

BUSINESS, AS USUAL: THE POLICY PRIORITIES OF THE WORLD BANK'S DISCOURSES ON YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS¹

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Abstract

International governmental organisations (IGO) are an active presence in youth unemployment policy. This article undertakes a detailed analysis of the formative role of one IGO - the World Bank (WB) – in the framing of policy in this issue area. It charts the WB's emergence as a powerful political actor in this policy field and identifies the ideational content of its discourses. Four principal themes are identified: skills deficits; the effects of employment regulation and social protection on youth labour markets; the 'demographication' of explanations for burgeoning youth unemployment; and connections between youth unemployment, criminal activity and social disorder. The discussion highlights significant evidence of neo-liberal continuity and reinvention in WB discourses as its normative and ideational frameworks are extended to new terrains of analysis in ways that infer direct links between youth unemployment, social protection and social cohesion

Key words: World Bank; social policy; unemployment; young people; neoliberalism; social cohesion; social disorder.

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1. Introduction

In a statement accompanying the launch of the World Bank's (WB) 2013 flagship *World Development Report: Jobs* (World Bank, 2012a) the director of the report, Martin Rama, proclaimed:

The youth challenge alone is staggering. More than 620 million young people are neither working nor studying. Just to keep employment rates constant, the worldwide number of jobs will have to increase by around 600 million over a 15-year period. (World Bank, 2012b)

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This statement reflects a growing volubility by the WB that there is a discernable 'youth' dimension to the catastrophic impacts of the global financial crisis (GFC) on employment. Indeed, between 2008 and 2009, the number of unemployed young people increased by an unprecedented 4.5 million; by the time its effects had been fully felt in 2009, 81 million were recorded as being without work – more than one in eight of the world's 15-24 year olds (ILO, 2010). Significant as these figures are, they underestimate the scale of youth unemployment because they leave out of account all those in that age range who are not in employment, education or training, those who are working in the informal economy, or who are 'inactive' but unrecorded (ILO, 2010).

Despite the fact that youth unemployment is a manifestly global issue (in its reach, causes and consequences) studies of youth employment have focused on national policies and politics and failed to notice that international organisations are increasingly active and influential in policy formation in this, and other, fields. Yet in addition to the WB, the ILO (2010, 2012), UN ECOSOC (2009, 2012), the OECD (2010) and the IMF (ILO-IMF 2010) have all variously pronounced on the grave social consequences, both actual and anticipated, of the current global crisis and its implications for young people.

This article undertakes a detailed analysis of the recently unfolding norms and ideas concerning youth unemployment of one IGO – the World Bank. The WB has emerged as a powerful and influential political actor in the formation of youth employment policy and programmes worldwide; yet although its general social policy promulgations have been reasonably well documented, its policy position on youth unemployment has not. Using a critical discourse analysis to identify how texts can create, maintain or shift ideologies, this paper undertakes a detailed examination of key WB social policy reports that bear on issues of youth unemployment: two *World Development Reports* – one on young people (World Bank, 2006), the other on jobs (WB, 2012a) - and the Social Protection and Labour (SPL) strategy (WB, 2011). It presents a critical detailed reading of the content of these policy texts to discern the World Bank's position on youth unemployment with regard to its attribution of the causes, consequences and preferred policy responses to youth unemployment.

In doing so, the paper contributes to on-going efforts to track WB social policy. Previous analyses (Deacon, 2007, 2008, 2011; Deacon, Stubbs & Hulse, 1997; Hall, 2007; Mehrotra & Delamonica, 2006, 2007; Merrien, 2001; Yeates, 2008) have emphasised the Bank as a promoter of neo-liberal, residualist social policy. They typically highlight a consistent policy orientation across social protection, labour, education, health and social services, that reflects neo-liberals' preference for individual responsibility, 'choice', self-interest and enforceable contractual rights over collective responsibility, social cohesion, integration and equity. In the words of Tanvir Suntasim "One is reminded repeatedly that the World Bank is a financial institution and not a development agency; economic returns are prioritised..." (Bretton Woods Project, 2010, no page number). This paper's focus on youth employment tests the extent to which this approach is evident in this trans-sectoral policy field. In addition, because the period covered (2006-2012) precedes

and post-dates the global financial crisis, the discussion makes a contribution to debates about how the global financial crisis may have impacted upon the Bank's policy stance in this area, and whether neoliberalism is being abandoned or reinvented in the wake of the crisis (Deacon, 2011; Sharpe & Watts, 2012; Utting, Razavi & Buchholz, 2012).

The discussion unfolds across two subsequent principal sections. The next section briefly charts the emergence during the last decade of the World Bank (WB) as a powerful political actor in the field of youth unemployment, and discusses the significance of this in terms of historic struggle between neo-liberal and social democratic policy positions. In section 3, the discussion presents a detailed analysis of the ideational content of WB policy on youth (un)employment. It is organised around four principal themes – skills deficits; employment and social protection; the demographication of youth unemployment; and social cohesion and disorder. This is followed by a discussion which draws together some of the implications of these themes. Section 4, which concludes the paper, briefly recaps on key findings and considers their wider significance in the light of debates about the direction of WB social policy.

The analysis presented in this paper finds significant evidence of neo-liberal continuities alongside the emergence of new themes extending the normative roots of those continuities, and some accompanying shifts in and adjustments to them. The WB's neoliberal social policy orientation shows no signs of being dislodged; indeed, behind some apparent concessions to labour force development and social protection its recent entry into this policy field may have consolidated the rootedness of neo-liberalism within the Bank and beyond.

2. The emergence of the World Bank as a political actor in youth policy

Although the World Bank is an established political actor in social protection policy (Deacon, 2007, 2008; Hall, 2007), its attention has turned to young people relatively recently. Indeed, it was not until the early 2000s that the World Bank began to directly engage with youth issues, since when it has emerged as a powerful presence in this realm of global policy making. Its entrance into this field occurred in the context of efforts to forge a 'new' development agenda, marked by the Millennium Development Goals, and to establish inter-institutional partnerships to progress their implementation. In the issue area of youth employment specifically, it was a core partner in a dedicated transnational policy network, the Youth Employment Network (YEN), established by the 2001 Oslo Millennium Summit 'to prioritize youth employment on the development agenda and to exchange knowledge on effective policies and programmes to improve employment opportunities for youth' (ILO/YEN website, no page number). Set up as an inter-institutional partnership of the UN, the ILO and the World Bank, supported by British and Swedish government aid, YEN 'is a platform and service provider focusing on policy advice, innovative pilot projects, knowledge sharing and brokering partnerships' (ILO/YEN Mission Statement).

Following its first substantive and extended youth-focused policy analysis in its 2007 *World Development Report* (World Bank, 2006), the WB instigated the Global Partnership for Youth Employment in 2008 (GPYE) in which the YEN became one partner alongside a regional development bank, and civil society groups and a consultancy company. The aims of the YEN and the GPYE share much common ground, though the latter's website places particular emphasis on the World Bank's claims to expertise as knowledge brokers and providers of technical assistance to stakeholders across government and civil society. Since this time, the WB has consolidated its position as a key global actor in relation to youth employment, through the GPYE undertaking research and evaluation, offering technical advice, brokering policy dialogue, and developing its policy position on youth employment through two 2010 reports, on active labour market policies for young people (WB, 2010a) and on job skills (WB, 2010b). This work fed into its new Social Protection and Labour (SPL) Strategy (WB, 2011) and its 2013 *World Development Report* (WB, 2012a).

By way of preface to our detailed analysis in Section 3 of the ideational content of the World Bank's policy orientation on youth employment, we offer some brief observations on the significance of the World Bank's growing 'actorship' in this policy field. First, the WB's entry into inter-IGO partnership arrangements with the UN and ILO in the YEN and latterly through the GPYE mounted an unassailable and direct challenge to the hegemony of the UN and the ILO in this policy field. The ILO had dominated this field since the 1970s (Freedman, 2005); its emphasis on labour rights, comprehensive social protection, and more recently on 'decent work', was *the* prevailing global policy paradigm.

Second, the publication of the 2007 *World Development Report* (WB, 2006) was significant beyond its specific content precisely because it was a launch pad with which to consolidate its position in this area over the coming years. In this case, then, the 2007 *WDR* was a decisive turn in the politics of the determination of this policy field. By the end of the decade, just as the political consequences of the global financial crisis were becoming apparent, the WB had a 'ready-made' policy position on youth employment and was leading its own global network. If the WB had moved from the margins of the field to occupy a lead role, so the ILO's position had correspondingly moved from *the* lead global agency enjoying hegemonic status in this policy field to being one of two principal global agencies. By the end of the decade, the UN/ILO were incorporated as one voice amongst many in the WB's GPYE network. Given the WB's historic position on social policy, and its growing 'actorship' in the field of youth unemployment at the sub-national, national, regional and global levels, it is, then, vitally important to look closely at the WB's policy priorities in its youth unemployment discourses if we are to grasp its distinctive contributions to shaping the direction of policy responses at this time and in the years to come.

3. Critical analysis of World Bank policy discourses

Our analysis of the WB texts is organised around four principal discursive themes. The first theme is the preoccupation with the (mis)match between young people's

skills (however defined) and the perceived skills needs of specific labour markets. The second theme focuses on the dynamics of labour markets, and in particular the dynamics of labour supply and demand, in relation to young people as these are realised through labour costs and wage levels, particularly concerning minimum wages, employment protection and social protection. To these two broadly familiar spheres of dominant WB discourse, two more have emerged since the unfolding of the global financial crisis. Our third theme, then, is the WB's of the coincidence of the crisis with the so-called 'Youth Bulge' in some countries, which, we argue, approximates a neo-Malthusian position. The final theme takes the form of a new WB interest in the relationship between (un)employment and social cohesion. Although the WB broadly explores this across the working-age range, it includes a focus on criminality and civil unrest and disorder when discussed specifically in relation to young people.

3.1 Unskilled youth: can mismatch be a permanent condition?

The long history of objections from employers, employers' organisations and government departments that young people's skills are in general poor matches for the needs of business is well-documented, and the many highly developed rebuttals have done remarkably little to significantly assuage this thinking (Gleeson, 1987; Avis, Bloomer, Esland, Gleeson & Hodgkinson (eds), 1996; Hyland & Johnson, 1998; Payne, 2004; Hutton, 2005). The WB continues unabated to attribute youth unemployment to inadequate skills. For instance, it singles out one report which purports to provide evidence that managers rate skills shortages as the greatest constraint on business compared to all other factors by a considerable measure across a range of economies (World Bank, 2012a, Figure 5.13).

Skills are broadly defined, across thinking skills, behavioural skills, specific knowledge, basic and post-basic skills and vocational skills (WB, 2006, p. 71). While an understandable preoccupation with elementary literacy and numeracy skills peppers the WB documents, the implicit and explicit emphasis placed on human capital development throughout the texts carries notions of endemic skills shortfalls across the range, and the need for perpetual skills updating and upscaling in pursuit of individual prosperity and national economic growth. Of significance for these purposes is the tenor of the analysis:

In middle-income countries with growing industrial sectors, the bridges between school and work, meant to address youth's lack of work experience and severe skill mismatches, take the form of formal apprenticeships or bringing work experience into the school context. (WB, 2006, p.111, emphasis added)

This captures well the insinuations of young people's shortcomings. The explicit language of failure creeps into the narrative, through references to 'young people who failed to acquire basic skills first time around' (ibid., p. 71) and to young people who are 'failing to enter the labour market' (ibid., p.96). In effect, young people are portrayed as the authors of their own unemployed status.

It is important to recognise that there is some recognition of the complex interactive dynamic between the supply of, and demand for, skills (WB, 2012a, p.174-8), although the WB analysis tends to conclude with examples that demonstrate unequivocal supply-side deficiencies rather than poorly articulated demand. Elsewhere, counter-dominant examples are offered of *over-skilling* as a cause of youth unemployment. Drawing on examples from the Middle East and North Africa, it presents data showing that graduate unemployment exceeds unemployment amongst young people who sought to enter the labour market at the end of primary schooling, especially where there are job guarantees for employment in the public sector (2006, p.109 and table 4.2). Six years later, the WB cites similar examples, alongside others of highly educated young people from affluent families being amongst the most likely to experience unemployment in low-income countries (WB, 2012c, p. 99). Elsewhere, these counter-examples are largely attributed to queuing for overpaid civil service jobs which have had dysfunctional effects on the distribution of skills in developing economies (WB, 2012a, p. 174, 176). But in neither case does the counter-example cited subvert the overwhelming dominance of the skills deficit discourse.

Where this narrative is not directly drawn upon to explain youth unemployment, the underlying argument remains that inadequate skills hold back the economic growth generative of demand for young workers. The prevailing interpretation is nowhere better or more succinctly captured than in the WB's SPL strategy document, which identifies three important elements for improving social protection and labour:

[F]irst, ensuring investing in the human capital of children; second, activating individuals, especially youth, and improving the functioning of labor markets to include them; and third, improving the earning opportunities of workers, especially through building their skills and productivity. (WB, 2011, p. 25)

This statement neatly reiterates the WB's human capital framework, places the stress upon individual young people and the need to 'activate' them into jobs, and identifies skills improvement as the centrepiece of this activation. These priorities are unambiguous and consistent throughout these reports. Invariably, economic development is the most important single solution to unemployment: questions of the structuring and distribution of employment opportunities, and of the rights and entitlements of young people attempting to embark upon independent lives are out of the WB's purview.

3.2 On being careful what you wish for: adverse effects of labour and social protection?

The theme of unemployed young people pricing themselves out of jobs is developed in the context of unintended consequences of labour regulations on youth labour markets:

....some broadly based policies, especially those regulating the labor market, can hurt new entrants disproportionately. For example, minimum wages are sometimes set too high, and some studies in the United States and Latin

America have found that they can reduce the employment of youth. Employment protection laws provide stability to those already employed, but could inhibit employers from taking a risk in hiring promising but inexperienced workers. A study of 15 Latin American and Caribbean and 28 [OECD] countries found the impact of such regulations on young people's employment rates to be more than twice that on prime-age male workers. (WB, 2006, p.51-2)

The WB's assertion that employment protection lowers employment rates (ibid., p. 105, figure 2) and is unlikely to prove successful as a youth employment policy (ibid., table 4.2) is echoed in the 2013 *WDR*. Here, it draws on extensive data relating to risks poor localities face in mimicking the wage expectations of booming cities (WB, 2012a, p. 204) and speedily qualifies narratives on the virtue of minimum wages by reference to their potentially exclusionary effects on young workers (and women) from the formal economy and the risks of rigid minimum wage legislation when economic circumstances deteriorate (ibid., p. 261). Where the impacts of minimum wage legislation are demonstrably redistributive, their uneven and potentially polarising effects (between beneficiaries and those who are unemployed) are invoked (ibid., p. 262) and consequential job losses are highlighted (ibid., p. 263).

This message is also visible in a discussion of the dilemmas faced by formalising economies in which an ambition to universal social protection appears attainable. The trade-off, the WB argues, is to balance the improved living standards of those who gain protection against the costs to those who are excluded from such protection, especially in face of the risk that 'formalization may reduce productivity if it distorts incentives or puts a burden on firms' (WB, 2012a, p. 210). In this, it echoes the Social Protection and Labour strategy document's suggestion that social protection schemes should continue to be extended to young people 'while keeping in mind capacity and resource constraints' (WB, 2011, p. 90).

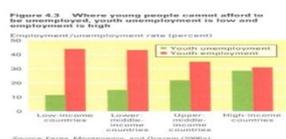
The underlying message is clear: in some contexts, young people price themselves out of jobs by trying to enter labour markets in which minimum wage legislation makes them 'unaffordable' (see also 3.2 above). As if to demonstrate, the 2007 *WDR* observes that:

Some youth are neither working nor in school [...]; other poor young people cannot afford to stay unemployed, most have to work. So the incidence of unemployment may be low, although youth are still mired in poverty. In the poorest countries, youth unemployment rates are very low and employment rates are very high (figure 4.3). As country income increases the incidence of unemployment among youth also increases—a likely reflection of available alternative income sources and safety nets that make it possible to be unemployed. Youth employment rates also fall as per capita income increases because youth devote more time to schooling. (WB, 2006, p.100)

The graphic representation (reproduced here as Figure 1), makes startlingly clear the different effects across rich and poor countries.

Figure 1. Where young people cannot afford to be unemployed, youth unemployment is low and employment is high

Source: figure 4.3, World Bank, 2006.



The low levels of unemployment and high levels of employment in low income countries are in many respects counter-intuitive. Almost as surprising is the near-1:1 ratio of unemployed to employed young people in high income countries. The steadily graded shift in the ratio of unemployed to employed between the two underscores the significance of socio-economic context in explaining such sharp differentiation. Nevertheless, it is a powerful and contentious claim to argue that 'other poor young people cannot afford to stay employed' (idem). Its voluble implication is that being unemployed is a privilege of being young in a high-income country, and as such must be interpreted as an individual choice on the part of each unemployed young person. There is insufficient space here to interrogate the data which gives rise to Fares, Montenegro & Orazem's (2006) findings cited by the WB in its 2007 *WDR*; suffice it to say that it gives rise to many questions about its definitional and categorical basis. Certainly, some interrogation of the 1:4 ratio of unemployed to employed in low-income countries is warranted before being led by the unstated implication that youth unemployment is in part a personal choice of the privileged rich.

In the aftermath of the global financial crisis which has informed the more recent reports, it might be expected that both the ratios in Figure 1 and the differences between them when categorised by country income grouping would look significantly different. It is likely that in the highest income countries shifts in the ratio would make an ostensibly even stronger case for encouraging young people to work for lower pay in pursuit of a deflationary economic recovery. Such a debate would make graphically transparent the unstated normative and ideological choices which make dilemmas out of WB advice to countries beset by youth unemployment. In such circumstances, attempts to straddle the divide between the interests of profit for businesses and the rights of those for whom work is essential for survival become ever more difficult.

3.3 Boom, bulge or surplus: the 'demographic' of youth unemployment

One consistent element of the WB's analysis of youth unemployment across all the reports is the so-called 'youth bulge':

Today, 1.5 billion people are ages 12–24 worldwide, 1.3 billion of them in developing countries, the most ever in history. This number will rise but not by much more, because it is fast approaching a plateau as fertility rates decline, producing a "bulge" in the world's population structure. (WB, 2006, p.4)

The report picks up this theme in its detailed analysis:

In 32 developing and transition countries, a 10 percent increase in the youth share of the population increased youth unemployment by an estimated 6 percent between 1980 and 2000. (ibid., p.104)

The theme continues in the 2013 WDR report:

Many countries with youth unemployment problems have very large youth cohorts... The Middle East and North Africa, which has especially high youth unemployment, is an overwhelmingly young region. More than 100 million people between the ages of 15 and 29, making up 30% of the region's population and about 47% of the working age population. Youth cohorts this large are not only likely to face higher unemployment rates but also tend to exert downward pressure on labour earnings. (WB, 2012a, p. 207)

This theme is revisited in a number of different country contexts in all three reports. Demographic fluctuations occur across the full range of country categories irrespective of development and national prosperity. In the context of most of Europe and North America, the post-war baby boom is seen, in retrospect, as an economic asset, associated with growth, technological advancement, cultural development and generally increased living standards. The shift from the discourse of 'baby boom' to the terminology of 'youth bulge' reframes this demographic trend not just as a labour market issue but as an issue of *oversupply*. The logic of all three reports is to try to avert ever-increasing youth unemployment by treating these enlarged populations as opportunities to re-steer economic fortunes. By juxtaposing two problems the notional win-win solution reveals itself, as follows:

- In some countries, large cohorts of new entrants and higher female participation rates will continue to add pressure on the youth labour market.
- Poor access to information and credit leads to premature exit from school, perpetuating skill mismatches. (WB, 2006, p.103)

Schooling the excessive supply of labour promises to alleviate rising unemployment and to prepare young people for a more skilled and developed economy by extending their education. But of course, the pressures upon young people to begin their economic contribution to their birth family by seeking poverty-wage jobs of the kind identified above militates against this solution. And by the same token, schools

are repeatedly referred to as failing – whether by virtue of their emphasis on rote learning (WB, 2006, p. 19), or because of curricula that failed to engage, instruct and teach work-related skills (ibid., p. 39), or because of generally low levels of learning achievement (ibid, p. 69-70). An obverse reading of the same circumstances interprets this strategy as an attempt to solve unemployment problems by keeping surplus labour off the labour market; and as an exercise in blaming the education system for failing to make this either an attractive proposition for pupils for a tangible benefit in the shape of meeting the ill-defined skills needs of a low-skill economy. Even in the most advanced economies, the limited successes of expecting the education system to warehouse the surplus labour of economies in recession has long been identified as a poor and sometimes cynical strategy (Roberts, 1997; Gleeson & Shain, 1999)

At root, though, the youth bulge is construed as problematic not primarily because of the failures of schools or of apparently-finite labour markets but because of those who created the boom. In its enthusiastic pursuit of responsible parents, the 2007 *WDR* lets slip the following normative Western nuclear family behavioural proprieties:

[Adults] also need to be adequately prepared to become parents to reduce the intergenerational transmission of poverty that occurs because of the failure to plan and space births, and nurture children appropriately. (WB, 2006, p.40, emphasis added)

In a phrase, the report momentarily lifts the veil which reveals that behind the quasi-benign terminology of the 'youth bulge' lurks a neo-Malthusian discourse of over-fecund foreigners whose problems would be solved by some simple technologies of population control and management. Seen in these lights, the massive problems of youth unemployment, poor job opportunities and the oversupply of labour are in part *sui-generis*.

3.4 Social cohesion: constructing virtuous circles from the vices of the poor?

The concept of social cohesion is a recent and significant innovation of WB discourses on youth unemployment. The *WDR* 2013 dedicates an entire chapter to the subject of jobs and social cohesion, beginning with the summary claim that:

Jobs can shape social interactions and the ways societies manage collective decision-making. They connect people with others and can provide access to voice. (WB, 2012a, p. 127)

Chapter sections are variously tagged with such optimistic (and occasionally banal) headings as: 'Jobs can manage social tensions', 'Jobs (or the lack of jobs) can shape social interactions', 'Jobs provide social identity', and 'Jobs connect people'. The chapter presents copious evidence of correlations between employment, trust, and civic engagement, while recognising the difficulties of adducing causal relations from such patterns of connection. The SPL strategy report similarly endorses this approach:

SPL is increasingly recognized as a vehicle for ensuring social stability and implementing social contracts to ensure that rights and state obligations are fulfilled and social cohesion strengthened as recognized in the prominent One-UN Social Protection Floor initiative. SPL can be an important element in ensuring social cohesion during periods of rapid structural change (driven, for example, by demographics or migration) and in the face of crises (WB, 2011, p. 2; emphasis added)

Perhaps the most significant aspect this new departure is the prominence it affords to the social and other non-economic benefits of work and employment, and its obverse recognition that crises like the GFC have adverse consequences far beyond the economic privations they visit on people living in poverty. But the benefits ascribed to being in a job are not allowed to stand entirely on their intrinsic merits as social gains, quality-of-life and personal satisfactions. Economic benefits are inferred both from well-being effects, from the amelioration of weakening bonds of social cohesion and rising tides of inter-personal and inter-group conflict, and, most notably for our purposes, from the minimisation of a range of more extreme legally sanctioned and normatively rejected conducts and events that the WB's analysis associates with unemployment. In particular, much of the discussion turns on the claimed crime-reducing effects of reduced levels of unemployment, particularly amongst young people, and the associated prevention of civil instability, unrest, disorder and violence – all of which have calculable economic costs.

At a number of junctures, the connection between unemployment and criminal behaviour amongst young people is described in the following terms:

In extreme cases, if people, particularly youth, lack jobs and hope for the future, they may turn to violent or criminal activity to compensate for the absence of self-esteem and sense of belonging that job might otherwise provide. (WB, 2012a, p.126)

While much of the evidence presented to support this claim relates to zones affected by armed conflict, links between unemployment, gangs, drug use and firearms are also cited to support this connection. Drawing on case studies from Ecuador, Chicago and New York, the report concludes that:

In extreme cases, unemployment can contribute to violence or social unrest. Youth in particular may turn to gangs or other violent groups to compensate for the lack of ties in economic and social life. (WB, 2012a, p.132)

Complementing this evidence, training provision for young unemployed people is found to reduce involvement in gangs associated with violence and criminal activity (WB, 2012a, pp.142-3; 171; 195).

Whatever the causes of the success of such locally specific examples, this line of analysis takes no account of the extensive and highly contested literature often referred to as the 'economic causes of crime' thesis. It selectively cites one of the

very few directly relevant studies whose findings unequivocally support the proposition that there is a causal connection between youth unemployment and rising crime (Fougere, Kramarz & Pouget, 2009) while overlooking the many others that point to the contrary. On this latter point, the current conjuncture in the UK alone gives serious grounds to doubt the association: in a period of high youth unemployment, and despite considerable difficulties in the isolation of secure data, there are strong indications that the incidence of crime on the part of young people has decreased (Fergusson, 2013). It is by no means clear that poverty and property-related crime amongst young people are associated in any consistent way. The inclusion of gangs in the chain of connection between unemployment and criminality is particularly insidious. It draws heavily upon a particular discourse of idle/troubled/drug-using/aggressive/violent youth which is highly contested in the research literature. The few serious studies undertaken have found difficulty in evidencing any clear connection (Goldson (ed), 2011; Muncie, 2009; Lewis, Newburn, Taylor, McGillivray, Greenhill, Frayman & Proctor, 2011).

The WB makes similar connections between high levels of youth unemployment and civil unrest and violence. The apparent associations between youth unemployment and the events of the Tunisian demonstrations, the 'Arab Spring' more generally and the English riots of 2011 are variously cited to suggest that:

Having, or not having, a job can shape how people view themselves and relate to others. While some jobs can be empowering, in extreme cases a lack of job opportunities can contribute to violence or social unrest. (WB, 2012a, p.12)

And that:

Frustration and even social unrest may develop when education and effort are not rewarded or when people perceive the distribution of jobs to be unfair (ibid., p.127)

In a slightly more reflective vein, the narrative continues:

The Arab Spring was as much or more about political voice as it was about jobs. Yet widespread disappointment, especially among youth, about the lack of job opportunities and frustration with the allocation of jobs based on connections rather than merit echoed across countries. (ibid, p.137)

This tentativeness grins through the text at a number of points. Notwithstanding, the World Bank's account of civil unrest amongst young people since the GFC is unequivocally blind to other interpretations that regard many instances as legitimate expressions of exactly the kinds of frustration quoted above. The *WDR* makes no reference to the much more explicitly articulated protest movements on the part of unemployed young people in Greece and Spain (Jawad, 2012; Papadopoulos & Roumpakis, 2012). In this, the WB's analysis stands apart from that of the ILO, which cautiously and discriminately interpreted demonstrations on the part of young

people across nearly 90 countries as warranted expressions of extreme frustration and resentment at being made victims of the foibles and abuses of international financiers (Somavia/ILO, 2012a, 2012b).

3.5 Defective youth or demand deficiency? The discursive tactics of deflection and distraction

This section began by emphasising the universal focus of these WB reports on human capital deficiencies, on adverse effects of robust employment regulation on the functioning of labour markets, on the necessity of activation initiatives directed towards young people for improving the functioning of labour markets, and on the centrality of the employability and skills-upgrading measures to such activation processes. Such parameters eclipse questions of demand deficiency, the structuring of labour markets, the distribution of employment opportunities and young people's rights and entitlements.

In addition, this reading of the WB's analysis of forms of employee protection based on minimum wages, employment rights and social protection drew attention to its construction of these provisions socially divisive - between the interests of those young people who gain access to oversubscribed labour markets and those who are excluded from them. It is strongly implied that the successful demands of young people (or of those who act collectively on their behalf) for wages that maintain them barely above poverty levels or compensate them for redundancy are significant elements in market closure, and significant determinants of levels of unemployment amongst their peers – primarily because of the cost burdens they placed upon employers. The emphasis of the WB's analyses falls upon striking an entirely unspecified balance in these supposedly opposing interests, and excludes considerations of basic rights and entitlements that deserve parity with or precedence over firms' maintenance of profit margins and shareholder dividends. The points noted earlier that the poor of low income countries have no option to be unemployed while the wealthy of high income countries can choose to be unemployed or in work also supports arguments in favour of wage deflation in times of economic duress. The accounts and analyses are constructed as though these were necessities of economic 'laws', not matters for debate and fundamental products of social priorities and values. The needs of business eclipse any such considerations.

Seen in this light, the WB's desire to bolster evidence in support of the case for social cohesion appears to be notably benign. Its venture into the 'soft' world of social cohesion could be interpreted as constituting a small gesture towards the idea of the 'social investment state', which seeks to justify pro-welfarist social policy interventions in terms of their measurable productivity paybacks; or as an effort to broaden the WB's historically narrow economy-focused pro-business horizons. Nevertheless, this new discursive trajectory has a disturbing tendency to align itself with some of the classic discourses which variously view 'the unemployed' as feckless, indolent and prone to criminal and violent acts. It has some alarmingly resonant echoes of the 'problem poor' as morally deficient. Criticism of the too-fecund populations unable to properly plan and manage their fertility and their

children's entry into labour markets also casts new light on the WB's 'youth bulge' analysis, which was offered in contradistinction to the positive attributes of a 'baby boom' in advanced economies.

Taken element by element, these analyses are underpinned by some evidential foundation powered by a good deal of accompanying discursive momentum. Taken together, they coagulate to portray unemployment as a condition resulting from personal deficits and deficiencies and as a product of overregulated, oversubscribed labour markets in which too many young people bring their ill-matched and poorly developed skills to market too early. Young people (and often their parents) attract a series of descriptors and analyses that portray them as a kind of underclass. Not only are they too populous, poorly educated and prone to swamping stressed labour markets prematurely; their consequential mass unemployment turns many of them to the company of gangs, to the comforts of drugs, to the protection of arms, to acquisitive and violent crime, or to follow the crowd mindlessly into riotous civil disorder disguised as social protest.

The composite cluster, assembled as a holistic analysis, feed alarmingly into a corpus of much more widely deployed but ultimately discredited discourses of the failings, pathologies and defects of this underclass. The cumulative effect of these layered renditions of youth unemployment is to hold attention on the supply side of labour market failures; they divert attention from one of the fundamental explanations of mass, burgeoning endemic youth unemployment: deficiency of aggregate demand for labour. The rationale underpinning the short-lived neo-Keynesian revival during the earliest and most alarming stages of the GFC (see Harvey, 2011; Peck, Theodore & Brenner, 2012), which identified public investment and major stimulus packages as the key remedial measures to stem the head-long plunge towards depression, is absent from these WB reports. Most remarkable of all is that the concept of demand deficiency in labour markets is almost completely absent from these reports. It receives rare passing mention and is substantively deployed only once, for the specific purpose of criticising closed professional labour markets and graduate queues in Muslim-dominated economic cultures that puts traditions of lineage and qualified succession above open competition and the pursuit of entrepreneurialism. In effect, this suite of analyses almost entirely ignores what is to many economists the dominant theory for explaining mass unemployment.

4. Conclusion

This paper has presented the first detailed textual analysis of WB policy discourses of youth unemployment. Focusing on the normative underpinnings and ideational content of WB key policy texts spanning 2006-2012, the discussion has been concerned with identifying the WB's attribution of the causes, consequences and appropriate policy responses to youth unemployment. On this basis, we are led to the conclusion that, despite the global financial crisis and booming global levels of youth unemployment, it is 'business as usual' at the WB: on this policy issue, the WB is deeply committed to a policy agenda that allies neo-liberal economism with social conservatism. In this its policy orientation is consistent with that identified in

relation other issues and sectors that have been the subject of independent critical analysis. The WB's analysis of the causes of youth unemployment refutes demand deficiency and structural analyses of youth unemployment in favour of supply side and individualistic factors: personal choices and conduct, skills mismatches and deficits, over-regulated labour markets, and poorly designed employment and social protection programmes.

While supply-side explanations of mass youth unemployment have remained broadly constant during this period, new themes have emerged which extend the normative roots of those explanations. Building on the 2007 *WDR's* discourses that have neo-Malthusian echoes, the 2013 *WDR* invokes demographic explanations of youth unemployment in its 'youth bulge' analysis while also placing great emphasis on behaviourist explanations of youth unemployment. Particularly notable in this regard is its invocation of underclass-style arguments in what is purported to be a direct relationship between unemployment, anti-social conduct, inter-personal violence, criminality and civil disorder. To be clear: the issue here is the failure of the WB to engage sufficiently with serious social science and to be seduced instead by popular discourses and discredited theories. Its ignorance of a body of evidence that consistently refutes the simplistic and inaccurate rendition of the relationship between these phenomena demeans its standing and credibility as a credible knowledge broker and a leading authority on research and evaluation.

On the question of whether the global financial crisis has prompted a policy shift, even a paradigm change, in political values and policy priorities, the debate to date has tended to revolve around whether neoliberalism is being abandoned or reinvented. With the WB being variously celebrated and criticised alike for its infusion of neoliberal values, policies and practices throughout its social policy, youth unemployment policy provides an important test of whether historic struggles against neoliberalism have taken hold. What few studies as exist on this to date have been tentative. Deacon (2011) queried whether the WB's formal participation in the UN global social protection floor initiative and its recognition of (some) of the limitations of welfare privatism might signal a possible reining in of the more extreme pronouncements of the WB and even indicate a new direction in social policy. However, this research finds nothing to support this reading.

More than this, though, it is not just that the WB's social policy orientation shows no signs of being dislodged or weakened; rather, it has been consolidated and extended over the period. We do not deny the possibility that this doctrine may be the subject of critical reflection and struggle within the WB, as Deacon (2007) suggests it is, but further research would be needed to ascertain the extent to which this is played out in the context of the internal dynamics within the WB during its formulation of its youth unemployment policy position. For the time being, we reiterate that neoliberalism at the WB is being consolidated and reinvented. That the near collapse of the global financial system and the consequent substantial weakening of youth labour markets worldwide did not dissuade the WB from this path is unremarkable if disappointing, while bank balance sheets recover at an infinitely more rapid pace

than those of the governments that underwrote them. The WB's priorities remain unassailably those of business – as usual.

On a final note, the point that an ideational project, hybridised and incomplete as it is, has capitalised on crisis conditions to refresh and extend its objectives does not signify the 'death' of alter-ideational, counter-offensive projects. These, too, have continued, and become resurgent in recent years. The historic struggles between neoliberal and social democratic (and other) approaches to youth unemployment, alongside other issues, will continue to be fought in the numerous spaces in and around the multiform structures of global governance and social policy. It is, indeed, business as usual, in more senses than one.

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