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# Learning, Philosophy, and African Citizenship

Edited by  
**Katariina Holma**  
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# Learning, Philosophy, and African Citizenship

Katariina Holma · Tiina Kontinen  
Editors

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# Introduction: Learning, Philosophy and African Citizenship

*Katariina Holma and Tiina Kontinen*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of citizenship is extensively discussed in multiple academic disciplines including the political sciences, sociology, philosophy, anthropology and education. More recently, the expanding field of *citizenship studies*<sup>1</sup> has innovatively drawn on diverse disciplines and initiated lively discussion of new conceptualizations of the notion of citizenship as well as traditional state-citizen relationships. *Development studies*<sup>2</sup> has, on the one hand, tackled questions related to promoting active and engaged

<sup>1</sup> This field is best exemplified in the volumes of the journal *Citizenship Studies* published since 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Development studies is a multidisciplinary field discussed, for instance, in the journals *World Development*, *Journal of Development Studies* and *Development and Change*.

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citizenship in the Global South by means of interventions and, on the other, presented critical reflection on the Eurocentrism inherent in the very concept of citizenship. Citizenship education in its different forms has been extensively debated in *educational philosophy*<sup>3</sup> and educational research, and various pedagogical approaches to educating active and critical citizens have been suggested. The contributions to this volume are located at the intersection of these research fields.

Scrutinizing citizenship and learning and their interconnections, the book is based on a four-year research project entitled *Theory and practice of learning to be a citizen* (2018–2022), in which we have initiated conversations between educational philosophy, citizenship studies and development studies, each with its lively debates on how to define citizenship and how to conceptualize the process of learning to be a citizen. These questions are relevant for the ongoing general discussion of citizenship, for accounts of citizenship education and for the theory and practice of development.

During the project, we have frequently been asked to provide *the* definition of citizenship and *the* theory of learning from which we draw. In response, we have explained that we do not base our project on one particular definition of citizenship but, rather, acknowledge that both citizenship and learning are concepts defined in various ways depending on the theoretical traditions and conceptual frameworks used. As Shachar et al. (2017: 5) in their introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Citizenship* point out, articulating a single definition of citizenship would be a ‘hopeless task’. In a similar vein, Peterson et al. (2020) in the *Palgrave Handbook of Citizenship and Education* show how contextual accounts combine philosophy, theory and education in multiple ways with the goal of citizenship education varying according to the conceptualization of ‘good’ citizenship in any context. Additionally, putting the theories aside, all those living their lives as citizens hold diverse conceptualizations and ideas about what citizenship means for them, and the ways in which they understand learning to take place. Against this backdrop, instead of fixing on particular definitions prior to analysis, our project has purposefully reflected the multiplicity of both scholarly perspectives and lived experiences of citizenship and learning.

<sup>3</sup> The most important journals in this field include *Educational Theory*, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *Theory and Research in Education*, *Educational Philosophy and Theory* and *Studies in Philosophy and Education*.

In everyday discussions, at least in the Western context, the first meaning attached to ‘citizenship’ is that of the legal status of an individual in relation to a specific state, most overtly manifested in the passport or national identity card held by the individual. In the same vein, the legal content of such citizenship—the rights and duties of which it consists—is articulated in constitutions and related legislation by most of the world’s nations. However, in each context, the question remains of how these are implemented and how they manifest in the everyday struggles of citizens. In other words, there are discrepancies between formal citizenship as a status and substantive citizenship as practice (Lister, 1997). Therefore, we want to emphasize the richness of both theoretical definitions and lived experiences.

Contemporary political and social science discussions of citizenship engage with the diverse ways in which citizenship encompasses membership in a polity, which can refer to a state, but also to any other political community (Isin & Nyers, 2014). These accounts, whether drawing on liberal, republican, communitarian, critical or any other wider theoretical tradition, have multifaceted ideas concerning the nature and characteristics of both political community and its membership—citizenship. Some accounts, such as those with liberal leanings, emphasize individual rights; others, such as communitarian explanations, emphasize belonging (see chapters in Shachar et al., 2017). Some focus on participation in a political community through ‘citizenship practices’ like voting and paying taxes, some on citizens’ deliberation and negotiation and yet others on citizenship acts such as making claims and contestation (Björk et al., 2018). Definitions of citizenship become even more multifaceted when they are combined with notions such as identity and belonging (Yuval-Davis, 1999). In such accounts, citizenship is not defined primarily as a relationship to the polity of the state, but as membership in communities at scales ranging from the local to the cosmopolitan (Clarke et al., 2014), and as interwoven with cultural, ethnic and religious ties. Given the variety of these debates, drawing on a single, specific definition would have meant excluding many relevant perspectives.

Similarly, educational philosophy addressing citizenship education draws on multiple philosophical traditions with different definitions of citizenship. Many of the wide theoretical traditions are encompassed by political philosophy, thus sharing theoretical foundations with the political and social sciences. However, educational philosophy is often more explicitly preoccupied with the question of what ideal citizenship is and

how education could cultivate and foster it. Although the traditions of the philosophy of education tend to stress the open-ended nature of any educational ideal, if a free and democratic society is the assumed aim and end of education, then ideals are a central part of educational theorizing. Therefore, the question of how to educate or promote learning for citizenship is closely connected to the ways in which good or desirable citizenship is defined. In most of the traditions, such ideal citizenship is connected to the notion of democracy where, again, ideas of learning and education vary in relation to the theory's conception of what is central to democratic life. Commonly, however, oppressive structures, inequality and injustice between humans, and how to best deconstruct them through education, have been discussed from various theoretical perspectives (Bell, 1997; Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1983, 2003; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; hooks, 1994; Hytten, 2006; Kumashiro, 2004; McLaren, 2003). Moreover, they have recently been increasingly complemented by accounts that take seriously the intrinsic value of nature and other, non-human, species (Engelmann, 2019; Horsthemke, 2020; Joldersma and Blenkinsop, 2017; Rice & Rud, 2016; Stables, 2020).

Development studies, both theoretical and in practice, has engaged with the role of citizens in societal transformation. On the one hand, international development policies have paid attention to the role of citizenship in building democratic institutions and establishing democratic governance, accompanied by a well-functioning state to ensure the realization of citizens' rights. On the other hand, development interventions, especially those implemented by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have focused on bottom-up processes of strengthening citizens' capacity to engage (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012), to demand social accountability (Hickey & King, 2016) and to hold duty-bearers accountable drawing from the human rights-based approach (HRBA) (Harris-Curtis, 2003). Some critical observers have pointed out that such interventions are the outcome of conceptualizations of citizenship based on European and North American historical trajectories and experiences—as well as the colonial legacies implicit in those conceptualizations—which are unable to capture the notions of citizenship embedded in diverse socio-cultural contexts (e.g. Robins et al., 2008). Therefore, attempts to strengthen citizenship in the Global South and empower citizens to promote social transformation and more inclusive society can be hampered by incompatible Western ideas concerning what citizenship is and how learning citizenship can be supported.



In our project, we have scrutinized these questions in specific contexts in Tanzania and Uganda, countries with diverse postcolonial socio-political trajectories. In both countries, development cooperation, including that with development NGOs, has been a significant feature of architecture of social and economic development. For us, the empirical cases from these two countries illustrate diverse conceptualizations of citizenship held by those living their lives as citizens (Kabeer, 2005), as well as how they understand learning to take place in their everyday lives and the educational settings where specific citizenship education is provided. At the same time, however, the cases present specific historically formed conditions in which citizenship takes place (see also Alava et al., 2020; Nyuyahambi et al., 2020).

In both countries, the social and political conditions of citizenship are entangled with colonial history and the related legacies concerning being a subject rather than a citizen (Mamdani, 2004). The area where current mainland Tanzania is located, Tanganyika, was under German rule from the 1880s to 1919, and then under the British administration until its independence in 1961. Uganda was also a British protectorate until 1962. Therefore, the legal and administration systems in both countries reflect, to some extent, those established by the British during colonial rule, although post-independence state-building has diverged. Despite the contested union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar into Tanzania, the first decades of independence were characterized by relatively peaceful state-building with the ‘father of the nation’, President Julius Nyerere, successfully establishing the spirit of a nation and preventing severe clashes between diverse ethnic groups (Aminzade, 2013). Introducing the national language of Kiswahili was an important means to state-building ends, while concentrating both political and economic power in the hands of a single political party, Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), in a framework of particularly African socialism, shaped citizenship experiences: while the state was there for its citizens, each citizen was expected to contribute to its development (*maendeleo*). In Uganda, on the other hand, the years between independence and 1986 were characterized by violent competition for power, including the devastating dictatorship of Idi Amin in the 1970s. The struggle over power reflected the colonial legacy of contradictions between diverse areas, related ethnic groups, traditional kingdoms and religious affiliations (Reid, 2017). When the National Resistance Movement (NRM) took power in 1986 after so-called bush war, it was often perceived as a guarantee of peace in the country, notwithstanding

the catastrophic war in Northern Uganda which raged from independence until 2006.

Nevertheless, although the NRM and President Yoweri Museveni's regime, in power ever since, still instigates violent retaliations against the opposition and other dissent, the overall relief of 'at least there is peace' was frequently mentioned by the rural participants in our research. However, the country continues to be characterized by divisions between ethnic groups, areas and languages to a much greater extent than Tanzania where such distinctions play a more minor and contextual role in the overall nation building (Aminzade, 2013). Both countries have introduced a multi-party democracy and conduct frequent elections; in practice, however, a single party has held power in Tanzania since independence and since the 1986 in Uganda. In Tanzania, presidential terms are limited, and the office holders have been changed accordingly. In Uganda, term and age limits have been abolished, and the same president continues to hold power despite growing demands for change by opposition movements whose activities are disrupted by the regime through violence or monetized co-option (Kagoro, 2016). In Tanzania, the opposition parties did pose increasing threat to the ruling party in the 2015 elections (Paget, 2019) but have since been more tightly controlled and restricted by it. Therefore, despite their differences, both countries provide kind on semi-authoritarian or hybrid regime for citizenship (Tripp, 2010).

As the empirical chapters of this book demonstrate, however, local practices, especially in rural areas, share many similar features, despite differences in cultures and languages. People are busy with livelihood-related activities, with attending funerals and other community events, and going to churches and mosques. The community of citizenship is mostly the village community, where it is important to be a good and contributing member. Nevertheless, in Tanzanian cases, constant connections were made between state and local citizenship ideals, with frequent local references to state vocabularies such as *maendeleo*, illustrating how locally achieved improvements were seen to contribute to the overall project of developing the country. Meanwhile, in Uganda, reflections in local communities and even in NGO-disseminated messages were geared around the idea that locals should not wait for the government to deliver; rather, communities should take care of their own development. Overall, the empirical nature of most of the following chapters means that we do not aim to make generalizations or comparison. Rather, we use diverse

case studies from these two East African contexts to illustrate multiple local definitions of citizenship and learning.

Ultimately, this book is inspired by and contributes to three different but intertwined discussions concerning the three elements of the title: learning, philosophy and African citizenship. In what follows, we introduce these discussions and describe the main contributions of the chapters: firstly, in terms of the variety of theoretical and local definitions of citizenship and, secondly, in terms of the related views of education and learning.

## 2 THEORETICAL AND LOCAL DEFINITIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

Definitions of citizenship vary both within philosophical discussions and according to cultural and historical contexts. The chapters of the book describe, articulate, reformulate and analyse a variety of conceptualizations of citizenship from those provided by scholars to those articulated by rural inhabitants in Tanzania and Uganda. By presenting such a range, we want to emphasize the connections between ‘citizenship’ and ‘learning’, whether built into sophisticated philosophical scholarship or less established articulations based on everyday experiences.

In chapter “[Citizenship Learning: Contextual, Material and Political](#)”, Tiina Kontinen and Katariina Holma provide an account of citizenship learning that builds on three dimensions prevalent in current citizenship studies. They argue that citizenship should be understood in contextual, material and political terms, and suggest an account of learning citizenship that resonates with these dimensions, especially in the context of Africa.

Chapters “[Incompatible Ideals of the Citizen: Deliberative and Radical Pluralist Approaches in Philosophy of Education—From Reactivity to Sustainable Citizenship: Perspectives from Braidotti’s Philosophy](#)” discuss definitions of citizenship from different philosophical angles. Instead of introducing a specific canon for the interpretation of citizenship in philosophy, the chapters illustrate the wide variety of alternatives existing in the field. In her chapter, “[Incompatible Ideals of the Citizen: Deliberative and Radical Pluralist Approaches in Philosophy of Education](#)”, Minna-Kerttu Kekki demonstrates how two differing accounts of democracy, one deliberative and the other radical pluralist, imply quite fundamental differences in their notions of what is central to ideal citizenship.

Hanna-Maija Huhtala, in the chapter, “[Mimetic Challenges of Learning to be a Democratic Citizen](#)”, starts her discussion of citizenship from Theodor W. Adorno’s pessimistic view of the (im)possibility of democracy and proceeds by scrutinizing potential sources of and solutions to such a crisis. Lenka Hanovská then introduces Balibar’s concept of citizenship as inherently conflictual in her chapter, “[Citizenship as Equaliberty Practice in the Philosophy of Étienne Balibar](#)”, in which she explores the antinomies in Balibar’s conceptualization of citizenship, which revolved around the possibility of citizenship as equaliberty practice based on the historically evolved ideals of equality and liberty. Anna Itkonen and Katariina Holma develop the notion of sustainable citizenship based on Rosi Braidotti’s new materialist philosophy in their chapter, titled “[From Reactivity to Sustainable Citizenship: Perspectives from Braidotti’s Philosophy](#)”, arguing that central to sustainable citizenship is the subject’s aim to increase her *potentia*, understood as the capacity for affirmative relations.

Chapters “[Communities and Habits of Citizenship: Everyday Participation in Kondoa, Tanzania—Climbing the Ladder? Community Perspectives on Learning to be a Good Citizen in Uganda](#)” demonstrate contextual, historically and culturally embedded conceptualizations of citizenship in different locations in Tanzania and Uganda. The chapters draw from diverse theoretical conceptualizations of citizenship, while paying attention to local ideas of citizenship and the diverse scales, spaces and communities where citizenship is practised. Citizenship as *good membership* of the community is one of the most important themes. Ajali Nguyahambi and Tiina Kontinen, in their chapter, “[Communities and Habits of Citizenship: Everyday Participation in Kondoa, Tanzania](#)”, draw from John Dewey’s philosophy, where the notion of citizenship is regarded as being constructed in everyday communities in the course of taking care of shared issues. Based on this definition, they identify diverse communities in which people residing in rural villages in Kondoa District participate, and analyse the kinds of citizenship habits constructed. In her chapter, “[Learning in Communities of Practice: How to Become a Good Citizen in Self-Help Groups in Rural Tanzania](#)”, Benta N. Matunga scrutinizes one important category of such communities, women’s self-help groups in Mpwapwa District, and analyses the kinds of citizenship learned in this participation. She suggests that local citizenship revolves around two notions—self-development and helping each other—that resonate well with the public discourses of a good citizen in Tanzania.

Continuing with women's groups but in the Ugandan context, Karemba F. Ahimbisibwe and Alice N. Ndidde, in "[Learning Among Rural Women: Village Saving Groups in Western Uganda](#)", focus on village saving and lending associations (VSLAs) in two villages in Rubirizi District. They draw on the notion of economic citizenship as women's right and ability to access, own and use resources. Furthermore, they demonstrate how women's economic citizenship is strongly related to the questions of gender autonomy, independence and equality. Henni Alava, Janet Amito and Rom Lawrence provide an additional account of gendered citizenship in Uganda in their chapter, "[Learning Marriage Ideals and Gendered Citizenship in "God-Fearing" Uganda](#)", which contrasts Christian clerics' and lay women's views on relationships and marriage to explore the intersection of religion, citizenship and gender in Uganda. The chapter highlights that gendered and religious ideals concerning what constitutes 'good' are in themselves contested.

In the context of Kabarole District in Uganda, Twine Bananuka, Tiina Kontinen and Katariina Holma, in their chapter, 'Climbing the ladder? Community perspectives on learning to be a good citizen in Uganda', build on the notion of cultural citizenship as a continuous learning process embedded in the meanings communities apply to notions of citizenship and the citizen. They used a tool called 'the ladder of citizenship' to explore ideas of good citizenship held by community members; these they identify as having lived long enough in the community to be accepted, cultivating a source of livelihood, being God-fearing and contributing to the joint affairs of the community.

### 3 EDUCATION AND LEARNING

In a similar vein, we set out to explore diverse conceptualizations of learning in both philosophical and everyday accounts. However, as we have also previously reflected (Holma & Kontinen, 2020), identification of the dynamics of learning related to citizenship is a challenging task. From the point of view of educational philosophy, selecting learning rather than education as a central concept for the book was somewhat daring. Many educational philosophers (e.g., Biesta, 2013, 2017; Smeyers & Depaepe, 2008) consider the increasing shift from education and pedagogy to the notion of learning in educational sciences an undesirable sign of a paradigm shift from a philosophical-societal approach to an individual psychology of learning processes. At the same

time, philosophers of education have shown an increasing interest in the concept of self-education as central to future challenges facing individuals and societies (Saari, 2021). Furthermore, many philosophical notions relevant to the acquisition of dispositions central to citizenship can be seen as involving an idea of learning without drawing on notions prevalent in contemporary empirical psychology of learning as an individual phenomenon. Furthermore, the field of adult education has for decades been interested in informal learning spaces where new ways of acting, doing and participating, central to one's citizenship, may be absorbed.

There are also various approaches to learning in educational theory that regard it as a socio-cultural phenomenon rather than an individual psychological process; these have been extensively used to examine learning in organizations, work and practices other than institutionalized school settings. Kontinen and Holma's account of citizenship learning draws on socio-cultural and socio-material approaches. They argue for an understanding wherein the contextual, material and political dimensions of citizenship are acquired and potentially transformed through interaction and practical action mediated by material artefacts, moving within the zone of proximal development, and located in specific conditions characterized by power relations.

The philosophical chapters of the book reflect how different concepts and ideals of citizenship ultimately suggest different ideas of what is central to learning and education. Kekki's chapter demonstrates how educational approaches based on a deliberative notion of democracy stress instilling tolerance and decreasing polarization, whereas a radical pluralist framework focuses on the central role of political action and even conflict. Due to their theoretical differences, deliberative accounts often see school as a potential space of learning democracy, whereas radical pluralist theories regard the hierarchical structure of schools as being in contradiction with very possibility of learning democratic action. Although both deliberative and pluralist traditions stress the possibility of learning from others in discussion, the former stresses learning from others through genuine listening, whereas the latter emphasizes the recognition of the political nature of emotions and identities.

Based on Adorno's and Horkheimer's philosophy, Huhtala develops the concept of *mimesis* as not only an informal but often also an unconscious and accidental way of learning, which can thus also lead to undesirable consequences. She then discusses how, based on her

approach, emotions play an inescapable role in learning genuinely democratic citizenship. Itkonen and Holma also stress the role of emotions—*affectivity*—in learning sustainable citizenship and argue that in order to learn to be an ethically and politically accountable subject, one must understand and manage one’s *affectivity* and the linked capacity to relate to others.

Nguyahambi and Kontinen, in their Deweyan reflection on citizenship habits constructed in the course of participation in multiple practices, focus on learning as acquisition and its potential for reformulating habits (Dewey, 1922, 1927; Holma & Kontinen, 2020). In their analysis, they demonstrate how participation in different practices resulted in six categories of citizenship habits including engaging citizenship, something that NGO interventions sought to inculcate, and responsible citizenship, which is embedded in normal everyday practices. Their analysis emphasizes the role of participation in everyday practices in shaping the characteristics of citizenship.

Matunga draws on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of situated learning and examines learning as peripheral participation in self-help groups in rural villages in Tanzania. Learning in communities of practice is a widely used approach in the socio-cultural tradition of learning, which understands learning not as an individual process but as something emerging from practice. She also explores in greater detail how members of the self-help group describe their learning in their own words. The notions of learning which they expressed—listening, observing, imitating and engaging in trial and error experimentation—all revolved around learning while acting together.

In their chapter on a village saving and lending association (VSLA), Ahimbisibwe and Ndidde utilize the participatory learning approach (Mayoux, 1998; Pretty, 1995), which emphasizes not only learning skills and knowledge together, but also learning as a process of empowering the marginalized. They show how VSLAs function as spaces for learning new skills, ideas and capacities related to both economic empowerment and gendered citizenship, arguing that learning by participating in saving groups is a potential way for hitherto marginalized village members to challenge local power relations collectively, and thus contribute to transformation.

Alava, Amito and Lawrence’s chapter demonstrates that providing church education on gendered roles related to marriage is one thing, while religious women’s learning about these during their life course is

another. Rather than reflecting on marital gender roles from the perspective of the normative ideas provided by the church, women's learning is solution-oriented and geared towards responding to (potential) problems in marital relationships. Nonetheless, the chapter pays attention to religion as a significant space of learning 'good citizenship'.

Bananuka, Kontinen and Holma draw on Jeremy Bruner's (1996) theory of folk pedagogies in their exploration of local conceptions of how one learns what is considered good citizenship. They identify five ways in which community members conceptualize learning citizenship, explicated in the Rutooro language by research participants: heredity (*obuzalirwaana*), religion (*ediini*), copying and observation (*kukopa*), challenges (*ebizibu*) and education and training (*kusomesebwa*). Overall, in a similar vein as Matunga's findings on ideas of learning in self-help groups, the analysis by Bananuka et al. shows that participating actively in community and religious activities, with their joys and sorrows, is an important way to learn.

Taken together, the chapters identify diverse conceptualizations of citizenship and learning through, first, conceptual analysis of the philosophical literature and second, by means of participation in the everyday lives in the rural communities as well as conducting interviews and group discussions; the methods used are described in detail in each chapter. Throughout the volume, the general idea has been to capture how research participants in diverse empirical locations give meanings to the notions of 'citizenship' and 'learning'.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

Situated at the intersection of citizenship studies, educational philosophy and development studies, the book invites readers from these and other fields to reflect on a range of conceptualizations of citizenship and learning. First, contributions offer the power to define these concepts to both scholars and citizens located in Tanzania and Uganda. Second, they show how definitions of citizenship guide the ideals of what kinds of citizenship should be learned. Third, they provide analysis anchored in ongoing practices of citizenship to facilitate the design and implementation of attempts to foster citizenship learning. Ultimately, the book extends an invitation to shift the analytical lens from education to learning.



Contributors demonstrate that themes such as democracy, equality, liberty and justice play a central place in definitions of citizenship, while the lived experiences of citizenship revolve around joining with others to form groups to ensure better livelihoods and environments, and participating in supporting other community members. Emotions, affects and being a caring citizen are emergent themes in both aims, as they are in citizenship discussions more broadly. Diverse approaches emphasize, in different ways, the significance of consensus and deliberation alongside the importance of conflict and claim making and illustrate how the complex phenomenon of learning relates to these approaches.

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# Citizenship Learning: Contextual, Material and Political

*Tiina Kontinen and Katariina Holma*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we discuss learning in relation to citizenship, ultimately presenting an account of citizenship learning. Both concepts are continuously contested and redefined in multiple academic traditions. When it comes to citizenship, historical reviews frequently begin description with the governance practices in the cities of Ancient Greece, quickly proceeding to the Enlightenment, with an overview of the French Revolution and citizenship rights, and the Constitution of the United States—both of which exemplify the birth of modern democracies—to more recent stages of neoliberalism and globalization. Notwithstanding the wide diversity of theoretical approaches to citizenship, whether liberal, republican or communitarian, the narrative follows similar lines. Introductions to theories of learning, for their part, examine everything from

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brain dynamics, through cognitive aspects of individual learning, to social learning and accounts of collective critical learning aimed at changing societal power relations, covering a wide terrain of psychological, socio-psychological, educational and sociological perspectives. In this chapter, our aim is not to offer a thorough review of these approaches but, rather, to conduct a selective reading to establish a particular account of citizenship learning.

What motivates us to discuss the concept of learning in relation to citizenship is that, although citizenship practices, competencies and capacities are considered central to the future of societies, there seems to be a kind of reluctance to bring the notion of learning to citizenship discussions. This might be because learning is often associated with the psychological and cognitive processes of an individual, whereas citizenship is fundamentally a societal and political phenomenon. While citizenship education is quite widely discussed both in the philosophy of education and in the studies of educational practices, learning, especially in informal settings and everyday encounters, although mentioned, is rarely conceptualized in detail. Our account of citizenship learning contributes to this lacuna.

Citizenship education, especially when conducted in institutionalized school settings, is often geared toward teaching citizens' rights and duties in a particular state, or promoting a specific ideal type of citizenship. Contemporary studies of citizenship, however, have broadened the common idea of it as a relationship between the individual and the state, inclusive of civil, political and social rights (e.g., Marshall, 1950), toward taking into account multilevel local and global spaces and communities where citizenship is performed. Novel ideas of citizenship challenge the possibility that it may be taught and its contents transmitted merely by means of formal schooling. Instead, they call for an account where citizenship is continuously learned in diverse spaces.

Additionally, as suggested by recent accounts of citizenship education (Peterson et al., 2020), the ideals of citizenship that are taught are intertwined with the contexts where they emerge. Most accounts of citizenship education are, explicitly or implicitly, located in Anglo-American or European liberal democratic worlds. To counteract this tendency, in this chapter we discuss our general account of learning citizenship in the context of Africa, the home of over a billion citizens—a choice which provides a reminder of the partiality of the typical narrative of citizens' evolution from Ancient Greek to contemporary multicultural societies, and the close relationship of concepts such as citizenship with

modernity and colonialism (Bhambra & Holmwood, 2021). From an African perspective, the story of citizenship is different, as institutions of citizenship as currently understood have not ‘evolved’ from African processes but are entangled with coloniality. To date, the colonial mindset continues to appear in discussions about citizenship in Africa that suggest it as something incomplete; indeed, it is as something in a continuous need to import from the more developed world (Boatcă, 2021). While a decolonization of the concept has been suggested (Isin, 2015), our attempt in this chapter is more modest. We merely aim to promote dialogue between citizenship studies and African contexts. Based on our research experience and reading, it is clear that what is understood as citizenship—both in scholarship on Africa and in lived experiences on the continent—is a dynamic mixture of concepts, institutions and ideas stemming from pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial times, and we see a certain resonance between it and current citizenship debates.

In this chapter, we suggest an account of citizenship learning that builds on three dimensions central to contemporary debates on citizenship: the *contextual*, the *material* and the *political*. Our account does not draw on a particular theoretical position on citizenship but, rather, seeks to articulate an idea of learning that encompasses these dimensions and can be further developed for empirical examination in diverse contexts. Previously, drawing from John Dewey’s (; b) philosophical pragmatism, we have elaborated on a framework of *growth into citizenship* (Holma & Kontinen, 2020; Holma et al., 2018). This approach holds that citizenship is constructed through participation in practices where certain habits of citizenship are acquired and potentially transformed and, thus, learned. Inspired by Lave (2012: 161–162)—who advocates on behalf of traditions that resist the theoretical and empirical treatment of ‘learning’ as an individual, mental exercise produced only in the institutional arrangement of schooling and teaching—we turn to some of these practices and their relationship with the three dimensions of citizenship. The outcome of such learning is best understood as new capabilities which strengthen one’s ability to exercise citizenship in relation to one’s rights, obligations, identity and belonging within diverse communities.

First, to address the contextuality of citizenship, we draw on the socio-cultural tradition that pays attention to the historical and cultural context of learning and the dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment and introduces the notion of a zone of proximal development in defining the possibilities and limits of learning in particular

situations. Second, to consider the materiality of citizenship, we build on socio-material ideas of learning that focus on how learning occurs in practices and activities that entangle human beings with technologies, infrastructures, artifacts and other material objects. Third, to reflect the political dimension of citizenship, we discuss the role of politics and power in citizenship learning and explicate how the socio-cultural and socio-material account should and could involve the political dimension central to citizenship. We conclude with an articulation of our account of citizenship learning and reflections on its implications for the future.

## 2 CONTEXTUALITY IN LEARNING CITIZENSHIP

The emphasis on the contextual nature of citizenship is one of the main characteristics of current studies in the field. Contextuality is discussed from various angles, all of which have an effect on how learning should be conceptualized. First, *multidimensionality* has been underlined (Shachar et al., 2017: 7; Leydet, 2017) in definitions of citizenship, with the assignation of different roles to legal status, rights and obligations, participation, identity and the sense of belonging. Second, there are multiple accounts with a specific focus, such as economic, sexual, cultural and ecological citizenship (see chapters in Isin & Turner, 2002; Volp, 2017). Third, there are various articulations of how to conceptualize citizenship vis-à-vis polities or communities other than nation states, such as cosmopolitan citizenship (Kymlicka & Norman, 2007; Linklater, 2002), indigenous citizenship (Gover, 2017) or multilevel citizenship (Maas, 2017).

The idea of performing or exercising citizenship simultaneously in multiple communities is a common trend. For instance, Maas (2017: 646) argues for multilevel citizenship that acknowledges the coexistence of multiple polities even in the same territory. He refers mainly to simultaneous belonging in municipal, federal and state polities and argues that citizenship, in distinction from subjecthood, entails the idea of participation in decision-making. In a similar vein, Isin and Nyers (2014: 2) refer to citizens' membership in overlapping and nested polities, and Yuval-Davis has posited citizenship as a multi-layered (1999) or multitiered (1997) construct, given people's memberships in different local, national and transnational collectivities.

While some authors, such as Kostakopoulos (2008), have argued for a post-national framework and 'anational citizenship' based on domicile,



most constructs of multiple citizenship consider that the state is still an important and significant polity, particularly for the status of citizenship. However, citizenship enacted through claiming rights (Isin & Saward, 2013), for instance, can also be performed by those who do not have the official status of citizenship in a state (Rumelili & Keyman, 2016). Critical of the view that citizenship can solely be practiced vis-à-vis a nation state, Clarke et al., (2014: 141) suggest the notion of communities of citizenship: articulations of imaginaries of people and places, and the everyday experiences of their connections, in which citizenship is enacted and where citizenship, literally, takes place. Each community entails a different degree of recognition of connections and commonalities, and, hence, belonging, rights and obligations.

The current debates on new conceptualizations of citizenship have mainly been articulated in the context of the global North, as a response to increasing multiculturalism, to a growing number of people not being citizens due to their migration-related legal status and to the overall effect of globalization in weakening the role of nation states, the traditional locus of citizenship. Definitions of citizenship and its practical manifestations receive greater nuance when such debates are raised in the context of Africa, where multi-ethnic and multi-religious states have been rather the norm than the exception. Conceptually, stands on citizenship can be situated anywhere on a continuum ranging from claiming the universality of the concept, making it valid and applicable globally, to arguing for extreme African particularity by highlighting, for instance, autochthony (being of the soil) as central to citizenship as belonging (Geshiere, 2009). Moreover, some accounts emphasize African communality and the philosophy of Ubuntu, an understanding of shared humanity particular to Africa (Moyo, 2021) that implies that citizenship is inherently communal and not individual, while others suggest that in many African contexts, state citizenship is less relevant than the rights, moral obligations and belonging inherent to social orders revolved around ethnicity and kinship (Englund, 2004; Kelsall, 2008). Although these arguments critique the liberal, individualistic idea of citizenship as status in a state (Robins et al., 2008), they are nevertheless conversant with recent discussions in the citizenship literature.

The shared feature of these contemporary approaches is that citizenship is increasingly framed in ways other than the state-citizen relationship with its status, rights and responsibilities (Lazar, 2013). Following ideas of the multilevel or multi-layered nature of citizenship (e.g., Isin & Nyers,

2015; Maas, 2017: 646; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 1999), one is expected to exercise citizenship or perform the acts relevant to citizenship in various local, national and transnational contexts. Therefore, it can also be argued that learning citizenship is contextual and potentially realized in relation to multiple communities or polities simultaneously. How can such learning be conceptualized? This brings us to socio-cultural approaches to learning, which draw on a wide variety of theoretical inspiration, particularly the cultural psychology of L.S. Vygotsky (1896–1934). His legacy to socio-cultural approaches revolves around three main ideas: human learning originates in social, cultural and historical interactions; learning occurs in the ‘zone of proximal development’; and learning is mediated by psychological tools (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). The zone of proximal development refers to a space where learning takes place in interaction with more experienced peers and, in Vygotsky’s account of children, with adults. Therefore, an overall idea in socio-cultural approaches is that learning and other processes categorized as ‘mental functions’ are intertwined with cultural, historical and institutional contexts through mediational means such as language (Wertsch, 1993).

Therefore, the notion of context is at the core of socio-cultural learning approaches (Danish & Gresalfi, 2018) wherein learning is located between individual and context and new knowledge is co-constructed in dynamic interaction with others, mediated by language and concrete tools. Here, the unit of analysis is the individual in context. These approaches to learning resonate with the contextual notion of citizenship which focuses on learning citizenship in interaction with the context rather than adapting or internalizing abstract principles of, for example, the nature of rights and duties stated in a nation’s constitution. They also resonate with Delanty’s (2003) definition of ‘cultural citizenship’, which refers to a continuous learning process whereby individual, social and cultural learning intertwines. The construction of meanings as shared interpretations of the world, beliefs and values is central to cultural citizenship. Meanwhile, the notion of zones of proximal development in learning citizenship relates to the notion of exploring citizenship as it is experienced and practiced in everyday lives (Kabeer, 2005). Here, learning that is potentially transformative of citizenship is not triggered by dissemination of new information about abstract ideas of citizenship distant from everyday life; rather it departs from citizens’ current ideas and practices concerning their rights, duties, belonging and identity, vis-à-vis the communities of which they are members.

So far, in taking the contextual nature of citizenship as a starting point, we suggest an account of learning citizenship which locates learning in interaction and encounters in social, cultural and historical contexts and takes place within a zone of proximal development. For educators, policy makers, NGOs and others who wish to promote citizenship learning, this implies that the ideas of citizenship imported from other historical and cultural contexts and from beyond the zone of proximal development are not potential objects of learning. Conversely, attempts to promote learning should start from the careful analysis of the context and current situation and be planned in negotiation with local views of the capabilities that would be worth learning.

### 3 MATERIALITY IN LEARNING CITIZENSHIP

If context is understood as mainly cultural, special attention must be paid to the role of language, beliefs and values. Additionally, however, we want to highlight the role of contextual material elements related to citizenship and citizenship learning. First, we suggest that the very material conditions that enable the exercise of citizenship require reflection. Second, we propose a view where learning occurs in practices in which human and material elements are firmly intertwined.

Material elements, such as property, have been at the core of definitions of citizenship since classical times (Balot, 2020), when owning property was considered a prerequisite for status as a citizen and the right to participate in decision-making; the classical Lockean liberal view also considers the right to private property central to citizenship. In more recent debates, the notion of economic citizenship has referred to the realization of rights to own property, but also to make work contracts and, further, to have labor rights (Woodiwiss, 2002). From a gendered perspective, Kessler-Harris (2003) has suggested a definition of economic citizenship that would not only mention property and labor, but also care and reproduction. She suggests economic citizenship should cover issues such as social benefits, public transport and education, which would ensure the fulfillment of economic citizenship as a ‘standing or status that enables men and women to fully participate in the democratic polity’ (ibid.: 159).

In general, economic and material conditions that bestow dignity are considered central to citizens’ rights and also enablers for the exercise of substantive citizenship through participation. In her human development

approach, Martha Nussbaum (2011: 34) argues that material conditions—being able to hold property and seek employment—are among the central capabilities that should be secured to all citizens. Relatedly, in the definition of poverty as capability deprivation, as suggested by the capability approach (Sen, 1999: 86), economic facilities, political freedoms and social facilities all intertwine to enhance people’s capabilities. Accordingly, the multidimensional poverty index widely used by development institutions regards poverty as multiple joint deprivations in the fields of health, education and living standards (Alkire & Santos, 2014).

Hence, the material conditions constraining the practice of citizenship, poverty, do not only refer to low income, but also to wider deprivation of property and basic social services such as education and health care. In some African areas traditionally characterized as poor, owning assets like land, livestock, houses and household items can play a crucial role in local understandings of good life (Brockington & Noe, 2021: 3) and, consequently, in gaining the agency to participate fully, at least in local communities of citizenship. In sociological citizenship studies, Baglioni (2015; 2016), for example, draws on Sen’s capability approach and posits a concept of material citizenship. He points out that while citizenship is a status, its realization is embedded in material resources, in which he includes not only tangible assets but also cultural and social capital. He argues that it is vital to examine how material resources and diverse forms of capital turn into capabilities to enact citizenship—and how the lack of them diminishes these capabilities.

A full account of citizenship learning processes, therefore, must pay attention to the material conditions in which citizenship is taking place. In light of this observation, here we turn to socio-material approaches to learning which make more fundamental arguments concerning materiality, claiming it is not only a condition of learning but an inseparable element in learning processes. Socio-material approaches to learning (Fenwick, 2015)—inspired by a number of theories, including actor-network theory (Latour, 2005; Law, 2009), cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström & Sannino, 2021), complexity theory (Davis & Sumara, 2006) or posthumanism (Coole & Frost, 2010)—generally pay attention to ways in which the material, the immaterial and the human constitute what is called ‘everyday life’ (Fenwick, 2010: 105) and, therefore, comprise inseparable elements of what it means to be a citizen and how learning happens.

Consequently, learning is understood as embedded in material action and interaction, and as a process where knowledge emerges from that action (Fenwick, 2010: 111–112). Materials like artifacts, tools, infrastructure, bodies and buildings are elements of any action and thus, can enable or constrain both the action itself and, in consequence, the learning that ensues. For example, Orlikowski (2010: 135) argues that capacities for action are enacted in practices characterized by ‘entanglements’ of humans and technologies. Actor-network theory (Latour, 2005) considers learning as ‘translation’, whereby human and material elements change each other in a process of creating new links and new actions. Activity theory (Chaiklin et al., 1999; Engeström, 2014) focuses on the ways in which learning as change is mediated by the concrete and symbolic tools and artifacts with which humans work on the objects of their activity. Therefore, in general, learning in socio-material perspectives refers to an enactment of a socio-material collective rather than the mental processes of an individual or something taking place solely in the interaction between individuals. Hence, the unit of analysis is the practice from which learning emerges.

The socio-cultural and socio-material approaches we have so far discussed both emphasize learning as taking place in joint practice, in contrast to learning that happens in a pedagogical relationship between educator and learner. In organizational learning, widely cited ‘practice theory’ (Ghedardi, 2000; Gherardi & Strati, 2012) emphasizes an understanding of learning as participation, something that takes place in the ‘flow of experience, with or without out awareness’ (Ghedardi, 2000: 214). Practice, in this approach, is historical, material and indeterminate (ibid.: 220). In a similar vein, the notion of situated learning that takes place in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) emphasizes learning through participation: apprenticeship and learning in participation with more experienced others. Learning is understood as an ‘integral and inseparable part of social practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 53), a process in which practice and participants’ identities are continuously co-constructed. Approaches employing activity theory (Engeström, 2014) argue that learning takes place in a system where the joint work is geared toward a certain object, mediated by symbolic and material tools and characterized by particular division of labor and rules. A specific kind of expansive learning occurs when all the elements of an activity change as a consequence of contradictions within activity systems or between them.

Learning can also be conceptualized as ‘retooling’ in a context of an activity system (Miettinen, 2006).

So far, based on the contributions from socio-cultural and socio-material approaches to learning, we have suggested an account in which citizenship learning takes place in the course of everyday participation in the practices of the diverse communities of citizenship to which people belong. These practices are embedded in socio-cultural contexts that shape the zones of proximal development which include the infrastructures, buildings, artifacts and resources that enable diverse kinds of practices to take place. Further, tools and artifacts play an essential role in learning, in addition to interaction between human beings, and learning can be seen as an accomplishment of a socio-material practice. Based on these principles, learning citizenship is embedded in everyday practices in which people participate, rather than in acquisition of information at an education or training event about statuses, rights and responsibilities as citizens of a certain state. For those engaged in citizenship education, a focus on what people do together in their interactions with nature and available infrastructure, technologies and tools, and what kind of citizenship those enable and constrain, is a beneficial starting point.

#### 4 THE POLITICAL ELEMENT IN LEARNING CITIZENSHIP

The third important dimension for citizenship learning is related to politics and power. Despite the multiple conceptualizations, citizenship remains an inherently political concept. In this chapter, we discuss two important aspects related to politics and power: the political conditions that enable and constrain the realization of certain kinds of citizenship and the power relations related to exclusion from and silencing within everyday practices.

One of the most used definitions in current citizenship studies revolves around the notion of *acts of citizenship* (Isin & Nielsen, 2008), where citizenship is understood as political subjectivity and political agency in the multiple social groups and polities in which people simultaneously participate (Isin & Nyers, 2014: 9). People can undertake acts of citizenship across these contexts, thus enacting and performing citizenship by making rights claims (Isin, 2017: 505, 501). In this account, citizenship is essentially about claiming rights and claiming the right to claim rights (Isin & Nyers, 2014: 8); it refers to something that enables subjects to become active claimants, rather than remain passive recipients. To be able

to perform acts of citizenship, one needs to have both the capacity and the authority to exercise rights and duties in a particular regime of citizenship—whether North-European, Anglo-American or postcolonial—which all have historically formed constraints on enacting citizenship (Isin & Nyers, 2014: 3): that is, particular political and legal institutions that shape the constellation of rights and duties and the space available for claim-making.

The current constraints in postcolonial citizenship regimes in Africa are partly based on the colonial legacies reflected in local legal and administrative state structures, initially established by colonial powers. Additionally, the colonial experience that full citizenship status can be granted only to the administrative elite, whereas most of the population would be considered subjects rather than citizens, continues to shape the imaginaries of citizenship (Mamdani, 2004). Today, most African countries are democracies and citizenship rights are determined in constitutions and include practices such as voting in multiparty elections; however, many are also what Tripp (2010) calls hybrid regimes where authoritarianism is the de facto form of governance. Notwithstanding multiparty democracy, opposition parties can be ignored, silenced, harassed or violently crushed, and citizens' critique and claim-making vis-à-vis the government silenced and restricted for decades. Consequently, the existing civic habitus (Pettit, 2016)—or habits of citizenship (Holma & Kontinen, 2020)—is geared toward fulfilling responsibilities rather than claiming rights. Moreover, when democratic institutions are weak, power is distributed through a system of patrimonialism (Cheeseman et al., 2020), whereby people enter personal patron-client networks to ensure their connections with economic and political power. Such networks are the main source of social security in situations where state provision is limited. In general, in the African context people can simultaneously identify as subjects, clients and citizens, which establishes a particular dynamic for performing citizenship (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012).

Another important political element is inclusion. Citizenship, understood as membership of a state or any other community, always has an inherent tension between inclusion and exclusion (Mohanty & Tandon, 2006). While some are included in rights, duties, identities and belonging, others are simultaneously excluded (Bhambra, 2015). The mainstream canon of the evolution of citizenship narrates how some groups, such as the illiterate, property less, women or the indigenous, have been included in formal citizenship over the course of history (Boatcă, 2021);

nevertheless, despite formal citizenship status, many groups continue to suffer from unequal opportunities for economic and political participation. Additionally, groups devoid of formal citizenship, such as migrants, are easily excluded from exercising full participation in the societies of their residence. In discussing the notion of inclusive citizenship, Lister (2007) recalls how struggles for social inclusion lie at the core, not only at the level of states, but also when the focus is on multitiered and spatially grounded citizenship in a variety of other contexts.

Therefore, sensitivity to power dimensions is central to all communities where citizenship is exercised, shared concerns approached and shared decisions made. For example, the theories of deliberative democracy, focusing on situations of equal speech opportunities and the possibility of consensus based on the best argument, have been criticized by radical pluralist theorists of democracy for bypassing the structures of injustice that may play a role in what is selected as the conclusions of consensus (Dryzek, 2005; Fraser, 1989; Wahl, 2018). In a similar vein, participatory and community development initiatives can fall into romanticizing communities as naturally democratic and egalitarian settings, whereas they may actually be characterized by local power asymmetries (Kontinen & Millstein, 2017). For example, local citizenship practices in Africa, such as the widespread women's saving and lending groups or local civil society organizations, are often governed by local elites who ensure that potential members fulfill certain criteria concerning livelihood level and general reputation as 'a good citizen' (Dill, 2010; Kilonzo et al., 2020). Thus, examination is needed of what Kontinen and Millstein (2017) call 'situated hegemonies'—the taken-for-granted ways of understanding good citizenship's relations to gender, income and other elements—and how they affect who can be included in communal practices.

Thus, politics and power are relevant to our account of learning citizenship. For instance, the proponents of radical pluralist theories of democracy stress that in citizenship learning one important dimension is recognizing the political nature of identities that play a role in the opinions and arguments presented in discussions (Ruitenberg, 2009; Kekki, this volume). In Biesta's (2011) account of learning citizenship, becoming a political subject in the first place 'includes explication of one's identity, criticality to the current order of society, claiming one's rights and contradicting the elite whatever its form: big corporations, powerful politicians and so on' (Kekki, this volume). In general, critical approaches to learning citizenship have focused on possibilities of



change and transformation through the promotion of active citizenship. Often based on Paolo Freire's (2000) 'pedagogy of the oppressed', critical approaches understand learning as a process geared toward conscientization: the identification of oppressive structures manifested in everyday life and initiating collective action to address them. Hence, pedagogy is perceived as a political practice that enables learners to be critical and engaged citizens (Giroux, 2010: 716), and learning requires education to avoid people being 'stuck with the local' and enable them to become conscious of wider power structures (Freire, 2014: 78).

It is also important to ask why—sometimes despite deliberate educational efforts—people do not transform into active and engaging citizens. In response, Pettit (2016) suggests that such learning requires changes in civic habitus, which is a longstanding, embodied way of being a citizen. Changing habitus is challenging, as the embodied enactment of citizenship takes place within collective experiences of power and oppression (Pettit, 2020). Thus, power here is something that is embodied in long-term experience, the realization and change of which should be the very content of learning new citizenship practices. Power positions can also guide the learning of other content. From a socio-cultural point of view, Chineka and Yasukawa's (2021) study of how an agricultural community in Zimbabwe learned to adapt its everyday practices in response to climate change showed how the zone of proximal development regarding agricultural practices was not so much about applying received knowledge of new, drought-resistant crops, but rather about avoiding a loss of social acceptance or power, or the risk of being ridiculed by other community members.

Overall, power has not been a central analytical category in socio-cultural or socio-material approaches to learning; rather, Contu (2014), for instance, has advocated paying attention to the power dynamics in and between communities of practice, and suggested a perspective wherein power is seen as a practical accomplishment embedded in practice. Similarly, Kontinen (2013) has shown that power is mentioned in activity theory as a feature of hierarchical divisions of labor and as the power to accomplish something emerging in activity but not systematically conceptualized. The notion of transformation prevalent in activity theory does not refer to change in power relations, but to something that is 'generated from below' with the co-creation of new forms of activities and the 're-orchestration' of social relations at work (Engeström & Sannino, 2021: 11). As Stetsenko (2021) observes, the transformations within an

activity system are not usually related to any particular historical-political struggles in the society where learning is taking place.

We argue that a notion of citizenship learning based on socio-cultural and socio-material approaches needs to pay attention to power and politics related to practices where the learning occurs. This requires, on the one hand, investigation of their political context, and how power dynamics enable and restrict certain citizenship practices, hence shaping potential zones of proximal development and affecting access to material resources such as infrastructures. On the other hand, there is also a need to acknowledge power relations that are embedded in practice by, for instance, scrutinizing who is excluded, the hierarchies in divisions of labor, the symbolic and practical manifestations of power related to tools, the diversified access to resources and the co-construction of practices and power positions within practices. While citizenship is understood as multi-layered and taking place in diverse communities, politics and power also manifest in the different levels of colonial legacies, political space for citizenship acts and power positions in practices.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have proposed an account of learning citizenship which locates it in interaction and practice rather than focusing on it as the mental process of an individual, thus taking seriously the contextual, material and political conditions of citizenship. We have identified three dimensions central to contemporary citizenship research—the contextual, the material and the political—which resonate with our broad understanding of citizenship as enacted *vis-à-vis* different communities ranging from the state to local and global levels.

Contextuality suggests that, in each case, citizenship is enacted in a particular socio-cultural context that shapes the kinds of rights, duties, belonging and identities that are at stake where the citizenship takes place. To address the contextuality of citizenship, we drew on socio-cultural approaches to learning that understand it to take place in certain cultural-historical contexts, in interaction and by moving within zones of proximal development. By materiality, we mean the material conditions that enable the realization of citizenship within diverse communities in the first place. Further, based on socio-material accounts, we suggested that learning is embedded in infrastructures, technologies and material artifacts. Both learning approaches were combined in the notion of practice and, thus,

we proposed citizenship learning to emerge in socio-material practices. The political dimension related to power referred, first, to the societal power constellations that constrain citizenship practices and, second, the power relations that manifest in inclusions and exclusions from local practices of citizenship. Therefore, learning citizenship in social and material practices always includes the reproduction or transformation of power relations and power positions prevalent in each tier of multi-layered citizenship.

Notwithstanding the multi-layered idea, we consider the state as one of the strongest historically formed communities of citizenship, with each state having its own state-citizen relationships as a result. The state as a community of citizenship has been central in framing both the legal and socio-cultural contexts for citizenship and in potentially ensuring the material conditions of dignity required to exercise citizenship, including education, health care, infrastructure and conditions of property ownership. The community, or polity, of a state also continuously shapes the kinds of citizenship acts which are possible. However, in terms of everyday lives, especially in postcolonial, African citizenship regimes, citizenship is often constructed in multiple, local communities, where the state might not be very visible as a service provider or in its exercise of political power (Jones, 2009). Therefore, we argue that learning citizenship needs to be understood more widely than the mere education and training of citizens in their rights and duties vis-à-vis the state, and encouragement to actively claim these, as this might fall outside the feasible zone of proximal development. Rather, an account of citizenship learning should include exploration of the acquisition and transformation of citizenship in everyday participation. In other words, learning should not only be understood as a consequence of education and dissemination of knowledge, but as something that emerges in practices, in places the educational theorists would call informal.

For *citizenship learning*, it follows that the unit of analysis is not an individual who, regardless of conditions, learns new citizenship capabilities, but on the contrary, the very socio-material practice wherein learning takes place. Furthermore, citizenship learning is not only learning new knowledge or information, but learning embedded in action, manifested in performing and exercising citizenship in new ways and thus better responding to situations where rights, obligations, identities and belonging are at stake. This implies that citizenship learning and change in contextual conditions and practices are inseparable: in order to learn

new citizenship capabilities, change in the very conditions of citizenship is necessary, while new capabilities of performing and exercising citizenship will certainly change existing practices. As the practices are deeply rooted in cultural and historical conditions, it follows that, in order to promote citizenship learning, the concept of the zone of proximal development is central; only by understanding the socio-material conditions, significant communities of citizenship and power relations which shape that zone, can one design programs to support potential ensuing steps for learning citizenship in any particular location.

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# Incompatible Ideals of the Citizen: Deliberative and Radical Pluralist Approaches in Philosophy of Education

*Minna-Kerttu Kekki*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the implications of two dominant approaches in democratic theory in twenty-first-century philosophy of education: deliberative democracy and radical pluralist (agonistic or antagonistic) democracy. While neither is homogeneous, due to both internal and external critique,<sup>1</sup> two strands of argumentation within educational theory are guided by them: one utilizing deliberative theory, especially that found in the works of Jürgen Habermas (Englund, 2010; Fleming, 2010, 2012; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996), Nancy Fraser (Huttunen & Suoranta, 2005), and John Dryzek (Wahl, 2018a), and the other utilizing radical pluralist theory strongly influenced by Chantal

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., Fraser (1989) has criticized Habermas's one-sided take on consensus and plurality, while Mouffe (1993, 2005, 2018) has criticized the deliberative approach, especially Habermas's work, for de-politicizing politics. Dryzek (2005) and has, on the other hand, criticized Mouffe's take on deliberative theory as simplistic (see also Ercan & Dryzek, 2015).

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Mouffe (Ruitenberg, 2009; Tryggvason, 2018; Zembylas, 2018) and Jaques Rancière (Biesta, 2011, 2012; Ruitenberg, 2009).

I argue that these two approaches imply two essentially different conceptions of citizenship in terms of its ideals and imaginaries and, thereby, the goals and emphasizes of learning it. I suggest, therefore, that following either of the theories makes the subsequent philosophy of education political, hence, a *political* philosophy of education. I develop my argument based on a reflective point of view with no aim to defend either approach but, rather, to analyze their different implications for citizenship from the ‘outsider’ point of view.<sup>2</sup>

The main concept explored in this chapter, learning citizenship, can be defined as ongoing acts of gradual change aimed at developing the skills to participate in the organization of society (see Biesta, 2014; Holma et al., 2018). Following Michael Merry (2012), such learning includes elements such as coming to perceive oneself as a citizen—that is, as having a valid position in political space—and participating in the mutual rights and responsibilities (broadly understood) of members of society.<sup>3</sup> This might mean, for example, learning how to form political opinions, how to contribute to the well-being of one’s community, how to make one’s statements heard in society and how to vote in elections (see Biesta, 2011, 2012; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996).

In the upcoming section, I sketch how the two approaches conceive of plurality, democracy and politics, and the ways in which their prescriptive-normative arguments differ from one another. Although it has been suggested that these approaches, especially Habermas’s or Rawls’s and Mouffe’s arguments, have drifted closer together during the twenty-first century (see Karppinen et al., 2008; Leiviskä, 2020b; Robertson, 2008), I argue that essential differences in their conceptions of plurality, democracy and politics remain. I then turn to the central differences in accounts within philosophy of education that follow each of the two approaches.

<sup>2</sup> This approach is not unique, e.g., Plot (2012) has investigated the possibility of a ‘third way’ to approach these theories from the perspective of political phenomenology.

<sup>3</sup> As Katariina Holma et al. (2018) argue, such learning is ‘a process of reorganizing habits’ (p. 223), where the person habituates herself to particular kinds of action. Similarly, Käte Meyer-Drawe (2008) has characterized learning as a processual situation wherein relations to the surrounding world change to some extent, and Michelle Maiese (2017) as a cognitive-affective alteration in relation to one’s surroundings. These are all critical of the transformative learning views presented by Jack Mezirow (1991; 2000): i.e., learning as a relatively rapid and complete transformation.

## 2 TWO THEORIES OF DEMOCRACY

The works of theorists belonging either to the deliberative or to the radical pluralist approach are widely used in twenty-first-century educational theorizing on citizenship.<sup>4</sup> The biggest name in this field from the deliberative approach is Habermas, a follower of the Frankfurt school and critical theory, and from radical pluralist theory, Mouffe, a left-aligned post-Marxist and one of the founders of the contemporary agonistic approach. The latter has largely developed out of critiques of the deliberative approach, which often consist of Mouffe criticizing Habermas's work. Therefore, both within and outside philosophy of education, comparisons between these two approaches to democracy often take the form of comparing the works of Habermas and Mouffe (see Dybel, 2015; Karppinen et al., 2008; Leiviskä, 2020a; Zembylas, 2018), despite the fact that no single thought, including those comprising the deliberative and the radical pluralist approaches, belongs to any single thinker. Both approaches include multiple different lines of argumentation and internal critiques, opening up to further arguments and theoreticians not clearly falling into either category. In my investigation, I bring Habermas and Mouffe together with other relevant authors whose arguments help to clarify my own, such as Dryzek and Rancière.

While the theorists adhering to one or the other theory are far from homogeneous and consensual in their argumentation, the content and the theoretical frameworks of the arguments within the deliberative and the radical pluralist arguments clearly differ: the deliberative approach utilizing Arendt and critical theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer, with pragmatists such as Dewey and Mead (e.g., Fraser, 1989; Habermas, 1981); the radical pluralist approach relying on Heidegger, Lacan, Marx (e.g., Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), Derrida, Schmitt and Hobbes (e.g., Mouffe, 1993, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Within the political theory of education, other political theories and theorists are used—such as critical pedagogy utilizing the works of Paulo Freire (e.g., Giroux 2020)—but, within the theory of citizenship, however, these two are dominant or mainstream (Leiviskä, 2020a; Robertson, 2008; Zembylas, 2018), despite, for instance, Deweyan contributions to the debate (e.g., Holma et al., 2018).

### *Plurality, Politics and Democracy*

The two approaches can be viewed as two strategies of argumentation for democracy and also as two different conceptualizations or intersections of politics and plurality. Both the deliberative and the radical pluralist approaches share the idea of plurality as foundational to theories of democracy. Both Mouffe (e.g., 1993) and Habermas (e.g., 1996) argue that a democratic society is by definition plural: different positions must be assumed for there to be debate, different views, opinions, values and so on. Without such plurality—that is, if there were only a single political ideology and identity—society would be totalitarian, with no space for difference and debate. The two approaches, however, conceive of plurality in different ways, leading to different conceptions of democracy.

Broadly stated, for Mouffe and many other radical pluralists, such as Laclau (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) and Rancière (2010), the radicality of plurality in democracy means that there might be no commonly shared ideology, value basis, beliefs or interests among members of society. In the words of Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 151), ‘the subject positions cannot be led back to a positive and unitary founding principle’. This also holds for any identities that emerge in society; more importantly, neither is a common founding ideology or identity necessary for a functioning democratic society (see Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 2005; Rancière, 2010). Rather, a democratic society should tolerate differences and dissensus, not eradicate them, to remain democratic (see Mouffe, 2005).<sup>5</sup>

For the deliberatists, in turn, a plurality of opinions, identities and even ideologies enables democracy as long as deliberation among the different positions can be maintained (e.g., Dryzek, 2005; Habermas, 1981; Wahl, 2018a, 2018b). In contrast to radical pluralists, for deliberative democracy, common ground among the discussants should be attainable in order to proceed with the organization of democratic society. Here, deliberation means careful conversations over how to proceed, with participants offering reasons for their views and listening to the views

<sup>5</sup> One might question Mouffe’s argumentation based on her and Laclau’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) and her *For the Left Populism* (2018), where they argue for breaking the existing hegemony to create a new one. However, even though she might hold such a position, i.e., according to her own argumentation, would not hold democracy to be an absolute value, she nevertheless provides an analysis of the democratic society as radically plural.

of others (Wahl, 2018a). According to Ercan and Dryzek (2015), while the early treatments of Habermas and Rawls emphasized rational argumentation oriented toward consensus on the common good, with time, the utility of other modes—telling stories, rhetoric, humor and even silence—has been acknowledged within the arguments about deliberative democracy. While Habermas (1981) viewed deliberation as a rational undertaking, over time scholars have come to include non-argumentative or even irrational speech acts. The main idea is nevertheless the openness to change in viewpoint with the aim of understanding the other. The endpoint of deliberation might be consensus on a political question, as it ideally is for Habermas (1981, 1996), or a better understanding of another party's positions (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015; Wahl, 2018a).

Related to the question of plurality, conceptions of democracy in these two approaches also differ crucially. Speech acts are at the core of political action in deliberative democracy; a democratic society is one where everyone is included in the discussion (see Habermas, 1996; Dryzek, 2005). Putting communication at the heart of politics means recognizing the need for effective justification of positions, stressing the pursuit of reciprocal understanding between those who have different frameworks or ideologies, and valuing inclusion and reflection (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015). Within this framework, it is often argued that political or other societal decisions in general should be the product of fair and reasonable discussion and debate among citizens (Eagan, 2016).

By contrast, for radical pluralists the core of politics is the decision ultimately made (whatever it concerns), which is by definition an exclusionary act: when choosing *x*, *y* is excluded, be it an ideology, particular action or group of people. Therefore, a democratic society is one where decisions are made based on no other hierarchy than the will of the people (not, for instance, on a hierarchy based on knowledge or age) (Ranci re, 2010). As everyone is allowed to participate in the public sphere, democratic society produces debate between adversaries aiming to make decisions that benefit their interests while tolerating the existence of others (see Marchart, 2018; Mouffe, 2005). The term 'adversaries' might sound strong, and it certainly does not emphasize the 'nice' nature of democracy, but that is precisely the point. The language of 'adversaries' emphasizes the ever-present potential of (and the underlying) antagonism in democratic society, with its plurality of ideologies, beliefs and identities, and with the possibility of displacing distinct subject positions (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). This is what politics is for radical pluralists,

at least in Laclauian and Mouffeian arguments: keeping society agonistic, while not letting it fall into antagonism (a conflictual relation) wherein the mutual ‘adversaries’ would become ‘enemies’—versus one’s own group as ‘friends’—without communicative contact (see Marchart, 2018; Mouffe, 2005). Noteworthy is that the decision also relates to how education is organized in society: those responsible must decide what to include and what to exclude from curricula.

Simply put, the conception of democracy in the deliberative approach reflects the post-war liberal democracy that values individual liberty and the democratic institutions (see Dryzek, 2005; Fraser, 1989; Habermas, 1996). In the radical pluralist approach, the conception of democracy is rather paradoxical in multiple senses: for Rancière, ‘democracy as a form of government is threatened by democracy as a form of social and political life and so the former must repress the latter’ (Rancière, 2010: 47); for Mouffe, to maintain the democratic order, there must be what she calls a ‘conflictual consensus’, a consensus that there will be no consensus (Mouffe, 2005). In addition, the democratic paradox lies in the ‘democratic’ being simultaneously a form of rule and a symbolic framework of democratic values and practices (Mouffe, 2000). Such paradoxes are not a concern for deliberative—especially Habermasian—arguments.

### *Prescriptive Arguments*

The two approaches to democracy include multiple normative and prescriptive arguments concerning democratic society (Mansbridge et al., 2010), which, as I argue in the next section, relate to the crucial differences in educational theorizing on learning citizenship. Neither approach, however, provides a clear blueprint for ideal society; rather, the argumentation addresses the possible ideals of democratic society. The prescriptive nature of the arguments starts with the valuing of democracy and the democratic values of equality and popular sovereignty. Further, as outlined above, the deliberative approach calls for unity and tolerance in order to be able to deliberate, while the radical pluralist one argues for explicating differences in the positions and identities of members of society and a tolerance of dissensus (Karppinen et al., 2008). In deliberative democracy, the differences among members of the society *should* not hinder some kind of a fruitful discussion and at least a vague consensus on something (see Ercan & Dryzek, 2015; Habermas, 1981; Wahl, 2018a),



while in radical pluralist democracy, these differences *should not* be overcome but recognized (see Marchart, 2018; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 2005, 2018; Rancière, 2010).

Deliberative prescriptive argumentation is based firmly on the Habermasian idea of the normativity of rationality (Dryzek, 2005), which distinguishes between what Habermas (1981) calls ‘instrumental rationality’ and ‘communicative rationality’. The first refers to rationality used to act successfully in the environment of a debate, while the second refers to rationality in argumentative speech through which participants in a discussion can overcome their mere subjective positions to gain consensus (Habermas, 1981). Specific kinds of understanding and practice are related to these rationalities: instrumental and communicative understanding, and instrumental and communicative practice. According to Habermas, communicative rationality enables functioning and enduring community; instrumental rationality, in turn, does not function to achieve shared understanding and the success of community, because it is not geared to understanding others without an overriding instrumental goal. In the arguments attendant on the deliberative approach, we can often see the implicit prescription for communicative rationality (whether it is called ‘rationality’ or something else). The arguments often stress inclusive speech, mutual listening in order to understand the other and the eradication of oppressive power structures that might hinder deliberation (see Dryzek, 2005; Fraser, 1989; Wahl, 2018a, 2018b).

Radical pluralist democracy, on the other hand, is what Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 136) call ‘radically libertarian’, and its supporting arguments often prescribe or assume left-wing values and motivations (Mouffe, 1993); simplified, left-wing ideology is evident in its advocacy for the well-being of the people and the reduction of oppression (Derrida, 1994; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 1993, 2005, 2018; Rancière, 2010). Concerning the prescriptive take on doing theory, radical pluralists, at least Laclau, Mouffe, Rancière and Derrida, do not intend merely to describe the political (Mouffe, 1993: 1; see also Derrida, 1994; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Rancière, 2010). Rather, at least for Laclau, Mouffe and Marchart, a theory of democracy should investigate underlying ontological antagonisms (not merely ontic, i.e., the empirical worldly state of affairs) in order to enable us to retain democratic society (see Mouffe, 1993). The complex ontology of antagonism falls outside the scope of this chapter, but there are several good elaborations on that topic (see, e.g., Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Marchart, 2007, 2018).

In more practical terms, the two approaches frame contemporary societies in different ways to illustrate their points. Deliberative theorists often argue that peaceful discussion and reaching consensus among citizens is not only the way it *should* be but also a *possible* way to do politics, even in divided societies (Dryzek, 2005) or communities with oppressive power asymmetries, such as those between mostly white police and black habitants in the United States, as Rachel Wahl (2018a) argues. Radical pluralists, however, often take as their examples situations where there are clear patterns of oppression (or subordination, since ‘oppression’ for Laclau and Mouffe (1985) means a site where antagonisms become evident) between different groups (e.g., Marchart, 2018; Mouffe, 2005, 2018). Here, there might simply be no common ground for meaningful deliberation. For example, Mouffe (2018) argues for leftist populism as a counter-force to twenty-first-century right-wing populism rather than deliberation with them, as the latter would mean recognizing their position. Marchart (2018), in turn, speaks of political action, such as demonstrations, as an explication of struggle. Thus, the two approaches to democracy emphasize different aspects of contemporary societies and different political action in democratic societies: the deliberative theorists often promoting discussion and debate, the radical pluralists decisive political action.

### 3 CIVIC ACTION AND LEARNING CITIZENSHIP IN TWO STRANDS OF PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Above, I have argued that even though there are common traits in the deliberative and radical pluralist approaches to democracy, such as the fundamental value of democracy, the theorists have very different understandings of plurality, democracy and politics; therefore, the prescriptive arguments they present differ considerably. Based on this, in this section I argue that following either of the approaches when investigating citizenship in terms of the philosophy of education determines much of the theoretical content of learning citizenship. Thus, I suggest that following either one of the two approaches is a political choice, making the philosophy of education investigating citizenship *political* philosophy of education.

It is worth noting that, in practical terms, neither view of learning citizenship necessarily excludes the other: a citizen might deliberate one day and join an angry demonstration another. Rather, the theory that

follows either approach to democracy argues what *ought* (primarily) to be included in learning citizenship, and presents citizenship ideals. Here, at least, the prescriptive nature of the deliberative and radical pluralist arguments becomes evident.

### *Formal or Informal Citizenship Learning*

The places in which, it is suggested, citizenship is learned vary between the two strands of educational arguments, with the followers of deliberative democracy often locating such learning in schools, and those of radical pluralist democracy favoring outside in the public sphere. While I do not focus more on one than the other here, the distinction between formal/informal learning is inherent to the presentation of educational arguments concerning learning citizenship.

In general, we can see that those following the deliberative approach often discuss learning citizenship in the form of organized civic education to instill tolerance and the practice of deliberation, and decrease polarization (e.g., Fleming, 2012; Giroux, 2001; Leiviskä, 2020a; Wahl, 2018a, 2018b). The suggested forms of learning often include classroom tuition in how to formulate one's position in a discussion (Giroux, 2001; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996), or adult education on acquiring skills in public deliberation and critical thinking (e.g., Deakin Crick & Joldersma, 2007; Fleming, 2010). The method here is often learning-by-discussion whereby the participants learn to deliberate, in the course of which they also learn about each other and the topic under deliberation (e.g., Fleming, 2010). There are exceptions, though, such as Wahl's (2018a) investigations of deliberations in divided communities, where deliberation skills are learned informally through public discussion. Such investigations, however, are a minority in this field.

By contrast, those following the radical pluralist approach often concentrate on action in the public sphere, with the frequent implicit assumption that citizenship as agency in this locus mostly concerns action in democratic societies (e.g., Biesta, 2011). Rancière (2004, 2010) has even argued that learning citizenship, in the sense of learning democracy, *cannot* take place in formal education, as the logic of the school is essentially different from the logic of democracy. According to him, while in formal education there are power hierarchies based on a person's knowledge and level of education, in a democracy there are no hierarchies based on any external factor that could be objectively measured,

such as strength, wisdom, age, wealth or particular skills (2004). In other words, a situation is not democratic if hierarchies are based on something other than the will of the citizens, whether epistemic skills or age, or the transcendent, such as God.<sup>6</sup> The political will cannot be taught—otherwise it would not be genuine political will—although it can, perhaps, be inspired by education. This is because, for Rancière, the goal of the democratic political will is to eradicate oppression, which cannot be genuinely taught, although one can gain the means to become aware of oppressive patterns. The point is not so much to promote citizenship outside the schools, as to explain the principles of these hierarchies and contribute to their demolition in democratic societies and their educational systems.

There are, however, also educational theorists employing the radical pluralist framework who do see potential in formal education and in bringing the radical pluralist approach closer to the deliberative one. For instance, Ásgeir Tryggvason (2018) and Michalinos Zembylas (2018) have discussed radical pluralist civic education in the classroom in the form of encouraging discussion of controversial issues and explicating the students' political feelings and identities. Still, as both Tryggvason and Zembylas note, in order to apply radical pluralist theory in the classroom setting the theory has to be 'tamed'. That is, it has to be brought closer to deliberative theory, which, according to Zembylas, is enabled by what is called 'affective citizenship', a form of citizenship where political emotions are cultivated and explicated by discussion and reflection (Zembylas, 2018). Affective citizenship, he observes, constitutes an example that fuses deliberation and agonism, because it pays attention to both political emotions and the procedural framework through which diverse opinions are enabled within a deliberative space.

One could argue here that, to some extent, applying any theory in educational praxis is never fully straightforward and being completely 'loyal' to a theory might not be the main point. One also might query the possibilities for transformation if the incipient citizen is not provided knowledge on the functions of the society. That is, one can learn about power asymmetries, subjectivation, the history of oppression and so on

<sup>6</sup> Claude Lefort (1988) has named these different hierarchies aesthetic-political, epistemic-political and theological-political: the first is the political order of democracy, with no fundamental basis for political hierarchies; the second is the political order based on epistemic skills; and the last is based on the transcendent, such as religion.

via formal education, which might lead the citizen to independent realization of the presence of such conditions and to the recognition of possible means of addressing them, including action. Moreover, an emphasis on praxis does not exclude school from loci where praxis takes place. On the contrary, according to Rancière (2010), educational practices reflect societal practices and people appropriate principles of action in the institutions. If schools are not able to provide or motivate principles of citizenship at all, it is less likely that students will learn citizenship in the public sphere. In order to learn how to utilize one's possibilities of participating in the organization of society, one must first be aware of them (see Martikainen, 2021).

### *The Content of Citizenship Learning*

For those following the deliberative approach, public debate as the central element of politics lies at the core of learning citizenship; therefore, learning to discuss deliberatively is a primary aim in this strand of thought (see Englund, 2010; Fleming, 2010; Wahl, 2018a, 2018b). In this, it is not only enough to be able to, respectively, share one's views, it is also crucial to learn from others; in order to deliberate, one must reach an understanding of where another person or group is coming from, and what their underlying values or beliefs are; one might have to acquire new knowledge from others. Indeed, according to some deliberative democrats, such as Wahl (2018a), to deliberate successfully in a plural society, one must learn from those who are different from oneself as well as from one's sharpest critics. In deliberation, it is necessary to question one's own points of view and reflect on various possibilities and perspectives, even those one could not imagine agreeing with.

Although Habermas (1981) argued in his earlier works that people might learn constantly, nowadays the educational theorists following the deliberative approach see the situation differently.<sup>7</sup> As Wahl notes, it is rather challenging for people to learn from each other, especially in contexts of inequality and deep social cleavages (see Wahl, 2018a). Therefore, for those working in this framework, learning to learn from others is also among the main aims of learning citizenship, one requiring goal-oriented training in practices such as relating attentively to what

<sup>7</sup> Educational psychologist Ference Marton (2014) makes a similar claim about people being able to learn in multiple, even all, circumstances.

another person is saying. This is part of the reason why the educational theory following the deliberative approach concentrates so much on formal education (see Deakin Crick & Joldersma, 2007; Fleming, 2010). Accordingly, tolerance, receptive listening, solidarity, caring and other discussion skills not aiming at ‘winning’ an argument should be taught and learned in formal civic education in order to be able to engage with others in deliberation (Robertson, 2008). Further required skills include making oneself heard and understood, as without this one cannot participate in the discussion (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). Wahl even argues that education prior to political deliberation must not only aim to cultivate skills, but also to shape virtuous deliberators (see Wahl, 2018a); deliberation cannot function properly if participants do not internalize the skills but only utilize them mechanically. One should be able to concentrate on what others are saying and not on the nature of one’s response. Here, consensus-seeking is not necessary, however, as simple consensus has been jettisoned as an ideal; instead, the importance of contestatory deliberation is recognized, and the conditional defensibility of self-interest has been incorporated (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015).

The followers of radical pluralist arguments, such as Claudia Ruitenberg (2009), also investigate the possibilities of learning citizenship through discussion, but here the idea of discussion is quite different from that outlined above. Educative discussion in this frame does not emphasize listening to others and learning from them, but focuses on explicating and recognizing the political nature of emotions and identities that have an important role in forming opinions and thereby formatting the discussion in general. As Zembylas (2018) argues, whether the ideal is deliberative or radical pluralist, political emotions are present in the classroom and thus have to be engaged pedagogically in discussion. Therefore, he adds, a critical conceptualization of the entanglement between political emotions and certain rules of pedagogical engagement in the classroom is also necessary, if educators wish to confront the consequences of choosing to cultivate specific political emotions (rather than others) without resorting to ideology or propaganda (see also Zembylas, 2014, 2015).

Biesta’s theory of learning citizenship is crucial to understanding the content of learning citizenship supported by the followers of radical pluralist authors. In line with the agonistic approach, he separates what he calls ‘subjectification’ and ‘socialization’: ‘socialization’ means assimilating pre-existing norms and rules of communication, while ‘subjectification’

involves becoming creative, envisaging new societal orders rather than conforming with what already exists (see Biesta, 2011). Following the radical pluralist argumentation of Mouffe and Rancière, he argues that the subjectification form of learning citizenship produces independent citizens of a democratic society. To become a political subject in the sense of subjectification includes explication of one's identity, criticality to the current order of society, claiming one's rights and contradicting the elite whatever its form: big corporations, powerful politicians and so on. Whereas the socialization concept is about learning for future citizenship, subjectification is about learning from current citizenship, from current experiences with and engagement in the ongoing experiment of democracy (Biesta, 2014). To summarize, for educational theorists following radical pluralist arguments, the central content of learning citizenship is learning to explicate one's identities and views, becoming aware of patterns of oppression and expressing any ensuing dissensual views in the public sphere.

Biesta views 'socialization' as the goal of educational theorists taking the deliberative approach, but Dryzek's (2005, 2011) and Wahl's (2018a, 2018b) investigations of deliberation in divided societies (see above), and explicating one's position in such contexts, might challenge Biesta's somewhat simplified view—something up for further discussion. Here, it suffices to say that both strands of educational theory investigating learning citizenship might actually be up for 'subjectification' in the bigger picture. As noted above, the difference between the two strands lies in the details of what learning citizenship should comprise, its goals, and what should be emphasized in such learning.

### *The Political Choice*

As I reiterate in this section, the differences between the two strands of educational thought make following either one of the approaches a political act. This is because, as I have argued above, neither approach to democracy is clearly 'better' than the other in any straightforward way (one can, of course, present arguments for preferring one or the other); rather, they differ in their emphasis on aspects and goals of democracy. Therefore, since the utilization of one or the other cannot be justified merely with objective reasoning, and as each presents different content in terms of learning citizenship and its ideals, the choice of theory is a political, not a technical or practical act. This is, therefore, the point

where the philosophy of education becomes political in its investigation of citizenship. What I mean by ‘political’ here is to be distinguished from the technical; the theoretical differences in place and content of learning citizenship do not imply that one is in some way ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than the other for learning citizenship. Rather, due to the process of excluding/including particular theses, and creating and re-creating conceptions and imaginaries of good citizenship and, thereby, conceptions and imaginaries of (democratic) political society, educational theories of learning citizenship are political.

As Biesta (2014) argues, the meaning of good citizenship is not evident, with differences in conceptions of it relating to different views of what democracy is about. Citizenship might, for instance, subsume a social or a fundamentally political identity (see Merry, 2012)—one that can be positively identified and articulated—or a process of dis-identification, as a moment of political agency that is always necessarily ‘out of order’ (see Rancière, 2004). For instance, Rancière (2004) argues that the moment of democracy is not merely an interruption of the existing order, but an interruption that results in a reconfiguration of this order into one in which new ways of being and acting exist that bring new identities into play. How the more detailed conception of citizenship is formulated affects the imaginaries of (ideal) citizenship and action in public.

Following Habermasian arguments, James. S. Johnston (2012) claims that the politicality of education or its theory is sometimes construed as a state-enforced apparatus for the inculcation of specific codes, conventions, beliefs and norms about social and political practices. However, as my discussion of the two approaches to democracy suggests, it is not merely the practical decision of curricula in the state or in school that might be political. Rather, educational theory itself is political in its choices of underlying political-philosophical theory. As I have argued, the two approaches to democracy are based on different assumptions about society and, therefore, they function differently when applied in the philosophy of education. As the different content of the two approaches currently dominant in the field of educational theory also governs the content of theories of learning citizenship, the choice of which strand of thought to follow is a political act.



## 4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that the two different approaches to democracy dominant in the field of philosophy of education provide two different conceptions of learning citizenship, plurality, democracy and politics, leading to different positions on what learning citizenship should involve. As I have noted, both approaches place great value on democracy, the requirement of tolerance for democratic society to function and the idea that a democratic society is plural by definition. What these ideas mean more precisely, however, differs. Therefore, as I have further argued, following either of the two approaches also means viewing the role of formal education differently. For the educational-philosophical theory endorsing deliberative democracy, learning citizenship does at least partly take place at school or university, while for that endorsing radical pluralist democracy, the role of formal education can be rather preparatory. Thus, on the one hand, if the central skill of a citizen is deliberative discussion, the place to learn to debate with others in a deliberative manner is the classroom or similar organized educative setting; on the other, if the assumed central skill relates to the transformation of existing power relations, learning citizenship occurs in the public sphere itself, and formal education can only provide a preparatory understanding of the current organization of society. Because the approaches comprise crucially different views of ideal citizenship and the content of citizenship learning, the choice to follow one instead of the other is a political act, making the theory of philosophy of education a political philosophy of education.

It could be argued that these two views on learning citizenship could serve different goals for citizenship in different situations and that, in the practice of civic education, both could be, in one way or another, integrated into the educative process (e.g., Tryggvason, 2018; Zembylas, 2018). However, this perspective does not consider the crucially different underlying assumptions of the two approaches to democracy. It is questionable whether the educator or the educational theorist would be able to utilize both theories of learning citizenship.

As noted, the dichotomy might look different in practice. As the educational theory of learning citizenship creates and re-creates our conceptions of what citizenship ought to be like—for educators, theorists and members of our societies—the question is not so much about what is done in particular educational situations, whether school and elsewhere;

rather, the crucial question here concerns the ideal nature of a good citizen and imaginaries of how that good citizenship is to be achieved.

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# Mimetic Challenges of Learning to Be a Democratic Citizen

*Hanna-Maija Huhtala*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Critical theorist Theodor W. Adorno would be among the first to agree that a short history of Western civilization teaches us to not to trust in the wisdom of the masses. According to him, democracy does not live up to its concept. In his lecture *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism* (1967, 2020),<sup>1</sup> Adorno warned that the prerequisites of fascism, such as the social atmosphere of coldness and increasing inequality, were present in his day: socio-culturally, if not directly politically. Thus, the most important lesson in history is that every measure should be taken to prevent a

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<sup>1</sup> Until the 2020 publication, Adorno's 1967 lecture *Aspekte des neuen Rechtsradikalismus* has been accessible only as an audio record by Österreichische Mediathek.

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social climate of coldness because it creates fruitful soil for the recurrence of Auschwitz.

The thoughts Adorno formulated almost a half century ago are topical today, as anti-democratic populism strengthens its position in many places around the world. It can thus be argued that a democratic mindset (in the widest sense) is not part of the innate character of the individual; rather, it requires educational intervention and learning. In this chapter, I examine how the concept of mimesis can be utilized in educational theorizations of democratic citizenship and in fleshing out desirable and undesirable learning paths related to citizenship. I approach mimesis as an informal way of learning that is, at times, involuntary, unconscious, ambivalent and even accidental, and which, due to these characteristics, can lead to unwanted outcomes on occasion. I argue that such characteristics of learning are inescapable for us as human beings and, thus, also hold crucial importance for education for democratic citizenship.

The motivation for the article stems from the observation that the mainstream theories of learning (Geier, 2018; Vassallo, 2013; see, e.g., Hadwin et al., 2018; Järvelä & Hadwin, 2013) and education for democracy emphasize rational, conscious and individual autonomy as the basis of agency (see, e.g., Ata, 2019; Bohman & Rehg, 1999; Harriger, 2014; Owen, 2020; Siegel, 1988). My intention is not to question these dimensions in building and strengthening learning and democratic citizenship; rather, it is to put forward, alongside previous perspectives, one that addresses a human element that is crucial for democracy yet is not considered by the previous debates. The approach I propose, mimesis, understands humans as profoundly interactive with their external environment, with multifaceted and intertwined (conscious and unconscious) learning processes. Thus, the individual is viewed as an active agent and a mimetic learner who is always positioned in a web of interdependent relations.

For Adorno and his contemporary critical theorist colleague, Max Horkheimer, mimesis is a possibility and a threat. As will be elaborated in more detail below, in its favorable form, mimesis refers to the subject's modeling herself on her environment without losing herself; the internal aspect of the individual is directed to the external and, in this way, the unknown becomes intimately known (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 154). In its unfavorable form, mimesis takes the opposite direction: the individual makes her environment like herself by repositioning her internal instability in the external and can lose herself in the

collective. For Adorno and Horkheimer, this is an erroneous, destructive projection (*ibid.*), although in both cases, we can view these changes as processes of learning. In their original way, the two critical theorists join the long tradition that renounces the Cartesian dichotomous subject-object relationship in which human beings are bound to, but also, potentially, the designers of their world.

In the first section of this chapter, I briefly introduce the notion of mimesis, after which I examine Adorno and Horkheimer's account of it. In their view, the modern individual has a strong tendency toward unfavorable mimesis due to an unbalanced human-nature relationship. A social atmosphere of coldness is an undesirable outcome of this mimesis. Drawing on the theory of mimesis, I also argue for the importance of acknowledging the mimetic and epistemic power of emotions. The overall purpose of this chapter is to examine how Adorno and Horkheimer's philosophy, together with the notion of mimesis, can contribute to education for democracy.

## 2 THE TWO BRANCHES OF MIMESIS

In what follows, I recapitulate the main characteristics and etymological background of the concept of mimesis, a broad notion that is best-known for its connections to art. In the Western philosophical tradition, mimesis plays a central role in the thoughts of Aristotle and Plato, originating in the ancient Greek words *Μίμησις* (imitation) and *μῖμος* (imitator). Plato understood mimesis as a *condition humana* that enables education (Wulf & Köpping, 2002: 56); because human beings are inherently prone to imitation, undesirable objects of imitation should, according to Plato, be excluded from the sphere of education, allowing a person to grow in the desired direction through good example. Aristotle shares Plato's view of the importance of mimesis and its educational relevance but disagrees regarding the content of educational reality (Wulf, 2008: 58; Wulf & Köpping, 2002: 79). According to Aristotle, even unfavorable objects should not be excluded from education, because encountering them in a controlled manner within the sphere of education teaches the child to avoid them in later life (Wulf, 2008: 58). For Aristotle, mimesis is aimed at progress. Mimesis is not limited only to the arts and philosophy but extends to the examination of the human being from physiological, psychological and historical perspectives (see, e.g., Mikkonen & Salminen, 2017); new media, artificial intelligence, new Nazism, the escalation of



societal violence and the process of socialization have also been studied from the standpoint of mimesis (Girard, 1972; Lawtoo, 2020, 2021; Wulf & Köpping, 2002).

According to Nidesh Lawtoo (2013: 2; 2019a: 722), mimesis theories can be mapped into two main branches: realism (familiar from art) and an interdisciplinary Homo Mimeticus approach that, according to Lawtoo, is a multifaceted, ‘slippery’ phenomenon. Erich Auerbach’s classic work *Mimesis* (1946) is probably the best-known representative of the realist approach, in which mimesis is understood as an imitation of reality that creates a copy of reality. The mimetic copy is like a mirror image that reproduces reality without being qualitatively similar (e.g., an object versus a reflection of that object in a mirror). The latter approach, Homo Mimeticus, understands the human being as a fundamentally mimetic creature. Here, mimesis suggests a materialized or corporeal agency or activity. It recognizes the individual as a being deeply interactive with her environment. I place Adorno and Horkheimer’s account of mimesis in this branch.

As mentioned before, in Adorno and Horkheimer’s conception, mimesis can be both destructive and helpful for the individual and democratic society. In destructive mimesis, the individual appropriates the exterior environment to her inner environment by projecting her own psychological makeup onto the outside reality and assuming that the two are alike. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, this identification is fallacious as the individual fails to experience the needed difference, which they call the non-identity, between the two environments. Instead, the individual thrusts identity and uniformity upon objects (see Zuidervaart, 2015), getting lost in her world relations and losing herself in the collective as a result. In the favorable, organic mimesis, the direction of identification is reversed; the individual makes herself like her environment without losing herself. As the individual adjusts herself to the environment—to the otherness—by opening to it and internalizing it, the unknown is learned through close, personal association (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 154). The Homo Mimeticus approach understands the subject as a deeply corporeal being whose mimetic processes are on some occasions intentional and, on others, unconscious and thus involuntary. For example, emotionally intense activities, such as laughter, love and violence, can be to some extent involuntary mimetic phenomena (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 152; Lawtoo, 2011) in the sense that they possess an autonomous, reproductive and communal character.

In light of contemporary empirical research, this means that the mere observation of such activities triggers an imitation reflex in our bodies as it activates ‘the motor areas deputed to the organization and execution of those acts’ (Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2008: 125; also quoted in Lawtoo, 2019b: 148; see also Lawtoo, 2011). Through autonomous communal activities, the individual simultaneously and unintendedly learns attitudes and values from her experience in different areas of her life sphere (see Eraut, 2004; Scheerens, 2009: 2).<sup>2</sup> Of course, mimesis can also be conscious and not always based on reciprocity. As an example of deliberate mimesis which is not reciprocated, we can take military rituals in which the attendants deliberately re-enact perceived discourses or acts (Kádár & House, 2021). Such mimesis is directed toward pre-existing behavior and not the present other.

Essentially, in the Homo Mimeticus approach the individual is seen as situated in a web of relationships with diverse processes of interaction that are often strongly mimetic. In what follows, I sketch out Adorno and Horkheimer’s view of mimesis after which I move on to consider the mimetic and epistemic role of emotions and how it relates to but also departs from Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s account.

### 3 ADORNO AND HORKHEIMER ON MIMESIS: ORGANIC AND DESTRUCTIVE MIMESIS

For Adorno, the subject is Homo Mimeticus, that is, a fundamentally mimetic creature—for better or worse. Adorno and Horkheimer’s negative conception of mimesis and its realization is described in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which the authors explain how the harmful developmental paths of Enlightenment suppressed innate organic mimesis. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the modern individual is geared toward the unfavorable form of mimesis due to the particular dynamics generated by the Enlightenment which led to increased instrumental

<sup>2</sup> According to Eraut (2004), implicit informal learning means that the learning is unstructured, unconscious and not acknowledged by the learner herself. Eraut further asserts that learning from experience usually contains implicit dimensions (ibid.). Scheerens (2009: 2) argues that in informal learning the ‘individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience ... from family, neighbours, from work and play, from the market place and from the library and the mass media’.

social relations connected to the expansion of instrumental reason (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002).

Adorno and Horkheimer's views have been challenged by many—perhaps most notably by the second-generation critical theorist Jürgen Habermas who in his *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1998) claims that his predecessors unjustifiably scorn modern societies' rationality, which is a 'specific theoretical dynamic that continually pushes the sciences, and even the self-reflection of the sciences, beyond merely engendering technically useful knowledge' (Habermas, 1998: 113). This dynamic does not only concern the sciences but stretches to the 'universalistic foundations of law and morality that have also been incorporated ... into the institutions of constitutional government, into the forms of democratic will formation, and into individualist patterns of identity formation' (ibid.). Habermas claims that Adorno and Horkheimer's 'oversimplified presentations fail to notice essential characteristics of cultural modernity' (Habermas, 1998: 114). While the degree to which Adorno and Horkheimer hold the Enlightenment to be the main culprit for everything which is bad and undesirable may indeed be untenable, their critical theories nevertheless contain insights worth scrutinizing and employing. In my view, these insights include their theory of mimesis, which underlines our interconnectedness with the environment and the dissolution of the untenable reason-emotion dichotomy familiar from the Western philosophical tradition.<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Adorno regards instrumental reason as one of the chief causes of despair in modern societies. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, an overemphasis on instrumental reasoning gradually expanded from the utilization of natural resources to an instrumental attitude toward one's fellow human beings, eventually becoming internalized as an individual's relationship to herself. In his radio speech, *Education After Auschwitz*, Adorno states that people who are unable to identify with others are internally cold and hold indifferent attitudes toward others (Adorno, 1969/2005: 201). When we relate to others instrumentally, we do not relate *with* them. In Adorno's view,

<sup>3</sup> For example, Plato claimed that smothering irrational emotions was necessary for generating moral knowledge. Plato's student Aristotle associated rationality with men, regarding women as creatures of nature ruled by emotions (see Garside Allen, 1979). Israel Scheffler, for his part, repudiated the reason-emotion dichotomy advocated by the previous thinkers (Scheffler, 1991).

with its heightened levels of abstraction and rationalization, instrumental reason strains our mimetic ability, which is inseparably entwined with our corporeality (e.g., our senses and emotions) (Wulf & Köpping, 2002: 71). However, as an outwardly directed process, mimesis distinguishes the phenomenon of instrumental reason and attends to its expansion itself (ibid.).

Rationalized Enlightenment mimesis is, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, built on power and increasing distance from the object of mimesis. It replaces organic, bodily, ‘resonating’ recognition of nature with rational instrumental thinking, in which qualitative differences disappear (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 149–150), which they dramatically call the ‘mimesis of death’ (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 14, 19, 44–45). Their examples of the repression of organic mimesis include the religious ban on graven images and education that ‘cures’ children of childishness (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 148). From their point of view, the education of fully rationalized society prepares the individual for the objective behavior that is required by work life and, thereby, cancels the resonating mimetic relationship between the individual and her surroundings.

In contrast to Adorno and Horkheimer’s view, the long canon of Western philosophy, from Aristotle to Dewey to more recent formulations, has taken education to be the decisive driving force on the path to a better and more just society (see, e.g., Aristotle’s *Politics*; Dewey, 1916; Noddings, 2013). While we need not endorse Adorno and Horkheimer’s dim view according to which the Enlightenment smothered all constructive development paths, with its education objectifying the educated, in my view the authors rightly question the Enlightenment’s deep-seated faith in reason, one result of which was the reason-emotion dichotomy mentioned above. In many contemporary educational theorizations this dichotomy is detected as the negation of the role of emotion and corporeality which can, at its worst, lead to distorted educational ideals and harmful educational implications (see Huhtala & Holma, 2019). With its emphasis on our interconnectedness and corporeality, mimesis bridges the reason-emotion divide.

Adorno and Horkheimer further assert that the properties of organic mimesis did not completely disappear during the Enlightenment. According to them, the connection to mimetic qualities lies in certain bodily gestures and behavior that are categorized as taboo in Enlightenment society. The individual encounters her mimetic properties in

the other as isolated residues in the rationalized environment (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 149–150). Adorno and Horkheimer argue that traces of an organic mimesis hide in the almost suppressed gestures of encountering the other: touching, nestling, soothing and coaxing (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 149). The gestures linked to organic mimesis are rejected because the emotional impulses associated with them are incompatible with Enlightenment society, in which ‘only enthusiasm is desirable’ (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 149). They assert that traces of organic mimesis provoke aggression because they are reminiscent of the fear of the unknown, which the individual had to suppress in order to survive (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 149–150)<sup>4</sup>; furthermore, they make an important connection between the rejection of difficult emotions and the risk of self-deceptiveness which may result. The idea here is that when distressing emotions are not properly addressed but smothered or cast aside, they do not vanish but can take a different, possibly distorted form. The danger is that if instinctual and emotional impulses are continuously neglected, they might burst out uncontrollably (see, e.g., Huhtala, 2016: 692).

Thus, in destructive mimesis, the emotional impulses of which the subject is unaware, but which nevertheless belong to her, are relocated in an object: a potential victim. As a concrete example of destructive mimesis Adorno and Horkheimer refer to antisemitism, asserting that anti-Semites project their own internal fears onto Jews. The emotion of fear is subjugated to mimetic re-creation as the individual (an anti-Semite) reproduces her original emotion while recasting it outside herself. As the ‘material’ of the mimetic repetition is the internal environment of the individual, its secondary address is more or less incidental; in other words, the victim of destructive mimesis might have been any vulnerable group in society (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 154; Adorno, 1967/2020). To put it in another way, an individual’s own vulnerability and weakness are psychologically ‘solved’ by projecting them upon something or someone else. When the individual removes her inner source of tension and assigns it outside herself, it become easier to combat. The

<sup>4</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer claim that in the early dawn of civilization, the individual had first to defeat the unpredictable, frightening forces of nature in order to promote his own freedom. According to their view, the quest for liberation from nature is inextricably linked to instrumental reason and the assumption that knowledge is power (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 1–34).

individual mimetically likens her interior environment with the exterior environment as she projects her inner psychological makeup onto others. Transcending mimesis discussions, the contemporary philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2004, 2010, 2018) has put forward similar interpretations of the intertwining of psychological and social levels. For example, according to Nussbaum, the reaction of disgust toward a specific minority is often a matter of psychological factors caused by our animality, referencing the fact that humans submit to the laws of nature, that human life is also limited and vulnerable. According to Nussbaum, the consciousness of the vulnerability and the finiteness of life produces difficult emotions that may be projected onto another.

As already noted, in the case of the organic mimesis identification takes the opposite direction: the subject makes herself like her environment. Here, the internal aspect of the individual is tuned to the external, and the unfamiliar becomes intimately familiar (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/2002: 154). Organic mimesis signifies adaption in the sense of belonging or kinship. The adaption to the other is based on what is perceived but also on attunement in the spirit of empathy. Organic mimesis involves a certain uncontrollability and creativity due to the openness toward the other. Hartmut Rosa (2018: 584) describes it as ‘the key to a relationship between subject and world, that is not geared to controlling the object and closing off the subject, but rather a resonance-sensitive opening to the object’s irreducible otherness and self-sufficiency’.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Adorno’s mimesis, in its positive sense, enables an individual to dismantle harmful instrumental relationships within herself and with others. Ernesto Verdaña (2009: 500) puts it in the following way: ‘Mimetic rationality seeks to find the ways in which the subject’s experience of the world is not merely instrumental’. Organic mimesis takes full advantage of our corporeality, which enables us to learn about others and ourselves in a way that is not based on increasing distance and mastery.

Because mimesis is about the relationship between the self and the other, it enables individuals to cultivate an empathic relationship with the other. According to Nussbaum (2010), the development of

<sup>5</sup> The translation is my own. See the original: ‘*der Schlüssel zu einer Art des In-Beziehungs-Tretens zwischen Subjekt und Welt, die nicht auf Beherrschung des Objekts und Schliessung des Subjekts hin angelegt ist, sonder auf der resonanzsensiblen Öffnung des letzteren für die irreduzible Andersheit und Eigenständigkeit des Objekts*’.

the democratic mindset must be supported by means of the humanities because they can foster imagination and empathy, which are also crucial for organic mimesis. More specifically, the ability to treat others empathetically can prevent the erroneous mimetic projections discussed above. According to Adorno, however, changing unjust social conditions through emotions such as compassion or empathy is not sufficient in itself, because ‘the idea of compassion contains nothing about changing the circumstances that give rise to the need for it, but instead... these circumstances are absorbed into the moral doctrine and interpreted as its main foundation’ (Adorno, 1963/2000: 173). Adorno’s idea is that, because our compassion often stems from the unfair circumstances faced by the other, anchoring compassion as a starting point in social relations can prevent the realization of simply additional development (see also Freyenhagen, 2013: 131). In the same spirit, Touko Vaahtera (2020) points out that empathy is problematic because it can be directed at those who do not really deserve it. Empathy toward such persons (who, e.g., consciously discriminate against others) can intervene with a course of action we set up to rectify the unethical situation. Michalinos Zembylas (2008), for his part, points out that experiencing the misfortune or injustice of others does not necessarily evoke any transformative action in us. In this way too, such ‘novel’ emotions can hinder a change toward a better future. Thus, in regard to education for democracy, paying attention to the role of emotion requires critical examination from various perspectives, on both the individual and social levels.

#### 4 THE EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATION OF MIMESIS AND THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS

In this section, I outline how Adorno and Horkheimer’s concept of mimesis is fruitful in formulating novel theoretical insights of education for democracy, enabling a conception of informal learning connected to education for democracy that heeds the epistemic and mimetic role of emotions. As I argue, it is crucial that this dimension is taken into consideration in educational theorizing. I also demonstrate that, when considering contemporary empirical knowledge from fields such as neuroscience, their theory holds vital importance in respect to fostering development of the democratic mindset.

Both research (see, e.g., Freedom House Nations in Transit, 2017; V-Dem, 2019) and our everyday experience tell us that anti-democratic

populism and hostile confrontations have increased in Western democracies. In recent years, the state of democracy has also deteriorated in countries that have long been model democracies (Freedom House, 2020; V-Dem, 2020). While the reasons behind these undesired developments are diverse and difficult to identify, there is, nevertheless, an urgent need to take every measure to fight against a social atmosphere of hostility and coldness. According to Adorno, in times of social change, unaddressed feelings from the past, such as fear or trauma, have the opportunity to surface which he suggests was the case with the rise of the right-wing radicals of his time (Adorno, 1967/2020). As I see it, Adorno is right in that emotions have a crucial impact on the social order. For example, properly considering the role of emotions in our thinking processes may help us to understand how it is possible that the far-right movement, which glorifies authoritarianism, not only survives time and time again but also succeeds within the framework of democracy. Based on current empirical research, we know, for example, that the effects of fear are manifold. Among other things, it distorts and skews our perceptual capacity, impairs our decision-making abilities and reinforces motivated closed-mindedness (Chajut & Algom, 2003; Easterbrook, 1959; Jameson et al., 2004; Mogg et al., 1990; Thórisdóttir & Jost, 2011: 790). Thus, fear is an action-facilitating emotion that exposes the individual to political and psychological manipulation. If we take the above seriously, it becomes obvious that what may at first sight appear as the wisdom of the masses could be in fact collective opinion stemming from fear.

According to Adorno, far-right propaganda is tailored to address the feelings of the recipient: the far-right supporter (Adorno, 1967/2020). Emotions are constantly at play in thinking processes and every action, one dimension of which is that they contain mimetic attributes founded on something that contemporary empirical scientists call ‘mirroring reflexes’ (Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2008). The mimetic attributes of emotions enable the individual to partake of another’s emotions directly, without the involvement of conceptual understanding: ‘Emotions, like actions, are immediately shared, the perception of pain or grief, or disgust experienced by others, activates the same areas of the cerebral cortex that are involved when we experience these emotions ourselves’ (Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia, 2008; also quoted in Lawtoo, 2019b: 148); thus, to some degree, emotions are mimetically contagious (see Lawtoo, 2019b). In other words, as Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia state, part of learning from



another's experience happens at a direct corporeal level outside the scope of our conceptual understanding.

Despite the subjective 'feeling' of emotions, many of our emotional reactions are trans-subjective (mimetically transmitted from one individual to another), as well as trans-generational (see, e.g., Costa et al., 2018; Debiec & Sullivan, 2014). Not only do we respond with automatic emotional reactions when witnessing emotions experienced by others, as demonstrated by Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, we also interpret our subjective emotions through communal historical and cultural discourses (Zembylas et al., 2014). In the latter case, emotions of the previous generations have settled into forms of communication through which individuals contract their present emotions. What is more, emotions affect our actions and decision-making, even when we want to act 'purely' rationally (Cohen, 2005; Damasio, 1994; Kahneman, 1994, 2003). Lawtoo (2019b: 149) further notes that the dramatic gestures and movements of charismatic populist leaders, as well as the tonality and rhythm of their speech, exercise unconscious mimetic power over the individual. To elaborate, the tone of a charismatic leader, for example, can beget deeply experienced mimetic identifications in the audience, generating support for such a speaker (Lawtoo, 2016: 138). Thus, the human mimetic character as well as the role of emotions in our thinking processes should be taken into account in theories of education for democracy. If they are not properly recognized, theorizations about education for democracy and populism cannot be successful, as they do not capture the true nature of the researched phenomena.

## 5 DISCUSSION

Adorno and Horkheimer's two-track interpretation of mimesis indicates that they associate mimesis inextricably with humanity. However, their views regarding the education of Enlightenment society (discussed above) are, to say the least, negative. After all, traditionally, education has been seen as a resource for creating a better future society. Adorno and Horkheimer's views on education and society are perhaps easy to ignore as over-critical pessimism; however, if we accept the assumption of humankind as *Homo Mimeticus*, they may have something important to tell us: mimesis is both an opportunity for and a threat to citizenship in a democratic society.

Mimesis demonstrates an individual's vulnerability and openness to otherness. The mimetic identification of the individual with the environment occurs continuously, and not all its forms are conscious or voluntary; we interact and learn unceasingly from each other at multiple levels. At its best, mimesis supports an individual's reciprocal world relations in such a way that it advances her development into an independent and unique personality. In its destructive form, the individual can lose herself in the collective. Through Adorno and Horkheimer's mimesis, one can study the anti-democratic dynamics associated with the atmosphere of social coldness (e.g., the manner and language involved in the communication of charismatic populist leaders) and mimetic learning. We constantly receive different levels of messages from our environment, which resonate with us on the levels of emotion, consciousness, the subconscious and behavior. Some of these messages settle in us and continue to circulate through us.

If the mimetic aspect of the individual is genuinely taken as the starting point for learning and education for democracy, we cannot assume that the change of direction to better social conditions will take place by rational and deliberative means alone. Furthermore, if we consider what strengthening a democratic mindset could mean from the perspective of Adorno's philosophy and mimesis in general, then awareness of the role of emotions and realization of diverse interdependencies should play crucial roles. Each of us is (involuntarily) open to mimesis, but that is what connects us to our ability to acknowledge others and develop a more just society. There is also an inalienable ethical dimension to recognizing the mimetic nature of humankind: one must consider the responsibility that arises from the mere fact that we exist in the life spheres of others.

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# Citizenship as Equaliberty Practice in the Philosophy of Étienne Balibar

*Lenka Hanovská*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on citizenship as a critically envisaged and inherently conflictual term discussed in the work of Étienne Balibar, a contemporary French philosopher with a background in Althusserian Marxism. It interprets and explains citizenship as a term ‘pervaded with antinomies’, yet one very actual and crucial for critical philosophy. The problem of citizenship has central importance in Balibar’s work, questioned in terms of its *possibility* in the current world and whether it can exist in contemporary globalized realities, under what conditions and how. To answer these questions, Balibar identifies the *conditions of possibility* of citizenship in history, finding them embedded in material socio-political settings, and discussing and developing his ideas in extensive works including *Equaliberty: political essays* (2014), *Citizenship* (2015) and *The Citizen Subject* (2017). Their interpretation provides contrast when evaluating the conditions of contemporary citizenship. Hence, his philosophy contains a *critique, grounded in* historical interpretation and critical reflection on

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actuality. It does not align with a pure description of reality, but develops through active selection, interpretation and purposive reading of historical realms placed in a comparative relation with actuality. Concepts resulting from such a critique have a dialectical structure linked to historical manifestations of phenomena in a comparative and evolving manner. In a similar vein, Balibar's notion of citizenship appears in relation to identified conditions of possibility as a historical, *structured practice* conditioned and shaped by context.

This chapter scrutinizes the nature of citizenship in light of the conditions of possibility critically assessed by Balibar; in other words, the kind of citizenship he reveals and enhances in his critical analysis. Such an inquiry might seem inappropriate as neither the substance nor the concept emerges in the critical realms; indeed, Balibar's citizenship always occurs in concrete historical settings shaped by the concrete conditions of the past and, hypothetically, of today or in future. Nonetheless, I argue that by identifying the crucial characteristics of Balibar's usage of the term, the positive features giving citizenship its delimitation might be abstracted and anchored in a positive figure—the task undertaken in this chapter. Balibar is widely known for his emphasis on human rights and transnational citizenship, yet the conditions of such a political standpoint and the sense (transnational) citizenship carries in his work are less addressed in academic discussions. Thus, to contribute to deepening our understanding, in this chapter I provide a detailed interpretation of Balibar's notion of citizenship.

According to Balibar (2015: 33), 'an institution of citizenship remains essentially antinomic'; in other words, citizenship contains and carries contradictions as its inner condition. Therefore, my interpretation of Balibar's notion of citizenship proceeds via exposition of this antinomy, which is neither a substance nor a quality but a structure evolving from numerous phenomena related to citizens' practice. I focus on phenomena where the antinomy is most revealing and elucidate Balibar's notion of citizenship from different angles. Balibar proceeds in a similar way in his work *Citizenship* (2015), the main text discussed in this chapter, although I also identify the antinomy in *Equaliberty: political essays* (2014), in which the author's significant contribution to political philosophy occurs.

In the first part, I approach *antinomy as an outcome* of Balibar's philosophy. He formulates his citizenship treatise as an argumentation *against* the critiques of citizenship, contradicting the theoretical voices negating

citizenship today; yet the very double negation gives rise to its possibility. In other words, by opposing theories that deny the existence of citizenship in the contemporary globalized world, the possibility of citizenship emerges. In this manner, citizenship is never revealed in positive terms. Paradoxically, this non-positive approach inverts citizenship from a passive phenomenon into an active element, which is alive despite its contradictions or, even better, evolves throughout them. Therefore, the first part introduces the discussion of which Balibar's work is part, and interprets his philosophy as a *stance* against the critiques: one that envisages citizenship beneath the renouncing institutions of the nation state and approaches the decline of national citizenship as an opportunity for new forms of citizenship practices to take root.

In the second part, I provide a closer analysis of the *citizenship antinomy*, focusing on its logic. In Balibar's philosophy, citizenship is antinomical because it is historical; as a historical phenomenon, citizenship appears as both a (passive) product of historical events and, at the same time, their active cause. Its active-passive character develops in citizens' relation to democracy, which is not simply reciprocal and causal but also transformative and creative. On the one hand, citizenship requires a stable democratic environment to occur; on the other, it emerges only by transcending and transforming existing realms, existing as a widening of the shape of the given. This active-passive character as a structure of practice remains characteristic of citizenship throughout its historical transformation. Balibar depicts it in terms of *insurrection* and *constitution*, referring to the communal revolt against existing institutionalized conditions and their simultaneous reproduction in other forms. Balibar's emphasis on antinomy and the consequent characteristic of citizenship as a structured, conflictual practice enables contemporary political transformation to be approached in terms of citizenship's actualization instead of its destruction or decay. Thus, this section provides a closer look at *citizenship's antinomy* logic, demonstrating that citizenship only lasts as far as it remains a problematic, even conflictual practice based on both acceptance and transcendence of existing realities.

In the third part, I reflect on the *antinomy's origin*, on Balibar's explanation of why citizenship is antinomic and how it developed its antinomical structure. It is a proposition, because no evidence exists of the antinomy's origin other than the antinomical presence of citizenship. To formulate and accept the origin as the foundation of citizenship represents an appropriation of a practical stance rather than a theoretical work.

For Balibar, this means actively enrolling in a particular political tradition. The origin of citizenship emerges via historical interpretation of the most decisive citizenship movements and their distinctive structure: the requirement of *equal liberty*. The demand for *equal rights* conditions and permeates *every* historical appearance of citizenship. Thus, the third part explains Balibar's concept of equaliberty and shows that if we anchor citizenship in this concept, it will result in a historical practice that distributes a (conflictual) unity of equality and liberty grounded in an unconditional claim whose every institutional inscription remains necessarily partial.

In the last part, I focus on the dialectical method as an essential source of citizenship antinomy. I demonstrate that the categories produced via the dialectical method are incomplete without the reader's participation in their formulation and, further, that the method involves the reader in theoretical construction, thus developing theory as a praxis. Likewise, dialectical citizenship accomplishes its full meaning via the reader's appropriation of the concept and the reversal of theory into practical stance. Therefore, I conclude, rather than a theoretical concept, Balibar's citizenship is a suggestion in search of endorsement.

## 2 CONTEXT AND DISCUSSION

Presenting Balibar's notion of citizenship must begin with the introduction of the wider discussion Balibar enters and enriches. His contribution emerges in relation to other authors and develops through discussion with contradicting opinions. As there is no positive articulation of the citizenship notion in Balibar and it emerges only via the contradiction of differing claims, in this section, I introduce ideas and voices Balibar opposes and in light of which his citizenship conception is revealed as a stance.

The principal discussion in which Balibar participates is framed by the structural changes in politics and society connected to developments in processes of globalization since the 1970s. These changes include the transformation of nation states and their incorporation into the global economy, in parallel with the accommodation of market interests by national politics. Contemporary left-wing critiques by Wendy Brown, Roberto Esposito, Ernesto Laclau and others claim that the infiltration of the global economy into the institutional structures of nation states has undermined federal welfare and required a switch from state-building politics to policies facilitating financial flow (Brown, 2005; Hardt &

Negri, 2000; Harvey, 2005). Such policies focus on stakeholders other than the nation state's citizens and promote the needs of transnational financial subjects instead of those of national citizens.

Most critical thinkers regard these changes in terms of the *de-democratization of democracy*—that is, politics focused on the destruction of democracy's preconditions (Brown, 2005). It begins with the extraction of competencies from the institutionalized structures of collective decision-making, such as local communities, political parties and nation states, continues via the authorization of transnational institutions' taking precedence over national policies, and leads to society's transformation into an instrument of the market economy. From this perspective, loci of collective decision-making have adjusted to the globalized course and lost their cultural/territorial differences; they have adjusted to the stakes of a single marketplace without any apparent reference to represented communities. Different political and social realities succumb to one single principle, thus generating an alienated *hegemony* (Harvey, 2005; *empire* according to Hardt & Negri, 2000) built on the rules of the economy, in which nation states no longer represent diversified populations; instead, they control and manipulate a localized workforce according to capital's needs. In such an economic frame, communal activity loses its sense as it has no significant effects. Similarly, politics transform into biopolitics: governance operating with 'bare life' as the sole subject of power (Agamben, 1998; Foucault et al., 2008; Hardt & Negri, 2000). Citizenship in this perspective represents kind of a lost treasure, no longer a powerful agency.

These structural changes deny individuals political agency. The loss of communal instruments, including representation, turns the economy into a societal principle, meaning that all individual and communal activity is reduced to the calculation of profit (Brown, 2005; Castel, 2002). Such utilitarian rationality produces the 'new ethic of self-care, whereby individuals must moralize their conduct by submitting themselves to the criterion of utility maximization or the productivity of their individuality' (Balibar, 2014: 26). All this results in the expansion of a vague and indeterminate globalized society based on neutralized communal participation and accentuated economic interests. In a society where places of communal engagement disappear, and commons remain unknown or unattainable, only economic subjects governed by a logic of profit, no longer citizens, seem to be active (Balibar, 2014: 102).

From the critical perspective, the globalized world represents an unfortunate reality for citizens and political agents, because its structural changes limit individuals' genuine agency and remove competencies from communities. In response to this, some theoreticians, especially in the liberal field, elaborate on the concept of transnational citizenship, which benefits from globalization processes and develops communal agency in a globalized world (Ivic, 2018). Balibar connects the critical and liberal stance, as he appeals for a *universal citizenship* while maintaining a critical view. He acknowledges the critiques of society and community transformation described above but, at the same time, refuses to see the transnationalization and economization of politics in terms of citizenship demise. For him, a decrease of national citizenship represents an opportunity to develop more appropriate communal activity whose conditions of possibility should be conscientiously examined and (re)established.

Balibar counters the critiques by claiming that, in history, the economy has never represented an independent force distinct from political practice, and neither citizenship nor democracy equates with the decreasing institutions of national state. If there are structural changes in terms of citizenship, it is hardly a consequence of hostile economic forces attacking existing democracies or a product of undemocratic powers infiltrating existing democracy. On the contrary, it results from citizenship transformation, breaking out of malfunctioning forms of national citizenship agency to develop distinct forms of collective autonomy situated in a globalized environment. Citizenship is not an effect of the external environment but an active cause. Therefore, Balibar posits a hypothesis to verify: the current structural transformation is '*an expression of the destructive aspect inherent in the antinomies of citizenship*' (Balibar, 2014: 3). If the antinomy is an inevitable constituent of citizenship—or, to put it differently, *if* citizenship is antinomic—then it represents an active force that causes its own transformation, turning the destructive aspect into a creative one and maintaining itself as a historical force. On that account, Balibar focuses on antinomy as *the core of citizenship*, whose elucidation identifies citizenship as an active historical element which produces its own contradictions.

### 3 CITIZENSHIP ANTINOMY

In the following, I explain how citizenship antinomy is elaborated in Balibar's work, *Citizenship* (2015). Here it is shown that citizenship

produces a plurality of contradictions, but they all evolve from a principal rupture which citizenship embodies, a rupture that might be explained as both horizontal—that is, historical—and vertical, in terms of citizenship's relation to democracy. In other words, it is evident in time—with citizenship maintaining its characteristics while transforming into various historical shapes (in the ancient polis, roman republic, city-state, parliamentary democracy, etc.)—and in space, in the citizen's relations with democracy. Balibar explains this double rupture—the historical relations of citizen to democracy—as the key structure of citizenship antinomy. In relation to democracy, citizenship appears as *conflictual activity*, with no causal or direct structure but rather one that is paradoxical and antinomical. As Balibar argues (2014: 2), '*At the heart of the institution of citizenship, contradiction is ceaselessly born and reborn in relation to democracy*'.

Citizenship reveals the reciprocal rights and duties constituting an individual's bond to the community (Arendt, 1951; Aristotle, 1976; Balibar, 2014; Lazar, 2013; Marshall, 1950), which endorse communal bonds, mirror an agreement over communal sharing and distribute collective power. Such power belongs to equals who share the duties/rights and henceforth participate in the commons. A democracy (not only a parliamentary one but any 'reign of the demos') distributes rights through its institutions, and citizenship thus belongs to equals who are recognized by the institutions and so take a share. On the other hand, democracy grounds citizenship in *natural* equality, which democratic institutions tend to affirm, maintain and further distribute. However, the full installation of equality is problematic because its inscription requires a definition that changes historically, culturally and socially. Equality grounded in nature/humanity is always historically delimitative; therefore, the inscription of citizenship always includes some but excludes others: not everyone fits the category of equals and enters the community. The un-equals, unspecified and dependent remain essential members of society but without participating in citizenship. The discord between 'the all' (society) and equals (community) opens a space of *politeia*, a space '*widening the sphere of equality, actively producing it as a fiction, constantly transgressing the limits imposed by nature*' (Balibar, 2014: 16). Therefore, democracy, in fact, only exists as an active distribution of equality, widening the shape of citizenship via the production of mechanisms for broader participation in community. It only exists as democratization, a practice transgressing its institutions, forcing community to open more

broadly. Likewise, citizenship consists of an activity that confirms equality and opens a space for its transgression. An openness, a possibility to extend, determines democratic institutions, including citizenship. Citizenship without democracy turns into an oligarchy; democracy without citizenship reverts to anarchy.

The relationship between citizenship and democracy is reciprocal and dynamic. It relies on an essential incompleteness of the political body of democratic society and goes with an enduring quest for equality.<sup>1</sup> Citizenship, therefore, cannot be entirely fixed to political institutions; in other words, institutionalized citizenship is always partial, enhanced by a wider community of the excluded, unrepresented (Schmitt, 1996), silent (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988), non-citizens (Mouffe, 1985), those without a share (Rancière, 2007). The unrepresented support the equals in a communal reign under various conditions.

Two democratization processes are widely acknowledged. First, the liberal view distributes equality and incorporates the masses into the condition of citizenship (society in the community) according to a single regulative principle. Such democratization relies on a presupposition of universal rationality (Habermas, 1982). Second, the agonistic denies a single principle that would enable everyone to enter the community of equals. For agonist theoreticians, including Balibar, the installation of equality always represents a temporal inscription of citizenship into political institutions based on a temporal agreement between equals and un-equals (Mazzocchi & Penner, 2018). Their agreement on equality embodies a temporal victory in which one group dominates the others, a *moment of temporal equilibrium* when the broadest number of people agree on the designated power distribution and conform to it under specific conditions. Behind this agreement, however, a constant dissensus pertains.

The antinomy is revealed in multiple ways here. It is evident in the discord between the universalist claim of democracy and the privileges of citizenship, the breadth of society and limitation of community, the power distribution among equals and the constant ‘threat’ from

<sup>1</sup> ‘It is clearly very difficult to define the idea of a community that has neither dissolved nor reunified in purely juridical or constitutional terms, but it is not impossible to conceive of it as a historical process governed by a principle of reproduction, interruption, and permanent transformation. This is, in fact, the only way to understand the discontinuous temporality and historicity of citizenship as a political institution’ (Balibar, 2014: 8).

those who demand participation in the communal. Balibar captures the discord in terms of citizenship antinomies caused by the fact that every power or form of governance, including democracy, produces universalistic ideology while at the same time relying on the suppression of un-equals who do not participate in the factual reign. Each universalist claim is delimitative (Balibar, 2020). Democracy, contrary to other regimes, enhances constant discussion and redefinition of the universality subsumed by citizenship and does not suppress the conflict.

In reference to the unresolvable conflict, Balibar labels the installation of democratic citizenship in terms of *insurrection* and *constitution*, activity that gathers community together *against* an unfavorable inscription of equality in political institutions and reinstalls it in other forms. It describes the negative movement *against* an existing institutional inscription, grounded in certain delimitations, and *toward* another equality installation in different realms. The insurrectional-constitutional movement is not necessarily violent but always contains conflict between various groups. The victorious group, gathering community into institutionalized bonds, wins equality over other groups as it installs and exercises the equality of its members in a factual reign. A gathering against inscribed equality in favor of its re-inscription regularly occurs in a democracy because the universality of community, in one way or another, consistently exceeds its institutional inscriptions and disrupts them from inside. The power equilibrium is temporal and fragile. In short, for Balibar, democratic citizenship exists as *both creative and destructive practice*—destructive because it opposes the existing order, creative because it installs equality and reproduces community in other forms. As such, it remains principally intact in different historical époques.

From the citizenship antinomy perspective, today's citizenship decline is only an institutional decline of citizenship inscribed in the democracies of national states. The communitarian bonds founded on territorial principles degenerate as there is no actual power to share in national rights. The commons (stakes) have shifted from immediate material realities to the transnational terrain without opening to majorities. The masses do not participate in communal sharing but can perceive the 'equals' who do. So far, participation in the global economy provides the masses with a position of the 'silent', the 'non-citizens', the 'share-less' or 'non-represented' who are promised citizenship (equality in rights) in the case of relevant accumulation. Today's equals are subjects with enormous wealth sharing the stakes within transnational space. As their collaborative practice does



not distribute equality or invite other humans to participate in equality, rather than constituting democratic citizenship, it is oligarchic. However, as the commons have transposed to the international terrain, Balibar perceives global/universal citizenship as an inevitable shape of citizenship in the transformed world. Its challenge is evident: how should bonds be created among inhabitants of an unlimited global society that has never existed before?

According to Balibar, the passage to transnational or universal citizenship consists of an inevitable identification with a global community achieved via the *productive movement toward its creation*. However, this movement is not a straightforward course toward an ideal, but contradictory, a counteraction against the institutionalized obstacles that exclude equals from communal sharing. It gathers the community in the negative movement against inequalities that prevent society from becoming a community. For example, contemporary participation in universal commons demands the specific skills necessary for entering the community of stakeholders, usually provided by international education. Today's democratic citizenship appears via collective contradiction of structural inequalities inscribed in elitist practice, and opposition to institutionalized practices that prevent everyone from achieving the same skills. The opposition produces community via a collective negation of exclusivity and exclusions (from dignity, property, security or rights in general). For Balibar, today's eventual citizenship identified as a practice has the same antinomical structure as it has always had: contradicting inequalities inscribed in institutionalized practices and installation of communities via a negative movement reinscribing communal equality.

#### 4 EQUALIBERTY

An emphasis on antinomy gives rise to citizenship as a non-substantial, indefinite, transformative practice that consists of specific relations among people and occurs in a dynamism directed at shared historical conditions. Citizenship consists of structural, historical relations, and to formulate it theoretically means offering a structural model of power distribution embedded *in* and *behind* political institutions (Balibar, 2015: 1–7). Elaboration on the antinomy is an effort to sketch such a model. Apart from the conceptualization of citizenship in relation to democracy (*ibid.*), Balibar (2014) develops a historical explanation of the antinomy, which I

discuss in what follows. While the previous section explained the principles of antinomy, this part focuses on its historical description, that is, it explains the origin of antinomic citizenship.

According to Balibar, the citizenship antinomy evolved historically from the combination of two contradictory requirements united and produced in citizenship practice: equality and liberty. Balibar does not search for ideals meeting these requirements or their inscriptions in people's minds; rather, he identifies the material inscription of the concept in historical realms, finding the first conjunction of equality and liberty in Cicero's Orations, where an appeal for equal distribution of laws urged the *nobilitas* to protect the reputation of Rome and defend the principles of citizenship in the republican regime. However, the most explicit and evident conjunction of both universals occurred in the revolutions of the eighteenth century and their declarations,<sup>2</sup> during which, Balibar argues, citizenship materially evolved through the deliberative action of the unrepresented against the aristocracy and unequal power distribution. The very act of rebellion against inequalities instigated the installation of common space as one of *everyone's rights*. The revolutionary act of *insurrection* opposed and destroyed the feudal order, and the very negation of inequalities resulted in the *constitution* of a new community, confirmed in the installed rights.<sup>3</sup> These rights did not take their legitimacy from an a priori transcendental realm but, in contrast, from the community of equals put in place by the very act of the declaration of rights. In that sense, the declarations guaranteed everyone the right to have rights and thus a share of the commons. The rights themselves distributed the communal right and served as an instrument for establishing a community of equals which materially emerged on the grave of unequal community, *in* the deliberative declarations projecting future installation. Therefore, the rights carried crucial importance, yet were rewritten many times and are still fluid in the present. Their purpose, however, is evident: to declare equality and *distribute* it further. With the right to have rights—that is, a possibility to possess rights—an individual gains the power over the communal, or to put it differently, becomes the communal individual. This individual is *to be* installed in rights, but at the same time, rights refer

<sup>2</sup> Balibar refers mainly to the French Revolution of 1789 but also assigns the same principle to the other declarations such as the American, Haitian, Belgian etc.

<sup>3</sup> Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen from 1789 in France but also the Belgian or American Declarations.

to this communal individual as their precondition, whom they presuppose and reproduce at the same time. Its installation in rights brings equality and liberty to all communal individuals. The revolutionary events materially entailed the unity of equality and liberty and enframed it in rights. The consequent rights only repeat this presupposition of the communal individual, who represents both the declared condition of the possibility of rights and *at the same time* their consequent product.

On the grounds of historical interpretation of the revolutionary movement and its inscription of equality in revolutionary rights, Balibar formulates the concept of *equaliberty*—a pattern which in his view conditions every citizenship and reveals it historically in the twofold act of insurrection and constitution. According to Balibar, the pattern remains intact throughout changing historical inscriptions of citizenship, be it in the ancient polis, roman republic, city-state or parliamentary democracy. It always expresses the same power of the individual over the communal, the right to have rights, thus, equal liberty. Citizenship has always resulted from this requirement and expressed it further. Formulated by Balibar, equaliberty has a unique structure which consists of a mutual interdependence and perfect equivalence of equality and liberty, literally an ‘equal liberty’ brought together in action. In the conjunction, neither equality nor liberty has a positive content; their meaning is tied up with historical conditions. Both, in a particular way, express the rejection of oppression. The content of equality amounts to the achieved liberty and vice versa. One is the other’s counterpart in the sense that one is revealed on the basis of the other.

This rather *extensive* meaning ties the character of the joined concepts to historical realms as equaliberty exists only in material reality. The only content of the unified notions ‘is destined to remain indefinitely open, indefinitely deferred by its very contradiction’ (Balibar, 2014: 46). The extent of one universal is measured by the other, but at the same time one concept excludes the other, as it is measured and realized *on the basis* of its counterpart. Both concepts are dialectically linked—excluding one another, yet existing only in mutual dependency. Equaliberty embodies the historical reality of this dialectical bond.

According to Balibar, equaliberty as a historically identified pattern embodies the real and principal condition of the possibility of citizenship. Citizenship, in one way or another, always displays its structure. However, as a historically identified pattern, equaliberty cannot be proved. Only its temporal reversal, a projection from the past to the future, can

verify its validity. If the ‘historical conditions of freedom are exactly the same as the historical conditions of equality’ (Balibar, 2014: 46), and if equaliberty materially *conditions* citizenship, then it must apply anytime, anywhere. Its verification proceeds accordingly: if something suppresses freedom, it simultaneously suppresses equality; if every freedom suppression results from inequality, every equality refutation evolves from the subjection. More than an idea or a concept ‘hidden’ beyond citizenship, in equaliberty Balibar presents an *appeal* for *equal importance and mutual intertwining* of equality and liberty in *citizenship’s incidence*, whose historical truth is only *to be verified*.

## 5 EQUALIBERTY AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF CITIZEN WITH HUMAN

Equaliberty, identified in material settings as a fundamental aporia, invites *anyone* to measure and approve the conditions of the possibility of citizenship in particular historical settings. In this section, I focus on the *anyone* addressed in the equaliberty term, who comes forward when perceiving equaliberty as an appeal. On the one side, equaliberty represents a historically identified pattern; on the other, imposed as an origin of citizenship antinomy, it incites people to endorse it. In other words, equaliberty is not only descriptive term, but also, and especially, regulative. As such, it addresses everyone universally. Its approval proceeds via the appropriation of the equaliberty perspective, resulting in a critical stance toward material reality, regardless of geographical locality, cultural apperception, societal organization or political circumstances. If equaliberty represents the fundamental citizenship pattern, then citizenship embodies a universal category devoid of idealization or normativity. Its universality results from the universal demand and possible application.

Equaliberty’s appeal is universal, which means it has an expansive tendency. If we accept the argument that an individual achieves liberty to the extent that equal others do, then, naturally, every individual tends to extend the equality of others to obtain liberty of his/her own. As long as there is someone unequal, my own liberty is limited. As the citizenry of one determines the citizenry of others, citizenship grounded in equaliberty expands and is allocated universally to all humans. A productive tension between citizen and human is already present in the formulation of democratic rights. As reflection on revolutionary events showed, democratic institutions articulate liberties in reference to equality grounded in

humanity. They apply to every human. However, in Balibar's view, the modern appeal of citizenship is characterized by the rejection of a priori human nature and the decision to install it via constitutions.<sup>4</sup> Rights produce the equality of citizens as the equality of humans and, thus, *create* and distribute the environment of citizens as the human environment. Although rights refer to humanity as a precondition of equality, they evenly *install* it anew in the production of communitarian beings, in citizenship. According to Balibar, every modern constitution explicitly relies on the equality of human beings and simultaneously produces it in rights. By producing citizenship, institutions produce the idea of humanity. Since there is no single definition of humanity, equaliberty expands as long as there are humans left who do not feel represented by a humanity distributed in rights.

Karl Marx was the first theorist who showed that the human to which the rights of the modern constitutions refer, does not entail a pre-existing substance, but a totality of social relations encapsulated within the notion (Marx, 1845). As only a few representatives formulate the rights of the community, rights often represent only those who participate in their formulation. Marx, for example, showed that the humanity inscribed in the constitutions of the nineteenth century represented the humanity of a male proprietor, a self-possessor (bourgeois), who is human as far as he already participates in the commons and has his share of the common wealth. Accordingly, Balibar argues (2015), all rights distributed in revolutionary constitutions only confirmed and circulated the equality of the bourgeoisie, who imposed their social being as a norm. Although the revolutions declared the eradication of any preliminary order, formulated rights did not escape inequalities of social relations, enframed in the distributed concept of human, which were later revealed in a society built upon distributed laws. The limits of such humanity, that is, a society based on restrictive preconditions, similarly arose in premodern constitutions. For example, the ancient constitutions explicitly distributed the rights of the human as interchangeable with those of a noble citizen. Aristotle's definition of human referred to those who had *logos* and spoke with

<sup>4</sup> 'Not only does the Declaration not install any "human nature" before society and political order as an underlying foundation or external guarantee; it integrally identifies the rights of man with political rights and, in this way, short-circuits theories of human nature as well as those of theological supernature, identifying man, individual or collective, with a member of political society' (Balibar, 2015: 54).

words; however, only a few citizens could speak and be heard, and therefore possessed *logos*. Only *nobility* formulated their speech in the agora and engaged in decision-making about the commons; therefore, only a few citizens enjoyed the rights (Arendt, 1951). The others, the unrepresented, naturally had a voice but their words were not heard and had no common meaning (*logos*). Their only chance to gain rights was to find a way to be heard and, thus, become humans to whom the laws would apply. They had to find instruments enabling the general recognition and acceptance of their existence as endowed with *logos* (Rancière, 2007). Later, the concept of social citizenship represented another effort to reformulate humanity and extend the universality of equals (Marshall, 1950). The rights distributed in welfare states referred to, and thus distributed, the equality of a worker, an employee regardless of gender, economic or national determinants (Balibar, 2015). The human who was the recipient of social rights was a worker, a citizen involved in economic production. However, such a formulation of humanity overlooked those working beyond the borders of the market economy and left plenty unrepresented (Castel, 2002). Therefore, the nature of being human distributed in rights as the nature of being citizen transforms again according to the actual historical reconceptualization and an expansive claim of equaliberty.

In equaliberty terms, the tension between society and community in democracy, as described above, is revealed in historical terms from a different angle: in the antinomy between a citizen and a human, terms which can never be reduced to each other, yet exist only in mutual interrelation (Balibar, 2017). However, equaliberty better captures the universalist tendency of citizenship and an expansive dynamism enhancing historical transformation. This dynamism is driven by a principally unattainable appeal to inscribe unconditional rights or, in other words, to inscribe rights unconditionally. The movement toward this inscription is a movement of ‘constant negotiation between constituted and constituent forms of power; between the demand for an institutionalization of universal rights and its actual incorporation into a legal framework’ (Nosthoff, 2014).

Evidently, an absolute inscription of equaliberty, even in a single political framework, is always challenged and underpinned by numerous aporias. Neither equality nor liberty can be actualized unconditionally, and their institutional inscription always depends on the existing instruments (cognitive and material) in societies to confirm their common will (Balibar, 2014: 104). Therefore, equaliberty has historical limits.

The parliamentary democracies distribute communal governance via the production of rights that balance equality and liberty, so they can ‘always agree with each other *at some point* in time’.<sup>5</sup> The representative powers use various mediators to provide a balance of equality/liberty and guarantee a certain level of institutional stability, especially in fraternity and property, material instruments easily regulated, controlled and distributed by laws (Balibar, 2014: 106). However, institutional inscription is never firm because *equaliberty* succumbs to constant reinterpretation, negotiation and challenge within historical contexts and the unstable matrices of power.

## 6 CITIZENSHIP ANTINOMY AND DIALECTICAL METHOD

An explanation of citizenship antinomy in terms of political history reveals citizenship as a dynamism that transforms and historically changes while maintaining its key characteristics. Balibar’s perception of antinomic citizenship entails equaliberty as a precondition of citizenship and, at the same time, reproduces it as a product. Such a duality appears in the dialectical method, which I examine in the following.

Reflection on methodology is essential because it explains why Balibar perceives citizenship in terms of antinomy and, at the same time, grounds it in equaliberty. An antinomical interpretation represents a logical approach to citizenship, while interpretation from the perspective of equaliberty situates antinomical citizenship in history and explains it materially within its frame. While the first approach leans on the terminology of contemporary political philosophy, Balibar’s historical interpretation of citizenship has a speculative intention and resembles a suggestion. Both approaches, however, are revealed by the dialectical method, which exposes citizenship without substantializing or ideality. On its basis, the notion is revealed in the negation of other meanings placed in a constructed context, and its nature is necessarily relational. Captured via the antinomies, citizenship appears to bridge them as a mediating *transformative practice*. The identified antinomies make citizenship appear as a structured movement—a bridging agency—mediating between the

<sup>5</sup> ‘Each modernity, each new way of thinking the reciprocity of equality and freedom, can engender its own consequences and its own problems, and therefore bears its own dialectic’ (Balibar, 2014: 105).

citizen and democracy, the political (communal) agent and his/her environment. However, this practice lacks causality or a linear structure aiming for an origin to achieve. It is not normative or prescriptive, which follows from the absence of hierarchies within identified antinomies or the mutual interchangeability between the cause and effect identified within the rights or their equality, both presupposed and produced.

The citizenship antinomies that Balibar presents to depict the structures within the term are not to be overcome, broken through, diminished or achieved. Their articulation invites personal meditation, suggesting that the reader mingle with the antinomies and meditate on their 'solutions'. The dialectics operating via the antinomies embody a theoretical way to involve a reader in the dialectical process and, throughout his/her thinking, launch the category in concrete practice. An effort to think about the antinomies within a single concept and see the term in relation to other material settings incites the reader to accommodate a fresh perspective and approach the actuality with new lenses, which do not prescribe citizenship as an object or normative stance but present it as a *possibility to try*. Dialectics turn theory into concrete practice. As depicted above, the installation of citizenship, according to Balibar, proceeds via communal agency based on both insurrection and constitution. Citizenship's historical inscription demands destruction and constitution, revolt against constitutive power and its constitution in other forms. Historical reconstruction of equaliberty as a fundamental citizenship antinomy provokes the verification of agency, applying the perspective in particular conditions in the globalized world.

Besides the incitation, Balibar's articulation of equaliberty also provides a critique of actual politics. Its enunciation repudiates, for example, political practice based on divergent perceptions of equality and liberty, laws separating individual from communal rights, practice focused either on liberation or emancipation and proposing some subjects as more equal than others (Balibar, 2014: 38). From the perspective of equaliberty, divergent practice distorts the understanding of citizenship, that is, does not produce a citizen. While doing so, it misleads the politics, because production of the citizen is a crucial political aim. This citizen to be promoted has a unique form. Its specification on an actual globalized level is a task to solve. In fact, according to Balibar, the subject's specification on the transnational level in terms of international rights provokes an envisaged political community because it enables anyone to identify



with the subject, defined outside of geographical and political circumstances (the universality of transnational citizen is broader). In his view, supra-national institutions such as the United Nations or the European Union already formulate citizenship on a more universal (supra-national) level and distribute citizens' rights as human rights. The human rights discourse produces a single human and covers a comprehensive spectrum of rights from free conscience or individual security to the right to existence or self-determination. However, in Balibar's view, formulated as a defense, rather than a conquest, they still do not admit their historical and political origin and fulfill their potential.

But the institutional politics movements are insufficient without the effort from below. An antinomic concept of citizenship grounded in equaliberty brings forward the need to involve the masses in politics, as they are, in fact, the real originators of the universalizing appeal, or 'place' where citizenship antinomies (henceforth citizenship as such) evolve. Equaliberty demonstrates that every institutional inscription remains necessarily partial and restrictive in the face of the immense unlimited social will as a constitutive power. To some extent, Balibar's antinomies and the equaliberty term invite readers to invent 'a politics against politics' (Balibar, 2014: 66) and realize action directed against institutional inscription (static politics), which both accepts the necessity of institutionalization but admits and revolts against the incompleteness implied therein.

## 7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed Balibar's contribution to the citizenship debate of his conception of citizenship as a term 'permeated with antinomies'. From his perspective, citizenship is never an evident or unequivocal task. As an activity, it always produces ambiguities resulting from the antinomy of privileges (the rights) citizenship distributes and universalizing (trans-limitary) demand which it imposes. The unconditional demand and parallel need to specify and maintain privileges together make citizenship a problematic concept as long as it remains democratic. Balibar's task is not to resolve the citizenship antinomy or narrate a history of antinomic citizenship; instead, he asks us to dwell on the unsolvable paradoxes and meditate over them, or even better, experience their material inscriptions and consequently participate in their distribution with a personal contribution. Opening citizenship as a concept permeated with

antinomies—which bridges the gaps between society and community, liberty and equality, humanity and citizenry, insurrection and constitution—invites a reader to participate in the ‘solution’ by taking an active and participative stance. The antinomies are not to be resolved or decided either-or; they only challenge individuals to participate, in their way, in the collaborative practice and dialectical analysis of the fundamental questions of citizenship and humanity.

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# From Reactivity to Sustainable Citizenship: Perspectives from Braidotti's Philosophy

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

New materialism is a theoretical orientation that has arisen since the 1990s, aiming to exceed anthropocentrism and dualism, such as the culture-nature and mind-matter dichotomies inherent in Western traditions of thought (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012: 85; Gamble et al., 2019: 111; Coole & Frost, 2010: 3). From the perspectives of both citizenship and education, these theories provide novel critical angles or alternatives to accounts that take rational autonomy to be the key to 'the good life,' such as those of traditional humanism and liberal individualism. Accounts based on rational autonomy have been criticised from various perspectives, ranging from feminist philosophy (Brown, 1995) to therapeutic psychology (Smail, 2005). The key new materialist thinker discussed in this chapter is Rosi Braidotti, whose 'vital materialism' turns the focus from the autonomous individual to the essential relationality of

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all human and non-human co-habitants. Despite the emphasis Braidotti puts on relationality, she insists on the importance of maintaining the subject position as ‘the site of ethical and political accountability’ (Braidotti, 2006: 138). This combination provides the grounds for ‘an ethological approach to citizenship’ (Braidotti, 2006:150), which concentrates on both how human subjects affect and are affected in the complex web of relations of the living and the non-living.

Inspired by Braidotti, and as a starting point for this chapter, we argue that in educating ethically and politically accountable subjects, it is of crucial importance to provide tools and spaces for learning how to understand and manage one’s affectivity, understood as the innate and deeply embodied capacity to relate to others. Our focus is particularly on the relational agency that Braidotti’s theory suggests: the subject is driven by affirmative relations, but also towards them, as they ensure them the possibilities to grow and endure (Braidotti, 2006: 257). In this chapter, we identify and elaborate on this kind of relations-based and relations-oriented agency as a mode of *sustainable citizenship*.

Sustainable citizenship implies that the subject aims to increase their *potentia*, understood as their capacity to affect and be affected through affirmative relations. Affirmative relations create positive affects which draw the subject in and enliven them towards further connections. This affirmative circuit, however, is not a given. Subjects are prone to be fuelled and oriented instead by *potestas*, understood as the restrictive form of power that works through political institutions and social conventions. We elaborate on two central forms of *potestas* in Braidotti’s philosophy: negative affects and discursive power. Reactivity, then, can be defined as an opposite mode of agency to sustainable citizenship, in which *potestas* overshadows *potentia* and limits the subject’s possibilities for connection and endurance.

In the first section of this chapter, we introduce our two Braidottian modes of agency—sustainable citizenship and reactivity—and the contrasting powers they build on, *potentia* and *potestas*. In the second section, to bring our theoretical framework alive, we illustrate reactivity in the context of populism, in which both forms of *potestas* discussed here—negative affects and discursive power—play key roles. The third section explores the educational implications of overcoming reactivity, or, from the opposite angle, growing into sustainable citizenship. Concluding, we argue that sustainable citizenship provides an alternative view of community-building and co-habiting in a common space. Sustainable

citizenship emphasises the essential relationality between human and non-human beings while maintaining the accountability of the subjects, thus offering vocabularies for challenging both the individualistic ideals and the culturally and politically polarised stances of our times. Moreover, sustainable citizenship calls for a radical change of focus from individual and identitarian thinking to the interrelational and post-identitarian. This change implies a novel understanding of how humans relate to themselves and their natural, social, and technological environments. In education, it calls for practices that foster one's 'ability to take in and on the world' (Braidotti, 2019: 169)—that is, the ability to respond in a non-oppositional way to human and non-human others, or to oneself. We discuss arts, contemplative practices, and embodied critical thinking as illustrations of what such practices might be.

## 2 SUSTAINABLE CITIZENSHIP AND BRAIDOTTIAN REACTIVITY

Rosi Braidotti has addressed the theme of citizenship in her earlier works, promoting the notion of a flexible and nomadic European citizenship (Braidotti, 2006: 79; 2011: 239). In this chapter, however, we explore an additional angle that Braidotti's vital materialism offers to the discussion of citizenship and education: one of relational agency. It expands the notion of agency to include awareness and accountability for both the way one affects and is affected in the dynamic web of human and non-human relations. In this section, we discuss the conceptual basis of the notion we have termed sustainable citizenship. The main goal of our conceptual work is to link citizenship to Braidotti's view of relational agency, which is based on the affirmation of *potentia*, or a subject's capacity to affect and be affected. We also discuss an opposite mode of agency, reactivity, in which the restrictive form of power, *potestas*, weakens the subject's ability to relate and connect.

Braidotti's vital materialism is grounded in an idea originating from Baruch Spinoza's philosophy: that the world consists of one and the same matter. This matter is intelligent and self-organising; it is one common life, which Braidotti calls *zoe*, in a continuous process of transforming, creating, and dissolving forms (Braidotti, 2019: 47). *Zoe* passes through subjects as the desire to expand and enhance their existence by seeking relations (Braidotti, 2019: 155). This idea is not merely philosophical, as Braidotti, like most new materialist theorists, draws inspiration from

the natural sciences. Here, *zoe* finds resonance in the Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana's and Francisco Varela's notion of autopoietic (i.e., self-organising and self-maintaining) systems (Braidotti, 2006: 126).

As all bodies, according to Braidotti, are of one and the same 'intelligent matter, activated by shared affectivity' (2006: 148), it follows that agency—usually preserved for the autonomous, rational human subject only—is seen as relational and distributed between the bodies affecting each other. However, this does not mean that the subject is passive, merely at the mercy of external forces or not accountable for their actions—quite the contrary. Whereas in the rationalistic approach, the subject is positioned as the starting point of the linear and causal line of intentional agency, the Braidottian subject is located in the middle of social, environmental, and technological forces, among which their share of agency covers both the way they affect and are affected by these forces. This two-tiered, relational understanding of agency leans on Braidotti's conception of *potentia* as the subject's capacity to affect and be affected (Braidotti, 2006: 216).

*Potentia*, as the gateway for the one, common life, defines how much the subject can connect with other bodies. It increases and decreases depending on the subject's encounters and determines their potential for action in any situation (Braidotti, 2019: 171). The ideal for the subject, in this framework, is to aim to enhance their *potentia* by 'choos[ing] those forces that increase its power of acting and its activity in both physical and mental terms' (Braidotti, 2006: 161). This creates an affirmative circle: choosing relations that create positive affects opens the subject up towards more connections and possibilities for action. Affirmative relations ensure the endurance of the subject, but also make way for sustainable futures as communities made up of such subjects:

[P]ossible futures are built into the logic of sustainable affirmative inter-relations. The point is to allow the embodied self to express its powers of affirmation, by increasing his or her capacity to be affected and to affect in the positive sense of sustaining enriching encounters. This is not Utopian, but rather a rigorous geometry of positive passions that expresses confidence in the sustainability of liveable futures. (Braidotti, 2006: 209)

In sum, our Braidottian notion of sustainable citizenship suggests the kind of relational agency in which the subject aims to maintain as much *potentia*—that is, ability to be affected and to affect—as they can. This

can be done through affirmative relations, whose positive affects draw the subject in, increase their *potentia*, and drive them towards further connections. This creates an affirmative, self-feeding cycle that both ensures the endurance of the subject and makes way for sustainable communities.

To explore obstacles to sustainable citizenship, we introduce another mode of agency, reactivity. Whereas sustainable citizenship is linked with *potentia* as the connecting and productive power of the subject, reactivity leans on its restrictive counterforce, *potestas*. According to Braidotti, *potestas* manifests as reactive forces that ‘mark, police, sustain and repress the subject’s inner freedom, defined as *potentia*’ (Braidotti, 2006: 150). These reactive forces are exerted by institutional orders, both political and social, and seek to manage society. *Reactivity*, then, appears as a mode of agency in which a subject’s *potentia* is overshadowed by the reactive forces of *potestas* that hinder or limit their potential for connection and sustainability. As the subject cannot be cut away from their relational power nor from the institutional powers, it makes more sense to approach these two different modes of agency in terms of balancing between two poles than as excluding opposites.

What are these reactive forces, then, that have the power to hinder the subject’s ability to develop and engage in affirmative relations? In Braidotti’s work, the word reactivity appears in multiple contexts—for example, in terms of reactive emotions (Braidotti, 2006: 154), reactive affects (Braidotti, 2006: 157), reactive passions (Braidotti, 2006: 222), reactive morality (Braidotti, 2006: 180), reactive thinking (Braidotti, 2011: 40), reactive values (Braidotti, 2011: 282), and reactive critique (Braidotti, 2011: 84). For the purpose of mapping reactive forces, we have distinguished two central themes among them, with one linked to affects (forces, emotions, passions) and another to language (morality, thinking, values, critique). Thus, we introduce reactivity here within two forms of *potestas*: *negative affects* and *discursive power*.<sup>1</sup>

Affects, in the Braidottian framework, do not refer to feelings or emotions. Instead, they are defined as embodied intensities that change the subject’s capacity to act (Braidotti, 2006: 161; 2019: 45). In contrast

<sup>1</sup> Braidotti’s philosophy carries a rich genealogy of thought, combining elements from philosophers like Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Luce Irigaray, which allows us also to draw connecting lines from Braidotti to these thinkers while maintaining distance from, for example, the ‘pure’ meanings of reactivity in a Nietzschean sense or discursive power in a Foucauldian sense.



to subjective feelings, affects are transpersonal: they turn the focus on what happens in encounters in between bodies. As discussed above, the subject's agency is relational: their possibilities for action are directly proportional to the quantity and quality of their relations. Affects, as relational forces, are categorised as either positive and negative based on whether they increase or decrease a subject's interactional capacity (*potentia*) (Braidotti, 2006: 148). Here lies the ambiguity in the concept of affect: its quality can only be judged afterwards, by the effect it has had on one's capacity for relations. The distinction between positive and negative is not based on a moral judgement, on 'good' or 'bad' affects. Rather, these definitions are pragmatic notions of the subject's resultant weakened or increased ability to relate to others:

What is negative about negative affects is [...] the effect of arrest, blockage, rigidification [...] Negative passions do not merely destroy the self but also harm the self's capacity to relate to others — both human and nonhuman others — and thus to grow in and through others. What is negated by negative passions is the power of life itself — its *potentia* — as dynamic force, vital flows of connections, and becoming. And this is why they should neither be encouraged, nor should we be rewarded for lingering around them too long. Negative passions are black holes. (Braidotti, 2011: 288–289)

Braidotti argues that there is pain behind every negative affect, whether it arises 'from being hurt, lost, and dispossessed,' or comes 'as a result of a blow, a shock, an act of violence, betrayal, trauma, or just intense boredom' (Braidotti, 2011: 288, 322). Negative affects, then, appear as a somewhat inevitable, mundane aspect of our embodied and relational existence; their pain is a proof of the fundamental way we are interrelated (Braidotti, 2011: 320). Braidotti identifies, however, something in our human condition that works as a doorway for negative affects. She argues that the pain they cause is 'indexed on the ego' (Braidotti, 2006: 154), understood as the individualised self, marked with social identities. Braidotti seems to imply that there is no guilt, shame, or anger—affects considered to be negative in Braidotti's view—that do not rise from one's 'self' feeling inadequate, unrecognised, or disrespected in an oppositional relationship with another. Here, Braidotti's concept of the human radically differs from that in liberal individualism, where reciprocity and recognition are considered elements that can only be realised between

rational autonomous individuals. Within Braidotti's relational frame, reciprocity and recognition are replaced by an acknowledgement of the positive co-dependence among human and non-human bodies (Braidotti, 2006: 158). From this perspective, the pain of negative affects is caused by an illusion of separation—an illusion which is nevertheless capable of distorting the way the subject is affected by other bodies.

The other form of *potestas*, discursive power, works through language as generalising but societally inevitable systems of representation and identification (Braidotti, 2006: 28; 2011: 278). Braidotti—like new materialist thinkers in general—emphasises the dynamic materiality of the world against the primacy granted to discursive and cultural practices in Western tradition of thought (Coole & Frost, 2010: 3; Lummaa & Rojola, 2014: 23). In Braidotti's subject-oriented work, the emphasis on materiality is most evident in the close link between *potentia* and the physical body. The force of *potentia* appears as an active, direct expression of the dynamic and flowing nature of the world, which the body, Braidotti argues, is able to sense in encounters; it is the 'thermometer of becoming' (Braidotti, 2006: 214). Something draws our attention—another person, the sea, a painting—and acts like a 'switch' that opens us up to new connections, feelings, and thoughts, and prompts us to action. This 'random attraction' (Braidotti, 2006: 163) of *potentia* is unpredictable; it follows a logic of affects, not the linear logic granted to language. In contrast to *potentia*, the reactive forces of *potestas* need somewhere to establish their hold. Their character is to limit and provide a frame for a subject's *potentia*. In a way, citizenship appears as a constant balancing, or synchronisation (Braidotti, 2006: 94), between these powers. The problem with discursive power, if given precedence, lies in its capacity to orient a subject in pre-determined ways, based on the oppositional and stereotyping patterns of thought.

Before we elucidate our take on reactivity in the frame of populism, we would like to bring two key concepts together. Sustainable citizenship, in our Braidotti-inspired interpretation, means that the subject is driven and oriented towards the increase of their interactional capacity—*potentia*—through affirmative relations with both human and non-human others. *Reactivity*, for its part, is fuelled by the restrictive forces of *potestas*: it is a mode of agency where negative affects and discursive power decrease a subject's *potentia* and thus limit their potential to grow and thrive. Negative affects arise from an oppositional relation between self and other, whereas discursive power works through habitual representations whose

repetitive grip take precedence over *potentia* and so limit the subject's ability to relate to and connect with others.

### 3 ILLUSTRATING REACTIVITY THROUGH POPULISM: NOSTALGIC REPETITIONS

In this section, we illustrate our Braidottian take on reactivity in the context of populism. Our reason for using populism as an example is that in this topical political phenomenon, both forms of *potestas* discussed above, negative affects, as well as discursive power (here understood as fixed identities, representations, and narratives), have all been noted as a playing central role (e.g., Palonen & Saresma, 2017; Salmela & von Scheve, 2017; Zembylas, 2020). In vocabularising these aspects of populism through a Braidottian lens, our aim is to bring our theoretical framework alive through an example, rather than to provide an overall interpretation of the admittedly complex and locally varying phenomenon of populism.

As Finnish scholars, we present our example by means of a dialogue between the populist rhetoric used and expressed in the principal programme of a Finnish populist political party, the Finns Party,<sup>2</sup> and Braidotti's theoretical thought. We illustrate the workings of negative affects through nostalgia and discursive power through fixed identities, narratives, and representations.

Finns feel 'Finland' in their heart and soul and it remains there — no matter how the world changes.<sup>3</sup>

Nostalgia, in its sweet quality, might at first seem an odd choice for describing a negative affect. Nostalgia is not the most likely affect to describe populism either, as populism is more often identified with negative emotions like anger or resentment (Zembylas, 2020: 156) However, nostalgia allows us to express well the ambiguity of negative affects and

<sup>2</sup> The Finns Party became the second-most popular party in Finland with 17.5% of support in the governmental elections in 2019. It is best known for its critical views on immigration and the European Union.

<sup>3</sup> This passage is an extract from the Finns Party Principle Program, [https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Periaateohjelma-19.10.2018\\_SU\\_In-English.pdf](https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Periaateohjelma-19.10.2018_SU_In-English.pdf).

their close relationship to identity-based thinking. Nostalgic feelings are evoked through the national romantic imagery used on the Finns Party's website and campaigns, and probably most blatantly by the slogan '*Suomi takaisin*' ('Finland back'), for which the party is famous.<sup>4</sup> The narrative of 'Finland back' promotes an idea of a once-unified land that has been lost—mainly because of the EU and what they consider to be unsatisfactory immigration policy—and which the Finns Party is now promising to bring back. When approached as a subjective feeling, nostalgia is qualified by what it is, for example as 'sadness mixed with pleasure and affection when you think of happy times in the past' (*Oxford Advanced American Dictionary* 2021, nostalgia entry). Approached as an affect, however, nostalgia gets qualified by what it does: weather it increases or decreases the subject's ability to relate to and connect with others.

Within Braidotti's new materialist framework, the others to whom the subject relates and connects include not only other human beings, but also non-human others. This dynamic brings forward a less discussed aspect of citizenship that is central to new materialist theories, which is the subject's relationship to their environment. The Braidottian subject is an extended body, wired up in technology, enmeshed in social relations, and entangled among their natural environment in complex ways (Braidotti, 2019: 46). These relations are not theirs—on the contrary, the quantity and quality of the subject's relations define them in terms of how widely and at what intensity they can operate (Braidotti, 2006: 156).

The question is, then, what does nostalgia in terms of the Finns Party's rhetoric do? As discussed in the previous section, sustainable citizenship implies an affirmative circuit in which positive affects, created by affirmative relations, drive the subject towards more connectability. Within the populist narrative of 'Finland back,' the driving energy of positive passions, like the relatable affection for the place in which one was born, is not integrated into the rich materiality of the present moment. Instead, its potentiality becomes captured by linking it to an illusory land, once lost, or to a restored dream land in future. The nostalgic feelings are also tied also to a certain identity: it is Finns, who 'feel Finland in their heart and soul,' as the quote above suggests. While this nostalgia does

<sup>4</sup> '*Suomi takaisin*' was first introduced as a slogan for the 2018 presidential election campaign of the party's candidate, and it has remained the party's main political theme ever since. It is one among many examples of similar populist narratives (e.g., 'Make America Great Again') used by populist movements in the recent decade.

serve to connect and bind together a certain group of people, it does so through a mechanism opposite to *potentia*; it forces relationships on the pre-determined basis of how the connecting bodies are defined and recognised. Thus, nationalistic nostalgia works more in terms of exclusion, limiting certain bodies out of inclusion, rather than in opening up unprecedented possibilities for connection and action in the bodies affected. As discussed in the first section, the negativity of affect is defined by the weakening effect it has on a subject's relationality, which arises from an oppositional relation to the other. Within populist rhetorics, then, nostalgia works as a negative affect: by tying into fixed identities and narratives, it works as an affective tool against the present conditions and their potentialities, thereby depleting the possibility of futurity wherein 'sustainable presents generate possible futures' (Braidotti, 2006: 276).

The populist rhetoric of the Finns Party promotes an assumption of a non-changing essence of a national identity and of a territory as *patria*, which the quote at the outset of this section captures well: no matter how the world changes, Finland and the Finns stay the same. Against the backdrop of the rapid change and complexity of our technological, social, and natural environments, this assumption plays on the well-documented illusions in Western traditions of thought of the separateness of the subject and their environment, of their control over it, and of their control over themselves. However, as Brian Massumi aptly expresses, 'the human is a carrier of a movement of relational transformation, one that swept it up, and sweeps through it' (Massumi, 2017: 8), whether one likes it or not. Moreover, the concepts of unitary and fixed identities that populist rhetorics promote are inherently incompatible with Braidotti's theory. As we return to the foundations of Braidotti's thought where the world is seen as one self-organising matter, we find a principle of difference as immanent and dynamic, and, as such, an inherently positive starting point for all beings (Braidotti, 2019: 12). In contrast, populist movements rely on a binary logic of identity and otherness, which presents difference as a pejoration, equating 'different from' with 'less than.' Braidotti argues that it is exactly this idea of difference, implicit in our social imaginary, that allows for the production of hierarchies and exclusion (Braidotti, 2011: 171; 2013: 15).

...a Finn will nevertheless know what it does mean to be Finnish — and what it does not.<sup>5</sup>

The excluding logic of ‘us,’ on which populist rhetoric builds, promotes an idea of communities thriving and enduring in the safety of their ‘own kind’: Finland is only for Finns, who know who they are and how to be that way. This connection between the politics of exclusion and the well-being of communities has been contested by, for example, Karatzogianni and Robinson (2010), who in their Deleuze-inspired work conceptualise groupings who build on unitary identities and aim at constitutive exclusion as reactive networks. Karatzogianni and Robinson argue that the hierarchic mechanisms of closure for which these reactive networks advocate are, in fact, ‘suicidal’; although these mechanisms are targeted at the different ‘others,’ they simultaneously limit the conditions of existence of the ones on the inside (Karatzogianni & Robinson, 2010: 203). Their argument is in line with Braidotti, who argues that interrelations should happen ‘in a pragmatic mode of random attraction’ (Braidotti, 2006: 163), and it is also due to this affinity that these relations endure, not because of an external law or agreement on ‘us.’ This mechanism of *potentia*, as discussed in the first section, creates ‘mutually embedded nests of shared interests’ (Braidotti, 2006: 162), bodies gathered together not on the basis of what they are defined or recognised as, but what they are drawn to do together. This principle provides the basis for sustainable citizenship, a dynamic and collective conception of co-habiting a common space which precedes the logic of identities and other systems of regulation.

Setting the positivity of *potentia* as the point of reference for citizenship does not remove the conflicts between groups with different interests or subjects with different values. Negotiations are still needed, Braidotti remarks, but they are more productively placed in a frame of shared affectivity than in an oppositional position of ‘us versus them’ (Braidotti, 2006: 157). Acknowledging that one’s essence as *potentia* is bound to other human and non-human bodies means yielding to a positive co-dependence. Looked at from another angle, this move suggests a collective conception of freedom, shaking the foundations of liberal

<sup>5</sup> This passage is an extract from the Finns Party Principle Program, [https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Periaateohjelma-19.10.2018\\_SU\\_In-English.pdf](https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Periaateohjelma-19.10.2018_SU_In-English.pdf).

individualism: the Braidottian subject needs others to be free (Braidotti, 2006: 163). From this standpoint, reactivity presents itself essentially as a lack of freedom: it is self-containment and the waste of both one's own *potentia* and of the possibilities for collective futures, which kept up by negative affects and fixed representations. Since the solution for self-containment cannot come from the outside, the emancipatory measures must be targeted at the right source: the subject's conception of oneself and one's habits of thought.

#### 4 EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES—TOWARDS POST-IDENTITARIAN SUBJECTIVITIES?

In this last section, we aim to map a way forward and ask what growing into sustainable citizenship would mean if interpreted in the light of Braidotti's thinking. In reverse, this means addressing the educational challenge of overcoming reactivity: how to provide tools to transform negative affects into positive ones and, as we demonstrate, to revise our understanding of thinking itself. In what follows, we reflect on these educational aspects through Braidotti's thought and elaborate on how, if implemented, they would change educational thinking and educational practices.

Negative affects are tied to the identity-bound 'me' in Braidotti's thinking, which stresses the role of the unconscious in the processes of subjectivity (Braidotti, 2002: 39). This theoretical shift challenges traditional views of education, as the case of the ego and the unconscious has not been traditionally considered to belong in the field of education. As the neuroscientist and philosopher Francisco Varela has aptly observed, the only Western tradition that has stressed the need for a space to explore the makings of the knowing subject itself, is psychoanalysis (Varela, 1999: 64). The educational challenge of transforming negative affects implies problematising the separate understanding of self, or more sharply in Braidotti's words, the 'paranoid-narcissistic self-nexus' (Braidotti, 2006: 180).

If post-identitarian selfhood—that is, a 'non-unitary, relational and outward-bound definition of the subject' (Braidotti, 2006: 251)—is taken as the key to affirmative relations and sustainability, how can education answer to such a radical call for transformation? Becoming aware of one's identifications, not to mention changing them, is challenging, because such identifications are not simply a matter of conscious will; they are

often unconscious, deeply rooted, emotionally loaded, and thus do not easily surrender to being observed. Braidotti uses the term *disidentification* to refer to those fleeting moments when the subject succeeds in creating an internal distance from the identities they have claimed as their own. Disidentifications appear as some kind of in-between states of re-negotiation, where the subject as who they thought they were is no longer there but has not yet become ‘new,’ either (Braidotti, 2002: 40). By disidentifying with pre-given identities, Braidotti argues, the subject distances themselves from the negativity that is tied to the dialectics of self and other and the historically accumulated power formations that the dialectic carries with it (Braidotti, 2011: 33, 42). In imagining what these educational practices of disidentification could be, we can recognise a recent example in the field. Contemplative practices, originating from Eastern philosophies, have become increasingly popular in the Western world during the past decade, also making their way into schools and workplaces (Kortelainen et al., 2014; Saari, 2018). Leaning on the principle of internal distance, that is, observing one’s identifications as if from the side, contemplative practices aim to create space for the observation of one’s thoughts and for becoming aware of one’s self-presentations.

The educational challenge of discursive power, in turn, challenges us to think differently about thinking itself. In the example of populism, discussed above, we problematised the restricting effect of habitual representations, or in Braidotti’s words, ‘the uncritical reproduction of Sameness’ (Braidotti, 2011: 244). Recalling the definition of *potentia* as the capacity to affect, but also to be affected, reactivity presents as a generalising, simplifying way of responding to oneself, others, and one’s environment. As a remedy for the repetitive loops of habitual representations, Braidotti suggests an idea of reason that also includes affectivity (Braidotti, 2006: 162). The affective idea of reason reaches one step further than the idea of reason behind critical thinking, for example, and the logical skills it requires. In addition to the cognitive and self-reflexive processes thinking entails, Braidotti counts in the pre-discursive moment of being affected—the moment of encounter, yet without words—to the thinking process. Affects pass through the subject equally in conceptual (not only embodied) encounters, increasing and decreasing the subject’s *potentia* as the ‘receptivity, capacity as well as the yearning for thinking’ (Braidotti, 2002: 125; 2013: 170). Thinking becomes ‘thinking-feeling’ (Massumi, 2017: 59): being capable and willing to see, hear, and sense anew, acknowledging the nature of the world—and oneself—as constantly



in flux. In Braidotti's words, the self gets unfolded to the world, and the world enfolds within the subject, always in new ways (Braidotti, 2011: 224). The kind of conceptual creativity that enables the creation of located and embodied meanings is at work in the field of art, whether that is poetry, dance, or any other form that 'speaks' from the realm of embodied and embedded experience, not from the habit of repetition (Braidotti, 2006: 202; see also Itkonen, 2020). Another example of practices of 'thinking-feeling' is the recently emergent movement of embodied critical thinking (e.g., Schoeller & Thorgeirsdottir, 2019), which aims to bridge the gap between the intricacy of the lived experience and conceptual thinking.

Lastly, we argue that sustainable citizenship calls for educational approaches that take seriously the role of negative affects in hampering the possibilities of building sustainable relations to others. At the level of philosophy, sustainable citizenship requires a concept of human that is not limited to a subject's rational consciousness but admits the crucial role of the affective, pre-discursive realm in human thinking and action. This calls for the kind of psychoanalytically oriented understanding traditionally excluded from educational concerns. Moreover, it demands the questioning of identity-based thinking and the related idea that recognition and reciprocity are only possible between rational autonomous individuals. Contemplative practices and the arts can provide fruitful avenues for overcoming fallacious conceptions of isolated identities and recognising the relational nature of the subject. By de-familiarising one from habitual representations and ways of perceiving, they also make way for unbiased encounters and conceptual creativity.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have introduced the notion of sustainable citizenship based on the relational agency entailed in Rosi Braidotti's philosophy. Braidotti's theory is grounded in an understanding of the world as one and the same matter that is intelligent and self-organising; it strives to endure and expand its existence by seeking relations. The Braidottian subject as 'non-unitary, relational, and outward-bound' (Braidotti, 2006: 251) is inclined to recognise and choose the connections that keep them going. Sustainable citizenship means an orientation towards affirmative relations that increase the subject's *potentia*, opening them up for more

connections. This self-feeding circle ensures the growth and endurance of both the subject and the communities created. We contrasted sustainable citizenship with reactivity, understood as a mode of agency in which reactive forces of *potestas* overshadow the subject's *potentia* and, accordingly, their ability to connect and endure. We introduced two forms of *potestas* that are central in Braidotti's thought—negative affects and discursive power—illustrating them in the context of populism, in which both factors have been seen as playing a central role. We discussed negative affects in relation to nostalgia within the populist rhetoric and demonstrated how the 'sweetness' of nostalgia gets captured when tied to an essentialised idea of national identity and glorified patria of the past, hampering the possibilities for affirmative relations in the present. We also problematised fixed identities and habitual representations as examples of discursive power. Their repetitive grip both limits the formation of relations and communities in an oppositional and excluding way and denies the dynamic difference that Braidotti places at the heart of each subject.

In the third section, we asked what overcoming reactivity and moving towards sustainable citizenship could mean in terms of education. Addressing the close connection that Braidotti draws between negative affects and the ego as the individualised and identity-based self, we first argued that transforming negative affects calls for tools that allow the critical examination of our attachment to identifications and self-representations. Contemplative practices were mentioned as already emerging tools of this sort in the educational field. Secondly, we argued that overcoming the habitual representations and dialectical thinking on which discursive power builds would require a more holistic approach to thinking that encompasses affectivity and creativity. The arts and practices such as the newly arising movement of embodied critical thinking, which emphasises the embodied and pre-conceptual side of our processes of meaning-making, were discussed as crucial for this change.

The aspect of sustainability that Braidotti's theory brings to the citizenship discussion is significant in our time in two deeply entangled ways. In the light of cultural and political polarisation, increased negativity, and social malaise, it provides vocabularies for the need to cultivate enduring, empowered subjectivities that are capable of relating and connecting to others and to oneself in an affirmative way. Furthermore, in the midst of the global environmental crises of our time, it heeds the call for

sustainable communities that also take into account the aspect of the non-human.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, moving from reactivity to sustainability implies a radical change of focus from individual and identitarian thinking to the interrelational and post-identitarian. This is not an easy switch, because it forces us to reconsider the ways we habitually relate not only to ourselves, but to our natural, technological, and social environments, as well as to our cultural values and norms. As Braidotti writes, it calls for an alternative social imaginary altogether (Braidotti, 2011: 269). This imaginary works as both the requisition and foundation for the yet unimagined, more sustainable practices of co-habiting and enduring in a common space.

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<sup>6</sup> This dimension deserves more attention than we have been able to give it in the limited space of our chapter.

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# Communities and Habits of Citizenship: Everyday Participation in Kondoa, Tanzania

*Ajali M. Nguyahambi and Tiina Kontinen*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter builds on and contributes to the debates on experienced, lived and multi-scalar citizenship that widens its conceptualizations beyond a legal status and membership defined by individuals' rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis a state. Recent literature in citizenship studies has suggested more nuanced, multifaceted and contextualized understandings (Clarke et al., 2014; Isin & Nyers, 2014; Lazar & Nuijten, 2013; Shachar et al., 2017; Yuval-Davis, 1999, 2008). The novel contextual definitions of citizenship are especially relevant for research in Africa because, as a wealth of scholarship has pointed out, most existing theorization on citizenship focuses upon experiences in Europe and North America, and thus ignores the institutional and everyday realities of the majority of the world (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; Isin, 2015; Kabeer, 2005; Kabeer & Kabir, 2009; Robins et al., 2008).

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In response to these suggestions, and in continuation of our previous research on the topic (Holma & Kontinen, 2020b; Holma et al., 2018; Nguyahambi & Chang’a, 2020; Nguyahambi & Kontinen, 2020), we introduce a perspective drawing on the work of John Dewey (1859–1952), a pragmatist philosopher whose ideas have had a huge impact in fields related to democracy and education (Garrison et al., 2016; Stitzlein, 2014). Based on the Dewey-inspired conceptualizations of Holma and Kontinen (2020b; Holma et al., 2018), we understand citizenship as something that is constructed by participating in communities and everyday practices in the course of taking care of shared issues. Additionally, we draw on a definition of learning as acquiring habits of citizenship through participating in these practices and reformulating them in response to disruptions (ibid.). Building on these definitions, we analyse qualitative interviews conducted in the rural location of Kondoa District in Dodoma Region, Tanzania. We address two main questions: (1) In what kinds of diverse communities and practices do people participate in their everyday lives? (2) What kinds of habits of citizenship are learned through such participation?

In what follows, we first elaborate on the particular conceptualization of citizenship and learning inspired by Dewey’s work as a contribution to current citizenship studies. Then we will provide a short introduction of the empirical context and the methods used, followed by presentation of the findings of our empirical analysis. In conclusion, we reflect upon the implications of the proposed perspective for understanding citizenship in sub-Saharan Africa in particular, and for contextualized notions of citizenship in general.

## 2 PRAGMATIST PERSPECTIVE ON CITIZENSHIP

In this section, we elaborate on our perspective on citizenship and learning, drawing extensively on the contributions of Holma and Kontinen to the book, *Citizenship practices in East-Africa: Perspectives from Philosophical Pragmatism* (2020a). Based on Dewey’s philosophical pragmatism, they elaborate a conceptualization of citizenship as “constructed in practices taking place in communities involved in the public, thus, in shared activities that have an aim of taking care of shared issues, and thereby realizing citizenship habits both acquired and reformulated, thus learned, in the course of taking part in these communities” (Kontinen & Holma, 2020: 228). This definition is a starting

point for our exploration of citizenship in the context of rural Tanzania and provides a useful angle for the debates on multiple and localized definitions of citizenship.

A growing body of literature in the field of citizenship studies argues for expanding state-centred conceptualizations and promotes the elaboration of more nuanced and multiple understandings of citizenship (Clarke et al., 2014; Isin & Nyers, 2014; Lazar, 2012; Lazar & Nuijten, 2013; Maas, 2013; Shachar et al., 2017; Yuval-Davis, 1999, 2008). These contributions have suggested the exploration of multiple scales, levels and communities, where citizenship as the rights and duties of members is constructed, and citizenship as belonging and identity is negotiated. The discussions have suggested focusing on “embodied” citizenship in contrast to its “abstract categories” (Yuval-Davis, 2008: 160), scrutinizing the “actual constitution” instead of the “normative ideals” of citizenship (Lazar & Nuijten, 2013), paying attention to how people “act as citizens” (Lister, 1998) and exploring “multi-scalar communities of citizenship” (Clarke et al., 2014: 9, 141). Overall, more context-sensitive analysis of practical manifestations of citizenship has been called for.

Pragmatist ideas contribute to conceptualizing citizenship as actualized and enacted by real people in particular contexts. In general, any pragmatist theorization and inquiry depart from the social practices taking place in different kinds of communities. For Dewey, the idea of citizenship relates to the notions of public and community, geared towards deliberating and acting on joint matters. In Dewey’s approach, the notion of *public* refers to the sphere where people attend to such shared issues, and where people take part in diverse *communities* in the form of groups participating in joint practices in their everyday lives (Dewey, 1927: 238–366). In contrast to some other action-oriented perspectives, such as “acts of citizenship” (Isin & Nyers, 2014), Dewey’s notion does not explicitly define citizenship as *political* participation, nor does it necessarily include elements of claim-making. Rather, it resonates with views wherein citizenship is seen as emerging in a myriad of community groups (Lister, 1997: 29) or in a variety of daily routines, in spite of or in addition to claim-making activities (Clarke et al., 2014: 132). In a similar vein, Dewey’s conceptualizations guide exploration of the kinds of communities that consist of people engaged in a variety of practices and addressing shared issues in any context.

Contextualized examination of citizenship is especially relevant in locations such as Tanzania. Obviously, much of the theorization on

citizenship is embedded in European and North American historical and societal contexts (Chung, 2017; Isin, 2015). As such, it does not adequately address or resonate with, on the one hand, the consequences of colonialism for shaping what is labelled “citizenship” in parallel of speaking of “subjects” in relation to colonial powers and, on the other, specific formations of state-citizens relations in postcolonial, independent African nations (Aminzade, 2013; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; Dorman, 2014; Mamdani, 1996; Manby, 2009). Therefore, it has been argued that more nuanced conceptualizations of citizenship need to start from contextualized experiences, practices and perspectives. It has been suggested (Lazar, 2013; Mohanty & Tandon, 2006) that, rather than drawing from Western-based assumptions or one-size-fits-all theoretical frameworks, exploration should focus on how “people see themselves in relation to others, and what this implies for their understanding of citizenship in the world as they know it” (Kabeer, 2005: 3). For instance, Englund (2004: 2) has pointed out the irrelevance of state-centric citizenship for ordinary inhabitants in African countries and instead suggests scrutinizing diverse arenas where material and social connectedness—what could be called economic citizenship (Ahimbisibwe & Ndidde, this volume; Kessler-Harris, 2001)—and members’ expectations and obligations emerge vis-à-vis communities other than the state. Examples of such meaningful communities include religious groups (Jones, 2012), producer co-operatives (King, 2015), micro-finance schemes (Ssendi & Anderson, 2009) and community-based organizations (Dill, 2009).

In a Deweyan perspective, each such community is likely to address shared issues and, thus, become an arena for cultivating certain kinds of habits, the “acquired predispositions to ways or modes of responses” (Dewey, 1922: 32). The notion of habits of citizenship, we suggest, refers to a tendency to think and act in a taken-for-granted manner upon issues such as participation, rights, obligations, membership and identities. Habits are formed in a particular cultural and social context (Dewey, 1927: 334–335) and through human experience of interaction between the self and material and social environments (Hildreth, 2012: 922–923). Therefore, habits are always formed in certain societal and historical circumstances (Holma & Kontinen, 2020b). For instance, Stitzlein (2014: 63) shows, in the context of the United States, how habits of democracy in citizenship develop through interaction in social groups; however, given the contextualized nature of habits, the kinds



acquired depend on the characteristics of the social groups and communities attracting participation. In addition to democratic or active habits, practices such as aligning with authority (Dorman, 2014: 170) or being passive by choice in repressed environments (Alava, 2020) may also be habit-forming. Yet learning, in the pragmatist perspective, does not only refer to acquirement and, thus, continuous reproduction of certain habits. In contrast, the notion of habit enables change as a response to a disruption to those habits. From the Deweyan point of view, as a consequence of disruption the habits of citizenship might come under reflection in a new situation where the old, taken-for-granted habits do not work, and communities start to experiment with new ways of thinking and action (Dewey, 1916: 107–108; Hildreth, 2009: 795–196; Holma et al., 2018).

Guided by the conceptualization of citizenship habits as acquired in the course of participation in communities that address shared issues, in what follows we scrutinize a specific location in rural Tanzania in order to understand the kinds of communities in which people participate and the habits of citizenship that are learned in the process.

### 3 INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTEXT AND METHODS

Tanzania shares characteristics such as colonial history and aid dependency with many other African countries. It is, however, a unique example of a long-lasting and somewhat successful nation-building during the first two decades after attainment of independence in 1961. Despite having more than 120 ethnic groups, division along ethnic, religious and racial lines is less significant in Tanzania than in neighbouring countries (Mushi, 2009; Swilla, 2009). When the state has played an important role in nation-building, historians describe how citizenship as sense of belonging has merely emerged in non-state arenas characterized by people's self-organization (Halisi et al., 1998; Mpangala, 1992). Different patterns in Tanzania's social, economic and political development have influenced the nature and current status of citizenship and continue to do so (Aminzade, 2013). The state-centric, one-party system of governance from 1961 to the mid-1980s shaped people's understanding of the current multiparty system among citizens, experienced as a top-down initiative, and supported particular understandings of the rights and obligations of citizens, wherein the role of citizens is to support the state's development (URT, 2011). Currently, the citizenship initiatives of civic education implemented by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and related to

democratic elections and social accountability are playing an important and ongoing role in shaping ideas and practices of citizenship (See also: Nguyahambi et al., 2020).

As an entry point, we used a national Tanzanian NGO, SIKIKA, which is active in supporting citizenship revolving around social accountability, and studied one of the locations where it had implemented projects. The data was collected in three wards in Kondoa District, one of the six administrative district areas constituting Dodoma Region, with a population of about 300,000. The main economic activities in the area are farming and herding. The Warangi constitute the dominant ethnic group, comprising more than 91% of the population in the district, and Islam is the main religious affiliation in the area, subsuming some two thirds of the population. However, despite the Warangi being the dominant ethnic group and Muslims the dominant religious group, there is no single village with 100% Warangi and Muslim dwellers.

The participants in our qualitative thematic interviews ( $n = 20$ , 9 females and 11 males), conducted in January 2017, were all Muslims and all Warangi apart from one Maasai and one Sandawe. Most of the interviewees were peasants, although five were also occupied in small businesses. The majority had only primary education, apart from three female interviewees with secondary education and one male interviewee with university level. These interviews comprised a small-scale explorative case study (Yin, 2003) conducted at the beginning of a wider project on practices of citizenship in Tanzania and Uganda (Holma & Kontinen, 2020a). The interviewees had been active in one way or another in the NGO's initiatives and, therefore, exemplify community members who have the opportunity, capacities and motivation to participate in various groups. The themes discussed included their definitions of citizenship, their belonging to and participation in various groups they considered meaningful for their everyday life, and the rights and obligations they attached to these groups. All the interviews were conducted by native Tanzanians in Kiswahili, a language used daily by all participants and also spoken by the second author. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Our inductive thematic analysis consisted of three rounds, with both authors participating. First, all accounts articulated in the interviews were coded according to their detailed, practical content. Second, from this content, the interview sections discussing participation in some kind of group or community were extracted for more detailed analysis, when types of communities were identified. Third, we used the notion of habit

to interpret the kinds of citizenship habits acquired, first by identifying habits related to each community separately, and then combining and abstracting these into six broader categories. The habits were constructed based on the taken-for-granted ways research participants described the characteristics of the communities, and the roles and responsibilities attributed to them. Overall, the analysis resulted in identification of six types of communities in which interviewees' participated—the village community, cultural groups, religious groups, self-help groups, economic groups and civil society organizations—and six categories of citizenship habits: habits of political citizenship, engaging citizenship, economic citizenship, cultural citizenship, responsible citizenship and moral citizenship.

Typically, the individuals we interviewed participated in a number of communities; those who were not active were not interviewed in this study. It is, therefore, likely that our interviews did not capture all existing communities or the experiences of those who were passive, not interested or unable to participate. Moreover, the borders between the types and categories identified overlap with each other; for instance, the line between some self-help groups and economic groups was blurred. Thus, the findings provide an illustrative picture of multiple arenas of participation. In 2018 the initial findings were discussed in two feedback sessions with the communities, providing the interview participants and other local inhabitants with the opportunity to comment on the findings and validate our analysis of existing groups and kinds of citizenship.

#### 4 COMMUNITIES AND HABITS OF CITIZENSHIP

In this section we briefly present our findings on the types of communities in which people participated, the shared issues addressed and the practices undertaken. Then we proceed to our findings on the habits of citizenship acquired through participating in these communities.

##### *Communities and Practices*

The interviewees identified a number of communities where shared issues were addressed and where they actively participated. Most common was the *village community* to which each registered villager belongs, possessing equal rights and duties according to the law: for instance, to vote and stand for the village council. The village provides an arena

wherein to participate in making decisions on joint issues and resources (Snyder, 2008), and functions as an official space for addressing common issues in village meetings and general assemblies. As an example of those mentioned, in one of the village meetings it was decided that village members should participate in building a pit-latrine in the village dispensary in order to address a concern over the lack of quality in health-care facilities.

The second important type was *cultural groups*, where villagers strengthen and maintain the cultural heritage of their ethnic groups: for example, the Warangi living in the area participate in group cultural activities such as dance, choirs and sports. These provided leisure and recreation, but also addressed the joint concern of supporting integration between generations, transmission of cultural knowledge and strengthening cultural identity in the area. Cultural groups also presented an educational opportunity in which people learned about their duties and rights in preserving their cultural identity and the welfare of their communities at large. Everyone also mentioned membership in *religious groups*, mainly Islamic ones. These were important, not only for building spiritual identities through participating in prayers and learning religious morals, but also for addressing practical concerns together. For instance, the interviewees narrated how members contributed to the construction and renovation of mosque buildings, participated in cleaning areas for worship and education and mobilized support for the teachers in *madradas*.

*Self-help groups* were established by economically and socially disadvantaged community members, especially women, in order to mobilize resources, with the expectation of helping each other during times of sorrow and joy, *kwenye shida na raha*. These groups addressed the general problem of poverty and economic insecurity in the face of surprising challenges. In Tanzania, as in many other African countries, forming self-help groups dates back to pre-colonial times (Aikaruwa et al., 2014; Rodima-Taylor, 2014). They provide social protection from unexpected challenges and can help to secure small credits and capital, which members cannot access elsewhere due to their limited economic capacity. Members have a duty to participate frequently in group meetings and to contribute money to the joint cashbox. They also have the right, in turn, to benefit from credit or a gift from the group if in sudden need. Self-help groups were, therefore, both economically and socially significant.

*Economic groups*, on the other hand, were communities that directly addressed the problem of inadequate income, poor productivity of agricultural activities and lack of access to loans from banks. The groups capitalized on joint efforts in performing production activities, and combined forces to market products and collect savings so that each member could benefit through the lending schemes, sometimes in the framework of an established village bank (VICOBA), an institution prevalent in Africa (Allen, 2006). Activities included horticulture, sunflower and maize farming, and goat keeping. Members have to subscribe to the regulations established by the group, which are meant to “maintain order” while somehow remaining flexible for the sake of strengthening group solidarity.

Finally, *groups sponsored by civil society organizations* (CSOs) were mentioned in reference to those created by the activities of a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that originated outside this particular rural area. Thus, as is common in African contexts, the CSOs discussed usually referred to urban-based organizations that establish their presence in villages by, for example, mobilizing committees to address certain issues based on the NGO’s agendas, such as health, education or the environment. For the research participants, the motive to participate in these groups was to benefit from the CSO’s activities by accessing the awareness created and support provided. A CSO initiative to encourage villagers to be active in monitoring the quality of the health service delivery—the Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) project—was mentioned multiple times. SAM projects are typical of NGO interventions aimed at strengthening citizenship and increasing states’ accountability for the realization of their citizens’ rights to quality services (Hickey & King, 2016; Joshi, 2013).

Overall, in regard to the multifaceted and multi-scalar idea of citizenship, the types of communities identified emphasized the scales of immediate village and neighbourhood groups as arenas of participation, identity and belonging. The wider scales, such as district, region or the nation were less deliberated, mentions of voting in general elections being an exception. This is not surprising given that some of the interviewees said that they had never even visited the nearest town of Kondoa; thus, everyday life was geared around their particular village and the diverse groups within.

### *Habits of Citizenship*

The identification of habits of citizenship took the analysis to a more abstract level than recognition of the types of communities. There is no straightforward relationship between a certain type of community and a certain category of habit; rather, each habit could be acquired in diverse communities with different emphasis.

The *habits of political citizenship* refer to the ways in which the quite traditional sphere of “political” was discussed. Exercising political citizenship included voting in elections and participating in joint deliberations at village level. The village community offered the opportunity to participate in representative democracy by voting in elections for local leaders. Political agency vis-à-vis the state was merely mentioned in relation to the national elections when one was supposed to exercise one’s right to vote. CSOs played an important role in promoting this aspect of citizenship through their voters’ education and awareness-raising campaigns, as reported in the following extract:

I am a member of this village and I often take part in village assemblies and other meetings that discuss issues of common concern, just as is expected of every other village community member. Also, every member has the right and duty to participate in the election of local and national political leaders by voting, or being voted into a political position.

Most importantly, however, regular village meetings offered a space for discussing shared problems, often resulting in practical initiatives implemented by the village members. Thus, active participation in the village community contributed to acquiring habits of active deliberation on shared issues and undertaking joint action to address challenges, such as poor roads or inadequate water supply. All the registered residents in the community had the right, and also a kind of duty, to participate in these initiatives. However, some of the less privileged community members needed to focus on their daily survival rather than allocating time to collective activities, and they were not described as contributing members of the village community but, rather, as a group that needed the care of others. Overall, the political habits acquired were those of deliberation, the collective solving of practical problems and undertaking the act of voting in elections. These political habits, where the taken-for-granted responses to village problems were negotiations and working together rather than claiming contributions from the government, differed from

habits of political claim-making or contestation of power suggested, for instance, by ideas related to engaged citizenship.

However, in some instances, there were signs of a reformulation of these prevalent political habits towards *habits of engaging citizenship*, especially within diverse CSO projects. In resonance with the pragmatist view of learning as the reformulation of habits in response to disruptions, these projects presented certain disruptions and questioned some existing habits. The interviewees mentioned an initiative related to rights advocacy promoted by a district NGO and the National Council of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NACOPHA), and an effort to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities undertaken by the Tanzania Federation of Disabled People's Organization (SHIVYAWATA). As a result of these projects, some HIV/AIDS victims found it easier to access medicines and proper medical advice, which restored their lost hope, while some with disabilities were offered learning opportunities that changed their perceptions of their own capabilities. A CSO initiative that most clearly aimed to change prevalent citizenship habits was the Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) initiative implemented by our collaborator SIKIKA, which included the establishment of SAM committees that were supposed to monitor and contribute to the improvement of health service delivery. For instance, the committee addressed the challenge of mistrust between community and service providers in a case related to the use of photocopied maternity cards during a shortage of originals. It also negotiated with a medical practitioner to get him to change his behaviour, which had been experienced as inappropriate by the patients. The engagement with those responsible for service delivery was experienced as beneficial, as one of the interviewees reflected:

Everyone appreciates the role of the SAM committee in enabling community members to participate in monitoring and advocacy activities to improve health service delivery. Today, the situation has changed in terms of availability of medicines and medical supplies, and the relationship between health personnel and community members has been harmonized.

While SAM initiatives usually aim to promote claim-making and habits of engaged citizenship that hold the government accountable, the habits actually promoted in this case emphasized negotiation, building good relationships with individual health service providers and the community's own contribution towards keeping the environment of the health

centre clean. However, most of these novel habits of engagement did not endure after the CSO project ended in the community (Nguyahambi & Chang'a, 2020). This common phenomenon is related to the difficulty of really transforming existing habits, but also to the fact that very few individuals are usually invited by the village leaders—based on NGO requirements—to participate in the committees that represent the villagers, and wider benefits depend on the willingness and competencies of the active participants to engage others.

For the interviewees, gaining effective *habits of economic citizenship* were among the most important. Essentially, economic citizenship denotes the ability to participate in groups in the economic struggles that enable one to fulfil social and political responsibilities (Kessler-Harris, 2001); livelihood and belonging were often closely intertwined in local participation practices. These habits were acquired in communities that addressed the shared challenges of sustaining and improving livelihoods through joint efforts in agriculture and small business, while simultaneously providing a basic social protection net. The acquired habits of being able to perform economic planning, to save and invest and engage with practical issues, such as procedures related to opening bank accounts, increased the members' general capacity to act (see also King, 2015). Economic groups with loose and informal structure attracted more participants than those that were formal and registered, as established regulations seemed to scare participants. Despite the long history of Savings and Credit Co-operatives (SACCOs) in Tanzania, people with irregular income flow found themselves outside such formal credit schemes because of their frequent inability to deliver contributions. Many participants preferred Village Community Banks (VICOBA) over SACCOS, because management of the former was based on traditional networks and social capital, while the latter operated in a formal system in affiliation with certain banks. Even more informal, small-scale and flexible self-help groups provided capacities in saving and credit use.

Most of the groups enhanced *habits of cultural citizenship*. These habits related to identity and belonging as exercised in the way typical of the ethnic groups residing in an area, and were gained predominantly in cultural groups but also, for instance, in self-help groups. Participants explained that these groups enabled them to appreciate their cultural resources, history and traditions, as well as culturally embedded activities of helping each other. Most of the self-help groups were informal constellations whose main goal was strengthening social belonging and mutual



support in forms exercised for decades—if not centuries. Moreover, participation in cultural groups enforced the construction of identities and the undertaking of certain rights and responsibilities, as one of the villagers narrated:

Taking part in a traditional dance group gave me the opportunity to recognize basic principles (*mambo ya msingi kwa mwanajamii*) embedded in the Rangi ethnic community. Through the activities of our group, we have offered not only entertaining and recreational opportunities, but also promoted a traditional life-skills education that preserves our cultural heritage.

Thus, the cultural groups were the medium of transmission of cultural ideas and habits although choirs or drumming groups were at times also utilized as media for providing new knowledge and promoting the reformulation of certain habits. The interviewees explained how local traditional dancing groups usually composed songs based on exemplary events that should be cherished or bad events that needed to be prohibited. For instance, there were songs that aimed to educate people about safe sex as a way of waging war against HIV/AIDS, while others promoted modern ways of preserving newly harvested food in order to reduce shortages during dry seasons.

Each group, in its own way, supported *habits of responsible citizenship*. Participants learned to contribute and take responsibility not only for the wellbeing of themselves and their family but also the community in general. Taking responsibility for general welfare was especially stressed in self-help groups and the village community. The habits of being responsible did not only relate to practical activities aimed at addressing shared problems, but also adopted the principle of taking care of disadvantaged community members. In the same vein, mutual support was significant in the self-help groups. While members, usually women from a particular neighbourhood, shared an interest in the economic benefits of the groups, social and moral support also played an important role:

You know..., I have passed through very hard times. After the death of my husband I realized that I was helpless and it was not easy for me to address the challenges I was facing. As of now I am very thankful to KIWAJAKO; with their moral and material support I have been able to pursue my matrimonial inheritance case.

The overall idea of shared responsibility for others was typically considered more important than adhering to the rules and regulations of the self-help groups. While each group had rules concerning the amount and number of required cash contributions and expected participation in meetings and other events, in practice these appeared to be very flexible and negotiable in order to keep everyone on board despite difficulties. Additionally, members were helped with school fees and medical services for their children and funerals and other family functions. The habits of responsibility attached to self-help groups strengthened the sense of belonging, as well as increasing knowledge and skills in executing mutual duties and responsibilities. At times these were also extended to more disadvantaged village members who were helped by the joint efforts of diverse self-help groups.

While all the communities promoted certain ideals of being a good member, *habits of moral citizenship* were especially acquired through participation in religious communities; these included taken-for-granted ideals concerning virtuous and righteous thinking and behaviour. For the interviewees, participation in religious groups developed some sense of commitment to divine forces from an Islamic point of view. The principal, shared issues addressed in the religious groups were the duty and willingness to worship, to pray and to participate in other religious functions in order to exercise one's faith and to ensure a good life and afterlife (Nguyahambi & Kontinen, 2020). For both children and adults, religious communities also provided places to learn about the holy scripts, practices and behaviour expected from a good believer. Consequently, the moral and ethical values that demonstrated being a "good believer" were equated with being a "good member of the community", as illustrated in interview quote:

Religious teachings prepare our children to become good community members and also good citizens of the country. Therefore, this motivates parents to contribute ... in order to make sure that our children learn Quran and [receive] other religious education.

The importance of learning the virtues of Islamic faith was also manifested in practical contributions for religious functions. Members voluntarily contributed money, which was given as a token of gratitude to religious education teachers in order to help them to meet some basic needs. Members of women's groups in mosques volunteered to clean the religious venues and their surroundings and to take care of the preparations

for certain religious festivities. Interviewees also felt that it was their duty to make sure that the young ones learned good morals and ethical values in order for them to become ethical persons with proper civic characters which, in turn, were linked to wide-spread and often quoted national values, such as the peace, harmony, unity and togetherness attached to the idea of a good society in Tanzania, and the general properties of good citizenry.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

We draw three main conclusions from our exploratory analysis of communities and habits of citizenship in this specific part of rural Tanzania. First, the employment of the pragmatist idea of starting exploration of citizenship in everyday practices showed that, in accordance with Englund's reflections on citizenship in Africa (2004), citizenship vis-à-vis the state did not play an explicitly significant role in everyday lives. Wellbeing, responsibilities, rights, identities and belonging were mostly constructed in relation to diverse proximate communities. The state was practically present at times of general elections, in the village and among its leaders as the lowest level administrative unit, and as a service provider when it came to health care and education. Therefore, the findings support the efforts in citizenship studies to promote multifaceted conceptualizations of citizenship that are formed alongside multi-scalar communities of citizenship (Clarke et al., 2014). At the same time, we provided a new, pragmatist approach, one that understands the moulding of citizenship first and foremost as participation in communities that address shared issues at grassroots levels; here, the habits of citizenship are formulated, to be potentially exercised at broader scales as well.

Second, the identified habits of citizenship revolved around features such as responsibility, contribution, negotiation and mutual solidarity, and, thus, around a certain kind of ideal of good citizenship. In contrast, a contestant, claim-making citizenship that would revolve around demanding one's rights or challenging existing power structures, was absent from participants' accounts. The new habits of "engaged citizen", mainly introduced by the NGOs, included some notions of claim-making, but were practically realized through negotiation and establishing good relationships rather than contestation. The hesitance about shifting from existing habits of political citizenship towards more engaged citizenship resonates with the idea that general alignment with

both the government and traditional authorities is an important characteristic of African citizenship (Dorman, 2014; Hoon & MacLean, 2014). Changing such taken-for-granted modes of relating to authority might not happen within the time-frame of NGO projects, although they can provide some disruptions and ideas for alternative ways.

Third, our exploratory study can inform the design of intentional efforts to promote citizen engagement as a means of enhancing local development. Previous research (Gaventa, 2016; King, 2015) has indicated that successful efforts to support citizens' engagement have taken into account the fact that people's own priorities often concern economic improvements in their daily lives rather than increased opportunities for political claim-making. However, the lessons learned also show that by starting with already existing groups geared towards local livelihood, cultural or religious priorities, the capacities and motivation for having a voice and engaging with the power holders can gradually increase as well (ibid.; Gaventa & Barret, 2012). Our methodological approach of asking prospective project participants about their existing communities of participation and their ideals of good citizenship, rather than starting with the introduction of new practices, might facilitate promotion of long-term change in citizenship habits.

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# Learning in Communities of Practice: How to Become a Good Citizen in Self-Help Groups in Rural Tanzania

*Benta N. Matunga*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

When asked about their motivations for joining local self-help groups in rural Tanzania, members frequently offered two reasons: *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*. The exact meaning of these Kiswahili notions are hard to translate in English, but it revolves around the idea of community development which combines the aims of *kujiletea maendeleo*, achieving self-development, and *kusaidiana*, helping each other. In Tanzania, the notion of *maendeleo*, in its different interpretations, has historically connected the goals of the nation and the aspirations of communities (Mercer, 2002). Since independence in 1961, *maendeleo* has been embedded in the famous state-building policies of familyhood and self-reliance, *Ujamaa na Kujitegemea* (Nguyahambi et al., 2020: 73). Even today, the notion is continually used in public discourses to

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emphasize the roles and responsibilities both of the state and its citizens. The Tanzania Development Vision 2025 accords high priority to ongoing learning involving the effective transformation of mindsets and culture to promote attitudes of self-development imbued with the spirit of self-reliance at all societal levels (United Republic of Tanzania, 1999: 17). While the history of self-help groups in Tanzania dates back to pre-colonial times (Rodima-Taylor, 2013), in different forms they continue to provide important arenas for citizens' organizing in contemporary Tanzania (Nguyahambi et al., 2020).

Self-help groups are local, often quite informal, civil society organizations that pool their resources to solve the immediate problems of their members (Tesoriero, 2006). Typically, they are small voluntary associations of 10–30 people, mostly women, who come together to address their common problems through mutual help (Fatimayin, 2015; Kilonzo, 2020). Self-help groups can be formed based on shared interests, trade, proximity, agriculture and socio-economic background. These groups meet weekly or monthly, depending on their practices, which include organizing savings, internal lending/borrowing, repayment of loans, planning activities and social bonding. Various studies have linked self-help groups to socio-economic elements and participatory learning (Aikaruwa et al., 2014; Waddell, 2005), and economic empowerment and survival (Alemu et al., 2018; Naik & Rodrigues, 2017). Additionally, they have been seen as satisfying social functions (Aikaruwa et al., 2014) and as arenas in which to build capacities for citizenship engagement in a bottom-up manner, while offering the space to participate, interact and take part in decision-making in everyday activities (Gaventa, 2016; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; Kilonzo et al., 2020).

Therefore, this chapter focuses on self-help groups not only as arenas for improving self-reliance and economic well-being, but also as spaces for learning citizenship at the local level. It draws on Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of learning as situated legitimate peripheral participation, according to which novices gain full competence through participating in **communities of practice**. Thus, learning is something that happens in a variety of informal contexts in the day-to-day lives of people in different settings (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice have been defined as groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise, which develop a repertoire to address this enterprise (Wenger & Snyder, 2000: 139; Zaffini, 2018: 38); as relations among persons, activity and the world (Lave &

Wenger, 1991: 98); or a social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time (Farnsworth et al., 2016: 143). Typically, communities of practice are seen to have three major elements: domain, community and practice (Farnsworth et al., 2016; Li et al., 2009; Wenger, 2009). In this chapter, I conceptualize self-help groups as communities of practice and, based on qualitative research in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania, address three main questions: What kinds of communities of practice do self-help groups represent? How do participants describe their learning in self-help groups? What sort of connections do participants draw between learning good membership practices in self-help groups and good citizenship in general? Exploring these questions illustrates the ways in which the participants in self-help groups understand their own learning in relation to their general goals of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*, and whether they draw connections between being a good member in a self-help group and exercising good citizenship more broadly.

In what follows, I first discuss the notion of communities of practice in the context of learning citizenship, then I briefly describe the methodology and the study context. After that, I delineate the kinds of communities of practice self-help groups represent—focusing on their characteristics, analyze how members describe their learning in self-help groups and discuss how they draw connections between membership in self-help groups and citizenship in general. In conclusion, I argue that participation in self-help groups contributes to local development at a grassroots level. The particular domain of self-help groups and the combination of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* creates a flexible space where good group membership and good citizenship at the community level can involve economic progress and a willingness to help others in diverse combinations. I also argue that such existing group activities and dynamics of learning could be more profoundly utilized by outsiders in designing development initiatives and identifying new communities of practice to be jointly established in a spirit of mutual learning.

## 2 LEARNING CITIZENSHIP IN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

This section discusses theories that focus on how learning is embedded in the course of participation in a community of practice, combined with the idea of the contextual nature of citizenship, which is learned through participation in diverse groups. Learning is viewed as a situated activity

giving rise to legitimate peripheral participation whereby novices participate in communities of practice and gain knowledge and skills, fully taking part in the socio-cultural practices of a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Such participation comprises reciprocal relations between persons and practice, since the movement of learners-newcomers towards full participation in a community of practice does not take place in a static context (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 116). In this view, learning in communities of practice varies depending on contexts and settings; for instance, the communities discussed by Lave and Wenger include midwives, tailors, quartermasters, butchers and recovering alcoholics, although the conceptualization of the process by which communities learn can be generalized to other social groups (Li et al., 2009). In analysing the notion of legitimate peripheral learning in communities of practice, Brooks et al. (2020) argue that knowledge and skills flow in one direction—for example, from expert to novice—but this sits less easily with the idea of a small community group, whose members work and learn together. However, I suggest that learning in communities of practice does not always involve novices and experts, as reflected in self-help groups.

To understand such learning, the literature suggests that three characteristics are crucial to investigation: the domain, community and practice (Farnsworth et al., 2016; Li et al., 2009; Wenger, 2009). The domain is defined by a shared sphere of interest and competence that differentiates a particular community of practice from others. Therefore, analysis of self-help groups explores what differentiates each group from other social constellations and identifies the broad characteristics shared by all groups.

The notion of community refers to the social structures that encourage learning through interaction and relationships among members (Li et al., 2009; Wenger, 2009), who engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other and share information (Li et al., 2009; Mohajan, 2017). Lave and Wenger's approach conveys a general sense in which people learn through mutual engagement in an activity which is defined by the negotiation of meanings both inside and outside the community (Fuller et al., 2005: 53). Mutual engagement is part of what matters in the group and requires the contributions and knowledge of all (Wenger, 1998). In this vein, analysis of community focuses on activities jointly undertaken by the members of self-help groups, their structure and how learning is enhanced based on their description.

Practice involves a shared repertoire of resources, experiences, ideas, stories, tools, documents, information and ways of addressing recurring problems (Li et al., 2009; Wenger, 2009). The shared repertoire of resources differs from one community of practice to another, but is constantly used in a manner that enhances members' efforts to attain their goals (Zaffini, 2018). Handley et al. (2006) suggest that individual learning should be thought of as emergent, and as involving opportunities to participate in the practices of the community. In that vein, analysis of practice in self-help groups focuses on the kinds of resources that are shared and how resources are used, based on their members' expressed views.

According to Wenger's (2009) notion, the achievements of communities of practice, including learning, are enhanced by the proper functioning of the three elements mentioned earlier. While Edwards (2005) criticizes the notion of learning in communities of practice for not being clear about how individuals learn something new, it should be pointed out that Lave and Wenger (1991: 53) do not focus on the individual mind, but, rather, argue that learning implies becoming able to be involved in new activities, perform new skills and function to master new understandings in the context of community—a process wherein both participants and practices evolve. Combining this view with the notion of citizenship, I argue that through participating in self-help groups, members acquire new skills and knowledge that enable them to function as good members and, further, potentially good citizens. The idea of learning citizenship by participating in communities of practice resonates with notions of multiple communities of citizenship (Clarke et al., 2014), and strongly reflects the close connection between local conceptions of good residency and good citizenship (Ahimbisibwe et al., 2020; Ndidde et al., 2020). Additionally, it draws on the idea that through participation in everyday groups, members learn skills relevant for citizenship, such as expressing opinions (Neveu, 2014: 87). In what follows, I describe the particular context and specific self-help groups where learning in communities of practice is explored.

### 3 METHODOLOGY AND INTRODUCTION OF THE GROUPS

The study was conducted from May to July 2020 in three villages in the Mpwapwa District of the Dodoma Region, Tanzania. The area is dominated by agro-pastoral, rural communities whose livelihoods depend

on small-scale livestock-keeping and farming activities. The major food crops are maize, sorghum, a variety of fruits and vegetables, and cash crops including sunflowers and sesame. The major livestock include cattle, goats, sheep, pigs and chickens (United Republic of Tanzania, 2012). In 2012, the district had a total population of 305,056 of which the majority, 80%, lived in rural areas (United Republic of Tanzania, 2013). A number of indicators, such as low-income levels, unemployment, under-nourishment and an insufficient supply of poor health services, depict high household poverty levels in the area (MDPO, 2013). This state of affairs has encouraged marginalized, impoverished communities, who are excluded from formal employment and financial sectors, to organize themselves as self-help groups which encourage their members to support each other (Aikaruwa et al., 2014) in solving their immediate social and economic problems (Kilonzo et al., 2020; Tesoriero, 2006).

For this study, I selected three self-help groups with at least five years of experience in working together. These include Sayuni and Amani, operating as a Village Community Bank (VICOBA) (see Ahimbisibwe and Ndidde, this volume)—to which members voluntarily contribute for saving purposes, internal loans and repayments—with 29 and 26 members, respectively. Vunjaukimya is a group of 12 women cultivating a variety of vegetables for food and income, which is saved by the group. They also joined the VICOBA as a single entity with a loan book in their name in order to access loans to cater for the group's need to expand its gardening activities. The study employed a qualitative research approach involving the author's staying in the villages and participating in the groups' activities in their real-life environment, such as meetings, social events and group projects.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 35 members of self-help groups—Amani (15), Sayuni (11) and Vunjaukimya (9); focus group discussions (FGDs) composed of 6 to 10 members were also conducted in each group. The interviews and discussions were conducted in Kiswahili, a national language used daily by the group participants. The recorded interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2016) was employed, reducing the data to specific subthemes based on the research questions for more detailed analysis. First, the elements of self-help groups as communities of practice—domain, community and practice—were explored, based on participants' descriptions of the reasons for establishing and joining groups, the ways the groups are organized

and the joint activities conducted. Second, analysis of the descriptions of how the participants experienced learning situations identified three main ways: listening while participating in group activities, observing and imitating what others do, and ‘trial and error’ experimentation. Third, the reflections of the participants on whether the attributes considered relevant for a good group member are also characteristics of a good citizen were analyzed. In what follows, I will discuss these findings in more detail.

#### 4 SELF-HELP GROUPS AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

In this section, I examine the characteristics of self-help groups based on Wenger (2009) and Li et al.’s (2009) framework focusing on its three central elements: domain, community and practice.

A *domain* is defined by a shared sphere of interest and competence that differentiates communities of practice (Li et al., 2009: 6; Wenger, 2009: 1). In both FGDs and interviews, participants repeatedly described the reasons for establishing and joining groups as *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* in times of both sorrow and happiness. Therefore, the combination of the interests that prompts the goals of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* can be interpreted as a particular shared domain, which differs from the domains of other groups such as churches or family. The notion of *maendeleo* was ultimately defined in terms of having opportunities to progress from a lower to a relatively higher standard of living: for example, being able to accumulate savings, engage in small businesses, afford house maintenance, clothing and farming requirements such as fertilizers and seeds, pay school fees and be assured of sufficient food. Other aspirations include contributing to village activities without facing difficulties, keeping livestock and increasing farming lands and, therefore, harvests of food and cash crops. The shared domain of interest was dominated by the social and economic needs, as narrated in the following:

I learned how to run a small business in the group; now I can easily get money to buy more savings shares, purchase items such as a mattress and television, pay school fees and so on. I can borrow money for farming requirements and so increase my food and cash crop harvests. I can also contribute to village development without a struggle. To be honest, I have learned more *kujiletea maendeleo*. (Participant No. MK019 Amani June 2020)

Thus, what members learned reflects the fulfilment of responsibilities to their households, groups and the community at large. In addition, participants described having increased their capacity-building skills, which enabled them to exploit the opportunities available in their settings. In the same vein, they described having acquired self-confidence, social networking ability and leadership skills and collective decision-making capacities, as one interviewee described:

Before I joined the group, I did not have enough confidence to stand and speak in front of people. However, through participating in group activities, such as meetings, discussions and events, I gained more confidence, and now I can even contest for a leadership position in the village. (Participant No. RU029 Vunjaukimya June 2020)

This extract demonstrates that members accumulated competence and empowerment not only socio-economically, but also through increasing their individual activism and the courage to grasp opportunities, which made a great difference. This is in line with Lave and Wenger's (1991: 53) findings that learning in communities of practice develops the ability to take on new activities requiring the performance of new tasks and functions in order to become competent.

As members described their learning trajectories, it became apparent that not all aspects of the process were replicated among all the individuals of a group at the same time. Based on their own proffered opinions, it emerged that some had experienced negligible changes in their personal *kujiletea maendeleo*. As such, they were not doing well in terms of saving, improving their homes, educating their children, assuring household food security and the like. Nevertheless, they continued to contribute to and participate in their group's activities—meetings, social events and projects—hence maintaining their membership. This reveals that learning in self-help groups is a process in which not all learners will attain all the anticipated goals, while still becoming good members in other ways, indicating variation in processual outcome.

The second element proposed by Wenger and Li et al.'s framework—*community*—is construed as a social structure that encourages learning through interaction and relationships among members (Li et al., 2009: 6; Wenger, 2009: 2). The authors further noted that learning together



in the course of carrying out joint activities is important in communities of practice. I suggest that learning is necessary because it provides innovative skills that can instigate positive change in communities. This is reflected in self-help groups which have social structure and joint activities that enable learning, through interaction, to do things differently in order to fulfil the aims of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*; this is exemplified by the growth of leadership structure in groups, whereby members elect their own leaders, chairpersons, secretaries, cashiers, security, discipline and personnel. The leaders then organize and coordinate the groups, making sure that all members obey set rules and that things are working smoothly. Meanwhile, the rules address issues such as timely loan repayment, meeting attendance, active participation in group activities and social events. Thus, members learn from their leaders and each other in a participatory way, thereby becoming competent and experienced. This resonates with Wenger and Snyder's (2000: 142) findings that communities of practice organize themselves, set their own agenda and establish their own leadership.

In addition, self-help groups engage in various joint activities that facilitate interaction, such as participation in face-to-face meetings, social events and group projects. Meetings were held on a weekly basis by the Amani and Sayuni groups and once a month by the Vunjaukimya group, but could be called any time in an emergency. The meetings were pivotal for discussion, buying shares, disseminating information and clarification of issues, obtaining and repaying loans, paying contributions and planning programmes. Failure to attend meetings incurred group-agreed penalties "*kasunzu*" ranging from 500 to 2,000 TZS (0.22 to 0.86 USD) to strengthen personal commitment. With these measures, members learn to be self-disciplined in regard to time-keeping and fulfilling their *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* responsibilities. Thus, meetings are crucial for the development of common understandings about decision-making and for reaching consensus on actions to take together to solve the challenges being faced.

Members also participate in and learn at various social events involving their colleagues and the community at large: funerals, illnesses and weddings, for instance, depending on the specific arrangements of the groups. Participation in social events also involves obligations to fulfil other needs in the community. For example, Sayuni had a basket fund

to support children identified as needy in their community, catering for health insurance, school uniforms and other items, to which each member contributes 300 TZS (0.13 USD) weekly. Other joint projects were also initiated, with Sayuni and Amani group members keeping pigs and constructing an office, respectively.

The third element—*practice*—is where members interact and share repertoires of resources and learn how to perform various activities efficiently (Li et al., 2009: 6; Mohajan, 2017; Wenger, 2009: 2). Self-help groups share various types of resources such as a cashbook and box, a bank account, attendance register and minute's book, along with intangibles like experience, ideas and knowledge. They also collect cash regularly, while some have assets they have acquired and own together. How resources are used effectively depends on the intended objectives of the group. For instance, all the groups in this study had a bank account, the aim of which, according to them, was not to protect their savings but because it was often a requirement for loan applications to various sources.

We opened a bank account as one of the requirements for obtaining loans from local government 'Magufuli funds' for women, youth and people with disabilities. We have a cash box for savings for social goals and children's funds. Our cash rotates through members' hands as loans for their development projects. (FGD Sayuni group July 2020)

Similar explanations were provided by other self-help groups when revealing how they learn to share resources. In addition, during interactions all members share ideas, experience and knowhow, which enables them to develop joint knowledge of how to solve the challenges they encounter. They also learn how to make effective use of resources such as loans by making timely repayments for others to access, and keeping good records of each member's shares and savings for future reference. These interactions and the sharing of various resources demonstrate the element of 'practice' in self-help groups suggested by Wenger (2009: 1) and Li et al. (2009: 6).

Next, I turn to analysis of the different ways in which members of self-help groups as communities of practice engage with available learning opportunities.

## 5 HOW MEMBERS OF SELF-HELP GROUPS LEARN *KUJILETEA MAENDELEO* AND *Kusaidiana*

The major ways that learning takes place in the daily practices of groups in their particular spheres include: *first*, learning by listening and participating in group activities; *second*, learning through observing and imitating what others do within and outside the groups and incorporating it into one's own practice; and *third*, learning through practice involving trial and error.

First, learning through listening and participating in groups' activities such as meetings, social events and projects is facilitated by participating in meetings and paying attention during discussions and other events taking place as narrated below:

I have never attended a seminar or any training; instead, I have just followed the group regulations by listening when our constitution is being read, and I participate in discussions during meetings ... By being in group I learned how to open my own personal savings account at NMB Bank once I realized that I can also save safely at the bank. (Participant No. AA003 Amani June 2020)

As this excerpt illustrates, members learn through participation in their group's activities without external facilitation. Others own a fixed asset—the Vunjaukimya group, for example, own land for gardening—that keeps members committed, united and keen to learn to maintain their property, leading to a “we feeling” that enhances their enjoyment of working together towards the goals of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*. Furthermore, all groups had succession plans whereby members registered their next of kin to take over in case of circumstances that hinder or terminate the full participation of an individual: one Sayuni group member had registered her daughter-in-law, who took over her membership upon her decease, while sometimes school children represent their parents in meetings and other group activities. These practices reflect an interest in learning preparedness to ensure the future continuity of the groups. Through social events, members learn by being together and offering support in times of joy and sorrow. This mutual support allows members to cope with the challenges facing them confidently, and simply get going, while also learning how to do things better depending on circumstances.

Second, members explained that their learning experience did not only take place in activities specifically associated with the groups but also through observing and imitating what others do both within and outside the group, and adopting aspects into their own practice. As one research participant described:

Before I joined this group, I was just a smallholder farmer with no alternative source of income. However, after joining the group I managed to accumulate some savings, obtained a loan and purchased a motorcycle bodaboda. I now sell water at 400 TZS (0.17 USD) per bucket; each day I can make up to 10,000 TZS (4.31 USD). ... I found myself making good profit. ... One guy my age in the village is selling water like me. One day I visited his place and noticed great improvement in his housing structure and materials—concrete blocks. It was an amazing development! Maendeleo makubwa! I asked myself how he managed to do that, then I also started saving and managed to construct my own good quality house. ... Then, as a result of observing how women within our group managed to engage in small-scale business and participate actively in group activities while sustaining their families, I also advised my wife to start a business. I obtained a loan from the group and provided her with 80,000 TZS (34.50 USD). She started by selling fruit and vegetables and now she owns a grocery shop in the village. (Participant No. BP004 Amani June 2020)

‘Outside learning’ was further illustrated by a comment made in one of the focus groups:

When we participate in social events such as funerals in the village, sometimes we observe what others do and learn how to improve our situation. (FGD Sayuni July 2020)

Learning through observation and imitation also engenders changes in fundamental ways of thinking and doing. Lave and Wenger (1991: 71) noted that apprenticeships provided opportunities to observe the master, journeymen and other apprentices at work as a route to becoming a competent, skilled expert in a given field. However, in the case of self-help groups there are no clear divisions between newcomers and experienced members; rather, they all learn together by observing what others do within and outside their particular groups, which enables them to imitate successful modes of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*.

Third, members occasionally learn through the simple application of ‘trial and error’ principles, which sometimes leads to success, sometimes not, as emerged during FGDs:

We started by keeping chickens, but this did not prove profitable; then we tried keeping pigs and we are now progressing well. (FGD Sayuni, July 2020)

Their experiences of trial and error methodology and their outcome were also discussed at the Vunjaukimya FGD:

Sometimes we find that ‘trial and error’ can work: for example, we started cultivating onions without timing the weeding and controlling pests properly and the harvests were poor. However, when we tried again, using proper timing and pest control, harvests increased twofold. (FGD Vunjaukimya July 2020)

Clearly, if participants’ ‘trial and error’ of a particular practice works, they will continue with it; yet, equally clearly, they are ready to seek problem-solving alternatives by experimenting with other methods.

## 6 CONNECTIONS BETWEEN BEING A ‘GOOD MEMBER’ AND A ‘GOOD CITIZEN’

*Kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* as motivation for participating in the self-help groups resonates with the overall understanding in contemporary Tanzania that good citizenship involves contributing to the nation’s development. Therefore, in this section I analyze how research participants themselves make connections between being a good member of a self-help group and being a good citizen. It should be noted in advance, however, that, despite the extensive prevalence of the notion of *maendeleo* in state discourses, the idea of a good citizen was mostly discussed by participants in terms of being a good householder, a good member of the village and vis-à-vis local governance; very little reference was made to the state or to being Tanzanian.

The connection between a good membership and citizenship was explored by first determining what were considered the qualities of a good member of the group, and, second, by prompting whether these attributes would also define a good citizen (*raia mzuri*). In the interviews

and discussions, participants provided a broad range of attributes, many of which involved adhering to group regulations, including attending meetings, participating in discussions, respecting others' opinions, buying shares and repaying loans on time. Additional attributes include commitment to group projects and events, cooperation with and care for others, trustworthiness, avoidance of bad language, discretion, self-discipline, sobriety, humility and a positive outlook. Furthermore, a good member has a respectable place of residence in the village and contributes to village development activities. It is notable that all the attributes assigned to being a 'good member', relate to individuals' general responsibilities for *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*. In addition, participants elaborated that by engaging in groups, they also promote *maendeleo* more broadly in the village and, thus, at the level of local government. For example, they contribute to the purchase of school desks and the construction of teachers' accommodation and school buildings, in resonance with the public discourses of *maendeleo* that emphasize the responsibilities of citizens to contribute to the development of Tanzania at large, together with the government (Nguyahambi et al., 2020).

On the question of whether these attributes also define good citizenship, the participants had different views. Some were positive that a 'good group member' definitely provides the template for 'a good citizen', because even before joining a group, one should be a 'good member' of the village community with the kind of character that enables one to work together with others in *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*. In addition, a 'good citizen' participates in village events such as funerals, meetings and development activities, and can confirm his/her citizenship by birth or registration and residency at the village level. This implies that those allowed to join the self-help groups are already 'good citizens', and identified as such by the village authorities and the community more broadly.

However, other participants had different views based on their own experience, as shown by the following excerpt:

It is not always true that a 'good member' is also a good community member, and hence a 'good citizen' in all respects. This is because in groups like ours, we have strict bylaws and regulations, which shape an individual; since she benefits from the group, she learns to behave well. However, in the community she behaves differently, becoming rude and irresponsible. For example, one of our group members confronted another

person and the village authority penalized her for presenting a bad image of citizenship. (Participant No.VN 034 Sayuni May 2020)

In this statement, good citizenship is defined based on individual behaviour; this might be well-disciplined in the context of the group due to the benefits that accrue, but may not be as acceptable in the wider community. In an additional view, being slow in *kujiletea maendeleo* in the group was not perceived as failure of good membership nor good citizenship, provided good membership was demonstrated in terms of *kusaidiana*:

Some members have made no changes in *kujiletea maendeleo* since they joined the group. For example, they do not have good houses nor businesses, and only work for other; they cannot afford to buy more shares in order to get loans and so on, yet they normally participate well in group activities and social events.

Overall, however, a good group member and a good citizen of the village were seen to share similar characteristics, such as being responsible, interacting well with others, and being able to learn *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*. This is similar to Ndidde et al.'s (2020: 110, 111) findings concerning citizenship in Uganda, where it is perceived mainly as a good and responsible membership in a community. There is flexibility in the differing emphasis placed on *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* in terms of the pace of learning new skills and the knowledge to be able to fulfil these aspirations; in general, even if a member does not achieve the group's goals, s/he can still be considered a good member and a good citizen based on other criteria.

## 7 CONCLUSION

Drawing on the notion of communities of practice, this chapter addressed three main questions concerning self-help groups as spaces of learning citizenship in rural Tanzania. First, it explored the characteristics of self-help groups as communities of practice, analysing their central elements of domain, community and practice. Second, it investigated participants' reflections on their learning experiences in the self-help groups. Third, it scrutinized the ways in which participants drew connections between

learning good membership practices in the self-help groups and good citizenship in general. The findings show that the domain of self-help groups appears to be a particular combination of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*, achieving self-development and helping each other. The shared group activities, as well as the regulations and routines that governed their organization, supported the domain in a variety of ways. Participants learned informally while participating in the groups, and drew diverse connections between the ideals of good membership and good citizenship. Based on these findings, I propose three conclusions concerning learning citizenship.

First, the domain as combination of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* indicates that organizing in self-help groups is motivated both by unfulfilled socio-economic aspirations and an acknowledged need for mutual support. Learning through participating in self-help groups supports the idea of being self-reliant, of using and increasing one's own resources, and interacting with other members to promote improvements. These ideas resonate strongly with the discourses of *maendeleo* circulating at the state level, and the position of a citizen as a responsible contributor rather than right holder. The self-help groups, even if not drawing many explicit connections with citizenship vis-à-vis the state, nevertheless strengthen such a role as participants learn to take responsibility for the improvements in their lives rather than demanding them from the government sector (see also Kilonzo et al., 2020).

Second, the domain of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* provides a flexible learning community. If some participants were not very successful in learning to implement new development initiatives, they nevertheless could be regarded as good members and good citizens at the village level when being active in social events and helping others. Therefore, the good citizenship learned does not only include the capability to enhance socio-economic development, but also preparedness to fulfil more social functions. While self-help groups, on the one hand, were considered to be for those who already enjoyed good citizen status in the village, on the other, their strict regulations and guidelines were also seen as offering the possibility to learn to be a better citizen of the village. Good citizenship, discussed mainly at the community level, was seen to revolve around self-discipline and good conduct, but it also included the ability to articulate opinions and negotiate.

Third, modes of learning by participating in self-help groups are not fixed. Learning takes place continuously by listening, observing, imitating



and by trial and error. These ways resonate with Lave and Wenger's (1991) explorations of how learning happens in communities of practice; however, they are in slight contrast with their notion of learning through legitimate peripheral participation. There are no clear learning dynamics between newcomers and old-timers or apprentices and masters in self-help groups; rather, in the course of shared activities these positions are interchangeable according to different contexts and places, and different participants can occupy the role of expert depending on the task.

In conclusion, communities have ways of organizing that address their interests, while learning citizenship is closely tied to practical activities. This kind of existing knowledge, skill and learning interest should be taken into much greater account in planning and designing development interventions which could facilitate establishing new communities of practice, sometimes with participants from outside of the particular communities. These would enable mutual learning and contribute to the goals of self-development and helping each other, but perhaps would also introduce new ways of perceiving ideas of good citizenship and the roles of citizen and state in bringing *maendeleo*, development, for all.

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# Learning Economic Citizenship Among Rural Women: Village Saving Groups in Western Uganda

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of economic citizenship is conventionally defined within the prism of rights to work, to own property, to earn wages and to access social benefits (Kessler-Harris, 2003; Lewis, 2003). However, among development practitioners and in gender studies, the notion is often understood from the perspective of addressing and combating female poverty to promote women's economic independence and realize their full and equal status in society (CARE, 2019; Lister, 1997). This chapter presents an empirical analysis of ways in which women learn skills and practices of economic citizenship in rural Uganda in the context of a local NGO's programmes. The NGO uses village savings and lending associations (VSLAs) to enable women to acquire the means to access and control resources in settings where history, traditions and norms regard women as "second class citizens" (Nyakato et al., 2020; Seely et al., 2013;

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Tamale, 2004). We use the notion of economic citizenship to conceptualize how women's participation in NGO-initiated VSLAs enables joint and supportive acquisition of multiple skills and financial resources, which combine to address and challenge some of the limitations to their rights and freedoms at community level.

Different forms of village solidarity groups have existed for decades across Africa, mainly to boost communities' capacity to deal with issues that require joint and mutual help (Benda, 2012; Rodima-Taylor, 2013). Historically rooted in African associational life, these self-organized groups have been vital spaces for mobilizing different forms of citizen agency during times of community misfortune and celebrations. Practices of reciprocity, self-reliance and mutuality form the bedrock of different types of solidarity groups, such as bereavement associations, rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs), village saving groups and rotational farming groups. VSLAs in particular have recently been popularized in development discourse as a panacea for rural poverty and financial exclusion of the majority population not served by conventional financial institutions (Allen, 2006; Muganga, 2020; Mwansakilwa et al., 2017). Better known as the *VSLA methodology*, as it is popularly referenced in the NGO nomenclature, the approach was first pioneered by CARE International in Maradi, Niger, in 1991 (Allen, 2006). It has since been replicated across African, Asian and Latin American countries to promote financial inclusion of the unbanked, especially 'impoverished and uneducated rural women' (Allen, 2006: 62). Although they serve both men and women, the majority (75%) of the current, almost 6.5 million VSLAs members in Africa are women (CARE, 2019).

In practice, a VSLA is a group of 15–30 self-selected members who pool their money in a fund which provides a source of loan capital (Allen, 2006: 63). Members then borrow at lower and affordable interest rates to expand and grow not only the fund but also members' households and asset base. VSLAs are, thus, operated at the village level and, in our case, created and trained by a local NGO. Members are required to buy shares at weekly meetings and to pay a compulsory nominal fee to a special welfare fund that acts as emergency support for members facing unforeseeable crises requiring cash. VSLAs are run on a cyclic model of between nine and twelve months, at the end of which 'members receive what they have paid in through share purchase plus interest proportional

to their shares' (Green, 2018: 110). Thus, VSLA methodology is entirely self-managing and does not receive external capitalization (Allen, 2006). Rather, it views the task of donors, especially NGOs, to be that of capacity building through a pool of community-based trainers and the provision of lockboxes (Maliti, 2017) that act as safe custody for group documents and cash.

Based on our recent participatory research in rural communities of eastern Uganda (see Ahimbisibwe et al., 2020), we argue that saving groups are primary arenas for communities to associate, enact and learn practices and skills that reinforce citizenship. This is corroborated by several studies which show the crucial role VSLAs play in Uganda in empowering the marginalized with diverse abilities that enable them to realize socioeconomic development. For example, VSLAs have mobilized communities in different parts of the country into self-generated income initiatives and addressed vulnerability in war-affected areas (Malual & Mazur, 2017), provided platforms for strengthening women citizenship at local level (Ndidde et al., 2020) and enabled women to become less dependent on men through diversification of economic ventures (Musunguzi, 2016). As most of the studies highlight the transformative impact of VSLAs on women's livelihoods, less is known about the everyday dynamics of learning in VSLAs (see Matunga, this volume). Therefore, in order to combine the concept of learning with the strengthening of economic citizenship, we draw on the notion of participatory learning (Mayoux, 1998; Pretty, 1995), which maintains that collective and supportive ways of sharing knowledge and experiences lead to sustainable and transformative impact among marginalized groups. We first explore the ways economic citizenship learning takes place in VSLAs, and second, how this learning contributes to enhancing women's citizenship in the local context.

In what follows, we review the literature on notions of economic citizenship and participatory learning, followed by a brief description of study context as well as methods of data collection and analysis. We then present the study's findings that illustrate the collaborative ways in which women learn to be economically self-reliant. Finally, we reflect on the impact of participatory learning on women's economic citizenship and conclude that VSLAs are platforms for women to acquire several skills that strengthen various aspects of their citizenship in the community.

## 2 PARTICIPATORY LEARNING AS AN APPROACH TO ACQUIRING ECONOMIC CITIZENSHIP

In this section, we discuss the concept of economic citizenship with particular reference to women's economic empowerment, the notion of participatory learning and the VSLAs as arenas of women's participatory learning to improve their socioeconomic status.

Economic citizenship is often linked with acquiring and enjoying liberal rights and freedoms related to adequate wages for self and family support, decent and equal work and labour participation and legal and financial independence in society (e.g., Kessler-Harris, 2003; Lewis, 2003). Kessler-Harris (2003: 158–159), for example, defines economic citizenship as:

the process of bestowing upon women the right to work at the occupation of one's choice (where work includes child rearing and household maintenance); to earn wages adequate to the support of the self and family; to a non-discriminatory job market; to the social benefits necessary to sustain and support labour force participation; and to social environment required for effective choice including adequate housing, safe streets, accessible public transport, and universal health care.

In the same vein, Lewis (2003) argues that economic citizenship should focus on promoting gender autonomy, independence and the equality of men and women within the family and workplace. She then calls for the need to 'secure a more equal gendered distribution of paid and unpaid work' (ibid.: 183) to change the male breadwinner model that constructs men as having the responsibility to earn and women as care providers for the family.

However, writing from the context of the Global South, scholars such as Harris-White et al. (2013) and Tamale (2020) present the dilemma of applying the concept of economic citizenship, if based on 'notions of liberal individualism and universalism' (Tamale, 2020: 210), to contexts where citizenship is practised in a collaborative, albeit socially constrained, gendered way. They opine that economic empowerment based on exclusive promotion of liberal rights and freedoms between men and women often faces backlash and resistance from 'hierarchized religions and reconstructed cultures that are deeply internalized through everyday practices and systems of power' (Tamale, 2020: 209).



Our previous research findings support these arguments. For example, in our recent study of citizenship practices, we showed how in rural Uganda, citizenship is inextricably localized, active and gendered (Ndidde et al., 2020). These contradictory and complex practices occur under the rubric of traditional norms and practices that construct the status of a woman vis-à-vis her relationship with a male, either a father or husband (ibid.: 112). The point we make in this chapter is that attempts to promote women's economic empowerment in such settings must at the same time be sensitive to women's multifaceted citizenship experiences (see Del Castillo Munera, 2021). Arguably, for poor rural women engaged in subsistence farming and other unstable and unregulated informal jobs, economic citizenship may mean no more than the struggle to acquire basic survival means.

Hence, VSLAs as avenues for access to safe and affordable capital, regular interaction, and peer learning and competition (Hendricks & Chidiac, 2011; Musinguzi, 2016; Mwansakilwa et al., 2017) may provide a more realistic route out of poverty than outright engagement with deeply socialized beliefs entrenched in gendered power dynamics, as advocated in feminist literature (e.g., Acker, 1987; Kessler-Harris, 2003; Thompson, 2017). Consequently, the notion of participatory learning (Mayoux, 1998; Pretty, 1995) facilitates understanding of how VSLAs can act as forums for women to learn and implement multiple skills and knowledge related to both economic empowerment and gendered citizenship roles. Participatory learning is premised on enabling the marginalized to generate and share knowledge that is collectively empowering and challenges power inequalities (Mayoux, 1998). Social movements and civil society organizations that apply participatory learning view the community as the key source of knowledge that is multiple, fluid, contextual and trusted, and leads the poor to 'collective action for social change' (Missingham, 2013: 35), self-reliance and sustainability (Wetmore & Theron, 1998). However, in a context like rural Uganda, where learning environments are characterized by marked uncertainties (Pretty, 1995), novel ways are needed to investigate how they promote and support sustainable acquisition and utilization of knowledge.

In general, the participatory learning approach resonates well with the VSLA methodology, which has been presented as an initiative that impacts positively on the livelihoods of vulnerable groups of citizens, especially women across African countries (Allen, 2006; Bannor et al., 2020; Green, 2018; Hendricks & Chidiac, 2011; Muganga, 2020; Musinguzi,

2016). For example, in Ghana, VSLAs sharpened women's business nous and built their confidence to diversify into off-farm practices during the drought period (Bannor et al., 2020), while in Zambia, they facilitated access to affordable credit for hard-to-reach and unbanked rural areas (Mwansakilwa et al., 2017). In Rwanda, Benda (2012: 243) argues that beyond the provision of income to the marginalized poor, VSLAs acted as critical post-genocide spaces for building social capital and 'restoring trust to a relatively recently fragmented, and highly traumatized community'. According to Kesanta and Andre (2015) in Tanzania, VSLAs are long-term models for poverty eradication because women who participate in them support their children's education, health and livelihoods. Additionally, in Mali, VSLAs spread nutrition messages from group to group and have created a number of community treatment centres to address malnutrition (CARE, 2019: 6).

Overall, these cases highlight the role played by VSLAs in strengthening the link between women's economic and social empowerment and more localized citizenship practices. However, they offer little insight into the ways in which learning takes place in VSLAs, and whether the learning leads to both sustained economic empowerment and the adjustment of inequalities, as proposed by the participatory learning approach.

### 3 STUDY CONTEXT AND METHODS

In this section, we provide a brief background of Uganda's gendered citizenship, introduce the context of the study and describe the methods used to collect and analyse data.

The reality of women's citizenship in Uganda can be analysed in the two contradictory dimensions of legalese and the living experiences of rural women. Legally, the rights and dignity of women as equal citizens are enshrined in the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (RoU). National Objective XV of the constitution declares, 'The State shall recognise the significant role that women play in society' (RoU, 1995). Specifically, Article 33, clause 4, emphasizes women's economic rights, stating, 'Women shall have [the] right to equal treatment with men and that right shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities'. The progressive legal and political regime has been supplemented by a generally autonomous gender-focused NGO sector (see Tripp, 2000) implementing various interventions to address poverty and related structures that discriminate against women. However, in spite

of these efforts, women, especially in rural areas, continue to face challenges due to structural power relations and practices entrenched in a long history of patriarchy (Ndidde et al., 2020; Tamale, 2020). For instance, women are primarily responsible for sustaining their communities and families and are, as a result, involved in energy-sapping and time-intensive subsistence agriculture, provision of family care, various forms of non-market work and voluntary community activities (Tamale, 2020: 294).

Rubirizi district, where this study was conducted, is found in Ankole sub-region of western Uganda. With over 75% of the population engaged in subsistence agriculture (RoU, 2017), the district is still characterized by some agrarian social and cultural norms that treat women unfairly. For example, the deep-seated ‘cultural notions of innate male authority’ (Nyakato et al., 2020: 76) place restrictions on women’s control and ownership of economic resources and legitimizes preferential treatment of male children as heirs. Among other things, these norms abet early marriages and gender-based violence while reinforcing unequal gender division of labour.

Against this background, Community Volunteer Initiatives for Development (COVOID) started in 2003 as a community-based organization, becoming an NGO in 2010, to offer a holistic approach to women’s livelihoods and general well-being (COVOID, 2019: 8). The NGO focuses on broad issues of livelihoods and gender, health, education and capacity strengthening, and climate change reduction (COVOID, n.d.). To achieve the mission of empowering the community, the NGO pioneered the VSLA methodology in 2005. Currently, it supports over 2000 VSLAs spread across five districts of western Uganda (COVOID, n.d.: 1) as one of the most visible antipoverty interventions in the community. However, it acknowledges that social and cultural traditions such as the ‘known example that the responsibility of cooking is for women’ (COVOID 2019: 19) and other gender constructions may constrain its programmes’ impact on women and generally, entire community.

Material for this chapter was collected through qualitative research that used participatory tools in two villages of Busonga and Nyakahama in Rubirizi district. Three focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with members of VSLAs, based on a seven-day activity diary. The tool was introduced to participants during the weekly group meetings. Members were then asked to write down all the activities they performed each

day of the week. After seven days, these diaries were discussed by the members in an FGD. Composed of 12–18 VSLA members, the majority of whom were women, FGDs focused on the kinds of activities participants performed daily, how they learnt these activities and the role played by the NGO and VSLAs in enabling their performance. The selected research participants were active members of VSLAs since it was not the scope of this study to explore the various (and often complementary) roles of other actors—the state, church, market and civil society—in empowering women in diverse ways.

In addition, key informant interviews were conducted with COVID senior members of staff ( $n = 3$ ) who were involved in the implementation and supervision of the NGO programmes. These interviews were conducted in English, the country's official language, while FGDs were held in Runyankore, the lingua franca of the community. Both lasted between one hour to one hour and thirty minutes. These methods were further supplemented by the first author's three-month (June–August 2019) stay in the community, which enabled spontaneous and informal participation and observation of much of the daily life in the community. A framework approach (Smith & Firth, 2011; Srivastava & Thomson, 2009) was used to analyse the data. The process involved intensive, manual back and forth reading of key informant interviews and FGD transcripts and participants' daily diaries while marking and noting recurring themes in notebooks. This was enriched by reflections and insights from informal community interactions and observations. As a result of the analysis, we identified the ways of learning and instances of strengthening economic citizenship discussed in the section that follows.

#### 4 THREE WAYS OF LEARNING SKILLS THAT STRENGTHEN WOMEN ECONOMIC CITIZENSHIP

In this section, we present the findings of the study. Based on our analysis, we identified three main ways in which women acquire and learn economic skills and knowledge which strengthened their citizen status and rights at the community level.

##### *Learning through Everyday Participation in Group Activities*

The entirety of VSLA methodology is a hub of collaborative learning activities for the members. Saving earnings on a weekly basis, attending

weekly meetings and applying for, utilizing and repaying loans are characterized by routine learning for all members. The resultant solidarity and trust acquired through participation spilled over into more associational benefits and practices of citizenship, such as rotational group farming and other community responsibilities. Our study, for example, found that the closeness arising from membership of VSLAs contributed to the revival and strengthening of the bereavement tradition. Locally known as *otamundekyera* (literally meaning, do not abandon or leave me alone with the dead person), the funeral wakes are a long-standing practice of self-help characterized by clear division of labour between men and women. This practice has been strengthened by members' putting money aside to buy items such as tents, kitchenware and plastic chairs, which are then used for group functions but also hired out to generate income. A woman participant who admitted to initial pessimism about joining VSLAs described the learning she had acquired from participation:

The truth is for me I used to be an aloof traditional woman. I used to keep in the kitchen, and despised women associations as fake and exploitative ... but since joining COVOID-supported saving groups, I have learnt to do many things.... Through regular interaction I have, alongside other members, learned to work, to save, to educate children, to start a poultry project.

One of the learning avenues is inherent to the VSLAs' method of operations: all activities are conducted in an open way to ensure the inclusive participation of every member. First, membership is self-selected and leadership is elected by all members through secret ballot. Members and leaders are (s)elected based on qualities that are generally agreed to reflect 'good' and responsible standing in the community (see CARE, 2011). Second, VSLA meetings are conducted in a scripted and structured manner, but with flexibility that allows members to exchange ideas and make decisions about group affairs. Third, VSLAs maintain a special social and welfare fund popularly known as *ez'ebizibu* (emergency fund), drawn from members' compulsory weekly payment ranging from 200 to 500 Uganda shillings (UGX) (approx. €0.05–0.125), which is used to cater for members' unforeseeable emergency expenses. Members with emergency cash needs, including those who do not have money for the weekly saving, borrow from this fund at no interest for a period of two weeks.

The openness of VSLAs is demonstrated in the practice of members sitting in a semi-circular form around the metallic lockbox with a clear view of all transactions. Leaders loudly announce the number of shares purchased by each member, the amount each borrower wants, those repaying the loans and, sometimes, members who may be in need of emergency cash. These processes are recorded in the respective member's passbook and meeting proceedings, in a counter book. All the money collected is announced and distributed according to members' loan requirement requests. As we show in the next sections, the open participation in these activities provides opportunities for learning different skills associated with personal development, public speaking and listening, tolerance, mutual (dis)agreement and many other critical personal growth skills and attitudes that collectively strengthen several facets of citizenship.

### *Learning as Non-formal Training and Awareness Creation*

The crux of the VSLA methodology lies in the comprehensive training provided by NGOs to members of the saving group. Conducted in the community, the trainings involve fifteen field visits scattered over a period of nine months (CARE, 2011). Training content is organized into sessions focusing on themes such as VSLA concepts, group formation, record keeping, conflict resolution, the making of rules and regulations and loan management (ibid.). The sessions also integrate wide-ranging knowledge to address context-specific factors that may militate against the growth of a saving culture in the community. For example, conversations with NGO staff and VSLA members revealed that joint family budgeting, gender relations, entrepreneurship, frugality and household poverty form important components of the training in this community. This is done to create awareness and discourage practices that promote persistent poverty in the community. For example, participants revealed that the prevalent habit of consuming expensive fish, which had for long militated against the culture of saving in the community, was discouraged and slowly abandoned. There was unanimity during FGDs that COVOID training discouraged habits of *okuriira eryo* (spendthriftness) and domestic violence by emphasizing frugality and family harmony. As a widowed female VSLA member observed:

I used to sell sweet potatoes and cassava in the local market and after buying books and pens for the children, spend all the remaining money

buying fish and second-hand clothes. Upon joining this saving group, COVOID trained us about the importance of saving and frugality. Gradually, I stopped spending on fish and learned to work hard in order to get money to save every week. Since joining the VSLA, I no longer worry about school fees because I can always easily get money from the saving groups to which I belong and clear the school fees.

From this quote, it is evident that in addition to teaching habits of saving and frugality, VSLAs provided the quickest access to affordable money to solve immediate problems. The NGO also used community-based participatory training techniques involving village agents and model couples and arranging field visits outside the communities. ‘Model couples’ was a strategy in which ‘successful’ married couples shared their ‘success’ experience of jointly planning and making family decisions and how they have addressed poverty and disagreements. Village agents provided continuous support for the saving group’s day-to-day operations to ensure sustained momentum of the groups, especially during the formative stages. As a participant observed:

They (COVOID) came into the village mobilizing women to start saving associations, mobilized us into groups, trained us on how to save, borrow and pay back in three months so that the other members can also borrow. After training ... we started this group, they sold us the lockbox at the cost of 30,000 UGX (approx. € 8) and we started saving.

Several stories were told of the important roles played by model couples and village agents in creating awareness about the importance of forming and belonging to saving groups, joint planning and decision making and diversifying income sources. Women reported regularly calling upon their respective village agents for support and training whenever they realized a skills and/or knowledge gap.

### *Peer Learning, Imitation and Positive Competition*

The study also established that women learn by engaging in mutual imitation and competition among themselves as peers involved in a shared struggle for self-development within the context of poverty and its related constraining effects.

First, young and novice women reported that they picked up valuable life skills and practical lessons through association with experienced

women mentors. For example, a story was told of a hardworking and selfless woman in the 1990s, who challenged women not to be lazy and dependent on their husbands. She was reported to have inspired many women in the community to join self-help groups, engage in petty informal trade to supplement their incomes and have stable marriages.

[S]he was a hardworking and committed woman. She would tell you, ‘Come let us go and garden’ ... ‘Why should we accept dying of poverty as women?’ She was always the first to harvest and sell fresh beans in the market. She was always the first one to plant, whether sweet potatoes or beans, in any season ... she is the one who taught us the practice of growing sweet potatoes. (Female participant, VSLA)

Similarly, women who had joined the saving groups much earlier and registered visible progress inspired others to learn from them. Cases of women joining saving groups after listening to and witnessing successes achieved by their peers, neighbours and friends were common. A COVOID staff member involved in the training of community members in VSLA methodology argued that when women save and share out relatively big amounts of money, they get excited and motivated to continue saving. Some women, he said, would earn in the region of one million shillings (1,000,000 UGX) (approx. €250) at the end of a saving cycle. Naturally, such a financial achievement would spread across the community and subsequently act as motivation for other women to join at the start of the next cycle. Moreover, such luminaries also made visible improvements in their lives, such as acquisition of household assets and moving children from ‘low’ standard public schools to ‘high’ standard private schools, among other changes. At the same time, women also reported that observing other women juggle different responsibilities helped challenge and replace prevailing laziness and lethargy with conviction that they too could multitask and fight against household poverty.

Second, it was reported that VSLAs produced positive and healthy intra- and inter-community competition. Locally, this feeling is known as *ihato*, which directly translates as positive, progressive or healthy jealousy and is considered one of the characteristics of a good and development-oriented citizen in the community. Closer observations and interactions within the two villages revealed communities and households in a positive competitive and convivial mood. The two communities were a hub of



activity as households ran different infrastructural and income-generating projects. There was, for example, a visible trend of new and more permanent houses being built or recently completed, with some of them connected to solar power and digital television panels. Further, atypical of many communities in rural Uganda, we did not find any school-age children stranded at home (due to lack of school fees) during this study. A female participant observed, ‘When a member of my saving group builds a permanent house or educates their children, I not only admire them but I push myself to work harder to see that I also do the same or even better’.

## 5 IMPACTS OF LEARNING WITHIN VSLAs ON WOMEN’S ECONOMIC CITIZENSHIP AND BEYOND

In this section, we reflect on what the identified ways of learning economic skills portend for women’s economic citizenship in traditional rural contexts. We argue that when women learn together in a supportive manner, they achieve reasonable financial means and attendant social recognition. Taken together, these achievements can gradually challenge unequal power dynamics and significantly change women’s status and rights in the community.

### *Intricacies of Negotiating Women’s Citizen Rights*

Research on citizenship in most parts of Africa shows that it is historically gendered (Seely et al., 2013; Tamale, 2004) and ingrained in deep-seated traditions of patriarchy (Ndidde et al., 2020). Against this background, the findings of this study suggest that the economic competence acquired through membership in VSLAs gives women renewed hope, confidence and belief in their abilities to change their own lives and that of their communities. This confidence was manifested in women’s increased activeness and enhanced capacities to meet immediate and, progressively, strategic needs. Inadvertently, women’s increased capacity to own property, and contribute to breadwinning, decision making and children’s education (Kwarteng & Sarfo-Mensah, 2019; Muganga, 2020), and assume leadership roles, among other skills, challenge age old gendered stereotypes and biases. It also subjects such norms to continuous scrutiny and ultimately, may lead to their modification and/or abandonment in the long term.

Analysis of women’s seven-day activity diaries showed that, first, women are involved in a plethora of economic livelihood strategies and, on average, belong to at least two VSLAs. Second, women were more involved than men in community activities, such as visiting the sick, attending burial wakes, participating in group farming and community work, as well membership of different groups of local churches. Third, on a typical day, women rested for only six hours, waking as early as 6 am and retiring to bed at 12.00 am. Comparably, men woke at 9 am and retired to bed at 10 pm and had more leisure time in between. Fourth, during FGDs there was consensus that women did more work than men, a trend that was also observable in several community activities in which the first author participated. It was clear, therefore, that women are still disproportionately affected by an unequal division of labour. There were also scattered voices claiming that some men contribute little or nothing to support their families. A woman participant in Busonga village, for example, claimed that ‘my husband is not bothered or interested in working’, while it was also emphasized that there were still some cases of men in the area who ‘spend most of their time in bars’ (Fig. 1).

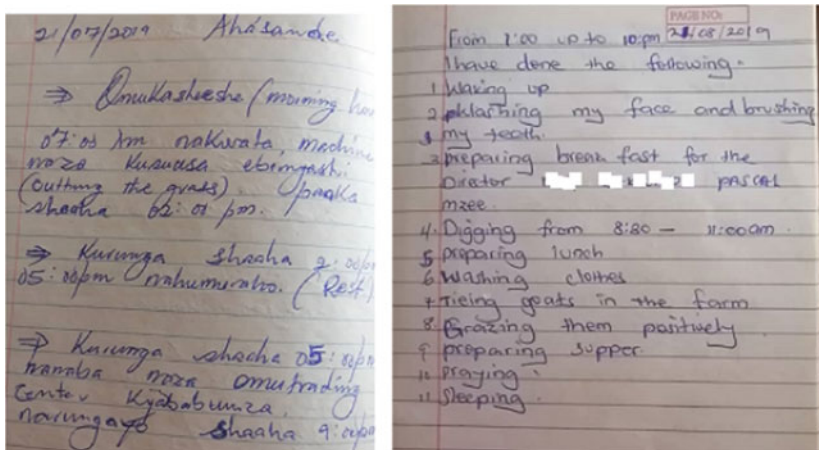


Fig. 1 A sample comparison of a woman’s (right) and man’s (left) schedule of daily activities

The woman's daily activity diary shows the typical 'heavy' workload involved vis-à-vis the man's 'light' workload that includes rest and popular leisure pastimes at the trading centre – usually for an evening drink. Photo by the first author.

These cases notwithstanding, evidence of changing and negotiated gender relations and mindsets abounded. Men and women argued that COVID had taught them the importance of joint planning and helping one another in the performance of some domestic chores. A male participant claimed, 'When my wife is breastfeeding, I assist her [with] some cooking because helping one another is the easiest way to chase household poverty'. During an exercise in which community members offered rotational agricultural labour, women told the first author that they agree to 'share' work with their husbands who are involved in doing more mobile work, mainly as *boda boda* motorcycle riders in the urban centres. In turn, the husbands contribute money, which is saved in the VSLAs groups as the couple's joint shares. For instance, there was a couple who ran a mobile restaurant together in the weekly market every Wednesday. In another case, a couple reported that they share responsibilities, with the husband rising early to buy fish from the distant lake shores and the wife selling it in the market. While such practices of gender interdependence (see Lister, 1997) were not widespread, they point to the fact that with increased learning and economic competence, significant changes and negotiations in gender relations began to manifest in the communities.

### *Contextualized Women Citizenship and Empowerment Experiences*

Feminist scholars argue that an overhaul and transformation of oppressive power structures and systems are required for women's equality and emancipation to be fully realized (Acker, 1987; Thompson, 2017). However, several studies draw attention to the gradual empowering and transformative potential of even modest knowledge and changes attained under VSLAs on the lives and experiences of women in marginalized contexts (Ahimbisibwe et al., 2020; Burlando & Canidio, 2017; Kwarteng & Sarfo-Mensah, 2019; Muganga, 2020). This view and our study findings remind us of a rather complex question an undergraduate student asked the first author during a lecture on practical and strategic gender needs: 'How can a "naked" woman be empowered?' The student's

argument was that, in the context of marginalization and poverty, talking of legalistic empowerment to a poor, hungry and destitute woman is, to all intents, an exercise in futility. Rather, any attempt to realize meaningful empowerment of women as equal citizens must, of necessity, focus on enabling poor women first to fulfil their subsistence and practical needs.

Our findings seem to concur with the student's argument. For example, the VSLA methodology was pivotal in enabling women to save and borrow affordably to meet several needs. It also became a space for self-mobilization and self-organizing and provided a training and grooming arena for confidence building, awareness, leadership, joint learning of useful economic citizenship skills and gaining experience. Crucially, the weekly meetings re-energized practices of community responsibility and promoted 'subtle ideals of citizenship' (Karlan et al., 2017) such as consensus-building, solidarity, learning, trust, participation and reciprocity in the community. Responding to practically felt needs of women increased their income and, therefore, provided an entry point to identifying and addressing their long-term strategic interests related to property acquisition, improved power and decision-making relations. Contextually, this manifested in women having, sharing and actualizing broader aspirations such as working with husbands to construct permanent houses and funding 'quality' education, of girl children in particular.

Subsequently, as VSLA membership strengthened women's position as economic actors, and reduced their dependence while promoting interdependence, transformative changes began to occur with regard to women's access to and control over productive resources. At the end of each saving cycle, women reported that they, sometimes with their husbands, had invested in tangible assets such as goats, pigs and *boda* motorcycles, while others had bought pieces of land and diversified into other activities, especially petty, informal trade. These and other assets are the 'banks' of women because they are easily saleable when the need for cash arises.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, we have demonstrated how an NGO-initiated and supported VSLA programme leverages the collectivist ethos inherent in rural communities to infuse the skills and knowledge of financial inclusion. We have identified the three main ways through which women learn and practice economic citizenship as everyday participation, non-formal

training and healthy peer imitation and competition. We have also empirically shown how, via these means, VSLAs reinforce women's economic citizenship as active involvement and improved gender relations in the community.

The nature of VSLA activities and procedures contributes to collaborative learning and action that permeate individual members and the broader community with a sense of hope, belief and belonging, critical elements for citizens living in contexts constrained by poverty and tradition. Because VSLA activities are largely participatory and constructed in a mutually supportive environment, they help women acquire different skills that increase their asset base, enable them assume leadership roles within and beyond the groups, and negotiate some of their rights at the local level. In our case, financial enhancement enabled women to meet diverse obligations and perform citizen responsibilities in society with a reduced burden. Therefore, understood in this context, economic citizenship entailed the ability of women to use the acquired financial wherewithal, first, to realize their potential and aspirations and generally contribute to socioeconomic transformations at both household and community levels; second, the ongoing learning and resultant developments created an environment of persistent negotiation of unequal power dynamics and modification, albeit subtly, of what is generally considered to be the 'unacceptable face of patriarchy' (Kabeer, 2012: 228) in the community.

Although VSLAs' activities are held in a participatory manner, some scholars have observed that weekly meetings are often conducted as a routinized and scripted ritual that is in contrast to the daily financial and social transactions of group members (e.g. Green, 2018). In the case of this study, however, while VSLAs ran on scripted rules and regulations, they were neither punitive nor manifestly alien to group members. Rather, the routinized rules are embedded in the methodology, consensually agreed upon and progressively learned as part of the norms of group behaviour. Crucially, the rules form part of the social bonding, trust and security which is the basis for the enactment of diverse practices of belonging and membership.

Yet the study findings have also shown that more work still needs to be done to close the gap between participatory learning and the practices of economic citizenship promoted by VSLAs. For example, while general improvements in the socioeconomic livelihoods of women have been realized, vestiges of unequal gender relations are still prevalent in different

aspects of the community. Some of the emerging improvements in gender interdependence discussed in this chapter remain largely sporadic, spontaneous and scattered from household to household. It would have great impact if NGOs purposely streamlined learning that consistently addressed the profound gender dynamics that limit women's full exercise of citizenship. This can be achieved by leveraging the feel-good effect created by VSLAs to propose mutually negotiated and participatory agreed initiatives such as village by-laws and sensitization efforts against some of the traditional norms related, for example, to control over resources and unequal division of labour. This would further strengthen VSLAs' niche as space where women's dependence slowly morphs into citizenship as gender interdependence.

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# Learning Marriage Ideals and Gendered Citizenship in “God-Fearing” Uganda

*Henni Alava, Janet Amato, and Rom Lawrence*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Hinged on her motto, “for God and my country”, Uganda has identified herself as a “God-fearing” country. Indeed, religion in its different forms finds its way into the social, economic and political facets of Ugandan lives, very particularly those of women and girls. In this chapter, we explore the crafting of religious gendered citizenship in Uganda through a focus on learning and marriage. Specifically, we ask how ideals concerning Christian marriage are crafted and taught in Ugandan churches, and how ideals concerning relationships (which may or may not be defined as marriage) are adopted, contested and actually learned by Catholic and Pentecostal women.

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Our analysis is grounded in the claim that churches' teaching about marriage is not *just* about marriage as such. Rather, encapsulated in formal teaching about marriage are more general notions of gender relations—about what makes a good Christian man and a good Christian woman, and of how they should relate to one another (see, e.g., Kisembo et al., 1998). Moreover, marriage is expected to do more than just organize relations within a family. In both Pentecostal and Catholic teaching, the family is seen to form the cornerstone of the state. The polity rests upon formally bound marriages, which in the Catholic faith are considered sacraments, and as insoluble by almost all Pentecostal churches, and it is ideally within the godly family that God-fearing new citizens can be raised (Alava, 2019). By seeking to inculcate ideals of marriage and gender, religious leaders are thus simultaneously seeking to mould ideal citizens for the service of God and for their country. That said, there is, a notable contrast between the Christian vision of ideal marriages, and the actuality of marriages in Uganda: few people marry in church, and many of those at a mature age (Alava, 2017a). As our data shows, this is true even for many women who grant the church a central place in their lives.

Following feminist citizenship scholars (Lister, 1997; Preece, 2002) we hold teaching about gender norms to be intimately connected to teaching about citizenship. When girls are taught—as many girls in Uganda are—that women must always accept their husband's sexual advances, or that land is passed from the hands of fathers to sons and not to daughters, or that fathers have more say in the use of household income than mothers, they simultaneously intuit that all members of society are not equal, and that some have the right to wield their power over others, while others are expected to bend under it. Such “incidental transmission of attitudes” (Ostrouch-Kaminska & Vieira, 2015: 6) contributes to patterns of gender roles and relationships, with impact on the way people exercise their citizenship and “evaluate themselves as members of society” (ibid.).

Yet such processes are far from straightforward. Not every lesson is learned, and not every attempt to form a person's mindset produces the teacher's desired results. It is particularly important to bear this in mind when analyzing religious education. We align ourselves with feminist religious studies scholars who “acknowledge that religion may be used to legitimate gender inequality and the discrimination of women [but] reject the idea that religion is by necessity patriarchal” (Nyhagen & Halsaa, 2016: 55). In this vein, and paralleling the distinction made in citizenship studies between formal and experienced citizenship (Kabeer, 2005),

scholars interested in the interconnections of citizenship, gender and religion have utilized the notion of *lived religion*, which directs attention not only to religious institutions and their formal teachings, but to “what people *do* with religious idioms, how they use them ... and how, in turn, men, women and children are fundamentally shaped by the worlds they are making” (Orsi, 2003: 172). By contrasting how churches teach about gender and relationship ideals and how women actually learn about them, we attempt to contribute to the call made by Nyhagen and Halsaa:

Rather than assuming religious women’s subordination or agency, we need to investigate whether and how religious women experience their lived citizenship within particular contexts as empowering or restricting in relation to their gender. (2016: 67)

The particular lens we bring to this attempt is one of learning. While scholars of sexuality and religion in Africa have shown how sexual and gender moralities are moulded through marriage counselling (van Dijk, 2013) and churches’ gender-specific peer support and training groups (van Klinken, 2013) and public “love therapy” sessions (van de Kamp, 2013), what these and other studies *also* show is that teaching and learning about gender, relationships and citizenship—and the character moulding concomitant within these processes—occurs far beyond the places formally set out for that purpose: in peoples’ everyday lives, and in their interactions with the world around them (Ostrouch-Kaminska & Vieira, 2015: 2). Therefore, we suggest that experienced citizenship, lived religion and informal everyday learning intertwine in the crafting of gendered citizenship.

The chapter proceeds as follows: first, we discuss three ways in which the religiously imbued gendered nature of citizenship is apparent in Uganda; second, we introduce two particular sets of empirical material on which our analysis is based: interviews with Christian clergy and with religious women; third, we discuss pastors’ views of marriage ideals and ways of teaching them, and the ideals of relationships and their learning as described by women. In conclusion, we draw parallels between the views of clerics and women and suggest directions for further research—by scholars in gender, religion and citizenship more broadly—into the part played by learning.

## 2 UNTANGLING GENDERED RELIGIOUS CITIZENSHIP IN UGANDA

The Ugandan Constitution grants equal rights to men and women (Articles 21 & 23, Republic of Uganda, 1995), yet the gendered nature of citizenship in Uganda is evident in multiple ways: in public debates about legislation concerning sexual morality; in persistent gender roles and inequalities; and in the arena of formal politics. Religion is closely entwined with each of these realms.

Public and political debates over legislation governing sexuality and family relations comprise the first arena wherein the gendered nature of citizenship in Uganda is made apparent. As Guma writes, the rhetoric of these debates is “symbolic of a deep concern about the apparent state of the nation in regards to the way we think about sex and gender in society” (2015: 24). This concern has crystallized in debates over three pieces of legislation: the long-stalled marriage and divorce bill, which would address oversights of women’s rights in the existing legislation (Larok, 2013); the so-called anti-gay bill, which penalizes not only many same-sex activities but also severely limits organizations’ support for sexual and gender minorities (Nyanzi, 2015; Ward, 2015); and a bill on pornography, which involved the entire Parliament of Uganda in a debate on the length of skirts women should be allowed to wear in public (Guma, 2015). This brief overview demonstrates that, despite what the country’s constitution says, Ugandan public debates construct citizenship as contingent on adherence to narrowly defined gender roles, which are upheld to a large degree through the moral policing of women.

Secondly, the gendered nature of lived citizenship is implicit in persisting inequalities. Despite improvements in some areas, gender inequality persists due to women’s differential access to and protection of land, resources and employment; wide-based sexual and gender-based violence; and “limited participation in household, community and national decision-making” (UNFPA, 2017: 1). In much of Uganda, the lives of both men and women are guided by starkly differing expectations of conduct. As Ndidde et al. observe in their analysis of gendered citizenship in rural Uganda, “the status of a female citizen [is] often constructed vis-à-vis her relationship with a male, either a father or a husband” (2020: 112). Although the constitution grants men and women equal rights as citizen, socially and culturally embedded views confer differing rights and responsibilities on men and women, resulting in women in Uganda being

held back in particular ways from accessing their full rights as citizens (*ibid.*).

Third, how citizenship is gendered is evident in formal political arenas. While Uganda has been given credit for its quota system for female representatives in governance structures, including parliament, and while notable advances were made by the women's movement particularly in the 1990s, opportunities for women's political power remain constrained (Tamale, 1999; Tripp, 2000). This is particularly true at the grassroots level, where forums for decision-making may be dictated by men, leaving little space for women's voices to be heard (Oosterom, 2011). Even prominent and locally respected female politicians may be perceived as the "daughters" of big men in power, and as ultimately bound to serving interests dictated by powerful men, rather than by their constituents (Alava, 2022). The male-centric nature of Ugandan politics is particularly clear in the religious arena where, despite the abundance of women carrying responsibility, prominent leaders are all men.

Religion plays a key role in all three realms, and there is considerable historic precedent for its contemporary influence on sexual conduct, family norms and gender roles. In the wake of Britain's colonization of Uganda, supported by Catholic and Anglican missionaries, Christianity profoundly ruptured pre-existing patterns of social relationships, and has, since then, often been drawn upon to curb challenges to patriarchy (Harris, 2017; Ochwada, 2007; Peterson, 2012). During the early 1990s, when Uganda was ravaged by a brutally wide-spread HIV/AIDS epidemic, churches featured centrally in moulding and promoting the "Abstain, Be faithful and [to a far less enthusiastic degree] wear a Condom" model for HIV/AIDS prevention (Boyd, 2015; Gusman, 2013; Parikh, 2007).

The growth of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity (PCC) has also shaken up religious sexual politics in other ways. Whereas the subject of sex was previously largely silenced in churches, one can now literally see pastors on stage flirting with their tightly-clad wives and talking smugly about the pleasures of sex, to the apparent glee of young audiences. On the other hand, the rise of PCC has led political discourse and public debate in Uganda to be "pentecostalised" (Bompani, 2016), whereby not only do religious leaders play prominent roles in public debates about morality, but politicians also increasingly employ religious reasoning and biblical mis/quotations to bolster their views, condemning those espousing different views as morally degenerate. Through these

developments, religious standards have become closely enmeshed with definitions of good citizens: that is, those who are hard-working (Alava, 2017b; Bompani, 2018); who remain peaceful during elections (Alava & Ssentongo, 2016); and who abide by particular gender and sexual norms (Bompani, 2017; Boyd, 2015; Christiansen, 2011; Gusman, 2009, 2017). Uganda thus follows broader regional trends in Africa wherein, increasingly, “[b]eing a good citizen requires being a good Christian” (Bompani & Valois, 2017: 7).

To add to these rich existing literatures, our study set out to explore the perspectives of teaching and learning in the dynamic space between religion, gender, politics and citizenship and, as we now explain, to experiment with methods of doing so. Due to the special place marriage holds in the Christian imaginary, but also in customary Ugandan societies, our starting point was to explore the importance accorded—and not accorded—to Christian marriage by our research participants.

### 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND MATERIAL

The analysis is informed by the authors’ ethnographic research on and personal experience of Christianity in Uganda, building specifically on two separate bodies of empirical data: interviews with Christian clergy (interchangeably referred to as pastors), and learning timeline interviews with Catholic and Pentecostal women. It should be noted that these data sets were originally collected with different methods, concentrating on slightly different questions due to the participants’ different positions vis-à-vis the research topic. However, for the purposes of this chapter’s analysis, they offer complementary perspectives on Christian marriage and on how gendered citizenship learning takes place in religious communities and within the weave of religious adherents’ everyday lives.

The interviews with pastors aimed to assess the different ways in which clergy formally convey their teachings about marriage to their parishioners. Issues discussed included the churches’ requirements for couples wishing to marry, training given by the church before and during marriage, and the pastors’ perceptions of their churches’ general influence on their members’ marriage practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Kitgum (a district capital in Northern Uganda), Entebbe (a town in Central Uganda with an international airport and a sizable expatriate population) and Bushenyi (a town with a university campus

in Western Uganda) with altogether 23 Catholic, Anglican and Pentecostal pastors, two of whom were women. Of the clerics, about one third were Acholis from northern Uganda, another third Baganda from Central Uganda's Buganda kingdom, and the remainder had ethnic roots in different parts of Western and Northern Uganda.<sup>1</sup> Among the interviewees were Catholic and Pentecostal pastors who headed the parishes in which the second body of data was produced.

While pastor interviews focused on the teaching of formal ideals, learning timeline interviews sought to understand what religious women themselves considered to be ideal relationships, and to trace how they described the events and relationships along their life trajectories that they considered significant in learning these ideals. These interviews were conducted in Entebbe with fifteen Catholic and ten born-again women, some of whom were married, some single (including single parents), some divorced and some cohabiting with their partners. The participants ranged from the fairly poor wives of soldiers living in army barracks to women of considerable affluence and high social standing, but all were identified due to their active participation in women's communities at their churches. Although residing in a town in Central Uganda, about half of the women were Luo-speakers (Acholi, Langi or Alur), and most of the others were a mixed group of women with roots all over Uganda.

At the beginning of the interview, respondents drew a picture or diagram conveying an ideal relationship between a man and a woman—a marriage or not, depending on their choice. They were then asked to reflect on the sources of learning that have led to the depicted ideal and to identify examples of learning from: (1) people; (2) experiences and events; (3) communities; and (4) media. These were then utilized to construct a "timeline of learning" from the time of the participants' birth up to the present. What emerges from our analysis of these two different sets of data is a difference in direction: whereas formal teaching seeks to inculcate pre-established ideals in religious adherents, religious women's actual pathways of learning lead to their own ideals being transformed.

#### 4 IDEAL MARRIAGES AND HOW TO TEACH THEM: THE PASTORS' PERSPECTIVE

In interviews with pastors, four core issues were repeated as central concerns of marriage teaching in Ugandan churches: (1) sexual purity; (2) harmony through hierarchy; (3) harmony with the extended family; and



(4) the primacy of marrying in church over doing so glamorously. With regard to the first concern, most pastors emphasized the ideal of sexual purity, of abstinence prior to marriage and the necessity of HIV testing, whereas few pastors mentioned sexual pleasure as a theme to discuss in marriage training. This resonates with a more general trend in Uganda where, as Parikh has noted, sex education in schools is taught under the rubric of “marriage and morality”, and its “embedded moral message suggests that sexual pleasure leads to dangerous consequences such as unplanned pregnancy or hiv” (2005: 143). Practically all interviewees highlighted that a Christian family should be founded upon Christian marriage, even while many acknowledged that marrying before having children was rare among their parishioners.

A second major concern was the maintenance of harmonious family relationships. Many pastors asserted that harmony emerged through submission to their view of a Christian gender hierarchy: God first, and the husband as the caring head of his wife. In one Catholic priests’ words, “The wife must know that the husband is a prophet, shepherd and priest”. In terms of the third concern, interviewed clergy placed varying degrees of emphasis on harmony with the extended family, with a division traceable between the attitudes of pastors in urban and more rural parishes. While Van Dijk (2013) has noted that marriage counselling in churches can lead young couples into conflict with their elders, most of our interviewees emphasized the importance of the couple’s maintaining good relations with relatives, indicating how committed Ugandan churches remain to the customarily valued notion of marriage as deeply embedded in kinship ties. Almost all the pastors we interviewed also considered the fulfilment of bride wealth requirements—always negotiated through the extended family—a self-evident requirement for a church wedding.

This brings us to the fourth key theme: money. Most pastors agonized over how bridewealth payments, which have in some parts of the country become highly expensive, and extravagant weddings were keeping young couples from marrying. Some churches organize mass weddings as a more affordable alternative for couples, while others advocate small weddings held simply in the pastor’s office, or for customary and church weddings to be held over the same weekend to cut costs. Yet none of these initiatives are popular: one devout Pentecostal woman we interviewed said marrying in a mass wedding would be so humiliating that she would rather not marry her partner at all.

To sum up, despite differences in emphasis between individual pastors, certain key themes cut across the interviews: the ideal marriage is sanctified through a church wedding; it upholds the husband as the natural head of the family; it is embedded in harmonious relations with the extended family; and it is based on an economy of humility, whereby the young family's wellbeing is put ahead of lavish wedding celebrations or exorbitantly high bridewealth payments. With these key themes of the pastors' teaching on marriage outlined, we turn to consider how pastors saw themselves and their churches as teaching these ideals to their parishioners.

The most central form of teaching mentioned by pastors was premarital counselling. The themes discussed during this often rather short training, consisting of a few gatherings led by the pastor or experienced laity, were rather similar in all of the churches we surveyed, and included financial management, handling relatives, raising children, proper intimacy and God's role in a relationship (see van Dijk, 2013 for an analysis from Botswana; and Parikh, 2005 on Uganda). Besides premarital counselling, urban churches in particular arrange couples' retreats, where lay counselors provide guidance on themes similar to those covered in premarital counselling. Interviewed clergy also emphasized the centrality of role models as teacher-mentors: a married best man and matron should guide new couples, who were encouraged to participate in groups such as the Catholic Church's "Holy Family", and cell groups central to the life of Pentecostal churches.

Besides premarital counselling, interviewed pastors also mentioned counselling in times of trouble as an important avenue for teaching about marriage. The centrality of counselling in African Pentecostalism (van Dijk, 2013) was highlighted by one Pentecostal pastor—as was, inadvertently, a "banking" model of learning:

It's part of our DNA. We can't just wed people [when] we don't know what they know and what they don't know. So, we are going to have to do some sort of premarital counselling so that we know for at least the following twelve topics, "we told you". In that way, if after the wedding and then you come back to us with a marital problem that comes out of those topics, it's a good point of reference, "We chatted about this and this is how it goes".

But Christian ideals of gender, sexuality and family are not only taught in those sessions that target married couples or those preparing for marriage; Ugandan churches' sermons, as well as speeches at events for women, men or youth, very often cover issues such as sexual purity, forgiveness, commitment, monogamy and the centrality of marriage in a good Christian life (Alava, 2017a; Klinken & Zebracki, 2016; Ward, 2015). A breadth of scholarship has shown that active participation in Christian settings *can* and often *does* mould people's ideals and the way in which they seek to portray themselves, as well as their sexual and relationship behaviours (Boyd, 2015; Christiansen, 2011; Gusman, 2017; van Dijk, 2013; van Klinken, 2013). As our analysis of religious women's interviews highlights, however, formal teaching can be adopted but it can also be resisted, and often is.

We turn now to describe how women with whom we conducted learning timeline interviews described their own relationship ideals and how they considered they had learned them over the course of their lives.

## 5 RELATIONSHIP IDEALS AND HOW THEY ARE LEARNED: WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES

Our analysis of the ways in which actively practising Catholic and Pentecostal women described ideal relationships, and the methods and sources of learning they marked as having led to these ideals, underscores Nyhagen and Halsaa's claim that "women have ambivalent and contradictory relations to religious institutions and authorities. They may choose to accept and submit to some religious prescriptions and practices, while contesting or rejecting others" (2016: 30).

In our interviews with women, three core themes could be identified as central to ideal relationships/marriages: (1) cohesion and the things that promote it; (2) spirituality; and (3) survival. First, under what we refer to as "cohesion", women spoke of friendship, openness, communication, love, sexual bonding, respect, patience, conflict resolution, faithfulness, compatibility of the couple in terms of age, religion and ethnicity, as well as harmony with the extended family. Owing to the presumption that marriage is permanent, many women argued that an ideal relationship meant sticking together through difficult times and being supportive of each other. While many interviewees emphasized the necessity of partnership and friendship, some women pointed out the tensions between different aspects of cohesion and women's desires for equality with their

partners. Describing how a good marriage should be protected from external forces, one widowed Catholic woman reflected on the younger generations' increasing criticism of gerontocratic control (see van Dijk, 2013; Parikh, 2005) when she argued that the idealization of harmony with in-laws "is highly oppressive". Why, she asked us, should women "be trying so hard to make sure you gain an acceptability from... relatives? Can't you just be what you want to be?"

The second theme raised by almost all interviewed women was the view that a relationship with God and spiritual practice increased the likelihood of an ideal relationship. Spirituality was seen to strengthen positive moral attributes, such as kindness, faithfulness, patience and sacrifice, while God was described as a source of guidance and protection. For instance, a Pentecostal married woman depicted the perfect relationship with the image of a triangle:

I believe God is the author of all marriages and He intends for a man and a woman to join in marriage, but with Him as the in-charge, the author of the marriage. And then working closely with God strengthens marriages. Let's say the triangle ... If you leave God out and if it's just man, woman and hope; who holds these marriages together?

Through spiritual practice, argued a young Catholic mother cohabiting with her partner, one can "learn about good ideals that help in living a good life". Interestingly, this woman, like many others, was in a relationship in which the man did not live up to the woman's ideal of spirituality. Whereas pastors we interviewed demonstrated a preference for both partners to belong to the same denomination, women largely argued that one's relationship with God was more important than one's formal membership.

The third theme that came out in practically almost all of the timeline interviews paralleled the theme of money raised in interviews with pastors. However, while the pastors' main concern and complaint was that financial issues outflanked spiritual ideals, for our interlocutors, issues of money emerged as a concern related to the physical survival and wellbeing of the couple and their children. Many women spoke emphatically on the necessity of financial stability and, specifically, the husband's ability to provide for a family. Fundamentally, the argument was that without income, ideal relationships cannot be realized. In the summary of one married Catholic participant, "a good man provides, looks after a woman and takes care

of her”. Yet a number of women also disagreed, including a young born-again woman cohabiting with her boyfriend, who stated, “My idea of a perfect relationship is eating on the same plate. Like we both bring to the table, we both take off the table, we both decide what gets on the table or put on the table”. Meanwhile, a number of participants with steady jobs had responded to the failure of their husbands to provide for their needs by separating from them.

With these key tenets of ideal relationships in mind, let us turn to how the women we interviewed described the learning path, and the people and events they had encountered along it, that had led them to hold their particular ideals. First, learning from people was strongly emphasized by the women we interviewed. Women mentioned having learned about care work, obedience and perseverance from mothers and—particularly in interviews with participants from Central Uganda—paternal aunts (*ssenga* in Luganda, see Parikh, 2005). As described by a married Catholic woman, “Aunties always will advise you to get a man and make sure you respect your husband. Be good to your husband”. Fathers were more often mentioned by those few women who themselves expressed fairly gender-egalitarian views on ideal marriages. Besides family members, interviewees emphasized the importance of learning through the peer support and mentoring provided by friends, with whom “you talk about the fiancées, you talk about the kind of a man you’re going to get. The kind of man you want to go to”. Similarly, some women reflected on how they learned about what they want for their own relationships by observing people around them—either those in abusive or otherwise unhappy relationships, or those who seemed to have “perfect” Christian families.

Second, the women we interviewed spoke of both joyful and painful experiences through which they had learned about relationships and formed their opinion of what made an ideal one. For instance, a middle-aged Pentecostal woman’s relationship ideals had been profoundly formed by her experiences as a teenager, when she was raped and impregnated, and forced by her family to marry:

So it’s like in fact even getting married, I didn’t have that love because I felt it’s just the family that wanted me to get married, they’re abusing you every morning and evening. “What are you doing at home? We want cows [=bridewealth]. Are you a tree that we shall make the table in you?”

Other women described things they had learned about ideal relationships through their own abusive relationships, through being betrayed by their partners, or by going through painful separations or divorce. Some experiences were more positive, however: for instance, when women reflected on how much their views on relationships had changed after their becoming mothers. Yet overwhelmingly, the experiences through which women described having learned about relationships were harsh—and far from the ideals that pastors typically convey in their formal teaching on marriage and relationships.

Third, besides people and experiences, women gave us many examples of what they had learned from media. Those most often mentioned were TV family programmes, radio call-in shows and different social media channels focusing on relationship issues, this genre having proliferated in the last few decades on the wings of commercialized “sexperts” (Parikh, 2005: 153). One Catholic single parent, for instance, commented on Facebook groups where “you read what people are going through and then you realize you are not going through it alone. You actually get advice from strangers to help you with your relationship”.

Fourth, women spoke to us about learning that took place through their participation in different types of communities and groups. In the interviews, we did not explicitly specify the church as a source of learning because we did not want to over-prompt this aspect in the timelines. We did, however, tell all interviewees that we were speaking specifically with Catholic and born-again women to hear about their ideals concerning relationships; furthermore, if they struggled to find something to write indicating the communities from which they had learned, or asked for more explanation, we mentioned “church groups” among a longer list of other examples. What is very notable is that despite the set-up of the interviews, and despite these prompts, many of the women did not mention the church or church groups at all. Among those who did, most mentions were for church-related women’s friendship and peer-support groups, which provided practical advice and support in times of trouble. A married Pentecostal woman mentioned that her church offered a cell group consisting solely of married couples, while another participant described the importance of the church group to which she was invited during her studies:

We used to pray in the university church [on campus] so not so many elders were there. It was just students and these two professors and their wives.

So there is this wife of a professor ... she would teach us how to take care of marriages, like preparing us for marriages. Every year she would have [college] finalists and she would meet [them] like for three days. And yeah, she would teach us those things. To me it was very relevant.

Even in this example of learning from a church setting the learning came not from the formal structures of the church, but from an active adult member of the laity, who took it upon herself to train young women to fulfil the future ideal of becoming a godly wife for a godly husband—perhaps what could be considered a religious variant of the customary *senga* (see Parikh, 2005).

Parikh has observed that young and adolescent Ugandan girls do not learn about sex through formal public health campaigns or religious teaching, but “from discussions with friends, by watching older people flirt at local social places such as discos and bars, and through representations of erotica in popular culture” (2005: 128). Thus our claim that churches are not very central to women’s learning about relationships is not surprising; however, our findings enable more general consideration about the nature of learning. Overall, they show that women’s learning about relationships is more solution-oriented than guided by externally determined ideals; learning is an inherent response to what is deemed an immediate or potential future problem. Through experiences incurred over a lifetime, the ideals women hold about relationships evolve. This suggests a very different understanding of learning than that underlying the formalized teaching on pre-given ideals offered by churches. Moreover, women are strategic learners. The lesson drawn from the church by interviewees who had separated from abusive, untrustworthy or negligent partners, was that they were worthy, which for them trumped the demand to sanctify or hang on to relationships that threatened their well-being. These contradictions reflect the view that religion is a “malleable resource” (Nyhagen & Halsaa, 2016) that women appropriate and reject according to their individual needs.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Over the past 150 years, the norms governing sexual conduct, gender roles and marriage in Uganda have undergone radical transformations, triggered importantly but not exclusively by religious upheaval and innovation. Simultaneously, the ways in which such norms are transmitted

have changed. Following the decline of kin-based education that prioritized social reproduction (see Parikh, 2005), women in Uganda today draw on multiple and often contradictory sources of learning concerning gender, sexuality and relationships.

Taking marriage as a meeting point of gender, religion, citizenship and learning, the principle aim of this chapter was to describe the discrepancy between the teaching of formal marriage ideals in Ugandan churches, and the ways in which relationship ideals are adopted, contested and actually learned by Christian women in Uganda. We have suggested that in learning about (religious) gender ideals, women simultaneously adopt and negotiate attitudes and beliefs concerning their status, roles and rights as citizens. From our analysis, we suggest two interrelated key features as potentially fruitful starting points for reflecting on the overlaps of learning, citizenship, gender and religion.

First, gender and relationship ideals, and the ideals of citizenship embedded in them, are very often learned outside of formal settings set-up for the purpose of teaching them. Drawing from our material, we show that even in Uganda, a setting commonly argued to be “highly religious”, this general argument about formal teaching and actual learning also holds true for the church and its committed members. Reflection on interviews with pastors and with religious women indicated an important “difference in direction”: whereas formal teaching begins from formal ideals, actual learning processes mould the ideals that people ultimately hold. There is a mismatch between, on the one hand, the teaching and learning of preconceived ideas (as presented by clerics) and, on the other, learning as a strategic response to life events and experiences (as indicated by interviewed women).

This underlines the important difference between how educators *think* they are teaching people, and how people are *actually* learning. Two examples in particular epitomize the distance between clerically-held ideals and many religious women’s lived experiences: the idea presented by one of our interviewed pastors that, after giving couples premarital lessons, one can simply refer to the lessons and say, “this is how it goes” if there is any future trouble; and the fact that church weddings remain rare in Uganda despite the country’s professed status as a highly religious nation and the churches’ insistence on the importance of marriage (see Alava, 2017b). Recognition of such mismatches highlights the importance of acknowledging context in analyses of gendered citizenship: individuals are citizens, partners in relationships, and practitioners of



religion, and learning about all of these realms and their interrelations continues throughout the entire life course.

Secondly, although our analysis shows that women do not simply take their church's teaching on gender relations as a given, the reality of continued gender inequality and deepening autocracy in Uganda raises serious questions as to where and how full rights—of women and of all citizens—can be achieved. Our analysis has shown how religious communities provide many women with support networks, and how women can strategically draw from Christian teaching to counter patriarchal violence. However, while it is important to be realistic about the means people have to expand their wellbeing and freedom in contexts of profoundly constrained citizenship (Ahimbisibwe forthcoming), such acknowledgment should not lead to a romanticization of agency (Jungar & Oinas, 2011). In Uganda, as elsewhere, it is vital to question the extent to which Christianity can be part of the struggle for expanding women's citizenship when for centuries it has bolstered patriarchal structures of power. In Nyhagen and Halsaa's words:

Religion is ... a malleable resource that may have empowering and disempowering effects in relation to citizenship as lived or practised. Whether religious identities, participation and belonging provide barriers or resources for women's citizenship practices must therefore be investigated in specific, historical and socio-political contexts. (Nyhagen & Halsaa, 2016: 68)

Our analysis contributes one such investigation to the field, and highlights the necessity of querying further the ways in which religion contributes to how women learn, contest and potentially unlearn their roles as citizens.

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# Climbing the Ladder? Community Perspectives on Learning to Be a Good Citizen in Uganda

*Twine H. Bananuka, Tiina Kontinen, and Katariina Holma*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the ways in which members of a rural community in Western Uganda perceive and conceptualize diverse ways of learning to be a good citizen. It analyzes data generated by means of a tool called the ‘ladder of citizenship’, which facilitated explication of local ideas concerning good citizenship, and reflections on how one can ‘climb the ladder’, thus learning to be a better citizen. In relation to the debates on conceptualizations of citizenship in ways additional to the state-citizen relationship (e.g. Clarke et al., 2014; Lazar & Nuijten, 2013), we are particularly inspired by Kabeer’s (2005: 3) emphasis on the importance of

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exploring citizenship based on how ‘people define themselves in different contexts, how they see themselves in relation to others, and what this implies for their understanding of citizenship in the world as they know it’. Citizenship is often discussed as something that can be learned or strengthened through education. These discussions always contain an idea—although it is sometimes implicit—about the direction in which citizenship should be strengthened and the ideals underlying the notion of good citizenship which should be learned. Additionally, there are at least implicit ideas of how the learning leading to good citizenship is supposed to happen. In this chapter, we focus on local conceptualizations of how one learns good citizenship.

The chapter utilizes two theoretical ideas. First, the concept of *cultural citizenship* (Delanty, 2003)—which understands citizenship as a continuous learning process that takes place through interaction in informal settings—is used to scrutinize learning that occurs in the everyday life of a community. Second, the notion of *folk pedagogies*, introduced in the cultural approach to learning (Bruner, 1996), guides our examination of people’s own conceptualizations of learning. Folk pedagogies refer to everyday rather than academic theories concerning models of what learning is. In this chapter, the notion enables us to focus on community members’ own ideas about how one might learn to be a good citizen. Although coming from different research fields, both Delanty’s and Bruner’s theories draw on similar views of culture as an arena where meanings are continuously constructed in interaction with others. Therefore, in line with these theoretical approaches, and instead of departing from detailed academic definitions of citizenship and learning, the starting point of the chapter is to engage with the meanings of citizenship and learning articulated by community members.

Overall, this chapter seeks to answer the question: How do community members conceptualize the diverse ways in which they learn to be good citizens? Examining local ideas of good citizenship in rural communities is especially relevant in contexts where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) implement diverse initiatives to strengthen citizenship. To be feasible and sustainable, these initiatives need to build on existing conceptualizations of what good citizenship is and how it would be possible to support learning processes leading towards it. We explore the question in the context of Western Uganda, where one NGO, the Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC), has interacted with rural communities through projects which are based on the principle

that civic competences go hand in hand with economic liberation (KRC, 2017). Most likely, many ideas concerning good citizenship articulated by community members in this study reflect their interactions with the KRC. Nevertheless, our main interest is not to explore only the ideas they have learned from the NGO or evaluate the influence of its programmes, but to analyze the meanings attached to learning good citizenship in general.

In what follows, we first discuss the concepts of cultural citizenship and folk pedagogies which inform our analysis. Then we provide a brief description of the study location and the methods used, before briefly describing the notion of good citizenship that holds in the area and presenting our main findings on their conceptualizations of diverse ways of learning good citizenship. In conclusion, we discuss these ideas in the context of our two theoretical sources of inspiration—Delanty’s theory of cultural citizenship and Bruner’s theory of folk pedagogies—and reflect on the implications of our findings for local development efforts revolving around strengthening citizenship.

## 2 CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP AND FOLK PEDAGOGIES

In this section, we discuss our conceptual approach to examining learning of what is perceived as good citizenship. Our main starting point is to define citizenship as a contextual phenomenon that entails an idea of continuous learning taking place in diverse ways. We draw on the notion of cultural citizenship suggested by Gerard Delanty (2003) and the cultural approach to learning proposed by Jerome Bruner (1996). In both, culture is understood as continuous meaning-making, where ideas are constructed in interaction with others by using and transforming the available cultural resources. These notions guide our examination of local ideas of citizenship and learning processes in the particular context of the rural communities under study.

The notion of cultural citizenship (Delanty 2003; Stevenson, 2012) approaches citizenship from the point of view of socio-cultural identity. Delanty (2003) differentiates the notion of cultural citizenship from what he calls disciplinary citizenship, which encompasses formal membership in a polity, usually a state. According to him, cultural citizenship differs from both liberal and communitarian ideas; rather, he suggests a cultural arena of citizenship where individual and social learning intertwine, and where beliefs, values and culture are preserved and shaped. Moreover,



cultural citizenship is highly contextual and is shaped in spontaneous ways through coping with lifestyles and survival.

For Delanty (2003: 602), cultural citizenship ‘is a learning process’ wherein common experience, cognitive process, cultural translation and empowerment gain more salience than citizenship as formal membership and the consequent learning of rights and responsibilities accompanying it. He categorizes citizenship learning using three intertwined levels: individual biography, the cultural level and the social level (ibid.: 601). For the individual, citizenship is learned through their life history, both through interpersonal interaction and increasing self-knowledge. Cultural level learning refers to the collective learning of symbolic forms and cognitive models that provide shared interpretations of the world. Social level learning embodies cultural level learning in an institutional form, enabling social change to occur. In cultural citizenship, these learning levels intertwine in a process that Delanty (ibid.) refers to as the construction of citizenship. Here, citizenship is understood as continuously evolving and, thus, also having the potential to transform.

Drawing on Delanty’s notion of cultural citizenship, we scrutinize citizenship as a learning process taking place in the space between the individual and communities. Our starting point is that rural communities in Uganda present a context for constructing citizenship through informal learning that occurs in the course of participation and interacting with others. Additionally, the construction of citizenship taking place in a particular community is intertwined with cultural meanings, especially those articulated in the vocabularies used when citizenship is discussed, and the beliefs and values that guide ideas of what is regarded as good citizenship to which it is worth aspiring.

Departing from the notion of cultural citizenship as a learning process in which citizenship is constructed and transformed, we aim to examine how the idea of learning itself is understood by community members. Whilst there are plenty of diverse theoretical accounts of individual (Kolb, 1981) and social (Bandura, 1977) learning, less research has been done on people’s own explanations of what they consider as learning and how learning takes place. In our effort to grasp these phenomena, we draw on Bruner’s (1996) notion of folk pedagogies, which incorporates diverse explanations for learning and perceptions of the interaction between mind and action (Bruner 1996; Ilić & Bojović, 2016). Bruner (ibid.: 46) suggests that in the practice of education and learning, whether in a classroom or any other setting, there are implicit ‘folk theories’ about learning

in play. These folk pedagogies might resonate with academic learning theories, but they are everyday ideas about mind and learning. Whilst Bruner mainly discusses folk pedagogies in the teacher-learner relationship, he also connects the notion of folk pedagogies with a wider ‘cultural approach’ to the mind and learning. He discusses the cultural approach in contrast to the ‘computational’ one where mind and learning are geared around information processing. The cultural approach emphasizes that learning takes place in cultural settings that provide tools for construction of meanings (ibid.: 4). Cultural meanings play a role in how people understand the mind, learning and, further, ideal society and the ideal citizen (ibid.: 5).

According to Bruner (1996: 63), people often hold both externalist and internalist theories of learning. The former focuses on how learning can be supported from outside and the latter on how learning is based on the intentional states of learners, thus, not only referring to cognitive capabilities, but also to beliefs, wishes and emotions (Ilić & Bojović, 2016). Under these two dimensions, Bruner (1996: 53) further proposes four models of learners’ minds which can guide teaching and also illustrate a range of ideas concerning learners and learning in general. These models perceive learners as imitators, as subject to didactic exposure, as thinkers and as knowledgeable. When a learner is perceived as an *imitator*, learning is mainly seen as following the models provided by teachers and mentors, and the skills and knowledge learned are taken-for-granted and neither negotiated nor subjected to critical reflection. In a similar vein, perceiving learning as resulting from *didactic exposure* includes the idea of unquestioned knowledge being presented to learners, as in many conventional classroom situations. These ideas emphasize the external generation of learning. The models that focus on the internal dimensions of learning, according to Bruner (1996: 56–61), include perceiving learners as *thinkers* and learners as *knowledgeable*. The former category pays attention to what the learner already thinks and strives to achieve, with learning aiming to develop these ideas through discussion and interaction. The latter refers to learning where the information provided is critically assessed and may be given credit or discredited based on the knowledge the learner already has.

Inspired by the general concept of cultural citizenship as a learning process and folk pedagogies as diverse ideas concerning learning, our next step is to examine how these are demonstrated in the particular context described in what follows.

### 3 STUDY CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter draws on a study that was carried out in the communities of Kanyatete and Busaiga in Harugongo Sub-County, Kabarole District in Western Uganda. The inhabitants of the two communities are peasant farmers engaged in subsistence agriculture. In distinction from many other similar rural communities, here most people have no land and therefore rent it from a few rich landowners, which makes them vulnerable due to unstable markets and fluctuating prices for their produce. The Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC), a Ugandan development NGO, has been partnering with these communities for the last 25 years. The KRC's engagement has been in the fields of agricultural production and processing on the one hand, and civic education on the other, drawing on the philosophy that civic competence goes hand in hand with economic empowerment.

Data generation was designed with the KRC who also facilitated building close contacts with the communities. The research team decided to use the tool referred to as the 'ladder of citizenship' to facilitate community members' explications. The tool is based on the familiar image of a physical ladder used in construction and it has been previously used by Arnstein (1969) to illustrate a continuum of citizenship participation. In our study, the ladder's rungs represented a journey towards what was considered good citizenship, which is at the top of the ladder; this initiated discussion on possible ways to climb the ladder and learn to be a good citizen. Together with study participants, we drew the ladder and accompanying illustrations on any surface available, such as the floor, tables, paper or walls (see examples in Fig. 1). The ladder of citizenship was used during qualitative interviews ( $n = 37$ ), and the issues arising were further discussed in four focus-group discussions with a total of 52 individual participants.

The analysis and interpretations are supported by the first author's prolonged stay in the communities, where he participated in community meetings, farming groups, church services, Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLAs) meetings and other activities. Moreover, after initial analysis, dissemination meetings in each community were arranged, joined by major stakeholders such as the KRC, local government officials and other opinion leaders. For this chapter, the interview and discussion transcripts were analyzed thematically (Bradley et al., 2007), first identifying instances where 'good citizenship' was defined, and second, places in



**Fig. 1** Samples of field participatory discussion frames of ‘ladder of citizenship’ (Source Author’s own field photo)

which the acquisition and learning of the characteristics of perceived good citizenship were discussed. The concrete articulations of learning were further combined into five categories, which illustrate the diverse ways in which learning was conceptualized.

#### 4 LOCAL CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF LEARNING CITIZENSHIP

In this section, we present our findings on the diverse ways in which local community members conceptualize their learning of good citizenship. We begin by briefly describing the general characteristics of good citizenship as explicated in participants’ reflections on how to situate people on different rungs of the ladder of citizenship. We then offer a more detailed analysis of diverse ways of learning and acquiring what was considered good citizenship qualities, based on the analysis of discussions with participants about moving up and down the ladder of citizenship.

##### *The Characteristics of ‘good Citizenship’*

In order to grasp local conceptualizations of good how citizenship may be learned, we start with a brief description of understandings of citizenship in this particular context. In the contexts of other Ugandan rural communities, Ndidde et al. (2020) claimed that the meanings assigned

to 'citizenship' by community members mainly revolved around local membership in the community, rather than legal status or membership of the polity of the Ugandan state. This resonates with Delanty's (2003) remark that a process of citizenship construction takes place in a particular community via its common beliefs and interests, and the shared meanings used to make sense of the world.

Shared meanings are closely connected with the language and vocabularies used. In the local language or dialect, Rutooro, which was used in the interviews and other interactions, the word *omwikazi* was used to translate the English term 'citizen'. *Omwikazi* literally refers to resident or member of a community, county or country more broadly. Thus, it was used to describe community membership at different levels, and further, at the national level, where it acquires legal status. However, when the research participants discussed the ladder of citizenship, their meanings revolved mostly around local residency and good community membership, whereas citizenship as membership in the state was rarely discussed, even when prompted.

In local accounts, *omwikazi* was perceived as attaching to a person who has lived long enough in the community to be accepted, has a source of livelihood and a known address. As one of the participants explained, 'Citizenship occurs when a person stays in an area for a long time and works with people in that area in one way or another, and sleeps in their home.' In a similar vein, the characteristics of good citizenship, *obwikazi oburungi*, were also usually reflected on in relation to what was considered the behaviour of a good member of the local community. Characteristics, such as a good home, hard work and self-sustainability were central to good citizenship: 'A good citizen is one who ensures that her home is clean, and her children sleep well.' Having a stable source of income and the economic ability to 'educate one's children' were central qualities enabling one to climb the ladder. Furthermore, good relations with others as well as the ability and willingness to help others in need were seen as important. A good citizen is expected to participate in joint activities, such as cleaning community water sources and helping at burial ceremonies. Good citizenship also involves subscription and allegiance to acceptable beliefs and community values expressed in local culture and religion. Occasionally, it was also mentioned that good citizens ought to abide by government rules and regulations, as when one participant claimed, 'A good citizen in the village must have good relations with

community members, attend community meetings and listen to what the government says.’

In general, the dimensions of good citizenship were mostly connected to one’s role in the local community. How then, according to community members, is it possible to climb the ladder, and learn new ways that make one a better citizen? We identified the following categories in participants’ responses: heredity (*obuzalirwaana*), religion (*ediini*), copying and observation (*kukopa*), challenges (*ebizibu*) and education and training (*kusomesebwa*).

### *Heredity (Obuzalirwaana)*

One of the most important ways of acquiring characteristics central to good citizenship in the community members’ accounts was what we call heredity. The local term *obuzalirwaana* literally means inherited traits or character. In community members’ references to family, they seemed to stress that learning—the question that interested the researcher—is not as crucial in terms of good citizenship as what one receives or inherits from intimate family. Overall, this category emphasized the role of kin and family in the kind of citizenship one exercises, some accounts also making reference to the ‘natural’ characteristics of a person.

Heredity was seen to play an important role when someone was *not* learning what was considered good citizenship. One of the characteristics frequently mentioned was laziness, explained, for example, as follows: ‘Some people are naturally lazy and they do not want to learn, adapt to changes ...; they remain in one state of life and also associate with people of the same character.’ However, the role of family was also discussed as a source of good citizenship. Whereas some families were seen as ‘producing thieves and children that will be murderers’, others were famous for being ‘hardworking, educated and developmental people, which gains respect from people in the community’. Locating a family that could cultivate good citizenship was especially important when reflecting on whom to marry so as to avoid any inherited bad habits, which included laziness, alcoholism, bad heartedness, bitterness, rage (*obulemu*) and selfishness (*okwegondeza*). As one community elder narrated:

Children will do the exact things that their parents do ... some people are not good citizens because that is how they were born. Even the Batooro say ‘*owasweera akaguuzza*’ [it is important to inquire about a family before

marrying into it]. It is common for some homes to produce children who are beautiful and handsome on the outside but with bad hearts... Unfortunately, your son or daughter can go and marry [someone] from such a family of, say, thieves or lazy people. This means that this kind of bad character or citizenship will also enter your home and this becomes cyclic. Such families produce bad citizens.

The role of inborn characteristics or those received from family and kin played a very important role in community member's ideas on how one becomes a good citizen. Although the community members did not stress the learning dimension here, the interpretation can be made that the characteristics and habits central to good citizenship are learned through socialization within family.

### *Religion (Ediini)*

Another important category which was not always explicitly related to learning was religion, *ediini*, which is an important part of the cultural landscape of the research location. The area can be characterized as deeply religious, the dominant faiths being Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism, with a growing following of Christian revivalists of the Pentecost movement, and a small Islamic sector. Whilst religious institutions were said to play an important role as intentional educators, religion was also described merely as an inner quality of a good citizen. For example, the characteristics of a good citizen were described as gift given by God, and reflections on how God has created persons as they are were common. It was said, for example, that some people struggle but 'God created them with good hearts' and they were therefore good members of the community. In terms of climbing the ladder, 'the fear of God' was often described as being the most important thing: 'When you do not know God or religion, you cannot move forward.' Additionally, having 'God in the household' was one reason for a person to be perceived as a good member of the community.

Religion as an inner force or source of motivation also played an important role in supporting personal growth towards good citizenship. As described by a male community member, 'I stopped drinking alcohol as I concentrated on God. This helped me to stop wasting money on alcohol and start saving up to buy property and animals like hens.' The stress on religion as an inner quality central to good citizenship, and a

source of one's possibility to change and take up habits of better citizenship, reflected the highly religious nature of the local community, and cannot, thus, be bypassed when local conceptualizations of what makes one a good citizen are discussed. In general, community members hold that good citizenship is built on a good religious foundation at personal, family and societal levels.

### *Copying Through Observation and Association (Kukopa)*

The local word *kukopa* is a direct translation of 'copying' in English. This category included accounts of learning through copying, observing and watching, and benchmarking by associating and interacting with others and was perhaps the most common description of learning good citizenship offered by community members. As a male participant stated, good citizenship can be learned 'by copying, [and] befriending others especially people who are at a higher level than me and who have good manners and who like working with others'. Unwillingness to learn by imitation was also seen as an obstacle to climbing the ladder: 'There are those people who are bad citizens and still don't care to work hard because they don't have an ambitious mind set, they don't like to copy or use successful people as an example and, with this, an individual will stay in the same position without rising to better levels.'

Important arenas for learning by copying were different kinds of meetings and gatherings: village meetings, government-organized events, meetings of Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs), village saving groups and NGOs, particularly the KRC, were mentioned. It was suggested, for example, that in the meetings 'people learn a lot of unity, working together to improve the community and to respect other people'. Initiatives such as demonstration gardens were also mentioned as opportunities to learn better cultivation practices through *kukopa*. Further important spaces for interaction that facilitated learning by copying were funerals, celebrations and casual visits and gatherings in diverse households, as explained by a female community member: 'People change through experience and the things that they face in life, for example in funerals, parties and visiting other places where you see how people do things and you learn from them, and that leads you to make changes [in your own life].'

One male community member illustrated the phenomenon by citing a saying, '*enkoni eteera ori haihi*', which can be translated as 'a cane



only beats someone that gets close to it', meaning in this context that good citizenship can be learned by being around those already considered to be near the top of the ladder. Many participants referred to ideas such as 'befriending others who are at a higher level and who have good manners' and reflected how those who might have bad manners can learn by 'moving around and interacting with various people [good citizens]'. Learning through interaction was seen to enable community members to 'change and be more socially approachable', and in that way manifest good citizenship, both by helping others and, if the need arises, deserving help from others.

In summary, community members stressed that one learns through observing those who have achieved characteristics considered important for good citizenship, and by copying their ways and practices. Different kind of meetings, funerals and celebrations provide opportunities for this kind of learning.

### *Challenges (Ebizibu)*

Challenges (*ebizibu*), were stressed as an opportunity to learn good citizenship. *Ebizibu* refers to challenges and problems encountered during the life trajectory, such as illness, loss of a family member or harvesting large crop gardens. One of the most common dynamic described in terms of this kind of learning was that, in a crisis, people may realize they are being ostracized due to their previous behaviour, and seek to change their ways of participating in the community as a result. As a female community member explained, 'When a person faces a challenge and people don't come to his aid, then he will learn that it's because he doesn't support others. This will now teach him or her to begin supporting others.' In some accounts, learning from challenges was related to hardship intentionally caused by others in response to someone's bad membership qualities. This was explained by a local government leader in the following terms: 'Now, some changes come after someone is punished; some of the punishments that we have given people have helped them to change.'

Some participants also reflected on the role played by 'tough conditions' in their own life in increasing their perseverance and teaching them good citizenship. For example, when a female participant talked about her devastating childhood and her work as a house help until getting married and then working hard with her husband, she said, 'The past suffering and

hardships pushed us from [ladder] level 1 to level 4, so we can improve our standard of living.’

In relation to challenges, the expression, *okweteera omukifuba* (beating your chest) was occasionally used. This referred to self-reflection resulting in changes being made towards the desired good citizenship, as a male community member narrates:

I was still young, stubborn and influenced by peers. ... Later, I noticed I was growing older and decided to leave the bad peer groups and I became a responsible person. I started farming because there was enough land for me. That’s how I left that kind of life.

Research participants stressed that whilst it is possible not to participate in community activities during the good times, encountering challenges somehow pushes one towards becoming a better citizen, in the sense of being ready to help and support others, in order to get reciprocal help from them. Such readiness to help fellow community members in times of hardship is essential in contexts where public safety nets are nearly non-existent, and families and communities are the main sources of social protection.

### *Receiving Education and Training (Kusomesebwa)*

One source of learning discussed by many community members was learning through participation in educational events or training programmes. The category of *kusomesebwa* (education) differs from *kukopa* (copying), as it was discussed in relation to events intentionally designed to foster learning by NGOs, churches and local government officials. Participation in these was considered important in order to gain what could be labelled ‘development’: ‘If people do not attend training [sessions] offered by the government and NGOs, that will leave them with no knowledge about certain things, and people should have the will to change from old practices to modern practices so that they can be good citizens.’ Education and training provided by diverse NGOs were frequently mentioned as important opportunities for learning. In the context of our research, the KRC’s educational programmes in farming practices, saving, addressing domestic violence and citizens’ rights were all mentioned as sources of new ideas and practices that enabled people to climb the ladder as a result of gaining new livelihood practices and

knowledge of their status as a citizen. Exemplifying the latter, one female community member narrated:

From the KRC I learned that a person has rights; for instance, everyone has the right to speak when a leader comes to our area, everyone can raise their hand and suggest and discuss. I also have the right to educate my children, and have learned that the teacher should not beat my child at school.

Church was emphasized as an important space, not only for worship by also as a provider of events designed for learning purposes. One research participant reflected on the church's overall significance by saying, 'Our grandparents were pagans. You find such people have backward thinking, whilst the teaching from churches and mosques has helped people to change and become good citizens.' In current times, churches conduct education sessions for diverse sections of the community, as one female community member described: 'In the church, we divide into groups, and each group is taught different topics according to their age and category... If you have been a wife with bad manners you will learn, and by the end of the lesson you will improve.' Furthermore, specific interventions by church leaders were mentioned, such as when they 'go and teach a person who has been a witch, and he changes from a bad to a good citizen'.

Although the government has established structures responsible for community education, such as community development officers and agricultural officers, they were mentioned as a source of learning only on a few occasions; rather, public office was discussed in relation to the Local Government Council (LC1), the village government level, when it was mentioned as a source of education on what a good citizen, a member of the community, should look like. As a male local council leader observed, 'The government, through its leaders, teaches people to work and develop their homes. For example, you must have an income-generating activity, you must have a garden and domestic animals.' Ultimately, education by officials was portrayed more as giving orders to make people fulfil the criteria of good citizenship and, on occasion, punishing community members for failing to do so.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The overall aim of this chapter was to investigate the meanings of citizenship and learning as constructed in certain locations. This starting point was inspired by, on the one hand, Delanty's (2003) idea of citizenship as a continuous learning process encompassing individual, cultural and social levels, and on the other, by Bruner's (1996) notion of folk theories of learning. In what follows, our findings on local conceptualizations will be discussed through the lens of Delanty's and Bruner's theoretical ideas.

In community members' descriptions, good citizenship revolved around being a good resident of the locale and a good member of the community. This included having a good home, being hard-working and self-sustaining in terms of livelihood, being socially engaged and willing to participate in common activities and help others in need. This mainstream of the findings resonates with Delanty's notion of cultural citizenship as a continuously constructed socio-cultural identity. In some instances, what Delanty terms *disciplinary citizenship* also occurred. The role attached to local government officials of instructing people in the nature of good citizenship and punishing those who fail can be seen as a manifestation of state's disciplinary citizenship. Moreover, stressing the importance of mutual help, in addition to being a sign of communality, also demonstrates how the ideals of good citizenship as a contributing and helpful community member are closely related to the political and societal condition of the absence of the state as provider of social protection in the event of hardship.

Delanty (2003: 601) categorized learning of citizenship under three intertwined levels: individual biography, the cultural level and the social level. Our findings reflect the intertwining of sources of learning citizenship. Some categories, such as heredity and challenges, reflected individual biography, whilst others, such as copying, acknowledged learning through interaction in acquiring and potentially changing the prevalent cultural meanings attached to good citizenship.

The identified notions of learning also resonate with Bruner's suggestion that certain folk theories of learning focus on internal sources of learning, whilst others stress the external. However, the overall themes in conceptualizations of learning were that, first, they were closely tied to community values and beliefs about what a good citizen is, and second,

they reflected, in a one way or another, combinations of social interaction and personal understandings, sometimes as a result of intentional education, sometimes of what was happening in informal spaces.

Taking a closer look on Bruner's (1996) theory, some further points of contact can be identified. For example, stress on copying resonates with Bruner's idea of learners as imitators, whereby the practices, ideas and behaviour of the more respected members of the community are imitated by the rest. Learning through the education provided by NGOs or the church demonstrates Bruner's 'didactic exposure' scenario. The internal dimension was mostly reflected in the category of challenges, when the realization that one was not regarded as being a good citizen resulted in changes in attitudes and behaviour.

To conclude, the meanings attached to the notion of good citizenship by community members were mixture of cultural beliefs, government regulations, religious guidelines and ideas introduced by NGOs. Local understandings of how good citizenship is constructed and the ways of learning it, of climbing the ladder of citizenship, are important for development workers and NGOs seeking to empower citizens. Identification of local understandings of cultural citizenship and the folk theories held on ways of learning it are vital in order to embed interventions in the local context to ensure their relevance, sustainability and resonance with the local priorities.

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