

Gendered constructions of citizenship: young Kenyans' negotiations of rights discourses

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the study of citizenship by interrogating how young people in Nairobi (Chege and Arnot 2012) perceive their rights of citizenship. It builds on previous analyses of the connections between gender, education and poverty's poor urban settlements by focusing on the political dimensions of the young people's lives. The findings are based on in-depth interviews with 24 young men and women (mainly siblings aged 16–25) from 18 urban households which explored how they define their national identity and citizenship rights and their expectations of the Kenyan government. All youth felt a connection with the Kenyan nation and actively engaged with rights discourses, but secondary schooled youth demonstrated a noticeably more reflexive and challenging approach to the norms and responsibilities of citizenship. Young men focused on the public sphere, emphasising voting rights, political corruption and their role in leading community change, whilst secondary educated young women recognised the importance of 'freedoms' associated with national membership, their rights to choose within cultural traditions and the need to support their families. Gender is shown to play an important role in framing their understanding of themselves as citizens.

Introduction

Socio-historical research on the role of citizenship education and on young people's civic attitudes has grown substantially in the last few decades. Although there are a number of international comparative studies of young people's civic knowledge, competence and commitment to political life, rarely do they refer to income-poor countries.¹ Successful transitions to adulthood in a global world require, according to Lloyd (2005, 4), good mental and physical health or a stock of human and social capital, and also 'the acquisition of pro-social values and the ability to contribute to the collective well-being as citizen and community participant'. Unfortunately the strategies to universalise primary education and eliminate gender disparities in schooling are not sufficient to support such transitions (Lloyd 2005, 10). What is most likely to restrict the acquisition of such values and well-being is poverty.

In the global South, the relationship between rights and duties is not as neat as that assumed in Western societies. The obligation to act as citizens in the labour market and the capability to be productive citizens may not be possible in contexts of acute poverty. Also, the much-reduced role of governments in the South, encouraged by neo-liberal economic policies, has pushed young people to become less dependent on the state to deliver such rights (Wainaina, Arnot and Chege 2011). The new imperialism of marketisation incorporates and mutes the processes of democratisation implied by such rights. Nevertheless, in poverty contexts the concepts of human, political and social rights can provide important discursive tools for individuals and groups to fight for the betterment of their lives. Different social movements or individuals fighting poverty mediate such rights discourses to fit the peculiarities of different social contexts (Kabeer 2004, 9). Studies of youth citizenship, therefore, need to find out whether, and if so how, excluded impoverished youth 'see themselves in relation to others and what this implies for their understanding of citizenship in the world as they know it' (Kabeer 2004, 3). Without studies of how youth experience citizenship as an identity, as membership of a relational world, as a set of political and social rights and as a sense of agency, it is hard to know how the state–citizen relationship works in practice at domestic, local and national levels, or to know how the 'mechanics of exclusion' work within such complex poverty contexts (Kabeer 2004, 1).

This paper aims to fill the empirical void in the study of citizenship education described above. It focuses on how differently educated Kenyan male and female youth, living in one of the world's largest slum settlements, address issues of citizenship, their rights, and the ways that their poverty could be alleviated. As such, the study contributes another dimension to the study of what the Kenyan research team called the gender–education–poverty nexus (Chege and Arnot 2012). The voices of marginalised youth living in extreme urban poverty contribute to our understanding of the contemporary political role of formal schooling within a post-colonial context that has been influenced by nationalist agendas as well as international agendas on human rights. As such, these national and international discourses are reshaping relations between individuals and government, between communities, and between men and women, although not necessarily in ways that create social equality or justice. We demonstrate here how young people in our study celebrate their membership of the nation state and show how election violence and political corruption frustrate young men's ambitions to engage politically as voting citizens. Young women here appear isolated from the community leadership as a consequence of sexual and political violence; they focus more on the responsibilities of the good citizen and employ the construct of gender equality within the cultural/familial sphere.

We begin by locating our study of youth citizenship within contemporary understandings of citizenship as an identity, before describing our research design, methodology and the ways in which the Kenyan research team engaged with youth. Our findings are separated for analytic

purposes into the themes of the right to vote and cultural/domestic rights, whilst recognising that both have gendered dimensions.

Citizenship knowledge, identity and rights-based discourses in the public and private sphere

The relationship between schooling and citizenship knowledge, identities and values has been dominated by philosophical interpretations of what can and should be achieved in citizenship curricula and the teaching of civic virtues and values. Major empirical studies have complemented this by assessing the impact of school achievement levels in civic knowledge (see for example Youniss et al. 2002). Such studies suggest that, in developed countries, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with lower levels of achievement have less civic knowledge and less engagement in civic action. Torney-Purta et al. (2001) found, for example, that there are 'achievement gaps' in knowledge about democratic principles, levels and types of participation, and engagement in civic action that are associated with different levels of schooling. Other links between schooling and citizenship suggest that there is an educational continuum which has, at one extreme, the teaching of *minimal* notions of formal knowledge about basic rights (e.g. voting or holding a passport) and simple normative acts of obedience to, at the other extreme, the teaching of *maximal* models of civic knowledge. This maximal model includes the teaching of reflexivity, a broad range of civil competencies, membership of a shared democratic culture with its rights, responsibilities and obligations and a sense of solidarity (McLaughlin 1992). Both these approaches refer specifically and restrictively to the public sphere. Neither perspective engages with the forms of civic knowledge, virtues and values that are appropriate for the private intimate sphere or challenge the gendered constructions of liberal or neo-liberal citizenship (Arnot 2009).

An alternative approach is provided by Lister (2004), who argues that citizen rights are important cultural elements since they can act as a 'symbolic rhetorical force' (2004, 158) and a critical edge to reflect not just on people's duties as citizens but also on the responsibilities of the state to improve lives by delivering civic rights. The learning and use of a rights-based discourse in this context becomes part of the struggle of oppressed groups and their practice of resistance (Kabeer 2004). Rights-based discourse gives voice to young people's powerlessness in their struggle against their oppression revealing *de facto* the gap between the promise of human rights and the reality of deprivation, invisibility, the degradation of living environments, and the failure of society to offer chances for individual development (Kabeer 2004, 163). Thus a rights-based discourse, even if only emergent, can expose the denial of citizenship rights to young people in the public, the private and community spheres. As such, it draws not just on the languages and vocabularies of democratic citizenship but also on historical, moral and religious constructions of the 'good citizen'. Political notions of duty, moral constructs of conformity and egalitarian notions of rights are discursive resources that are often gender

differentiated. Not only can one find differentiated engagements of men and women using different citizenship discourses, but the application of these discourses to what have been commonly seen as the male public and female private spheres can lead to different gendered notions of the 'good citizen' within each sphere (Arnot 2009).

Within the economic and political spheres and within the private, domestic and intimate sphere, young people as 'citizens in the making' (Arnot 2009) find themselves living in a frustrating space characterised by 'exclusion, of non-belonging, not being heard or superficial consultation' (Lister 2004, 163). There are different economic, family and domestic transitions into adult citizenship (Hall, Williamson and Coffey 1998; Arnot et al. 2012) and gendered or racialised/ethnic experiences which shape such transitions.² These transition experiences influence the symbolic ways in which particular groups of young people, especially those at the margins of society, struggle for recognition and status. As Kennelly and Dillabough (2008, 494) argue, sociological studies of citizenship need to explore 'the cultural contingent structure, symbolic processes and cultural meanings that influence young people's national and class imaginaries of legitimate citizenship and the state' where they become the equivalent of subordinated or even 'non-citizens'. In the demographics of the national and local community, disadvantaged Canadian urban youth in their study discovered a sense of belonging, legitimacy and social positioning by employing what Pierre Bourdieu (1984) called 'classification struggles' to mark themselves out from others (Kennelly and Dillabough 2008, 494–495). Such marginalised youth search for importance, value and capability using the meanings and values that are shaped by their 'lived social and political status' as well as by the 'larger cultural narratives of democracy and citizenship' (Kennelly and Dillabough 2008, 496). Their search for identity is influenced by gendered relations both in the private construction as well as the public shaping of their lives.

This paper contributes to these sociological concerns by interrogating the gendered citizenship dispositions and identifications of young male and female Kenyans who are unlikely to have the resources or the opportunities to achieve entitlements which they had come (often through teaching about citizenship) to value. It explores how, in the context of living in considerable poverty, young male and female Kenyans with different educational experiences report and respond to their rights as citizens. Put another way, we explore the ways in which a group of these young people position themselves as gendered 'rights-owner' citizens (Lister 2004).

Working with Kiberan youth

In 2007, a cross-national research team began a year-long project researching the connections between youth, gender and citizenship.³ The study attempted to find out what young people aged between 16 and 25 felt that they had learnt about self-protection, gaining a livelihood and citizenship through formal schooling (Chege, Arnot and Wainaina 2010). The team explored

how youth described themselves, what they believed were the rights and duties of a citizen, what was a 'good citizen', what needed to be done to alleviate their poverty and give them a sense of being Kenyan. We asked about their involvement in civic participation, their expectations in terms of the Kenyan government, and their own responsibilities towards those who depended on them for support. Our research site was Hohoni (pseudonym), one of the 10 villages in Kibera, a massive urban settlement on the outskirts of Nairobi. This settlement is home to the Nubian community, alongside other ethnic communities such as the Luo, Luhya, Kikuyu and the Kamba. The structures that constitute people's residences in Hohoni village provide important indicators of their material poverty. The census data from our study of 278 households found that the majority of inhabitants lived in mud/earth-walled shanties. Approximately, 50% had earthen floors and were roofed with iron sheets. In some cases plastic coverings were used to secure the dwellings from rainwater. The community had a severe lack of sanitation facilities, running tap water, electricity and road networks. Most residents used pit latrines, only 3% had flush toilets, whilst the rest purchased the use of a toilet on a daily basis or used the '*flying toilet*'.⁴ Only 1% of the households in the sample village received piped water: the rest purchased water or depended on rainwater. Just over half of the households used electricity for lighting while the rest used kerosene lamps and improvised lamps. Approximately 20% of the population were categorised as 'students', whilst the majority of the adult population claimed not to have any employment. About 20% of the women and 17% of the men claimed to have some stable, but mainly casual, paid employment. Employed women were predominantly domestic workers and bartenders while men were domestic workers, as well as drivers and security guards.

In terms of citizenship entitlements, despite the introduction of free compulsory education in 2011, there is only one government-funded secondary school available for Kibera children. In contrast there are numerous private secondary schools. Our census revealed that out of the 83% of the population who were over six years of age (official school commencement age), 28.4% had attained a primary school certificate, 22.3% a secondary school certificate, while only 10% had post-secondary education. Nearly 61% of those with primary school certificates compared with only 41.6% of those with secondary education certificates were female. Only two women out of every eight Hohoni residents attained post-secondary certificates. The overall level of educational achievement was, therefore, strongly in favour of men.

The research team comprised five researchers (two men and three women of different ages) who often worked in pairs, and who together spoke several local languages, combined with English whenever necessary. The team worked hard to establish a partnership with the community and specifically with male and female local elders who acted as gatekeepers, mediating the researchers' presence in the community. Researchers gave as much collective ownership of the research as possible to households by involving two generations (parents and

youth) in the research. Youth appeared eager to talk when interviewed by researchers who were perceived to be 'young'. Several young men commented that 'people come here but never ask us such interesting questions about our lives'.

Eighteen households were purposively selected out of a community study so as to include youth who had different levels of formal schooling (whether public or private). Of the 12 female and 12 male participants (from six households with siblings), six female and four male youth only had primary school education (two young women had not completed this level) and six female and eight male youth had attended secondary school. Two in-depth semi-structured recorded interviews (lasting between one and three hours) were conducted with each youth, their mother and where possible their father or father-figure. Informal observations and discussions were also employed to elicit young people's understandings of citizenship. The Kenyan and UK team analysed the data using a variety of techniques that included applying atlas.ti coding, and multiple readings of untranslated and translated transcripts. Below we report what these young people said about their schooling and national membership.

Kenyan nation-building and the politics of belonging

For the poor, the concept of citizenship has long been contradictory. As Ndegwa (1998) argues, in Kenya there was conflict between 'dual and competing citizenships'; the desire on the one hand to promote a form of republican citizenship in ethnic political communities with a keen interest in ethnic preservation and, on the other, to encourage the notion of liberal citizenship which requires a unified national political community. This contradictory aim of preserving difference whilst promoting national unity is often evident during national elections and particularly amongst dispossessed youth seeking a sense of belonging.

Further, the social rights of the Kenyan population to an education were equally contradictory. Although provided by Kenyatta, the first President post-independence, free schooling was later dropped and then reinstalled in 2003. President Moi offered Free Primary Education (FPE) to bond youth to Kenya's modernising project. However, although this had the effect of raising enrolment from 5,874,776 in 2002 to 6,906,355 in 2003 (an increase of some 17.6%), there were still approximately one million children who could not attend primary school – mainly because of family poverty. In 2008, Free Secondary Education (FSE) was introduced, raising secondary enrolments from 1.18 million students in 2007 to 1.3 million in 2008, pushing the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) from 38% to 42.5% (GoK 2008). Yet while FSE relieved families of tuition fees and the purchase of teaching and learning materials, poor parents and guardians were still required to meet other school-related costs, such as school meals and their children's school uniform. Secondary school was therefore largely out of the reach of the poorest of citizens such as those in Hohoni. Young people were therefore taught about the value of schooling but also denied their civic entitlements to a full education.

Kiberan youth were likely to have come across the concept of human rights as a form of political currency. The conceptualisation of a human right, introduced through international agencies, lifted the notion of citizenship to one of personhood, outside the realm of the state. Like many African countries, Kenya had signed up to the UN Convention of Human Rights and the African Charter of the Rights of the Child (1999) and set up a Human Rights Commission (Mutua 2008). The Charter expressed clearly what rights children and young people ought to expect of their government and what responsibilities and duties children had (de Waal and Argenti 2002). By 2001, there were some 70 civil society organisations (CSOs) offering the National Civic Education Programme (NCEP), promoting *Uraia* (citizenship) including the importance of human rights, democracy, constitutionalism, as well as 'nation building' (Kanyinga and Wesselink 2002). These programmes aimed to teach young people rights-awareness and ways of engaging with this 'new political space'. Many Kenyans had apparently joined these workshops.

Young Kenyans' learning about citizenship at school was less straightforward. Not only had there been no formal political education since 2002 when Social and Ethical Education (SEE) was removed from the curriculum (see Wainaina, Arnot and Chege 2011), but schools themselves have been found to promote an undemocratic culture. The IPAR (2008), for example, observed that Kenyan school administrators were autocratic in how they managed their institutions, demonstrating an intolerance of dialogue. School pedagogies were characterised by the use of threats, verbal abuse and physical punishments (Sifuna 2000). However, those Kenyans who attended school would also come into contact with the nationalist post-independence agenda which privileged national days, anthems, flags, loyalty pledges to the state and the daily singing of the anthem. According to Avoseh (2001), the political imaginary of the modern nation state resonates with African traditions of an extended family and community in which citizens need to be 'sensitive to values such as the sacredness of human life, mutual help, generosity, cooperation, respect for older people, harmony and the preservation of the sacred' (Avoseh 2001, 483). Such collectivist identities, when transferred into a relationship with the nation state rather than an ethnic/tribal group, could allow young people living in poverty to reposition themselves as loyal and patriotic members of the country.

Nationhood and citizenship identities: young people's perspectives

It was noticeable in the interviews we conducted that having citizenship rights within the Kenyan nation seemed to be a defining element in young Kiberan's identity. Our respondents foregrounded the importance of their country of birth more than the places where their parents or fore-parents were born or originated from. The formal identification of being a Kenyan was associated with pride. Like five other primary educated youth, 20-year-old Linet, for example, argued that 'possessing an ID indicates that you are Kenyan' and was an important

citizenship symbol. Their schooling taught them about Kenyan struggles for independence, nationhood and their inclusion in the national community. For example, 19-year-old Wambui reported learning at school about the history of Kenyatta and later presidents, and the symbolism of the Kenyan flag – green for the environment, black for her skin-colour, white for peace in the country and red for the bloodshed associated with freedom struggles. Equally 22-year-old Mukhebi's pride and sense of well-being as a Kenyan was established at school through singing the anthem and pledging allegiance to the national flag. He believed, like others, that 'even the government depends on me' to do what is expected and to contribute to the growth of the country. Primary schooling also appears to have impressed upon the group a sense of duty as citizens to their country, and provided new skills which allowed them to communicate with or tolerate a diversity of people with different views from themselves.

In contrast, a fuller and richer construct of national identity appeared to have been created amongst three female and two male youth who were secondary educated. They talked about learning their citizenship rights from the school curriculum, particularly from studying history. Informally, they had also learnt about citizenship from their families/parents and by attending seminars organised by CSOs like *Haki Ya Jamii [Community Rights]* which visited their community or by listening to talks given by teachers and elders in the community during informal discussions (*barazas*). This group also tended to see birth certificates, identity cards and passports as important confirmations of their Kenyan identity. Formal schooling itself was represented as a unifying process – by subjecting all students to the same rules, learning and social environment, schools apparently made everyone feel that they were equal citizens, irrespective of ethnic origin. Thus despite their acute poverty, each educated youth could feel respected, confident and positive about their belonging to the nation. They were connected to 'like minds' in an educated relational world. Twenty-one-year-old Hana, for example, felt connected with 'other [secondary] educated people' adding: 'I am pleased when I have a certificate and you also do ... there is something that relates us'. Her Form 4 certificate made her feel 'that I am a Kenyan'.

Both the primary and secondary educated youth in our study employed a discourse of rights, although the latter were more articulate about the range of rights they deserved. The responses of primary educated young men did not go much beyond naming a person's rights to basic needs such as shelter and food. In contrast, secondary educated male youth discussed, in relative depth, their understandings of rights issues such as freedom, security and other entitlements. Some members of this group argued that, having safety and 'freedom' was the key. Kenya, they argued, was devoid of the perceived dangers and instability of countries such as Djibouti, Somalia or Burundi. Also, as 19-year-old Naema pointed out, the right to be Kenyan 'followed you everywhere' – Kenyans were 'free' in their country – whilst Asman (a 16-year-old third-year secondary school student) echoed this sense of freedom saying, 'I am free in this

country', noting that his rights 'as a human being' had not been 'violated'. This discourse of freedom included freedom of movement, speech, self-expression, 'to be dedicated' to particular activities, freedom from molestation, the rights to protection by the Kenyan government, to own property and to be treated fairly.

Over and above these unifying effects of schooling, there appeared to be differences in how these more educated young men and women represented the 'good citizen'. Primary educated youth put forward minimal normative notions of a 'good Kenyan', such as: 'I obey the rules of this country', 'obeying the rules of prominent people', 'stopping people smoking', 'confronting fighting', preventing 'something wrong happening', by helping at funerals, or helping raise fees for orphans and school dropouts. In contrast, all three secondary educated female youth referred to the need for 'good citizens' to vote, to respect age and the country, to live in peace and to obey the law, 'not being idle and not mugging others for their money'. Twenty-five-year-old Musa and Asman, like two other secondary educated male youth, described a social contract which involved more than obeying the law and 'paying taxes'; it included 'attending public meetings', promoting national unity, participating in community development initiatives such as improving the environment, and being non-intrusive toward other people. In both cases, preventing violence, being educated enough to know the 'good things about our country', helping others to be educated, being involved in youth groups, representing one's country in sport or art, or becoming a successful leader were key patriotic virtues.

Although the secondary educated group appeared to have a more reflexive awareness of the notion of such rights and duties of citizenship (closer to McLaughlin's concept of a maximal model of citizenship), the employment of such political rights appeared to be affected by the level of education of young people and by gender differences. Our research team found that, while most young men spoke critically and eagerly about the right to vote, to lead and to be heard by government, young women were cautiously distant from this sphere. We describe this gendering of the public sphere below.

Masculinity, political violence and the right to vote

The right to vote is the most fundamental of political rights that connects the individual to the state. In many Western societies, there is concern about the political disengagement of young people – because of their assumed apathy or disenchantment with political cultures and politicians (see Youniss et al. 2002; Lister 2004). In the African setting, there is concern that such disengagement of young people is expressed through the joining of violent militant groups. Whether constructed as 'vanguards' or 'rebels', African youth are often portrayed as 'the problem' (Abbink and von Kessel 2005). Although Kenyan political leaders promised a generational change of guard as a blueprint for a more accountable system of governance, following post-independence they locked youth out from positions of decision making

(Kagwanja 2005; Imoite 2007). In this context, voting signifies resistance to poverty and political exclusion (Otieno 2002).

When we started our interviews on schooling and citizenship, post-election street violence had erupted in Kibera. The results of the national election in December 2007 were challenged by the presidential candidates – the then-president, Mwai Kibaki, and Raila Odinga, the leader of the Orange Democratic Movement. Nairobi slums saw some of the worst violence, exposing young people to the fragility of democracy. Response to the post-election violence was presented in many forms. A wall painting with the slogan 'Non-violent elections: fight for Kenya not each other' (Figure 1 below) at a local administrative office in Kibera is an example of such a response. Aware of the prevailing situation, our questions about citizenship and belonging were politically apposite.

Within this volatile climate, nine of the 12 young men (whether primary or secondary educated) claimed the right to vote as one of the great privileges of citizenship symbolising their inclusion (despite their poverty) in a nation state. The primary educated young women claimed they were not interested whilst two of the five secondary educated young women could name political parties and considered the vote symbolically important. Nevertheless, as we shall see, they chose to distance themselves from this dangerous sphere. For some young men, such as primary educated Mukhebi, although not voting himself, he recognised that his vote (if used well) could help locate a leader who would genuinely bring development to the area, challenge the violence and give him 'a future'. However, the relationship of the male youth to the formal political sphere was deeply ambivalent. One primary and the eight secondary educated male youth talked about being outside the political arena of decision making, their distrust of politicians and their sense of betrayal. Stanley, Asman, Musa and Oburo, for example, referred to the volatility and dangers of politics; 21-year-old Stanley, like others, was purposively secretive about his choice of political party, whilst Asman went into detail about the role of politics in creating both understandings and misunderstandings – the latter leading to violence. He explained how he had himself been caught up in the election violence claiming that every day he had seen tear gas and neighbours fighting over minor things. He rationalised that by getting involved in violence:

You have already violated [the law], pouring of blood, if it's killing you have killed. You have done many things, you see? So they [the politicians] will not care about us, so we will have to care about ourselves for them to know our rights.

Going further, Asman argued that politics made 'you realise that you were oppressed', that some things were wrong, and that 'there are lies and there is truth'. Musa protected himself from violence by not revealing his vote, and looked for non-political movements such as the scouting movement to teach others (through, for example, puppet shows) not to engage in violence, whilst 25-year-old Oburo hoped to stand for election himself so as to ensure that something was done to help the community.

Disillusionment with politics and a sense of betrayal was captured by primary educated Mukhebi who pointed out that 'When they [politicians] fulfil their promises they give us morale to vote but when they don't fulfil, it brings it down'. Most of the secondary schooled male youth were equally aware that their vote could not easily control those Kenyan politicians who favoured their own ethnic groups by giving them funds. Such politicians were seen as either unable or unwilling to help the Hohoni community develop. The youth we interviewed were aware of the fact that voters were often bribed to vote for specific leaders which meant that those elected had no obligation to address the needs of the community as Asman commented: 'Yeah, I voted ... We needed change. Yes we needed a change but I don't see change'. Once elected, politicians often could not be reached by their members – and hence were not accountable to them. The general feeling conveyed was that educated young men distrusted government and felt betrayed by it since politicians never fulfilled their promises. Stanley expressed this sentiment clearly when he commented that, despite their patriotic sentiments, youth were 'losing faith' in their country not least because of what he termed political 'mistreatment' and young people's lack of rights:

Being Kenyan one is supposed to be a patriot. You should die for your country at whatever cost ... but there comes a time when you lose faith in your country ... to be condemned by your own government? Yes you are a Kenyan but you have been denied your rights, to be Kenyan, the government needs to make people enjoy and defend their rights. This makes some people give up and say it is better to go to another country that will put my needs first in comparison to my own country that mistreats me.

There was also some evidence in our study that male secondary educated youth were able to think of leading social reform themselves particularly in the name of their community (the so-called 'third sphere'). Some male youth represented themselves as being able to tackle their own, and their community's poverty by becoming community leaders (Chege and Arnot 2012) – perhaps because they wanted to stay and live in the community. For example, 21-year-old Eric intended to begin at the local councillor level so that he could assist Kiberans to build roads and bridges, thus improving the infrastructure and the face of his environment. Obura – older brother to Hana – described his ambitions to become a leader so he could make a difference to the Kiberan community. Using the language of rights and responsibilities he singled out the

negative school experiences he had encountered and his desire to do something about it (to be 'a fighter') by staying in the community facilitating transformation from within:

To make a difference, ... I realised, it made me not to dream to come out of Kibera ... [not] to move and live in a different place, but, to change the life of people [here].

Female political engagements: challenging gendered spheres

Young Kiberan women in our sample appeared to be aware of the notion of empowerment and women's rights, of gender change in the community, particularly in terms of the boundaries between male and female employment, and were reflexive about the implications of poverty, the lack of opportunity and the need to move forward in their thinking about gender equality as future mothers (Chege and Arnot 2012). However, none of the primary educated and only a few secondary schooled young women engaged with our questions about citizenship, politics and power. They were far more articulate when discussing gender equality, rights and their family responsibilities. In contrast to the mainly (but not exclusively) male engagement with the rights, duties and responsibilities associated with the public sphere was the distancing of young women we interviewed from this space.

The difficulty that young women faced in trying to gain entry into the formal political world and access to power has historical antecedents. The colonial legacy created a sexual dualism and political marginalisation of women that continues to be sustained today (Aubrey 2001). Despite the active role that Kenyan women played in the transition to democratisation, the patriarchal nature of the post-colonial state denied women a political voice, a chance to enter mainstream politics, or to achieve genuine bargaining power (Nasong'o and Ayot 2007, 170). Equality of political empowerment of Kenyan women has been difficult to attain:

State power in Africa remains conspicuously male power ingrained with predominantly male values, ideology and vision of the world. This male constructed machinery codifies, institutionalizes and legitimates patriarchy, a system that manifests itself not only in social and economic life but also in the law and biased political and legal statuses of women. (Nzomo 1997, quoted in Nasong'o and Ayot 2007, 170)

Consequently Kenyan women have not been able to benefit from the dissemination of knowledge about the universal principles of human rights and the advantages of their unalienable rights as human beings. Paradoxically the strengthening of political rights post-independence has been associated in recent decades with a decline in social, cultural and economic rights which would have assisted poorer women.

Nevertheless, many CSOs and NGOs such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) have actively promoted women's rights in Kenya.⁵ Gender equality is a cross-cutting

theme in the current National Civic Education Programme referred to earlier. From the point of view of young Kiberan women in our study, this contemporary discourse with its emphasis on 50:50 male:female parliamentary representation clearly had some purchase. For example, Hana, who had completed secondary school, commented:

It is important for us [women] to have equal rights ... The way it is said that women should enter parliament in a given percentage. Thirty percent, maybe for the next time ... next we will be pushing for 50%. Men ... 50 us [women] ... you start from scratch ... then you build up.

But the violent nature of Kenyan politics frightened young women who feared both physical and sexual assault. Hana spoke of politics as a 'dirty game', explaining that:

Like the other day women went up there to a [politician's] rally. They were given money. After being given that money, they were raped. So why should I wake up early in the morning, clean my house and to take a cup of tea, to go for only one hundred shillings only to come back with injuries?

Male exploitation of political power militated against young women's participation in politics. Perhaps in response, female political interest focused on using their rights in the family context and in relation to cultural traditions. Mumbi and 21-year-old Hana argued for the importance of their rights to go to school, and to choose 'only the good things' in the culture and tradition of ancestors. Their rights involved both listening to their elders, and choosing the safety of marriage (Chege and Arnot 2012).⁶ Their use of the language of rights did not exclude them as such from political engagement but rather demonstrated their commitment to a *caring form of citizenship* (Lynch, Baker and Lyons 2009). According to the respondents, caring for dependents within the family, such as parents, siblings and children, was the moral duty and goal of a citizen. What distinguished young women was the need to care for their children as well as their parents. For example, Jamila, an 18-year-old young woman who dropped out of primary school at F3, narrated:

Being the eldest I have to take care of my mother and siblings and I also have a three-year-old child. I have to struggle to take care of my child and also my sisters who are still in school, one is in Class eight ... They [her parents] are important because even when I have problems they are with me, comforting me, you see?

Today, there is considerable tension between the concept of democracy with its liberal definitions of freedom and local gender cultures which rely on female domesticity. Kenyan teachers have been found to articulate democratic values but tended to face difficulties when such values challenge local cultural practices. In Kubow's study (2007), for example, teachers found it hard to encourage girls to ask questions confidently in class in a culture where they were taught not to answer back in the home. Such female assertiveness would be inconsistent

with early marriage and where serving men was constructed as the feminine norm. Encouraging girls to challenge unequal gender power relations means asking them to challenge community practices that restrict women's freedom and education, sustain differential male and female jobs, ostracise women politicians or even forbid women to read the bible in church in front of the congregation (Kubow 2007, 321).

However, some young women we interviewed were already aware of the right to make their own decisions. For example, secondary educated Mumbi identified her intimate body rights saying:

As a Kenyan, as a girl ... I have a right to go to school, a right to be married, and also a right to love the person I want to ... I have got the right to choose whatever I want to do. I cannot be forced to follow some cultures because my parents want me to. As a girl I must not go to be circumcised because my parents follow the culture ... I am not supposed to do that because as a Kenyan we have got some communities which follow their culture but as for me I can't follow them. You can follow them if they are good ... but if they are bad they are going against my rights, I cannot follow them.

The young women in our study wanted to make responsible decisions that did not put their future lives as mothers or wives at risk. Hard work and having children that were planned for and therefore able to be looked after, were of great importance to them (Chege and Arnot 2012). In addition, getting an education to guarantee a source of livelihood and thus reduce their dependence on their husbands could also be important. Catherine, an 18-year-old, who had dropped out of secondary school at Year 10, underscored this by saying:

Let them not expect that when you get married you will depend on your husband. Let them [women] be able to support themselves in terms of earning a livelihood.

Kiberan youth and the gendered nation state

The transition of Kenyan youth living in poverty to adulthood, citizenship and well-being is affected by a number of different elements. The post-independence agenda around national unity and democracy (although still current) is undermined by undemocratic schooling processes with their authoritarianism and cautious approaches to gender cultural conventions. Similarly, the severe lack of the rights of social citizenship such as entitlements to state education, housing and health services, and the image of political corruption and a government (post-structural adjustment) appears to have greatly reduced the state's role as *chef de mission* (Kanyinga 2002) over national development. It has also affected young people's frustrations with politics. In the context of endemic poverty, it is hard to know what civic knowledge and identity should be transmitted to Kiberan youth.

Our findings suggest that, whether primary or secondary educated, Hohoni youth believe that schooling plays a number of important symbolic roles in overriding acute social exclusion, offering social status and addressing cultural difference. It offers a mythologising discourse about nationhood and citizenship that masks the acute sense of disquiet and betrayal over political corruption, violence and the lack of social rights. Our study suggests too that there is awareness of human rights and a sense of personhood which begs questions about power relations such as between government and citizens, and between men and women. Young people living in poverty develop their own strategic political responses to the messages offered to them through schooling, through civic education programmes (and most probably through access to international digital media). They weave together and make sense of their positioning outside the boundaries of Kenyan society. Whilst both sexes engage with notions of nationhood, and employ the egalitarian languages of rights and entitlements, the political language of duty, voting and accountability appears to be more accessible to young men than women, who combine the language of equal rights and moral languages of obligations, care and caring for dependents. Why this occurs is not yet clear. We need to question whether the interviews we conducted subtly encouraged such gender differentiation and to think more about what this says about the content of citizenship awareness education in NGOs and within the school curriculum. Whatever the causes of such differentiation, despite their poverty, male and female youth appear to be bonded to a national imaginary without the benefits that accrue to citizens and without sufficiently coherent integration of political discourses to challenge the gendering of the nation space.

This article encourages an analysis of the gender differences in how citizenship is perceived, received and worked on by young men and women in the contexts of poverty. Citizenship identities are not fixed; they are permanently contested, and enacted. Nationalism, liberalisation and individualisation have transmitted (through various institutions and informal settings) a range of political, moral and egalitarian discourses of citizenship to such marginalised youth. The gendering of political life has shaped which discourses young men and women employ to make sense of their lives and their demands for social change. Similarly, Ndegwa's dualities of citizenship (between ethnicity and state citizenship, and between civic republicanism and national unity) referred to earlier reinforce and are reinforced by gender cultures. Young women's struggle is focused largely on ethnic cultural traditions while male youth struggle to remain politically involved; even offering leadership. Citizenship education arguably needs to mobilise a national imaginary in which civic exclusion and political corruption are critically discussed along with recognition of female political marginalisation and the need to address gender rights in the context of ethnic cultures. The gender dimensions of Kenyan citizenship in the public political sphere and the private sphere need to be addressed directly if citizenship education is to be successful. As Odhiambo and Odhiambo (2006) argue, educating women is not sufficient – they need to be educated about their legal civic rights and to be able

to access their rights in practice, but it is also necessary to educate men about the patriarchal nature of society for women to be able to function successfully as citizens in the political sphere. Our study also suggests that if citizenship knowledge is not to be minimal, secondary education is required to achieve at the least a critical reflexive awareness.

Finally, this study illustrates different types of civic participation amongst youth even though affected by chronic poverty. Such youth have been characterised as either 'emancipatory', i.e. militant and politicised, or 'apocalyptic' – destructive and rebellious (Kagwanja 2005, 83–84).⁷ Yet Kiberan youth appear to fit into neither category. Kiberan youth urged the government to recognise their rights to a free post-schooling education, to a clean and habitable environment, to food, money and clothing, to provide employment, training, and tackle corruption for example, in the provision of funds designed to help young people set up small businesses. Without employment, the educated are not any different from those not educated. The government failed to respect young people by not listening to them. The positive outcomes would be found in raised morale, reduced youth violence and conflict with government and reduced crime rates. In the view of the majority of our sample the future of their community depended on them. Their major concern was that the violence in their community be reduced and that the government should listen to them when it comes to building the nation.

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Notes

Torney-Purta et al.'s (2001) and Torney-Purta's (2002) study of 28 democratic countries did not include Africa.

Hall, Williamson and Coffey (1998) define citizenship as an *etic* term when it is used as an external vocabulary to assess young people's successful move into the social majority, and an *emic* term when young people use the vocabulary of citizenship themselves.

The RECOUP project ran from 2005 to 2010 and was based in urban and rural settings in Kenya, Ghana, India and Pakistan. See <http://recoup.educ.cam.ac.uk/> for relevant working papers.

A flying toilet refers to the unsystematic disposal of human waste using plastic wrapping that is dumped in the neighbourhood.

Towards 50:50 men and women governing together is promoted by the Gender and Governance Programme in Kenya with numerous partners [e.g. the Education Centre for Women in Democracy (ECWD), Womankind Kenya, Kenya Women Political Causes, Young Women Leadership Institute]. The role of gender in acquiring citizenship status has become a major concern among women's organisations including the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), the Law Society of Kenya and the League of Kenya Women Voters (1992/1997) (see Wainaina, Arnot and Chege 2011).

Some of the young men we interviewed described such familial duties, and also the dependency on them of their siblings for educational support or of their mothers.

For the history of youth in democratisation see Mwangola (2007).

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