, youth as a concept indexes shifting relationships of power and authority, responsibility and capability, agency and autonomy, and the moral configurations of society” (Durham 2004:117). It can thus become a discursive phenomenon, which can be used and manipulated by a myriad of actors both institutionally or otherwise for a mixture of purposes, ranging from political campaigns to radical and fundamentalist movements.

As argued by Honwana (2005), youth are often perceived through opposition to adulthood and as ‘people in the process of becoming rather than being’. They often appear on international agreements as pre-social and passive recipients of experience, often portrayed as dependent, immature and incapable of assuming responsibility; seen as ‘the next generation’, whose time and role in society is yet to come, yet to be fulfilled. However, ‘being young’ is a highly heterogeneous experience (Honwana and De Boeck 2005;

¹ Expression borrowed from Honwana and Boeck’s seminal edited volume “ Makers and Breakers: children & youth in postcolonial Africa (2005).

Gebremariam 2017; Forbrig 2005;Thorson 2012), which intersects with factors such as socio-economic status, gender, race, ethnicity, political & religious affiliation, the socio-historical context, culture as well as the political settlement (Khan 2017) of the society in question. Thus, as argued by Durham, the concept of youth is a ‘a ‘social shifter’: “a relational concept, situated in a dynamic context, a social landscape of power, knowledge, rights, and cultural notions of agency and personhood” (Durham, 2000:116) making it instrumental, as argued by Gebremariam (2017), to draw a distinction between young people as a segment of a population and youth or ‘youthfulness’ as a socially constructed category within society with varied and multifaced experiences and expectations (Honwana 2005).

As ‘makers of society’ (Honwana and De Boeck 2005), while youth contribute to the norms, structures and directions of society, they are also being shaped by them. They can act as political forces benefiting the powerful in society and simultaneously become sources of resistance and resilience. They also have the potential to become ‘breakers of society’, as emphasised by most of the literature on the so-called ‘youth bulge’, they have the propensity to break societal norms, conventions and rules. While on the one hand, young people constantly shake and shape society, on the other hand, they are also shaped and shaken by it through influence exerted as they are often pushed, pulled and coerced into various actions by being part of structures and processes over which they have little or no control such as family, community, the state, education and the media. In many parts of the world, youth are often more vulnerable to risk and poverty, they are often ‘used’ by powerful elites to advance their interests, manipulated during elections and then marginalised and destroyed by unemployment, exploitation, poverty and lack of access to education and training opportunities. Thus, over the last decade, we have witnessed the re-emergence of an academic debate focusing on the relationship between the state and youth as a social category (A. Honwana 2005; A. M. Honwana 2012; Simões and Campos 2016; Adsett 2003; Bessant 2016; Forbrig 2005).

In African studies, youth, as a social category, is emerging today as one of the central concerns (Diouf 2003). However, the problematizing of the ‘African youth’ as opposed to ‘other youth’ is not a new phenomenon. Robert D. Kaplan’s (1994) well-known essay ‘The Coming Anarchy’ posited, in apocalyptic prose, “that African States and eventually the world would be overwhelmed by overpopulation, environmental disasters, paired with organised crime, social disintegration, state decay, porous borders and the like, which would be caused

by West Africa, a ‘dying region’, whose ‘hordes’ of young men are like ‘loose molecules in a very unstable social fluid, a fluid that was clearly on the verge of igniting” (cited in Philipps 2018). This kind of discourse is emblematic of a tendency to generalise on the study of Africa which has led to a widespread acceptance of the idea of a particular, typically ‘African’ youth, as if reality was largely the same in Africa (poor, underdeveloped, victimised and lacking agency) and significantly different from the rest of the world (Philipps 2018).

Furthermore, the ‘youth question’ in Africa has become an issue of concern to politicians, government ministries, social workers, international organisations, communities and families (Diouf 2003). If on the one hand youth are regarded as perpetrators, on the other hand they are also seen as the main victims of crime. By the same token, while there is certainly a level of recognition of them as leaders in their communities, as innovators capable of being agents of societal transformation, they are equally criticised for being dupes in the globalisation of culture (Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Bessant 2016). Thus, although this characterisation of youth is not unique to Africa, there is a particular need to focus an analytical lens on the lives of contemporary young Africans in order to better understand the challenges they face today, in their communities within a failing system of representative democracy. Furthermore, there is a need to research and conceptualise them not as victims of a terrible globalised system of exploitation and corrupt governments, but rather see their role as agents of societal transformation who are both shaping and being shaped by their social world (A. Honwana 2005; A. M. Honwana 2012).

Youth Politics and Democratic Theory: is there space for youth in democratic theory?

The classical approach to youth political participation stems from socialisation theories of Eisenstadt (1956) and Coleman (1961 cited in France 2007) and it follows an ‘integrationist’ stance. As a result, political participation has been traditionally understood as a mechanism to ensure the control of dissent (Forbrig 2005) and requires the accepting of the so-called ‘establishment’ with little space for contestation. This approach is in line with orthodox ‘democratic theory’ (Schumpeter 1952), which conceptualises the “electoral mass” as incapable of political action other than to vote. At the heart of the orthodox approach to youth political participation is the idea that young people need to be integrated within formal

systems (Bessant 2016; Wallace 2003) and respect the authority and guidance of older citizens.

In the 1950s and the 1960s, there were growing anxieties over the ‘youth question’ amid the rise of youth unemployment and the subsequent occurrence of acts of civil disobedience. Therefore, various theories emerged to rationalise the role of youth in politics. For instance, Parsons (1952) conceptualised youth political participation to engender their ‘integration’ within existing institutions through the internalisation of dominant social norms and customs. Participation in this context became “more about controlling young people and regulating their activities in concordance with the requirements of the state system than about their autonomy or self-fulfilment” (Forbrig 2005, 22). This approach, later considered narrow and biased towards the preservation of the *status quo*, saw any deviation from such expectation as uncharacteristic because youth were considered merely passive ‘acceptants’ of adult values and practices, too young to know or care about political ideology or discourse. As such, further theories emerged to explain what was considered at the time to be deviant behaviour in places such as the USA, the UK and France. For instance, for Merton (1938) social disobedience was not out of geography or deviant groups in small neighbourhoods, rather it was a problem of mainstream values which emphasised the importance of material and monetary gain and then blocked youth from attaining such aspirations. Youth were thus, not actors with an agenda, but rather, merely reacting out of frustration for not being able to fulfil their aspirations. This is an argument which is still recurrent in attempts to rationalise youth urban violence in places such as London and New York, but also in smaller cities such as Praia, which in recent years have become increasingly influenced by USA urban culture.

For Cloward and Ohlin (1961) deviance was a mechanism used by young people to gain a high status in their own poor communities and thus did not emerge out of an ideological struggle, which intended to challenge the *status quo*. Instead, it was perceived more as a struggle for power than a struggle for change. Such a narrow analysis of the idea of deviance in political participation disregards the heterogeneity of the struggles of the youth within an integrationist mindset which denies their agency and does not value dissent as a form of political participation and engagement.

More recently, theorists have started to link the concept of participation with that of citizenship (Forbrig 2005; Arnstein, Sherry 1969; Thorson 2012) emphasising it as a question

of social exclusion vs. inclusion, thus recognising that social class, gender and race might also affect participation and thus need to be accounted for in research (Forbrig 2005; Thorson 2012). In this process political participation has become a central concept in youth studies and thus very attractive for research and policy agendas (Forbrig 2005).

The modern mainstream approach to youth political participation has been to analyse the perceived lack of engagement as a “decline of social capital” (Putnam 2001), as ‘social vulnerability’ (Tivadar and Mrvar 2002), and as political ‘marginalisation’ (Bessant 2016). However, a number of recent studies have challenged this view and argued that young people are indeed key actors in politics (Norris 2004; Claire Spencer 2016; Adsett 2003; Forbrig 2005; Young 2010) and instead of being passive by-standers they have reacted to their disillusionment by searching for and developing new forms of political participation that are more relevant to them. They are becoming part of what Neocosmos (2014) called ‘emancipatory politics’, the central aspect of which being that it can only exist at ‘political distance’ from state influence, making it top-down and independent from the limits of neo-liberal political thought, requiring consequently, flexible research strategies and epistemological approaches to properly account for it. This idea of being at political distance is particularly important in small insular states where politics are reserved for a small elite, a middle class enclave that, as argued by Cornwall (2008), seeks to normalise and ‘domesticate’ the popular classes through interventions involving ‘civilising’ citizens by teaching them about the importance of ‘participating properly’. The focus is on educating ‘citizens’, particularly younger ones, on the ‘ways of the state’ in an attempt to ensure the continuation of the *status quo* and compliance with State *modus operandi*. This may disrupt the potential exercise of agency and ultimately benefits both the state and the political elite which oftentimes are the slowest to show signs of change, adaptation or modernisation, continuing to operate in a logic of coloniality. This patronising and narrow approach may undermine, rather than facilitate citizenship and political participation from below.

The analysis of youth political participation is characterised by a binary between those who play by the rules and thus are deemed to ‘participate’ and those who wish to challenge the *status quo* and thus are deemed to not ‘participate’. This analysis reveals crucial differences on how ‘the political’ is understood. On the one hand, the narrow deliberative approach to democratic tradition relies on a restricted framing of the ‘political’, which omits the value of opposition and dissent (Rancière 2011) and thus chastises youth as disengaged

and apolitical. On the other hand, critics of the traditional paradox argue that the focus has been both adult and state centric (Thorson 2012; Forbrig 2005; Costa 2013; Bessant 2016). The ‘establishment’ has the monopoly on the decision of what a good citizen is and what the expectations are. This is achieved by completely ignoring the specific needs of youth, as well as other marginalised groups such as women, and neglecting their perspective on the future direction of their country. As O’Toole *et al* (2010) argued it becomes impossible to determine whether or not youth are becoming apolitical without understanding how different groups of youth understand politics from their perspective. Thus, analysing youth political participation from a state-centric approach will certainly produce a distorted understanding (Farthing 2010) of the phenomena.

The dominant traditional paradigm fails to account for the agency youth have in creating their own spaces for what they consider political participation to, which necessarily reflects their personal experiences. As argued by Levine (2008) the traditional approach obscures new modalities of political participation, ignores the heterogeneity of young people as a group and fails to explain the increased engagement of youth in voluntary projects, in ‘online-politics’ and in protests.

In response to these criticisms, a more heterodox approach, which moves away from the ‘myopic obsession’ (Farthing 2010) over voting and party systems emerged. The political is conceptualised as a space of contestation (Schaap 2011; Rancière 2011; Neocosmos 2014; Bessant 2016), bottom-up and non-institutional, hence shifting the focus from voting to new modalities of political participation. Within this new paradigm there is scope to acknowledge that youth all over the world are developing new ideas of politics through the enactment of new spaces for citizenship and political participation that are yet to be recognised both by the State and society as ‘doing politics’ (Bessant 2016; Farthing 2010; Simões and Campos 2016). Within the framework of new ‘spaces of citizenship; is quite important to note that “space is a social product... it is not simply ‘there’, a neutral container waiting to be filled, but it is a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control and hence domination, of power.” (Lefebvre 2011). Thus, it becomes important to analyse the extent to which these new spaces for political participation and the exercise of citizenship reproduce the same marginalisation and neglect of the overall society.

From the perspective of the state, there is a recognisable tension between, on the one hand, acknowledging youth as active political agents whom are behind the organisation of electoral campaigns, the recruitment of new members and are thus instrumental members of political parties and on the other hand, putting in place policies and interventions that seek to criminalise, discipline or re-educate young people that adopt particular kinds of behaviour that challenge a certain political order (Varela and Lima 2014; Lima 2012; Bessant 2016). Therefore, a more contextual understanding of the ‘politics of everyday life’ (Robins, Cornwall, and von Lieres 2008) is needed to progress in the theorisation of the ways in which youth are engaging in politics in their localised contexts.

Youth in insularity: young people and spaces for ‘doing politics’ in Cabo Verde

Cabo Verde is widely recognised as a democratic example in Africa (Baker 2006; Mo Ibrahim 2017; Borges 2017; Meyns 2002). It currently ranks 1st in Africa for Political Participation & Human Rights (Mo Ibrahim 2017) and since 2001, the country has achieved the highest score on the Freedom House Index with regard to both political rights and civil liberties. Furthermore, there was never a war or civil conflict within the national territory and since the country’s political transition to multiparty democracy in the early 1990s, there have been six presidential and parliamentary elections with a total of three changes of government through what has been deemed generally free and fair elections. This puts Cabo Verde in an exclusive category within the African context alongside countries such as Mauritius and Botswana.

Nevertheless, democratic success in Cabo Verde has been accompanied by rising social inequality and the marginalisation of disadvantaged social groups such as youth, women and the urban poor. Thus, such indicators need to be juxtaposed to a tradition of apartheid between politics and the people (Chabal 1992) resulting from very low levels of civic engagement outside the election period (Sarmiento 2013; Varela and Lima 2014). Thus, although the Mo Ibrahim Index (2017) places Cabo Verde as 1st in Africa for Political Participation because there are systems put in place to allow for such participation (freedom of association laws, freedom of expression provisions, lack political violence, etc), due to the socio-economic reality of the country most citizens, particularly young people whom are often yet to enter formal employment and thus yet to attain some level of economic freedom,

do not really organise to express political ideas outside party dynamics. There is thus a dominance of party competition in which the general population finds itself caught within, making it difficult to think of politics outside political party lines.

In terms of State-society relations, it can be argued that the authoritarian legacy of colonialism left the post-colonial State in Lusophone Africa (Monteiro 2015; Cardoso 2015; Varela and Lima 2014; Sarmiento 2013) with an ensuing feeling of ‘democratic deficit’ (Costa 2013) conditioning the relationship of the State particularly with marginalised groups such as youth, women and the poor (Neocosmos 2014) and contributing to high levels of dissatisfaction with the quality of democracy (over 50%) and to the low levels of interaction with government agencies (9%) to solve community problems (Afrobarometer 2017). Cabo Verde remains thus, a classic case of what Verba (1953) cited in Monteiro (2016) called the ‘*subject political culture*’ where the citizen’s relationship with democracy is essentially passive. This is associated with the fact that both independence in the 1970s and democratisation in the early 1990s were achieved through negotiations between political elites with a scarce participation of the society. Democratisation, therefore, did not encompass the bringing of the *dēmos* to *kratia*. The institutional routine, the political privileges as well as the decision-making processes were retained leaving citizens, particularly women, the young and the poor, marginalised by the process (Costa 2013; Sarmiento 2013; Varela and Lima 2014).

In Cabo Verde, therefore, despite youth constituting almost 70% of the population (following the African Union definition :15-35-year-olds), according to the latest information provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INE 2018), youth remain marginalised economically due to high levels of unemployment, as well as politically and socially due to their impoverishment, lack of opportunities and formal ‘spaces’ to exercise their citizenship.

Enacting new geographies for political participation: Youth, associations and everyday politics in Cabo Verde

With the advent of protest movements such as the Arab Spring, the ‘*Indignados*’ and ‘Occupy’, new spaces of political participation were enacted and subscribed to by young people all over the world. In Sub-Saharan Africa groups such as the *Y’ en a Marre* in Senegal

have successfully pushed their political agenda to ensure that the voice of the marginalised, denied by formal institutions, is heard through rap, graffiti and street protest. Similarly, in Cabo Verde, despite the long-lasting state of ‘civil society lethargy’ (Costa 2013; Sarmiento 2013), in March 2016, a few days after the victory of the opposition in the legislative elections, a group of young people organised across three different islands, as well as in the Diaspora, using mainly social media mediums such as Facebook and Whatsapp.

The group, #MAC114, protested and was successful in compelling the president to veto a law passed by the national assembly to increase the salary of civil servants and politicians, which was perceived by the population as outrageous, considering the already significant gap between the salaries of the political elite and those of the average citizen in Cabo Verde. It became very clear that youth in Cabo Verde today understood politics in a completely different way to older generations. While older citizens argued that there was no need for protests and that nothing could be achieved out of protests, younger citizens pushed ahead with the protests and eventually were very successful. The mood in the country, as evidenced by the vote for a change in government, was for change beyond rhetoric. Having, many of them, been exposed to other systems either through living and studying abroad, as well as through increased and more intensified contact with friends and family in the diaspora, it became clear that they had their own set of revindications and approaches to ‘the political’, in other words, on how to engage with politics, governance and democracy in their country.

Furthermore, interesting new activity is emerging among youth in poor urban neighbourhoods in Praia, the capital of Cabo Verde. While youth have always expressed political ideas through rap, graffiti and other art (R. W. D. Lima 2012; Varela and Lima 2014; R. W. Lima 2017), more recently, the trend has been to occupy previously abandoned public buildings to create new spaces for social interaction and enactments of citizenship through acts of everyday rebellion and civil disobedience (Ranci re 2011). Many believe that they are fighting a system that has failed to bring prosperity, and has instead, turned them into what Standing (2016) called the ‘precariat’ class, defined as:” a new class of many millions all over the world without an anchor of economic stability” (p. 1). The precariat was conceptualised by Standing to be different from other workers, even within the working poor because they lack a sense of belonging and a ‘secure work-based identity’. Thus, in this environment of insecurity and lacking a sense of belonging, these youth in Cabo Verde have gone beyond societal expectations and are claiming spaces (Cornwall 2002) for citizenship and civic engagement that have never been accessible to them before. Price-Chalita termed

the claiming of new spaces an ‘appropriation of the spatial’ defined as ‘creating new spaces, occupying existing spaces or revalorising negatively-labelled spaces (1994).

Furthermore, these youth are developing micro systems of local governance, through the creation of local associations, led by youth to fight the problems that are closer to them. This question of the creation of micro systems of governance in poor neighbourhoods becomes all the more relevant considering the current debate in Cabo Verde around regionalisation and power sharing within this small insular nation.

While most of these initiatives have gone almost unnoticed by the State, as they focus mostly on poor, informal and marginalised urban settlements, they are starting to gain societal recognition through various national prizes and they are undoubtedly challenging traditional perceptions of youth from poor neighbourhoods which tends to label them as thugs, violent, lazy and lacking any agency or competence to contribute to society. As their work gains more visibility the natural consequence should be a shift in the dominant paradigm based on the out-dated ‘*decline of social values*’ debate combined with the ‘*in my day*’ syndrome (Farthing 2010), which denies youth both their agency and the recognition for the vital contributions which, as a social group, they have always made from domains as diverse as arts, music, entrepreneurship, politics, education and general culture. The aim of highlighting their civic and political efforts is to challenge the widespread misrepresentation and misunderstanding of how youth today, particularly in Africa, experience ‘the political’ in their localised contexts of ineffective government policies which provide no space for youth voices and other marginalised groups such as women and the poor generally. The intense social, political and economic activity generated by these youth in different poor neighbourhoods in the capital are signalling to the State that it needs to re-evaluate its relationship with young people, particularly those in the peripheries.

This paper argues that civil society actors such as youth ‘community leaders’ can play a significant role in enabling poor people to claim their rights as citizens through forms of collective action, ‘solidaristic’ networks and popular education (Robins, Cornwall, and von Lieres 2008). Thus, youth-lead movements and demands for new spaces of citizenship can be constructed as challenges to the hegemony of a specific pattern of power relations, which in some cases, it can be argued, was inherited from a colonial system. This struggle to challenge the *status quo* constitutes, therefore, an attempt to build a new social contract with different state-society relations. However, can it be said that such change contributes to transforming

patterns of exclusion and social justice and to challenging power relations? Chatterjee (2004), argued that it remains the case that, particularly in poor countries, with limited resources such as Cabo Verde, the key priority of governmental bodies remains the administering of populations and responding to their particular demands. Thus, there is little preoccupation with the provision of arenas for democratic deliberation, the power-sharing, the consolidation of democracy and the levels of public satisfaction with the current political system. It is a government approach shaped by an ideology and practice of governmentality. Diouf, on the other hand, posited that through political demonstrations and alternative forms of political participation that were bottom-up and non-institutional youth groups managed to, over a long period of time, challenge tradition and authoritarianism and redefine new spaces and forms of citizenship.

Conclusion

Despite the various indicators of the success of the Cabo-Verdean democratic model, there remains a feeling of democratic deficit and dissatisfaction with the way the political system works. This paper has sought to emphasise that excluded from the arenas of power, work, education, and leisure, young Cabo-Verdeans, particularly those from poor urban neighbourhoods have sought to enact new forms of community engagement and socialisation. Considering that youth today navigate a world that has become simultaneously more interconnected and less capable of silencing long-standing inequalities (Philipps 2018), they are using their increased access to technology and information to develop new forms of engaging with politics and their communities. The main function of such initiatives, associations and manifestations is to draw attention to and solve localised community issues and to give more visibility to the marginalisation of the poor and peripheric citizens who often do not have a voice or a space of expression. These initiatives operate either on the margins of society or at its heart, rendering these youth simultaneously victims of neglect, and active agents of societal transformation. The ideological and cultural reorganisation that flows from these enactments of citizenship takes place in spaces deserted by political powers and outside dominant political cultures, which then works to the advantage of the margins, which go from being unoccupied areas in which emptiness and uncertainty are dominant to becoming places of possibility which are ready to be filled, conquered, and named. That

because, as posited by Bell Hooks, “marginality is much more than a site of deprivation. It is also a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance” (Hooks 1989, 23).

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