GENEVIEVE RITCHIE

2. "YOUTH" AS THEORY, METHOD, AND PRAXIS

INTRODUCTION

The category "youth" appears as a stage in the *natural* progression of an individual's life. There is, however, deep and expansive politics that give meaning to the category youth. Within contemporary debates, the struggle to define youth has positioned young adults at the centre of policy frameworks, state-led initiatives, and international development discussions, which are concretizing various distinctions between "emerging" and established adults in terms of a range of characteristics, including their civic and economic participation. The efficacy of the category youth can be linked to its broadening reach, expanding both upward into age ranges above 25 (and even 35 in some cases), and downward to incorporate those in their late teens. The ballooning category is then politicized by threats of large mobs of disaffected and jobless youth, or a promise of the economic potential that lies latent within a population of young people eager for the correct education and training (Damon, 2004; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015; United Nations, 2016; World Bank, 2006). Historicizing the social construction of youth, Sukarieh and Tannock (2015) demonstrate that the category youth has never simply described an age range, and has usually been deployed to serve the changing needs of the elite. For example, characterizing youth as a time of leisure and unconstrained consumption normalizes white middle-class family formations and occludes the economic and social struggles of working-class and racialized people. In their assessment, moreover, today's understanding of youth has its roots in the rise of industrial capitalism and the associated configurations of public and private spheres. Constructing youth as not yet completely independent participants in the public sphere has engendered a transitional life stage between child and adult, which is both a potential threat and a great resource. The category youth, therefore, must be understood as bound to the norms of social reproduction, and the ballooning of the category should give us reason to pause and reconsider the relationship between capitalism, neoliberal ideology, and the rise of youth as a distinct (and extended) period in one's life.

The following analysis begins with the observation that across policy discussions, which draw on a framework known as the positive approach to youth, young adults are being described in contradictory terms. Rather than attempting to resolve the contradiction that the positive approach espouses, my analysis seeks to understand the epistemological and ontological rooting that form the contradiction "youth at-risk"/"youth as-assets". Situating the positive approach to youth within human capital

S. Carpenter & S. Mojab (Eds.), Youth as/in Crisis, 13–26.

theory, I argue that dominant articulations of youth are part of the ideological fabric constituting the neoliberal form of capitalism. The contradictory position of youth can then be understood as a tool for naturalizing human capital, and individualizing the social relations that young adults experience as racialization and gender.

The latter phases of the discussion are broadly organized by the question of how to challenge dominant social relations. If we do not accept human capital as the universal solution to the challenges faced by young adults, which threads should we tug on to unravel capitalist social relations? Sociological discussions of youth have been largely organized by a metaphoric transition into adulthood, which characterizes youth as the transitional stage between child and adult. Surveying the literature that employs, rejects, or re-orients the youth as transition metaphor, I broadly sketch out the conceptual moves that gave rise to the generational approach to today's youth. Although the generational approach has overcome some of the limitations of the youth as transition framework, it perpetuates an atomizing ontology. The ontological foundation of the generational framework mirrors the positive approach, and thus the two approaches articulate distinct yet complementary frameworks for explicating the experiences of today's young adults. At the crux of my critique is the argument that we cannot understand the particularities of youth experienced today in abstraction from the history of accumulation and dispossession. The discussion concludes by emphasizing the historical and capitalist social processes that form the preconditions for contemporary formations of youth. Rather than viewing youth as historically and socially distinct, I contend that the ideological apparatus constituting the youth formation engenders the appearance of distinctiveness, while the material essence, firmly rooted in the capital/labour contradiction, simultaneously exhibits continuity.

The overarching analysis is rooted in a dialectical epistemology and ontology, which understands phenomena through their internal contradictions. A dialectical contradiction is the internal struggle between two opposite forces that mutually and reciprocally shape the relation as a whole. For example, the capital/labour contradiction is constituted through, and takes its shape from, the ongoing struggle between capitalists and workers. While the appearance of a given phenomenon, such as youth, may articulate the contours of a particular social relation, we must also grapple with its essence to understand the relation as a whole. There is, in other words, an internal contradiction of essence and appearance that constitutes youth. This is not to say that appearances are somehow less real or do not orient consciousness and praxis; rather, my concern is that if appearances are interrogated in abstraction from material essence only a partial explanation can be formed leaving us ill-equipped to critically transform social relations as a whole (Allman, 2007; Marx & Engels, 1970). Explicating Marx's dialectical theory of consciousness and praxis, Paula Allman (2007) notes that critical/revolutionary praxis cannot be imposed upon people and instead must be chosen through a thoughtful engagement with their material conditions. While consciousness (and praxis) is the active sensuous and relational practices/experience of humans, critical/revolutionary praxis requires knowledge of both the essence and appearance of phenomena. Drawing from the

weighty philosophy of Marx and Allman, the following discussion rethinks the appearance of the youth formation, that is, a particular formation of theory, method, and praxis coalescing into the category youth, and situates this formation in the ongoing struggle between capital and labour.

CATEGORIZING YOUNG ADULTS

Today's young adults are confronted by a complex arrangement of economic frameworks and political policies that depict youth as lacking employable skills, while simultaneously removing access to socialized services. Drawing a contrast with the labour market conditions of the 1990s, the United Nations (UN) notes that young people entering the labour market today are significantly less likely to be able to gain secure employment. Furthermore, a "staggering number" of young people are not currently in education, employment, or training (a phenomenon referred to as NEET) "delaying their full socioeconomic integration" (UN, 2016, p. 12). In the United Kingdom and Australia, at the very same time that NEET young adults became the target of government policy initiatives, social welfare policies for those under 25 were being cut, making it harder for young adults to access income supports. Accessing tertiary education, however, is also understood as prolonging the transition into adulthood when it is accompanied by lower levels of financial independence, and remaining in the family home (Bessant, 2002; Furlong, 2006, 2009; Lawy, Quinn, & Diment, 2010; Roberts, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2000). What is striking about the depiction of youth as ill-equipped and overly dependent is that the status of adulthood becomes harder to attain at the very same time that austerity measures critiqued so-called social (welfare) dependency. Failing to attain the markers of independence, synonymous with adulthood, can then be constructed as a problem faced by individual youth, and the category youth at-risk emerges as a social problem in need of attention.

Linking the rising global youth unemployment rates with illiberal political conditions or cultural inequalities, youth are described as at-risk. Everything from bullying, racism, and political activism to gun violence or militarized extremism has been employed to illustrate the seriousness of ignoring disaffected youth (The Ministry of Child and Youth Services [MCYS], 2014; World Bank, 2006). At the crux of the youth at-risk problem is the argument that youth who do not participate in the labour market and liberal democratic traditions will have their individual development and personal agency impaired, which is said to breed mistrust in public institutions and cause social disengagement (MCYS, 2014; UN, 2016; World Bank, 2006). Bessant (2002) argues that the youth at-risk category is a wide net cast far enough to include all young people, thereby making policy interventions both responsible and necessary. The formulation youth at-risk theorizes individual development as a problem for social stability and economic growth. In this sense, youth at-risk embody a complex array of social problems, and youth policy interventions are a method for tethering individual development to economic growth.

The category youth at-risk, however, does not work alone. The notion of youth as-assets forms the complementary opposite to youth at-risk. From the perspective of the World Bank, youth is an important transitional period of intense learning when the human capital necessary for thwarting the intergenerational transmission of poverty can be acquired, which will, in turn, encourage private investment in the economy (World Bank, 2006). The skills learned and developed by young adults are thus placed at the centre of an economic development model, and the acquisition of human capital is positioned as the primary purpose of training and education. In developed capitalist societies the so-called demographic dividend that youth embody is said to ease the economic strain of an aging population, and, if managed correctly, can reduce costs to social services (MCYS, 2014; World Bank, 2006). There are a number of observable tensions that arise from the categorization of youth as simultaneously at-risk and as-assets. For example, contemporary cohorts of young adults constitute both a burden on, and solution for, state expenditure. Moreover, no matter if youth are NEET, lacking skills, victims of racism and bullying, or highly educated yet not financially secure, fostering the human capital of youth can transform all young adults into society's greatest asset. On the surface, the contradictory position of youth (that is, youth at-risk/youth as-assets) could be said to dissolve into the multitude of individuals, or atomized units, that constitute society as a whole. If, however, the contradictory position of youth is problematized as indicative of a deeper formation of social, political, and economic relations, then we need to question not only the contemporary appearance of the youth formation but also its epistemological and ontological rooting.

Before delving deeper into the contradictory position of youth, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the liberal ontology that undergirds dominant articulations of youth. As Himani Bannerji (2015) argues, from a liberal vantage point the social whole is conceived as a collection of discrete issues, or atomized units, that can be arranged into different aggregations for the purpose of analysis. The atomized ontology of liberalism thus precludes the mutual constitution of phenomena and building knowledge of social formations presents the cumbersome task of establishing links between abstract categories. Both Dorothy Smith (1999, 2011) and Himani Bannerji (2015, 2016) argue that the epistemological fracturing of social relations constitutes an ideological practice of knowledge production that renders the social relations of ruling less visible. More than simply a synonym for politicized discourse, ideology is a historically specific practice of knowledge production, rooted in the specialization of intellectual labour, that grants primacy to concepts, and as such, ideas are positioned as the prime movers of history while individuals are reduced to the bearers of discourse. Liberal ideology, and thus by extension neoliberal ideology, conceals its atomizing ontology by naturalizing the separation of the individual from society and then reconstituting the social whole through a democratic contract articulated as legal rights and responsibilities. The contradiction between the liberal tenet of formal equality, and the observable continuation of exploitation and oppression reflects both the severing of ontology

from epistemology, and the historical interweaving of capitalism and liberal democracy. At the very same time, the disharmony between theory and experience presents a fissure that can be cracked open to expose the obfuscations of liberal and neoliberal theory. Turning now to the conceptual apparatus constituting youth, it is important to be attuned not only to the particular concepts that are deployed as a response to the contradictory position of youth, but also the extent to which youth discussions conceal or mystify broader social and historical relations.

The Positive Approach to Youth

A common thread that runs through more recent youth policy initiatives is the positive approach to youth development (also termed the ecological approach). Explicitly rejecting the idea that young people are in some way deficient or lacking self-sufficiency, the positive approach to youth argues that young people are intrinsically resilient and capable of contributing to society (Damon, 2004; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2008). The notion that young people are naturally resilient and capable is not in itself an ideological premise. However, youth resilience sits at the centre of a linear and universalizing model of human development that is oriented by the neoliberal theory of human capital (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2008; World Bank, 2006). Theorizing the transition into adulthood, the positive approach positions the abstract young individual (devoid of race, class, and gender) as separate from society, and the praxis of becoming an adult is conflated with the acquisition of human capital. While the model of youth development presented by the positive approach abstracts young people from the socio-historical relations of race, class, and gender, it must contend with the concrete realities that young people face. In other words, having severed young people from material social relations, the positive approach must create the ideological glue to reconstitute the social whole. The resilience and capabilities of young adults is that glue.

By challenging social welfare frameworks, which aimed to shelter young people from the pressures of the economy, the positive approach argues that youth ought to bear their full share of rights and responsibilities. The resilience of young adults has been used as a justification for scaling back income supports, as well as linking youth services to entrepreneurship, internships, and volunteerism (Damon, 2004; MCYS, 2014; World Bank, 2006). In other words, the asset embodied by youth is unwaged labour. The precarious and insecure work experiences of young adults are concealed behind the ideological premise of natural resilience. Furthermore, targeted as youth at-risk, Aboriginal, newcomer, racialized, and queer young adults are described as facing additional barriers to gaining work experience and accessing education. Here again, the trifecta of unwaged labour, that is, volunteering, internships, and entrepreneurship, are positioned as a method for building capacity, which will help young people overcome individual barriers to social participation before they reach adulthood (Damon, 2004; MCYS, 2014; World Bank, 2006). Funnelling complex histories of colonization, patriarchy, and racialization into the contained category youth at-risk allows the positive approach to individualize and temporally delimit

the experiences that inform and organize racism, homophobia, and misogyny, while simultaneously erasing the historical relationship between unwaged labour and capitalist accumulation. Various manifestations of discrimination can then be treated as ontologically separate from one another (and histories of dispossession), and human capital is positioned as the universal solution. Not only does the positive approach to youth position capitalist social relations as the solution for, rather than precursor to, oppression, but it also attempts to naturalize class relations by imbricating human capital in the process of becoming an adult.

Discussing the social construction of youth, Sukarieh and Tannock (2008, 2015) argue that the rise of the positive approach to youth coevals with neoliberal political economy. As such, contemporary articulations of youth must be situated within the broader neoliberal objective of fortifying the class power of the capitalist elite. In the hands of neoliberal advocates the contradictory position of youth is deployed to valorize liberal capitalist democracy and erase or vilify the praxis of young adults when it strays from liberalism. The more general denial of youth resistance gestures to a preservationist thread within neoliberal ideology. In the aftermath of financial and refugee crises, and with the intensifying rumbling of fascism, the unresolvable contradictions of liberal capitalist democracy are festering. Drawing youth into the class project of reproducing neoliberalism is a mode by which the current form of capitalist democracy, and its corresponding forms of consciousness, might be preserved. The reproduction of existing social relations implies a predetermined end, and as such youth must be positioned as the heirs to, rather than the architects of, the future. The relationship between youth, that is the next generation of workers, citizens, parents, and caregivers, and the trajectory of social relations brings the importance of youth into view; which is to note that at the heart of the youth formation is not only a model for the future but the question of class struggle. The struggle to define youth is, therefore, an arena for reproducing, reforming, or critically transforming social relations. The question that needs to be brought forward into the following section is the extent to which scholarly debates either normalize or confront the existing form of capitalism, and its associated neoliberal ideology. Are youth conceptualized as the bearers of neoliberal discourse, or as agents of critical/revolutionary transformation?

Surveying the debate that surrounds the school-to-work transition, the following section sketches out the epistemological terrain that gave rise to the generational approach to youth. Early discussions pertaining to youth transitions, which predate neoliberalism, have largely been dismissed as too simplistic or falsely universalizing a single step transition into adulthood, and for this reason, I have not included them in the discussion. It is worth noting, however, that some earlier class-based critiques of a universal youth experience, such as Willis (1977), have been de-emphasized by the epistemological trends of the 1980s and ’90s, which focused attention on individual identity formation (Furlong, 2009; Rudd, 1997). I have chosen to pick up the thread of youth transitions after the epistemological turn toward individualism because I am explicitly interested in the less visible convergences between neoliberal ideology and the theoretical framing of youth consciousness and praxis.

THEORIZING YOUTH

From a Transitional Stage to a Distinct Generation

The metaphoric transition into adulthood articulates the idea that young adults move through a set of stages, attain predetermined markers signalling independence, and then arrive at the status of adult. As such, the transition metaphor describes an abstracted process that will be influenced by the contextual particularities of a given milieu. Implicit in the transition metaphor is the notion that young adults have not yet reached the status of full citizen/worker, and that the transitional period can be smooth (single step from school-to-work), prolonged, or interrupted. Following the logic of youth as a transitional stage, the primary role of education, training, civic engagement, and preliminary labour market participation is to aid the process by which one reaches the endpoint known as adulthood. Research done with a transitions approach has successfully delineated the ways in which deindustrialization, the rise of service sector jobs, and the increased labour market participation of women have reshaped the general character of the school-to-work transition (Furlong, 2006, 2009; Lawy, Quinn, & Diment, 2010; Rudd, 1997; Thompson, 2011; Wyn, 2014). Conversely, calling into question the explanatory power of the transition metaphor authors, such as Davis (2014) and Raffo and Reeves (2000), suggest that greater attention needs to be given to cultural or ethnic identities, and individual narratives of young adults. At the crux of this debate is a deeper, unresolvable tension between whether emphasis ought to be placed on either the forces of socialization (embodied in the family, workplace, etc.) or the individual agency of young adults. Reframing the central tension between agency and socialization, we can also note that the transition metaphor is premised on the universality of experience (all people become adults), while agency-centring approaches highlight the particularities of individual experience.

Retracing the conceptual divide between agency-centring and transition-based approaches, Woodman (2009) notes that the current orthodoxy in the sociology of youth is to work with a middle ground approach. Such approaches tend to emphasize notions of bounded agency or structured individualization. Furlong, Woodman and Wyn (2011) critique the middle ground approach for its failure to transcend the false binary of structure and agency, and instead argue for a focus on social generations. Similarly, Wyn (2014) and Cuervo and Wyn (2014) argue that emphasizing notions of belonging in connection with an analysis of a social generation is a way to explore the relationship between subjectivity and place (or context). Although the notion of a social generation moves beyond the false binary of structure and agency, I contend that the generational approach is rooted in an atomized ontology and depicts social relations as interactions between units of analysis. Taking a closer look at how the generational approach has been elaborated by its primary theorists Wyn and Woodman, I find reason to question the extent to which the framework provides a theoretical basis for challenging the various forms of oppression, exploitation, and dispossession that young adults are currently confronted by. Additionally, it is

worth noting that although both authors gesture to the fact that race impacts the lives of some young adults, neither has taken up an explicit consideration of race or racialization. Thus, my analysis begins from the observation that race has been relegated to an individual subjective experience and/or discrete category, rather than a formation of social relations that orient the consciousness and praxis of all young adults, albeit in very different ways.

Distinct Yet Partial: Explicating the Current Generation

The generational approach outlined by Wyn and Woodman (2006) starts from the premise that there are distinct material conditions and associated subjectivities that constitute the current generation of young adults. For Wyn and Woodman, a generation is more than simply a birth cohort, it is also formed through the social, political, and economic context that organizes the lives of individuals. The distinctiveness of our current moment is emphasized by pointing to the increasing prevalence of non-standard work hours and employment insecurity, as well as increasing access to, and time spent in, education and training (Furlong, Woodman, & Wyn, 2011; Wyn, 2014; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). A social generation, therefore, is not a universalized phase of life, but rather is a commonality of conditions and experiences that mark each contextually specific grouping of young adults. For Furlong, Woodman and Wyn (2011), moreover, cultural responses to shifts in material conditions "can no longer be neatly mapped onto structural positions such as class or gender" (p. 363). The political economy of what they term to be *late modernity* reconfigures the experiences of young people so that class-based resources are less important than individual aptitudes (Furlong, Woodman, & Wyn, 2011). To summarize, their analysis is balanced on the premise that there has been a decisive shift in material conditions that more or less aligns with the current generation of youth. Social change sits both at the forefront of the framework and creates a definite temporal division in the characteristics of capitalist social relations.

The centrality of social change is not the sole defining feature of Wyn and Woodman's theory of a social generation, however. For Wyn and Woodman (2006) the implications of social change must be understood through the distinctive features of generational subjectivity. The dual foci of context and subjectivity are intended to emphasize the fact that young adults actively navigate and respond to changing labour market demands or consumptive cultures. Young individuals are said to build subjective narratives of personal choice, cultural capital, or self-management as they attempt to find their place or sense of belonging within the generational context. Today's young adults, moreover, are said to understand the self as a project and engage in so-called identity work, which enables them to be adaptable (Furlong, Woodman, & Wyn, 2011; Wyn, 2014; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Viewed through the generational approach, the process of becoming an adult can also be understood as a subjective process of navigating and making sense of one's social, political, and economic context. As such, the emphasis on a normative or universal transition into

adulthood is pruned back to expose individualized aptitudes and generational values within a contextually bounded social moment.

Having summarized the generational approach to youth, I would like to pause for a moment and reconsider the units of analysis that the framework builds and deploys. The generational framework is premised on the segmentation of temporality and begins from the vantage point of western liberal capitalism. In other words, the generational approach grounds its conceptual apparatus in two implicit, yet decisive, divisions: firstly, late modernity is severed from earlier forms of capitalist production and accumulation; secondly, the capitalist core is severed from colonial history. The uneven history of capitalism, therefore, falls from view as the relationship between self and society is articulated in primarily local terms. Further, there is an interesting tension linked to the framing of history and dynamics of social change. Societal change and subjective agency are positioned as central to the framework, yet young adults are presented as managing or coping with the current form of capitalism, rather than active participants in defining the character of today's, or future, society. Generational subjectivity is limited to making sense of one's location within the generational context, which simultaneously elevates ideation and elides the praxis of young adults. Concerned with neither past nor future forms of youth consciousness, generational subjectivity is shaped by, and tacitly oriented toward, the reproduction of existing social relations.

Although the generational approach may not be explicitly oriented toward the reproduction of neoliberal political economy, the framework, nonetheless, accepts the norms of neoliberal capitalism and thus mirrors the positive approach to youth. A clear point of convergence between the generational and positive approaches can be observed through the utilization of the categories of marginalization and exclusion. Furlong, Woodman and Wyn (2011) note "not all young people 'fit' into a generational patter." In their words, "A generational approach may possibly lead to a lack of sensitivity to marginalization and exclusion if the focus is not extended to the different units that occupy a single generational location" (Furlong, Woodman, & Wyn, 2011, p. 367). In other words, the experiences constituting a generation are understood as discrete units occupying dominant and marginal positions within the generational whole. The categories "marginalization" and "exclusion", however, are abstractions empty of concrete experiences and capable of describing any manifestation of oppression. Empty of concrete human praxis and social history, marginalization and exclusion can only be articulated in individualized terms. Much like the reliance on so-called barriers to participation within the positive approach, notions of marginalization and exclusion construct the self and society as binary opposites and confine the question of transformation to the individual.

Not only does Wyn and Woodman's theory of a social generation flatten and individualize the social relations that constitute oppression and exploitation, the approach mutes the cacophony of rhythms that make up youth experience in general. In more concrete terms, despite residing in western countries and being surrounded by youth who "fit" the generational framework, the norm for refugee

"youth" includes long interruptions in education (due to war and displacement), low wages, inadequate access to age-appropriate public schooling, experiences of racism, as well as feelings of isolation and alienation (Bonet, 2016). Beginning from the vantage point of so-called excluded youth, we can note that the generational whole is posited despite its contradictory parts, rather than through the concrete particularities of youth consciousness and praxis. A middle-class western subject position is, thus, implicitly constituted as the norm, and the categories marginalized and excluded stand in for the experiences of migrant and racialized young adults. In short, the theory of a generation subsumes experience.

Although the generational framework begins from a different point of entry to that of the positive approach to youth, the shared ontological underpinning orient both analyses toward the reproduction of existing social relations. Thus, the question that remains is how to conceptualize and explicate the experiences of young adults in a manner that reveals something about our current moment and how to critically transform it. On that note, Bannerji's critique of ideology is, again, instructive. As Bannerji (2016) explicates, when concepts are divorced from their material grounding they "admit no epistemological disclosure as to their own construction", and as such they become highly mobile, arbitrary frames for interpretation (p. 9). The limitation of the generational approach is not that it highlights the distinctive characteristics of the current social moment, but rather that it does not situate the particular experiences of today's young adults in the historical evolution of the relations that are now defined as youth. Distinctiveness is taken as definitive, and thus the epistemological disclosure that the youth formation might admit is swept away. Built upon abstractions, concepts such as barriers, exclusion, or marginalization can only rearticulate their ideological forbearers. The task for building anti-ideological knowledge, then, is to reverse the ideological severing of ontology from epistemology, and to understand concepts as particular formations of social relations rather than the determinants of reality (Bannerji, 2015). Taking a wider view of the youth formation, the remainder of the discussion fleshes out some of the historical and social conditions that were de-emphasized by both the positive approach and the generational framework. Situated in the ongoing cycles of capitalist accumulation and dispossession, the relationship between the essence and appearance of the youth formation begins to take shape.

A Materially Situated Approach to Youth

Historicizing the relationship between the labour of young adults and capitalist accumulation, Sukarieh and Tannock (2015) illustrate the cycles of integration and removal that characterize the role of youth in the labour market. They note that early industrial capitalists targeted young unmarried, often female, adults as a source of cheap, temporary, and easy to discipline labour. This particular characterization of youth labour was later transported to formerly colonized regions and became the norm of factory production during the 1970s and 1980s. Prior to

the global relocation of industrial production, the labour market participation of teens and young adults in the core capitalist regions declined as secondary and tertiary education expanded. However, the expansion of the service sector, in the latter part of the twentieth century, saw a rise in jobs targeted at young adults irrespective of who performed them. From the vantage point of capitalists and governments, one of the key advantages of utilizing the labour of young adults is that they have been historically constructed as non-adults, which justifies lower wages, employment insecurity, and irregular work hours. The casting of service sector jobs as youth jobs serves the dual purpose of normalizing the claim that students ought to have a part-time job, and that service sector workers do not depend on their paycheques or require job security (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015). The larger picture of youth labour is, thus, one of expansion and contraction where young adults are pulled in and out of the labour market relative to the cycles and locations of accumulation.

The participation of young adults in today's labour market continues to be geographically uneven, and international migration for the purpose of employment is becoming increasingly significant. Global youth unemployment has shown a fairly steady upward trend and currently sits at 13%, with the highest rates in Africa and the Arab states at around 30%. Moreover, the percentage of employed young adults living in poverty is above 25% in the Arab states and around 75% in Sub-Saharan Africa. Low wages and poor working conditions were also a significant factor in the increasing willingness of young adults to emigrate from the Caribbean and Latin America. Although the global unemployment rate for young women remains higher than that of young men, unemployment rates aggregated by sex across locations are uneven. For example, the unemployment rates for young women are lower than those for young men in Europe, Eastern Asia, and North America, but significantly higher in Africa and the Arab states. In developed countries, the rate of NEET young adults increases significantly for those between the ages of 19 and 30 (International Labour Organization, 2016). Importantly, this snapshot of youth in the labour market echoes the partial explanations given by both the positive and the generational approaches. Deindustrialization has shifted the labour market experiences of young men and women in developed areas, and the staggeringly high levels of underemployment and unemployment in formerly colonized regions are greatly concerning. Conversely, the picture that the current youth labour market paints is not dissimilar from the broader history of young workers, particularly in the formerly colonized areas, constituting a highly-exploited section of the labour force. Young adults are a prominent grouping in the unemployed and underemployed population, and the ideological apparatus constituting the youth formation is routinely deployed to minimize the rights of workers and increase rates of exploitation. In this sense, youth labour simultaneously expresses a distinct appearance and the historical continuity of class exploitation. The significance of the contradictory position of youth can be seen through the manner in which global accumulation shapes, and is shaped by, the youth formation.

In a recent discussion of imperialism, finance capital, and dispossession, Judith Whitehead (2016) reconsiders the current relationship between the active and reserve army of labour. She notes that in 2012 the reserve army of labour (those unemployed and underemployed) exceeded that of the active army by a billion people. In Whitehead's assessment, the dominance of finance capital, which is increasingly delinked from labour, has created the conditions for dispossession and accumulation without proletarianization, particularly in the global south. In other words, contemporary modes of dispossession are creating a mass of pauperized people, many of whom are young adults, but not reabsorbing them into the working class; our current moment is, thus, one of labour expulsion (Sassen, 2014; Whitehead, 2016). Whitehead connects the intensification of authoritarianism, patriarchy, and fascism to the global dynamics of finance capitalism and pauperization. Given that the youth formation exists to both discipline highly exploited labour, and silence dissent, her analysis underscores the significance and utility of youth. Her analysis, moreover, raises the issue of the relationship between labour expulsion, youth, and racialization and begets the question: In which ways will the pauperization of young adults reshape the character of racialization and migrant labour in the capitalist core?

CONCLUSION

Viewed through its internal contradictions, youth can be understood as a particular formation of ideological constructs and corresponding forms of consciousness and praxis. More than simply an age range or transitional stage, the youth formation provides insight into the contradiction that mutually shapes labour and capital. While the current generation of youth does display distinct characteristics, theoretical approaches that elevate the current experiences or subjectivities of young adults elide the broader historical processes that pull young people in and out of the labour force. At the centre of both liberal and neoliberal approaches to youth is an atomized ontology that individualizes the consciousness and praxis of young adults. Recasting experiences of race and gender, or marginalization and exclusion as individual challenges severs human praxis from knowledge, and contributes to the ideological fragmentation of social relations. Confronting the social and historical relations that organize the experiences of young adults requires that we begin by reconnecting ontology and epistemology.

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Genevieve Ritchie
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto