



Gigs, hustles and hope: work for young Africans beyond the wage

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Situating work for young Africans in relation to work available for youth elsewhere:

1. Capital as value (production)- changes since 1970
 2. Precarity: a relative concept
 3. Capitals as endowments (circulation of resources)
- Positioning and relationship to **capital** shapes **relative precarity** and **access to capitals** amongst young people globally

Contexts: what is
changing globally
about work,
employment,
livelihoods?

- Pre 1970s: a 'global dream' of the proper job with social security for all
- The 20th century, will be remembered as “the century of labouring man” (Standing, 2002:7) when the lifeway of... a small fraction of the population (the stabilized urban working class) became, quite suddenly (and somehow-for many-quite convincingly) projected as the future of all (Ferguson & Li, 2018)

Why that dream has stalled? Two changes, disproportionately impacting young people:

1) De-industrialisation/post-Fordism since the late 1970s:

- Large global process of capitalist transformation aided and abetted by IMF and World Bank policies: discouraged state protection of local production: industries more mobile and seek cheaper (or “more efficient”) labour
- Mechanisation, new ICT and changed global monetary practices have disrupted the viability of universal employment with social protection everywhere.

2): Uneven political commitment to developmental trajectory based on mass employment in secure/rewarding wage work with social protection:

- Populations of labourers largely superfluous to capitalist production in the global south seem increasingly to be the image of capitalism’s future, not its past.
- The model/ Class structure of the Global North- relatively secure working-class aspiring to inter-generational upward mobility and middle-class life, has been upended.



Precarity in the light of these changes:

Guy Standing: the precariat, a “new dangerous class” with low, unstable wages, low, diminished state support

- Precarity useful to unpack young people’s lives... but universalisation as a “class” misleading.
- Precarity diverse, relational and contextually dependent; state support different
- For global youth: precarity relative to a) previous generations and b) contemporary peers in other places
- Urbanisation and industrialisation have played out differently in the global South (e.g. Brazil, India and South Africa); continued rural ties, large informal sectors (Breman 2013, Braga 2014, Scully 2016).

- DIFFERENT PRECARITIES

“The spectre of wageless life in the sprawling shanty towns and favelas of Asia, Africa and Latin America overwhelmed any clear divide between employed and unemployed...it appeared to be the main mode of existence in a separate, almost autonomous, economy” (Denning, 2010: 86).

African Youth Precarity: Waiting, hustling, Navigating

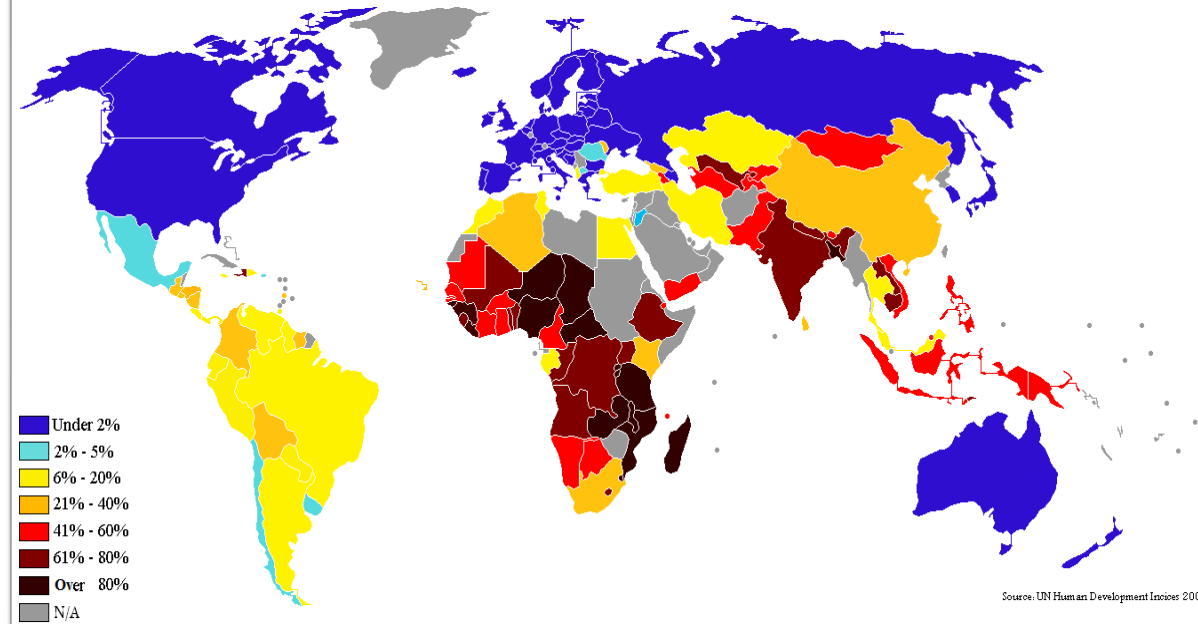
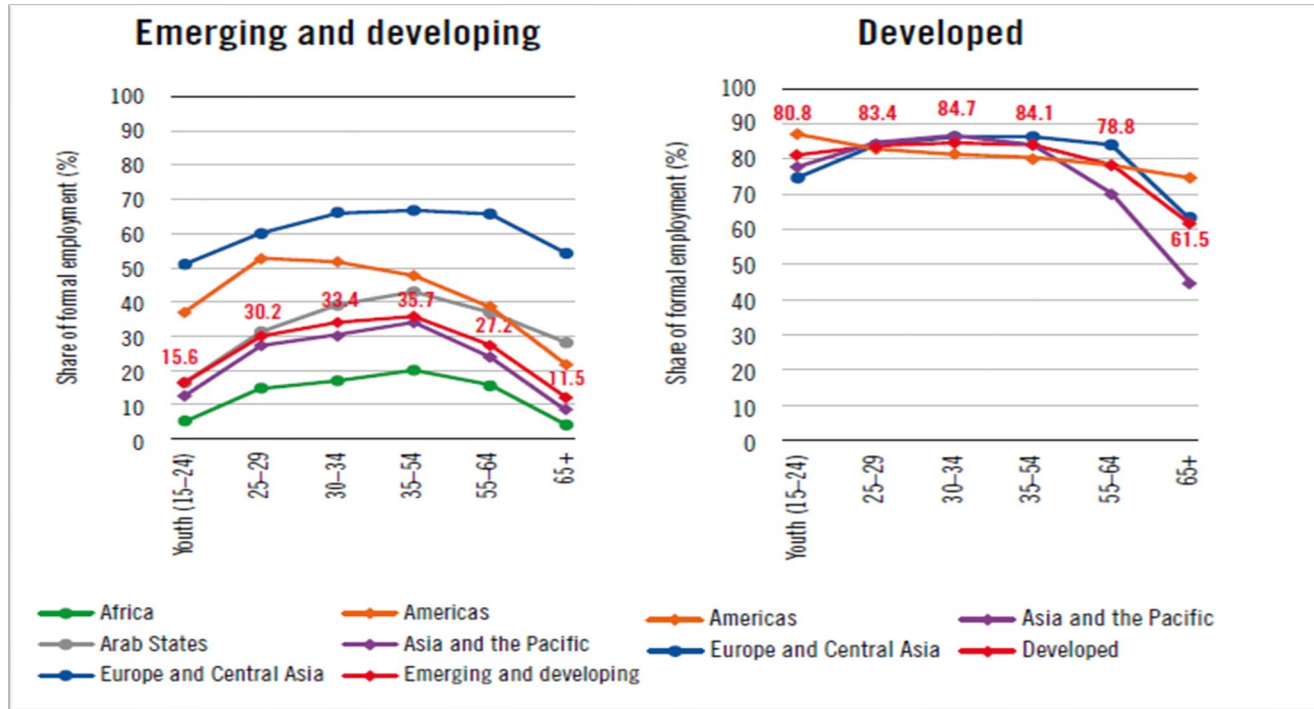
- Youth in rich countries- parents had secure wages for 1 or 2 generations; current generation first to be materially worse off than parents (Bessant, Farthing & Watts, 2017).
- But....
- Global south precarity: receive less state support/security; live off opportunistic survivalism.
- African youth livelihoods exist amidst older practices of informality, waiting, and opportunistic survivalism/innovation
- Youth-centred concepts: waiting, hustling, navigating describe opportunistic survivalism
- Hustling (Thieme, 2018): beyond mainstream institutions; insecurity, irregular employment, improvisation, protracted waitness (Honwana, 2012)
- Hustling: a condition, cultural economic practice and identity for living on the margins in semi-permanent emergency, used to negotiate the uncertain crisis of waiting for better future.
- Youth survive off diverse/distributed/mixed income streams: wages, small informal businesses, handouts from the state and kin, criminal activities and reciprocal exchange (Ferguson, 2015).
- Social navigation: spatial metaphor for finding a way through challenges and opportunities using various capitals (Swartz, 2021; Vigh, 2009)



African and Global South precarity

Informal employment

Income



- Share of formal employment in total employment by age in emerging/developing countries and developed countries (*Source: ILO, 2018*)
- African youth: less than 15% formal jobs

- Percentage population living on less than 2 dollars per day 2007-2008 (*Source: UN Human Development Indices, 2008*)

Gig work: into the precarious mix

- Some policymakers and scholars in affluent countries- exploitation in the gig economy;
- Elsewhere: financial inclusion???
- Democratisation of global labour???

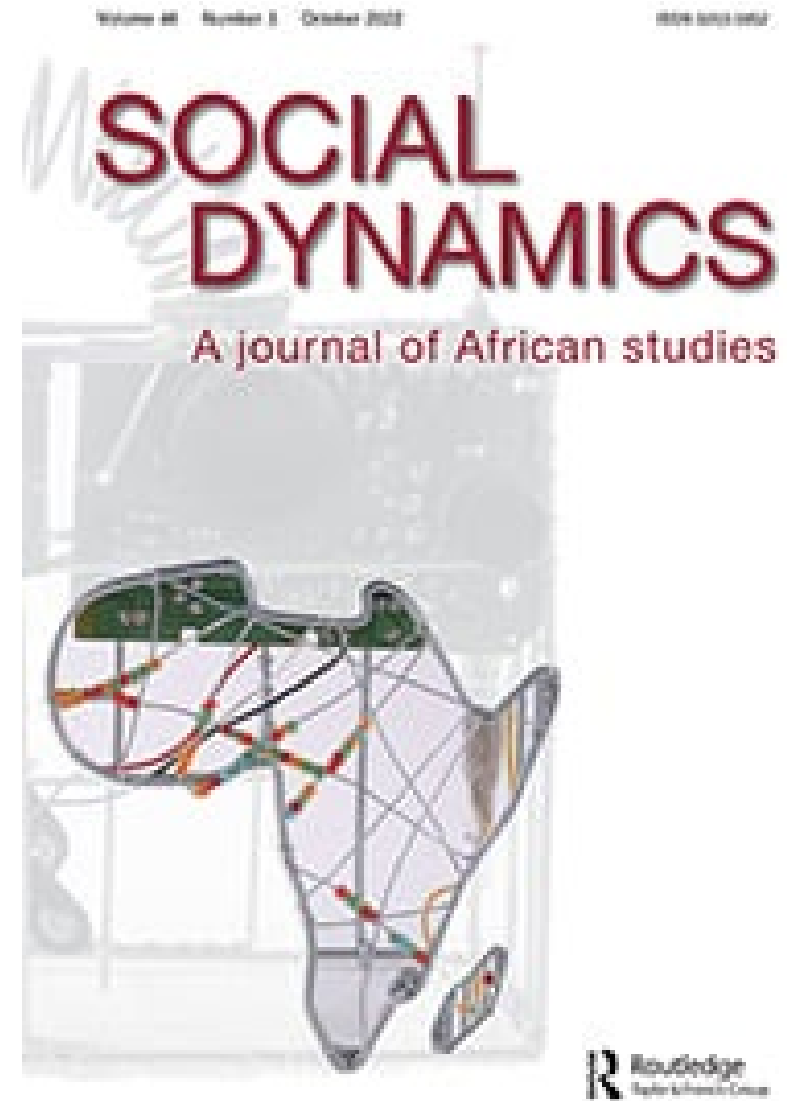


1.) Capital and 2.) Relative Precarity intersect with 3.) Capitals

- Social, cultural and economic capitals accumulate inter-generationally, geographically and in relation to peers, endowing people with skills/ resources to compete in fields, forging/reproducing stratification.
- In increasingly informalised economies the ability to acquire and mobilise social status and local, spatialised networks of connections becomes a means for youth to get by, and ahead.
- What do capitals/resources mean in contexts of waiting/hustling/navigating

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- Youth and the future of work in South Africa



Andrew's story

Why Andrew?

- Part of a Kenyan cohort of recipients of a prestigious tertiary education scholarship
- Interviewed annually 2020-2023
 - “best case scenario for normal African youth”: well-educated, academically gifted
 - Illustrates hustling, waiting, navigating
 - Aspires to the “proper job”, but...mixed livelihoods, gig work, entrepreneurship
 - Demonstrates relational nature of precarity vis-à-vis better off peers, in the context of African “post-Fordism” or urbanisation without industrialisation

Andrew's story

- Raised in Naivasha: +-90km North-West of Nairobi
“when I was a kid, I was this kind of a person who liked, tried to fix stuff or fix the tv...I became so interested in...technical things...”
- Studied computer engineering
- Discontinued university in Kenya and went to AIMS Ghana
- Returned to Kenya after university: internship at government funded power company



Internship: Electrical company...no job, hustle, Covid

- Despite not earning income or securing permanent work during/after this internship Andrew described it as a wonderful experience:

“it was one of my best experiences of my professional life, because it’s good when you meet people... who you can speak the same language. ... whenever you talk to somebody who is the same field... a topic go can go deep together...it feels good.”

- Part-time Lecturing in Nairobi
- Covid hits... Shocks: Kinship networks as forms of social security for multiple intersecting crises
- Returns to Naivasha:
- Works on father’s construction site, saves money

Mixed livelihoods: Game shop and 'academic writing'

- "I do academic writing... give it three hours in the morning...that can gimme some, some small amount of money for that day. Then I come and open the shop"
- "So, okay that academic writing is more of a, I don't know if you have heard of it, you know schools in, abroad, including like England, UK, And then US school, like, those **students in those universities...Most of them sometimes don't have the time to do all their work. So, they will send the work... and then they will pay you.**"

New York Times article:

- "academic writing is a lucrative business for college graduates from Kenya, India and Ukraine, with a facebook group for academic writers having 50 000 members. Kenya is a country with a per capita income of \$1700 but academic writers earn up to \$2000 a month."

Andrew's shop: sells alcohol and movies,
playstation games for youth and cyber services

“The wine business wasn't bad...but the problem with that was, uh, uh, the police would always be on your neck... they want some money every day... I've paid for license... They need something small from you.. Sauce... they'll say you're selling to people without wearing a mask...”

“I was, downloading movies and selling the movies to people.. and offering cyber services... applying (for) like our health services, like (the) card that you need if you need a job.”

“The shop... came from my interest of movies, I actually love, and then it's IT related...I took computer engineering in my undergraduate so everything I was doing at the shop is all related to my degree...it was work but more of a hobby because I love movies, I like interacting with IT stuff, ja.”



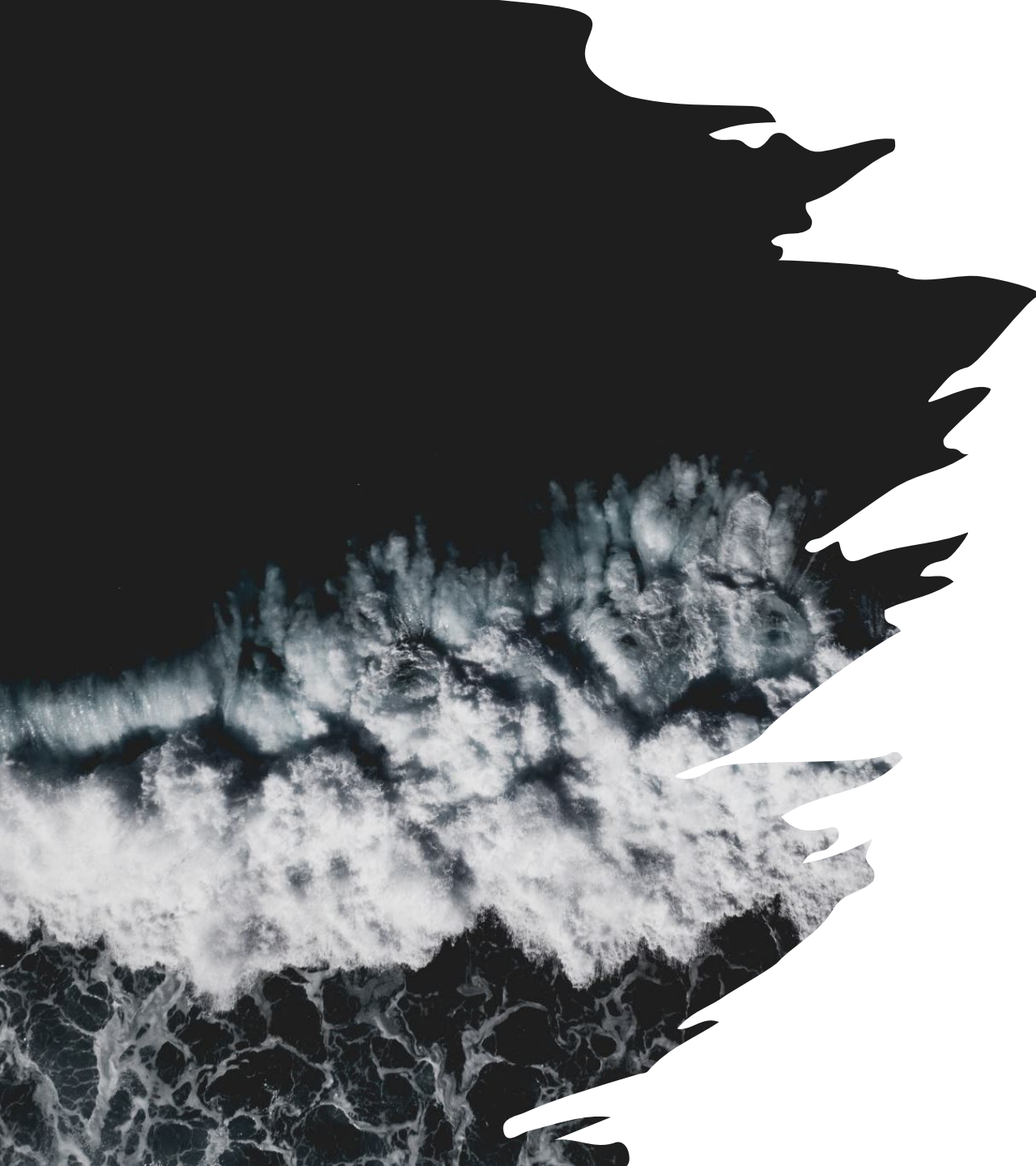
But...Andrew wants a “proper job”

The search for the proper job continues: Application to study abroad

“I was checking the opportunities... I have an engineering degree, one of the most marketable...(but) a job is an issue. But when you check a city, like uh, **Arizona... I have majored into data analysis... data analysts are a hot cake there. Like you didn't take even two months before you get a job..** I was thinking is I have to shift somewhere. **Maybe my skills are more valued, you know?”**

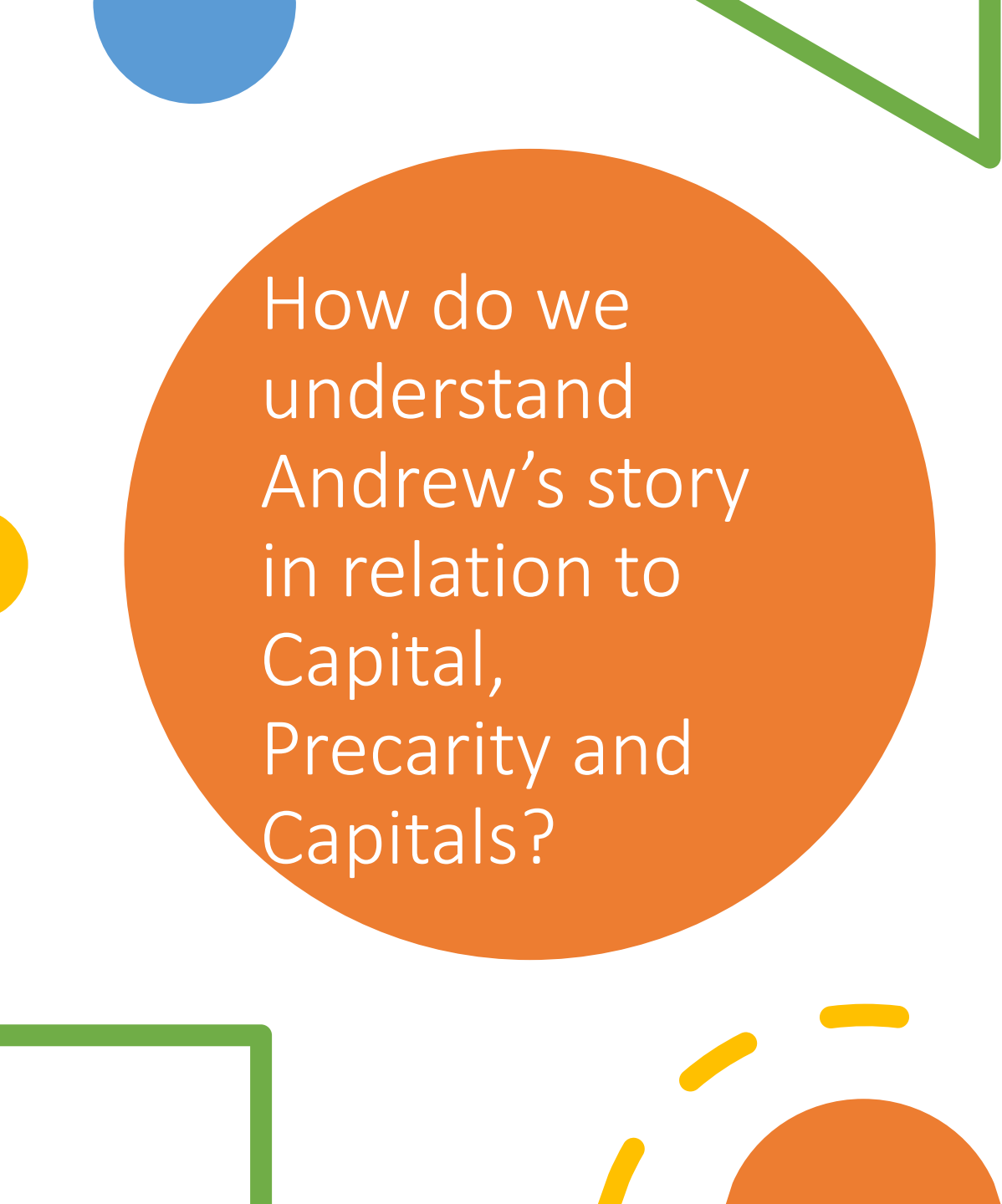
Andrew sells his shop after being accepted at Arizona State and securing a bank loan, but can't get an interview for a visa until 2024...





5. Gig work continued: Cloud surfing and bidding time

“So right now I'm using a platform called Cloud Surf...at level three. **It's paid per minute. Like most of the task maybe go for \$1, \$2.** The Cloud surf I'm using right now, **I paid \$600 for it to get that...** this crowd surf company won't accept me.. **we have Canadians who like, create the accounts for us and they sell it to us.”**



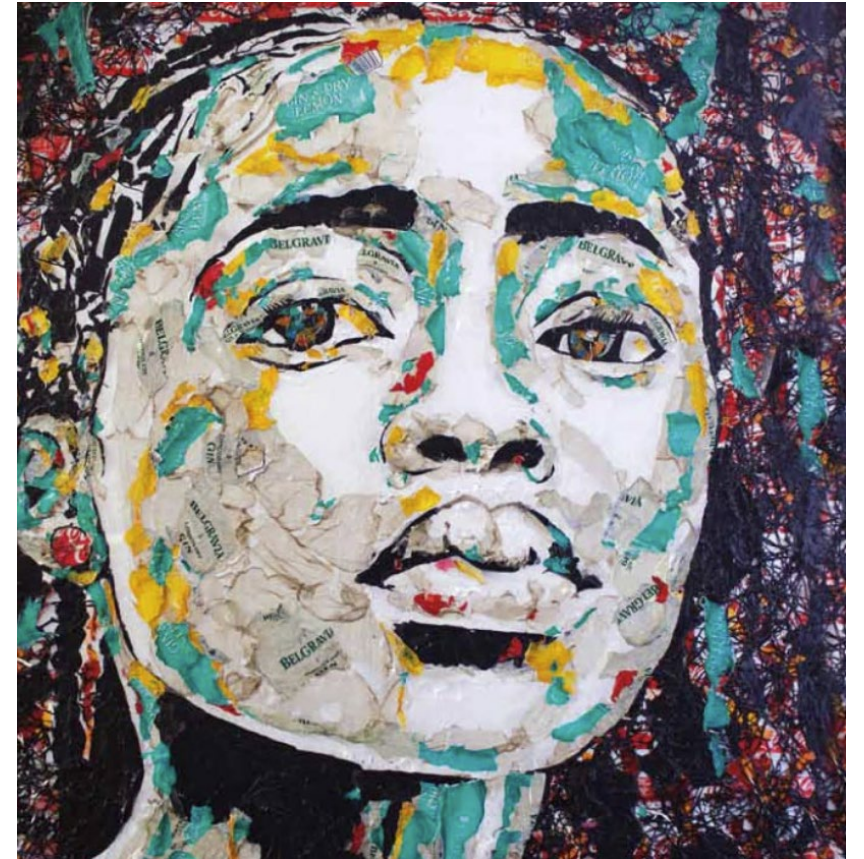
How do we understand Andrew's story in relation to Capital, Precarity and Capitals?

1. "Capital": Despite the stalled proper job, still an aspiration for African youth
2. Capitals: nationality, social security, education
3. Precarity

1. Capital: only mixed livelihoods available despite the continued allure of the proper job...

Life on the margins of late capitalism:

- Andrew wants a proper job... waits for it with mixed livelihoods, hustling and navigating gig work; a shop and aspirations for the future
- Not just an idea: a 'taste' for it in internship, provided social identity and connection ("deep connections")
- Wants respectability and belief that his are skills valued
- Interpreted as lack of appreciation not urbanisation without industrialisation
- Mixed livelihoods provide hobbies, passions but not self-realisation
- This is a slightly more middle-class hustle: some institutional support secured through education



2. Capitals: endowments, resources used for livelihoods and status

- **Citizenship** as a form of capital: two-fold exploitation of Andrew's labour, once by capital and once by peers in the global north: selling gig work accounts and to complete their degrees to get jobs Andrew cannot
 - but gig work gives Andrew income to bide his time, wait for next opportunity
- Using **education** as resource for mobility and livelihood
 - Education as computer engineer provides skills used across work and leisure: the game shop

But social mobility hampered by real borders: Capital mobile, labour less

 - Rules of the game often fluid for Andrew, visas, embassies, borders not
- **Kinship relations**
 - Secured the game shop through returning to kinship-based home; State social security has always been partial in Africa, fall back on human economic relations

3. Precarity

- Andrew's gig work- demonstrates relational nature of precarity, connected through global circuits of value and the social statuses used to tap into them.
- Navigate precarity through kinship relations that operate across translocal sub-fields with different rules of the game: international, urban- mainstream and informal, rural
- Rather than the individualised Euro-American worker
- Precarity and Capital(s): ***Understanding livelihoods like Andrew's require analysis of the intersection of precarity and capital(s) as they play out globally, in relation to evolving economic conditions that provide global youth with unequal opportunities that are both similar and different***