



Getting a picture of the Cape Flats and the ImaginingOtherwise Youth Arts Festival

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South Africa is perhaps best known for two things: the decades long race-conflict known as Apartheid and former president Nelson Mandela who was responsible for negotiating the largely peaceful transition to democracy.

Thirty years ago, young people relied on a generation of freedom fighters to implement the changes they fought for: yet today, South Africa is known as the most economically unequal country in the world, in a racially divided city. What does being young in Cape Town mean for different communities? What do young people in different communities imagine alternatives to look like?

Introducing the Cape Flats:

Apartheid's strategic social engineering is perhaps most starkly present in the area of the Cape Flats – about 25 km in all. 'Difference' in race, religion, hybridity, and language come together in complex ways that collapse and also problematize the nature of categories. Today, so-called coloured people usually speak Afrikaans as a first language, and remain marginalised by virtue of difference from the majority Black ANC government.

To get a picture of the context of life in the racialised spatial stages of the Cape Flats, Maggi Fernando, our project coordinator who has a background as a performer and theatre maker trained by Magnet Theatre and UCT tells us:

“Being a young person is extremely challenging in the Cape flats due to” “languages and cultures. There’s a shortage of recreational facilities, and this” “can mean that young people feeling there are no safe spaces for learning and” “creativity”. She explains “the Cape flats has a high rate of unemployment, and” “there is overcrowding due to the cost of living.”

Maggi mentions that:

“Many of the young people come from a strict home background with a social context that includes teenage pregnancy, school drop outs, alcohol abuse and peer pressure always bring about inner conflict”. She says this results in “looking for a sense of belonging.”

Apartheid legacies mean that the spatial politics is characterised by exclusion, aridity, overcrowding and containment. Added to this, costs of transport [the vital connection between life (home) and value (work)] can make accessing other resources across the city very difficult. There is a lack of employment opportunities and for those who find work, minimum wage.

Our partners BottomUp tell us that education has its specific issues: school safety, teacher preparedness for complex social issues, as well as rigid approaches to teaching and learning.

THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE AMONG THE YOUTH IS HIGHER IRRESPECTIVE OF EDUCATION LEVEL

Unemployment rate by education level and age group, Q1:2019

Change: Percentage points Q4:2018 to Q1:2019



- Diminished class mobility (which in this context is probably associated with moving out of the neighbourhood);
- How people manage everyday lives characterised by extreme violence: associated with gun crime, drug trade and gangs;
- Context that is paradoxically forged by state forgetting which then justifies state surveillance and intervention in the name of securitisation (as in the 2019 military takeover (see Bax et al, 2019 & UCT law students, 2018));
- Young people dropping out of school: the need for children to start earning or minding their siblings/ teen pregnancy etc.

The 2020 Tshisimani Arts Festival

2020 marks thirty years since Mandela was released and South Africa became a symbol of hope across the world. It was a time when anything seemed possible. Thirty years later, possibility has been replaced with uncertainty particularly for youth: will it be possible to get a decent education, a job, funding for further education, to openly live my sexual identity, to feel safe? In a world of climate change and political instability and pandemics, as well as a country dominated by economic, educational, unemployment, health and gender-based violence crises, the future seems even more uncertain.

While uncertainty often defines being young, it also means being open to change and shaping a future that is always changing and not yet determined. Globally, it is young people that are leading struggles for change as they demand a more just world and imagine otherwise.

Our event in September, Tshisimani Youth Arts Festival will focus on how young people understand crisis and uncertainty in their lives, and how they imagine change.

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COVID-19 world look like? How will young people drive this change? We are also creatively grappling with what a no-contact arts festival might look like. How might collaborative art-making happen when we are physically isolated?

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Sources:

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TAGS: APARTHEID ARTS AND HUMANITIES CLASS COVID-19 EDUCATION SOUTH AFRICA

