

The allegory of the Cave, Youth-ness, Producing, Projecting and Creation: A Walk with Plato

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Abstract

This paper will attempt to discuss the concept of 'youth-ness', producing, projecting, and creation from the perspective of Plato's allegory of the cave in the Republic. To do this, the paper will define "youth-ness" and attempt explaining this concept alongside producing, projecting and creation/creating. Youth development and youth participation begun in West Africa during the independence struggles in the region – Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria are key countries that relied heavily on their "youths" to gain their independence. Siaka Stevens, Wallace Johnson, Kwame Nkrumah, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nnamdi Azikiwe were the faces and voices of the young people pre-independence in the region. After independence, there were calls to involve the "young" people who helped their nation-states to gain independence in the governance of these new states. Many young and largely politically and generally inexperienced youth were co-opted into governance at various levels of government. Youth is a complex phenomenon in most of Africa, it defies definition as the notion of 'youth' is presented as a phrase or sentence, rather than a word in any ethnic African language more so in Sierra Leonean languages. Youth is a triad of 'development' speak, politics and culture/tradition, hence as a phenomenon that we build policy around, we cannot focus on just one of the triads; it is necessary to weave the strings of the different 'phenomenologies' of 'youth' together with the policy actions we seek to take in order to produce the outcomes we want.

Keywords: *Sierra Leone, Youth-ness, Plato's allegory of the cave, The Republic*

Introduction

About Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is located south of the equator in West Africa. It is neighbours to the Republic of Guinean in the north and east, on the south by Liberia and west by the Atlantic Ocean. Sierra Leone also a member of the 16-nation economic, political and proposed common currency group of ECOWAS – the Economic Community of West African States. ECOWAS is designed to operate like the EU – open borders, common political position among the league of nations and a proposed currency by 2027, etc. But Sierra Leone is known more for its 11-year civil war from 1991 to 2002. The war was a spill over from neighbouring Liberia with the goal of evening out resource distribution, better government, and reinstatement of democracy from a one-party state¹.

January 18, 2002, saw the end of the civil – the era of peace; from hence Sierra Leone has experienced 20years of people. During the 20years, the country has also face challenges – floods, Ebola, Landslides and in 2020, COVID19 like the rest of the world. In the 20 years of peace, it felt like Sierra Leone did not catch a break.

Youth in Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, the youth population stands at 42% and has grown nearly 40% from 5.5million in 2008 to 7.88million in 2019². The concept of youth development/youth participation³ is not new.

According to the UN Joint Response to Youth Employment in Sierra Leone, 70% of the 1.5million approximate youth population are unemployed⁴. 50% of the unemployed are either illiterate or unskilled. The UN joint response to youth employment document further states: “Many of the pre-conflict conditions that helped fuel the youth’s participation in what was a brutal conflict (exclusion from family life, society, jobs and the decision-making processes as well as living under oppressive traditional and cultural systems in the rural areas) still exist today. Large numbers of unemployed youths are a potential source of insecurity given their vulnerability to recruitment into criminal and violent activities.”⁵

¹ See BBC Sierra Leone profile: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094419>

² In December 2021, a new census was launched, and it is expected new populations figures will be announced in mid-2022.

³Used here synonymously to mean the same thing. The terms will be defined in the fuller proposal.

⁴ See UN Joint Response on Youth Employment in Sierra Leone.

⁵ ibid

Sierra Leone has since 2003 implemented 3 youth policies. The first under the SLPP government led by late President Ahmad Tijan Kabbah; the second by former President Ernest Bai Koroma of the APC. This third and current policy is under President Julius Madaa Bio of the SLPP. The important factor across all three policies so far is the definition of who a youth is – a phenomenon that is fully discussed elsewhere in this paper.

Defining Youth

In 1995, the United Nations (UN) defined its youth population “as the age cohort 15-24” (UN Economic and Social Affairs Report on World Programme of Action for Youth, 1995)⁶. The report further goes on to state that, “the meaning of the term ‘youth’ varies in different societies around the world.” And further stressing that “definitions of youth have changed continuously in response to fluctuating political, economic, and sociocultural circumstances (p.11).

The African Union’s Youth Charter in its opening declaration states “For the purposes of this Charter, youth or young people shall refer to every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years.” (African Youth Charter, 2006:4)⁷.

The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) defines youth as people “aged 15-29” in its policy document “Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE). The PAYE is a strategy and policy plan for the CYP for the period 2007-2015. While the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) does not currently have its own region-specific youth policy it seems to adopt very much the African Union Youth Charter of 2006. Indeed, all West African States have the same definition of youth as the 15-35 age cohorts. Ghana, Liberia, Senegal, Nigeria, and the remaining 10 states; figure 2 shows the population dynamics of Sierra Leone. With more than 50-percent of its population in the 15-35 age group.

⁶<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay2010.pdf> (viewed: 11 March. 2012)

⁷http://au.int/en/sites/default/files/AFRICAN_YOUTH_CHARTER.pdf (viewed: 11 Jan 2022)

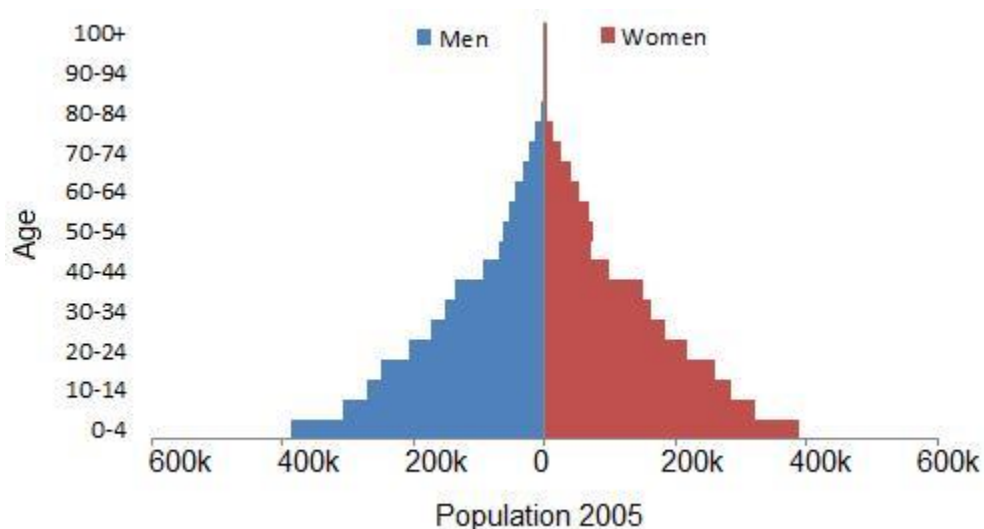


Figure 2: Population Pyramid of Sierra Leone.

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sierra.leone.pop.pramid.2005.jpg> based on work from: <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/country.php>

These national, regional, and international definitions have contributed to inconsistencies in youth policy development and implementation. For instance, UN-led programmes for youth will target people within 15-24 years while the CYP will target 15-29 and the Africa regional groupings – AU, ECOWAS, Southern African Development Commission (SADC), and MANO-River Union among others all subscribe to 15-35-age cohort.

This disparity allows for whole regions to fall behind in various development indicators or in other cases seem to do well while on the ground there maybe gaps in implementation. “Indeed, in most Western cultures, having a child ends “youth-hood”; whereas in Africa, as long as one’s parents are alive you are considered a child”(Tsike-Sossah 2012).

In the 2020-2025 Sierra Leone Youth Policy, there is a critical change the policy drafters (claimed to be some 20,000 youths across the country) assert that “[t]he policy maintains the AfricanCharter’s definition of youth as a person between the ages of 15-35 but calls for interventions and opportunities in the sector to pay special consideration for those below the age of 29”(National Youth Commission - Sierra Leone 2020)pg 7.

The Youth Problem

Youth development and youth participation begun in West Africa during the independence struggles in the region – Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria are key countries that relied heavily on their “youths”⁸ to gain their independence. Siaka Stevens, Wallace Johnson, Kwame Nkrumah, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nnamdi Azikiwe were the faces and voices of the young people pre-independence in the region. After independence, there were calls to involve the “young” people who helped their nation-states to gain independence in the governance of these new states. Many young and largely politically and generally inexperienced youth were co-opted into governance at various levels of government.

Thus, the call for youth participation in governance in West Africa and especially in Sierra Leone is not new, in the words of (Lefort 1986), “the past is not really past until it ceases to haunt us, and we have become free to rediscover it in the spirit of curiosity”. Elevating young people to the governance class elevates their privileges. (Johnson 2006) posits, “Although privilege is attached to social categories and not to individuals, people are the ones who make it happen through what they do and don’t do in relation to others”. You realise that the bearers of “youth participation” are the negotiators of this new privilege; but (Johnson 2006) states further, “by discriminating, (whether positive or negative⁹) we strengthen privileges that need not be formed in the first place”.

In socialist states, social and political positions are mostly pro-scribed rather than ascribed. For instance, to lead a political party in West Africa, the key requirement is which tribe you belong, whether your family and relations are known to have a positive history with the party, among others¹⁰. This is especially the case in Sierra Leone where there are only 2 main political parties – the **Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP)** and the **All Peoples Congress (APC)** party. These two parties have alternatively ruled Sierra Leone since independence in 1961.

With these required but undocumented desirables, the question of intelligence, maturity, professionalism, and other pertinent leadership traits are kept to the back burner.

⁸Youth will be defined and contextualized for the period.

⁹Emphasis mine

¹⁰ This is a very wide generalisation, but it is the foundation of our political ethos across (West) Africa.

The result is usually a popular but deficient individuals and systems that do not help the collective good of the people; the net effect is a lineage holding on to power for many years.

Youth-ness

Who is youth? In the preceding text, we defined youth in the general sense of the word according the standards set by global and regional organisations – The UN, the EU, AU and ECOWAS. But are those definitions fair or arbitrary? Who decided the start or end of youth? What happens to people who think “age is just a number”? or that “how old you are is determined by how you feel at heart”?

Tesar, Rodriguez and Kupferman (2016), posit “[c]hildhood, youth and adolescence are contested notions and constructs. These constructs are tainted with ontological and epistemological histories and ideas about ‘real children’ and childhoods” and *youth*¹¹. In Sierra Leone, the local lingua franca – krio has a descriptive phrase for youth – “youth-man”. The concept of youth then is very masculine and combines the description of youth (aka young) man. In the other dominant indigenous languages Temene and Mende Youth is also a phrase...

It is therefore important in discussing “youth” to be mindful of the socio-cultural dimensions. As Tesar, Rodriguez and Kupferman (2016) argue, we cannot employ the concept of “youth” without questioning what they mean and how to employ them (p169).

For instance in my field work, I have seen 40year old men or 37year old woman with 3 kids as “youth leaders”. I have also seen some “youth leaders” whose children are themselves “youth”. Thus, in a meeting of young people or youth, you are likely to a husband, wife and child. In the backroads of Sierra Leone, this is very normal – the mother could be 35years, the father 38years and the child 19year.

But in times of war, the 38 year old man and the child, if male, could be on the front lines fighting for their community or village. So who is “youth” and what are the characteristics of “youth-ness”?

¹¹Emphasis mine

Youth, Youth-ness as a Subject (of convenience)

As we have seen, youth and for that matter youth-ness does not lend itself to easy definition and is difficult to assign it without the nuances of context – culture, social, and politics (power).

Youth is homonymous¹² in Sierra Leone, it could mean when categorised as a fact, a person of age 15-35 (as per the youth policy), a warrior or ‘youth-man’ – a face of transition between a man and not-so-a-man.

In the Mfantse language of Ghana, “youth” is Mbabun; mba – is children or offspring while bun – denotes ‘green’ or the notion of “Greenleaf”; life! Mbabun thus connotes the state of being¹³ new to life and of inexperience-ness.

The phenomenon of a non-youth being "Youth leader" is vestige of an old tradition of the Youth being under the guidance or an experienced adult during the long process of ushering them into adulthood. The phenomenon of “youth” in Mfantse ends at marriage or childbirth¹⁴.

In Sierra Leone, I have spoken to and sought to find from the main languages of *Mende* and *Temene*; having already explained the *Krio* version of “Youth man” but this has not been very successful yet, but the ideas are not different from the *Mfantse* explanation. However, it seems in Sierra Leone, “youth” does not end at marriage of childbirth.

For the Mende, youth is “Fonige” which is a word used by older people to describe young people; specifically things that young people do that they, older people cannot do¹⁵.

The Allegory of the Cave

In my opinion, the allegory of the cave captures the essence of the malady of the youth question/issue, and agency of and for how we negotiate the phenomena including the framing/frames, narratives, and the context.

The allegory of the cave is part of Plato’s major work, the *Republic* which is deemed his most important and popular work¹⁶. The allegory of the cave is book five (chapter) of the *Republic*.

¹²As in Aristotle’s “Categories” as translated by J. L. Ackrill

¹³ Emphasis mine

¹⁴ Notes from Abeku Adams, Central Ghana 28 January 2022

¹⁵ Ansu Mattia, Freetown, Sierra Leone – Facebook comment/call about the topic. 29 January 2022

¹⁶See <https://iep.utm.edu/plato/>

According to the internet source Wikipedia, the allegory of the cave sought "...to compare "the effect of education (παιδεία) and the lack of it on our nature"¹⁷.

"In the allegory, Socrates describes a group of people who have lived chained to the wall of a cave all their lives, facing a blank wall. The people watch shadows projected on the wall from objects passing in front of a fire behind them and give names to these shadows. The shadows are the prisoners' reality but are not accurate representations of the real world."

I posit this is the reality of the Sierra Leonean Youth – the lack of “education in general and the lack of it on our nature” – how things are done.

The foundation of the allegory of the cave by Plato is hinged on the premise that education leads to liberation. But the education required to become ‘aware’ and move out of the cave into liberation is one that I am interested in. Who holds the key to this education? Do they have the agency to hold that key?

Sanga 2018, posits that allegory has seven (7) concepts which I call “obstacles” in this paper – “cave, prisoner, **shadows**, sun, fire, chains, and finally the escaped prisoner” (p83). These are obstacles because I will show they contribute to the “...lack of education...”¹⁸.

The **cave** as an obstacle relates to the environment, they youths’ world of ignorance – where people (youth) can learn but are limited due to factors such as laziness, contentedness (with their current situation), political and social illiteracy in navigating their circumstance, ignorance, entitlement among others. Cohen (Eds, 1995) in Sanga (2018) states “.... The power to learn is present in everyone’s soul and the instrument, with which each learns, is like an eye that can turn around from the darkness.” Sanga proceeds “[t]he people who are not able to get out of the cave are like those who are contented in their ignorance and they do not wish to see the light as they ought to.” (p84).

To escape the cave, which has become a **prison**, Sanga suggests is the work of the *true*¹⁹ Philosopher to educate the people and thus liberate them. Showing them that the shadows they see are not the real world but a presumption of what the real world is that shadows are but

¹⁷See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory_of_the_cave

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Emphasis mine

a feeling moment in the real world. The *true* philosopher's job is to "unblind" they youth in a cave that they have come blinded in due to the absence of "light²⁰".

In my opinion, the [*true*] philosopher is the third phenomena in the Master-Slave dialectics; the silent watcher, the one that makes reason out of the relationship, now, with the additional responsibility of "teaching or leading" the subject (Youth) to the light of knowledge.

Sanga further continues, "[t]he chains ... represent all obstacles which impair or prevent *youth*²¹ from seeing realities. There are many obstacles, such as irresponsibility, poverty, moral decadence, poor leadership, political instability, lack of teachers, ignorance, and irrationality among others. The chains can also represent the whole situation of a person such as idleness, economic dependency, lack of vision, lack of curiosity, and lack of attention to the facts of reality. Moreover, people can be obstacles to others, impairing them from acquiring knowledge"²². Education negates this construct of "**chains**" and thus negates the notions of poverty, breeds curiosity, economic dependency and all negative blockages.

The **light/sun** represents knowledge as already mentioned; and negates the negative power of the shadow and opens literally and figuratively the flood gates of knowledge towards reality. As in the original allegory, this sun/light at first hurts the eyes and requires adjusting to it – akin to exercising the muscle. At first, it hurts but when one continues, the pain goes and the muscles gets used to the pain and build from it; hence the maxim "no pain, no gain". But many of the youth fear the notion of pain before trying while the other group give up on few tries. The mind is as such – developing the mind is a great work and requires dedication, commitment and continus hardwork. Virtues that youth of Sierra Leone lack and the nature to which to apply them.

The **escaped prisoner** are the youths who sought the light, figured how to tame their negative virtues but perhaps more important, they exhibit and reach into themselves to tap their *innate cognitive capacities*– knowing that there is 'something' better out there – external to them. These are the "engliehtened" youth – those who want to change because they see a vision that is real and brighter than their present.

²⁰ Light here denotes awareness, education, knowledge

²¹ Original text is 'people'

²²Sanga (2018), p 84

Facts and creations: Agency in Youth-ness

The Youth problem for Sierra Leone is multifaceted – lack of education, access to political power, (un)employment, security, human rights and the list is long. This section will look at the question of those in the cave (prison) and those who escaped.

Youth as a subject in Sierra Leone is constantly changing, constantly renewing. Year in year out, the youth dynamics change – young people exit the group new people join, the flavour of the interactions change as those who leave and those who enter come with their own unique flavours. They are more politically savvy, relatively smarter, better knowledgeable, increasingly ignorant of the past, more aware of the present and increasingly living in the present.

In consonance with Durkheim's "*sui generis*" the "society of youth" has over time formed its own class and this uniqueness changes. As different groups of youth, especially the leadership change, the culture, the vision, the politics change. In essence the ethos of the youth change with time and those who lead it. For Durkheim, his "*sui generis*" means [new] creation ... "when individual consciences interact and fuse together to create a synthetic reality that is completely new and greater than the sum of its parts."²³ So while the idea of "youth" or "youth-ness" have not changed the collective known as *youth* has changed.

The escaped prisoners – the youth who have seen the light, who know there is "something" better out there leave the cave and seek out the light/sun - the knowledge and the freedom that it provides.

Generally, these youth – call them "liberated youth - LY" usually return to the cave and this time to show other youth how to get out and sometimes become their leaders in this endeavour. When these LYs return to the cave the question that needs asking is, do they have agency? When they (LY) offer to lead or show the way out of the cave into the light, do they do it as an act of altruism or it is for their own interest?

²³ See "The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: <https://iep.utm.edu/durkheim/#SH6a>(Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy -)

When LYs lead, whether out of ultrim or for self-gain, there is the question of *agency*. Who gave them the right to lead? How do they know the society of youth want the same things they want as individuals? Who sets the vision? Do the people in the cave want out?

In the allegory, those in the cave tred in hearing the experience of the LY, to hold them back; considering them as perhaps mad. For how could they say everything as they know in the cave is false? The prisoners try to imprison the returning LYs for the visions and experiences they speak of did not make sense.

However, they win support from within the cave, the few co-opted LYs; they are the second layer of youth leaders, parroting the vision of the LYs; the next to the leadership mantle. The question raises again, Who do these co-opted LYs speak for and on who behalf? The LYs or the consitituents from whence they come from? What do they do with the power gotten from LYs? Here, we have an interplay of power and agency. How is it used and for whose benefit?

Second, is the creation of the co-opted youth a function of power (to take away or increase) or one of agency? Because thereis the illusion that co-optedyouth have constituents but that sometimes, that is not the case; when they do, it is to their godfathers and mothers rather than the presumed constituents of “youth” they represent (in the cave).Over time, their supposed constituents see that their supposed leader and voice does not speak for them; that his or her actions are directed at benefiting people other than them - the constituency. The constituents then question the legitimacy of their representation and therefore their agency to speak on their behalf, asserting, exerting, and extracting the privileges that come with their agency.

How do co-opted young leaders hold on to their agency even when they longer represent or seem to have lost the mandate of their constituencies? How does the structure of society and political economy sustain such incompatibility? These are questions that are deeply embedded in tradition and political ethos of the groups (political parties) that exist outside the “cave” – they are a creation to capture important aspects of society in the capturing and peperuating their hold on power. Political parties call them “wings” – there are the youth, women and sometimes “professional” wings. It allows to have groups that help breakdown or build up solidarity within groups in their respective “prisons or caves”. This is present in workers’ unions of all kinds and sometimes, these unions are able to determine who has access to power at the national level either as president or prime minister. The various “systems” hold

each other up in order to take power *away* from the people except when they go to “renew” their mandates as during elections.

Like Marx’s *converted forms*, it is all part of a larger scheme of keeping appearances, to keep the gravey train moving.

Many questions have been posed and a lot of those questions find their answers in tradition/culture. The concept of youth for the Sierra Leonean is not one that absolutely relies on age; it is a combination of a rite of passage and a reserve of power. Youth formed the army – for war, statebuilding, farming, communal work, etc. Their leader is not necessarily a “youth” himself²⁴ but like the *mfantse* in Ghana, he is a model for the youth. He may not be young with youthful zeal, but a person that guides young people. This is where the taking away of power happens. Because the system is functioned as a pseudo military, commands are given and they must be followed not questioned. The youth leader, seats at the village or community council of elders and makes decisions on behalf of young people; he assumes their collective power and uses it to negotiate largely, not on their behalf but on his own behalf.

Youth is not an arbitrary age range (15-35 years) but a rite of passage. Thus, **for any real change to happen it requires a system that takes cognisance of the cultural and social underpinnings of the phenomena of youth**²⁵. It requires finding (negotiting) the middle ground between the triad of tradition, culture and policy. Positively impacting youth is not about creating but rather re-arranging the chaos that creating brings.

In the policy making fray, the greater questions among others are how do youth keep their issues relevant in the milieu of agendas? How do they prevent outsiders or insiders from sowing chaos? How do they identify agents and actors and how are orders carried?(Fischer, Miller and Sidney 2007).

Walk with Plato

Plato’s works on Politics focused on “conceptual analytics: the classification of political concepts To understand what this means, it may be useful to think of concepts as the uses of words. When we use general words, such as “table,” “chair,” “pen,” or political terms, such as “state,” “power,” “democracy,” or “freedom,” by applying them to different things, we

²⁴Youth leader in the traditional sense is always a male and never a female.

²⁵“Real” is the operative word.

understand them in a certain way, and hence assign to them certain meanings.”(Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy -).

Plato would categorise “youth” and explain its political context as a preparatory step towards finding meaning. He will then evaluate the beliefs around the subject “youth” find incompatible ideas; further sieve down to which incompatible idea is correct or wrong. He believes decisions which are political in nature cannot be left to public opinion, however, the result of those decisions only become sign posts in the history of time.

In conclusion, the phenomena of “youth and youth-ness” is one of politics, tradition (culture), and development discourse. We often have seen it as one or two – *politics and or development* and never as a triad of *politics, development and tradition* we intricate interconnectedness – the function of which impacts greatly on outcomes. The results of which in the case of Sierra Leone, have fueled an 11-year civil war; resulting in stagnated development, stunted education, among others.

The solution, like in the thinking of Plato, remains one of defining, redefining and correcting the ingredients of culture/tradition, agency, politics and time.

Introduction

My proposed thesis topic [t]he *notion of Youth-ness, Power and Policy Making (A case study of the Sierra Leone situation)* seeks to explore the notion of youth-ness and power and how it impacts policymaking in Sierra Leone. This paper will try to understand Freud, or perhaps explain how Freud would analyse the concept of youth in Sierra Leone based on the concept of *slips* or *repressed* youth-hood from the war.

The paper traces the definition of youth and argues the framers set the definition and the implementation of the policy in ways that benefit them because of the unique circumstances of the country of Sierra Leone. Eleven (11) years of war and more than three decades of post-independence economic and political mismanagement form the fundamental of the young nation-state.

The paper concludes that the peculiar problem of Sierra Leone and how it defines and operationalises its concept of youth and youth-ness would be described by Freud as a nation finding and living its youth-ness.

Sigmund Freud's "*A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*" is a series of 28 papers presented by Freud and it became the foundational material for understanding Psychoanalysis. Here, I apply Freud's method of the subconscious to the Sierra Leonean definition of youth and how it applies to policy making and development planning.

In Sierra Leone, youth is defined as persons between the ages of 15-35 years old²⁶. The regional economic bloc of West Africa, ECOWAS – defines youth in the same language, as anyone between 15-35 of age. The African continental bloc, the African Union (AU) also has the same age definition. Within the European Union (EU) and other Western regions and blocs, youth is defined as between 15 to 29 or lower.

Youth is a complex phenomenon in most of Africa, it defies definition as the notion of 'youth' is presented as a phrase or sentence, rather than a word in any ethnic African language more so in Sierra Leonean languages. Youth is a triad of 'development' speak, politics and culture/tradition, hence as a phenomenon that we build policy around, we cannot focus on just one of the triads; it is necessary to weave the strings of the different 'phenomenologies' of 'youth' together with the policy actions we seek to take in order to produce the outcomes we want.

In reading Freud's *General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, I am confronted with the question: 'in defining youth how it is defined in Sierra Leone, is that an association to the 26 years (11 years lost to civil war and 15 years of misrule) or is it slip of ink or a transference from repressed youth-hood from the war'?

Like Freud, I seek meaning to why a 35-year man or woman is a youth in a world where 35-year-olds are ministers, millionaires, Prime Ministers and Presidents in other countries.

There are two theories to explain this phenomenon of why Sierra Leone thinks a 30- or 35-year-old wo/man is a youth. First is the notion of *slip*. The first coherent Sierra Leonean

²⁶ See <https://www.yacansl.org/assets/files/National-YouthPolicy2020.pdf> page 14.

youth policy was in 2003 under President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and the country has just emerged from an 11-year-old brutal civil war, displacing over 2.6 million people with at least 70,000 deaths.

Many fighters on both the rebel and government sides with children as young as 8 years. It is reported that at least 14,000 such children were involved in the war^{27, 28}. During the reconstruction period, President Kabbah is reported to invite anyone and everyone willing to come back to work for the government and country to come back and when it came to the issue of young people, he is reported to have said ‘as long as you feel young at heart, you are a youth’. Now here is where the crust of my argument is.

The 8–18-year-olds who were taken as child soldiers missed out on their childhood and for some their transition into adulthood (youth), further, those already transitioning out of youthhood to full adulthood did not have the opportunity to experience those periods, so you have a group of people, forming more than 40% of the population missing out a significantly on their growing period. I argue that these people were the leaders in the drafting of the first youth policy and that these people who missed out on their youth sought to relive that period through the youth policy by setting an age bracket that included them and casts them as a vulnerable part of the population.

I posit that Freud would say the policy and its use of the upper limit age of 35 years is one of ‘interfering intensions’ in his grander concept of *slips* - “... the slip arises from the content of the intention itself or is connected with it.” (pg. 56, E-book version). The connection is the fact that many of the drafters missed their opportunities to be youth and the provision in the policy makes them relive those lost or past opportunities. In 2022, the youth development policies include access to business development opportunities and travels for training and conferences, among others. This is what many young people in Sierra Leone want; break free from the country, the poverty, disease, and all the things that seem to hold everyone, not just the youth down. This is what many people want to run away from, and the youth development programmes provide them.

²⁷ See <https://borgenproject.org/10-facts-about-child-soldiers-in-sierra-leone/>

²⁸ See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_soldiers_in_Sierra_Leone

The war that took away, the opportunity to be young, free and careless now in peace, life thrusts them into a life that they do not understand and would have very much been part of their lives.

Living here in Sierra Leone for the last ten (10) years, much of Freud's work makes sense in the realm of interference with intentions. As already argued, I posit the fixation on having 35 years as the upper limit of the youth 'age' is one steeped in the framers' plans to enjoy their 'youthhood' in their adulthood. Just as Freud reproduces his quest for meaning, this paper also seeks to understand the reason, if one likes the 'psychology' behind the definition of 'youth', especially in the upper bracket of 35 years.

While the paper is not arguing 'errors, it is important to mention that "[W]e do not wish merely to describe the phenomena and to classify them, but to comprehend them as signs of a play of forces in the psychic, as expressions of tendencies striving to an end, tendencies which work together or against one another. We seek a dynamic conception of psychic phenomena. The perceived phenomena must, in our conception, give way to those strivings whose existence is only assumed.'" (pg61-62 E-book version). While we can use late President Kabah's rallying call that 'as long as you feel young, you are a youth' it is a false assumption to think that alone shaped the framers of the youth policy and hence how youth is defined and who can assume the agency and the privileges that come with it; hence the urgency if one wishes 'to give way to those strivings whose existence is only assumed'.

Freud maintains that all the manifest or surface content of the dream comes from the experience of the previous waking day. Because dreamers fear the censor or dread reality, their minds distort and condense. And here is how the sector around youth and youth-ness work, by being dense and distorting reality in order to feel safe.

While Freud's work and his psychoanalysis come from the study of obsessional neurosis of sex this paper argues that he would see the unique case of Sierra Leone as a country as one caught in a cycle of experimenting and living out its youth-ness. This process, like a child exploring its sexuality emotionally and mentally unready only creates a cycle of unhealthy self-seeking pleasure.

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