

What a time to be young in South Africa! Youth are the ones we have been waiting for!

By [Tumi Rabanye](#), issued by [Brave Group](#)

28 Jun 2019

As I enter the last lap of my third decade on this earth, by virtue of my physical stature, I am often exposed to a first-hand sample of what youth status must feel like today. More specifically, a first-hand view of what it must mean to be a young black, African woman in current South Africa. Interestingly, the specific experience in my working week was being told (the opposite of being consulted) in front of a panel of my potential suppliers, what inputs I needed to perform my job; a job whose authority I hold by designation... a discussion for another day.



Tumi Rabanye

Youth in South Africa, in my range of experience, feels like an exciting state to be in; especially if one considers our country's transition over the last 25 years. Notwithstanding the expansively documented challenges faced by young people currently; from frightening levels of unemployment to a crisis in education; in 2019 youth have great personal agency, protected by the legislative frameworks to ensure that! By personal agency I'm referring to the innate means, capacity and power to be heard, act and impact your immediate environment in a meaningful way. If anything, by sheer virtue of numbers, young people's agency matters so much that it is counter-productive for the generations before to plead ignorance or deafness... *(60% of Africa's population is under 25; by 2030 the UN predicts that youth (15 – 24) in Africa will have grown by 42%. In South Africa 1 third of the population is young, of that more than half is female).*

Thanks to the frequently referenced context of The Fourth Industrial Revolution, whose own offspring is disruption; the effect of a young person's agency multiplies exponentially whether it is accepted or not. In other words, more young voices (be they in protest or comedic) are exponentially amplified

today due to social media and integrated media as a whole; the effect of which has paradoxically turned the globe into a village of common-interest communities and shrunk its vastness. Young people know and live integration as a fact; they are native to it, while entire academics methodically study from retrospective evidence, how to realise it in the future - oxymoron much? I would argue, that it is generations past who are perhaps grappling with how to channel young people's agency in a positive and sustainable way. With very little consultative aptitude, I might add.

Let's reflect on the exponential personal agency of young South Africa for a bit... in our own parliamentary system today, the youngest MP Itumeleng Ntsube, in the National Council of Provinces, has matured "from cradle to seat" in less time than Nelson Mandela's entire tenure on Robben Island. If one is to reflect on the #FeesMustFall Movement that changed the youth agenda in academic institutions; the catalytic protests happened in 2015 and the protagonists thereof remain interspersed between "classical activism" as seen by Sdumo Dlamini and parliament, as well as Nompandulo Mkhathshwa and Fassia Hassan in 2019. The reflection is by no means meant to diminish the role of young leaders across the seminal stages of our political and socio-economic evolution. The lens is meant to rather reinforce the potency of youth, the agency thereof and the exponential leadership potential waiting to be harnessed.

In many other spheres young leaders are not just actualised entrepreneurs, but exponential social change agents delivering the fruit of the '76 change agents. It is for this reason that Youth Day deserves a new (not to be mistaken with white-washed) lens of affirmed, actualised change agents. Youth deserves positive reinforcement in South Africa; it almost even feels urgent. As a sample of one, at times tasked with the responsibility of employing or growing young minds, I continue to grow exponentially from listening more. The Millennials are not some naughty, spoiled kids, sponging off their parents –

they are the current customer you keep referring to as central to your business strategy; they are fintech entrepreneurs giving century-old banks sleepless nights; they are activists resetting entire governments - ask Teresa May.

Young people in the world – South Africa is not exempt – are authoring the future of the world. We ignore that; distort what they are telling us for our own comfort at our own peril. Youth is a state of affirmation! Youth is a state of exponential personal agency. Let's harness that for the sake of our children, their children and their children.

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