Rethinking 'Citizenship' in the Postcolony

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ABSTRACT   *This paper argues for an approach to researching citizenship and democracy that begins not from normative convictions but from everyday experiences in particular social, cultural and historical contexts. The paper starts with a consideration of the ways in which the terms 'democracy' and 'citizenship' have been used in the discourses and approaches taken within mainstream studies of citizenship and democracy, drawing attention to some of the conceptual blind spots that arise. We call for more attention to be paid to contextual understandings of the politics of everyday life, and to locating state, NGO and donor rhetorics and programmes promoting 'active citizenship' and 'participatory governance' within that politics. It is this kind of understanding, we suggest, that, by revealing the limits of the normativities embedded in these discourses, can provide a more substantive basis for rethinking citizenship from the perspectives of citizens themselves.*

The election victory of Hamas in Palestine in January 2006 brought home the contradictions and inconsistencies of the 'Western' democracy industry. While the USA continues to wage war ostensibly to promote democracy and regime change in the Middle East, Hamas' electoral triumph, itself a clear expression of 'the will of the people', was immediately denounced by the Bush administration and its Israeli counterparts. The promotion of 'democracy' clearly carries with it normative entailments that go beyond the package of liberal and liberalising prescriptions that have come to accompany it. Like democracy, citizenship is an inherently normative term, likewise the buzzwords that have come to be associated with it in today's development speak: terms like 'participation', 'accountability', 'civil society', 'social capital' and 'good governance'.

The normative imperative underlying much of what might be termed the democracy industry assumes that through interventions by donors and civil

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society actors, it is possible to export and extend these democratic models, and thereby 'deepen democracy' on a global scale. The project of transplanting the institutions of liberal democracy from First World contexts, where ever-higher levels of political apathy are hardly a testament to their success, has come to be complemented by the introduction by donors, lenders and NGOs of what has come to be known as participatory governance. Taking a range of institutional forms, from the user groups of health sector reform programmes to orchestrated participation in Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) processes to more radical democratic experiments such as Participatory Budgeting, the technologies of 'invited participation',[1] through which citizens and their representatives are lent opportunities to contribute to the shaping of plans and policies, have become an established part of development practice in most countries.

While Western donors, NGOs and policy makers extol the virtues of democratic citizenship and participation, actually existing forms of participation in many parts of the world do not conform to these idealised models. In other words, there is a glaring disjuncture between everyday political practices and the models of democracy, citizenship and participation that are exported throughout the world. This paper brings this normative approach towards understanding citizenship and participation into question. It argues that this approach tends to obscure contextual dimensions of political life, especially in the Third World, where the political cultures of states and citizens are so diverse that to speak of standardised democratic models makes little sense. Acknowledgement of the pro-poor and developmental character of the state, for all its illiberal and paternalistic nature in many contexts, is missing in much of the donor-driven discourse on citizenship and participation in the Third World. By being missing, it tends to ignore the critical role played by the state in many developing countries as the key vehicle for the provision of services and resources, albeit in settings where political life may depart from standard liberal democratic ideals and principles.

Taking its point of departure from the recognition of the polyvalence of each of these terms, and from the importance of locating these multiple meanings contextually, this paper argues for an approach to researching citizenship and democracy that begins not from normative convictions but from everyday experiences in particular social, cultural and historical contexts. The paper starts with a consideration of the ways in which the terms 'democracy' and 'citizenship' have been used in the discourses and approaches taken within mainstream studies of citizenship and democracy, drawing attention to some of the conceptual blind spots that arise. It is a critique that recognises that the authors are themselves profoundly implicated in the very discourses that they seek to critique. This means that this exercise can only but be a reflexive mode of self-critique from authors and actors located inside the discursive web that they seek to disentangle and deconstruct. It is with these limitations in mind that we hope to provide a critique that is constructive while at the same being both provocative and polemical.

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Locating the 'active citizen'

The 'active citizen' has become the privileged object of development imaginaries; citizenship has come to take its place alongside civil society, empowerment, participation and other buzzwords.[2] The assumption that underlies the reframing of citizenship in more active terms is that, through processes of participation in the pursuit of claims for rights and accountability, people will be transformed from passive recipients of services into rights-bearing 'active citizens'. As we suggest in this paper, appealing as this normative vision is, citizen engagement with the state and other authorities does not always result in the acquisition of new political identities as rights-claiming citizens. The nature of relations between people and government in political and historical contexts marked by histories of disenfranchisement, authoritarianism and clientelism may not be as amenable to such dramatic ruptures with the past as normative versions of the new citizenships created through struggle suggest. Rather, we go on to show, the engagement of publics with government may mimic and reproduce existing relationships and identities within the 'new democratic spaces' that have been opened up in recent years.

Civil society actors can play a significant role in enabling poor people to claim their rights as citizens through forms of collective action, solidaristic networks and popular education. Little attention has been paid within the mainstream political science literature, however, to elements of 'civil society' that hold little of the liberating, democracy-inducing potential that the promotion of 'citizen participation' has come to carry in development. Neera Chandhoke's brilliant exposition of the imaginaries created and sustained in the wishful literature on civil society highlights the extent to which the normative so overshadows the empirical that it comes to eclipse any sustained account of the 'uncivil' tendencies within 'civil society'.[3] This is certainly the case in many of the countries where civil society organisations have mushroomed in recent years, largely thanks to an influx of donor funding and support in pursuit of a broader democratisation agenda or in relation to improvements in service delivery. Arguments about the effects of this funding have drawn attention to the depoliticisation of civil society. Indeed, as Neera Chandhoke points out, there can be no automatic association between civil society and democratisation: civil society is always only as democratising as its members. As others have commented, ever closer funding relationships with international donors,[4] as well as the ever deepening pursuit of neoliberal contraction of the capacities of the state through outsourcing to NGO service providers, has meant that 'civil society' have increasingly become 'a residual category in which more progressive politicized elements come to be conflated with political or positively reactionary civic organizations that may have anti-democratic ideals and practices'.[5]

Civil society organisations do not automatically possess the democratising properties associated with the public sphere under liberal democracies. It is therefore necessary to take cognisance of complex contextual factors that

modify the possibilities of democratic citizenship in civil society in many countries in the global South, eg the differences in political and institutional contexts, and how these affect possibilities for citizenship and democratic engagement in civil society by marginalised groups. Such an approach would need to address at least three key normative assumptions underpinning dominant conceptions of citizenship.

The first is the idea that citizenship is primarily about active participation, and that citizens are automatically willing and ready to participate. If participation is seen, instead, as a contingent outcome of political struggle, produced through complex struggles, networks and practices of political agency, this would draw attention to forms of 'strategic non-participation' as a political strategy,[6] and to prevailing cultural patterns of compliance with social imaginaries of the paternalist state that could come to preclude the more active and politicised engagement evoked by the idea of the 'active citizen'.[7]

Second, there is a need to problematise the implicit assumption that underlies the promotion of technologies of democratic participation: that the more participation there is, the more democratic things will be, and that new democratic arenas are easily filled, once they are created, with 'new democratic citizens' whose engagement in these spaces serves to deepen democracy. Our own work has brought into question the idea that 'democratic' spaces and arenas are easily filled with democratic subjects who are embedded in deeper democratic relations.[8] Drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre our work suggests the need to explore the extent to which any newly created political spaces are etched with the traces of existing relationships of power.[9] Here a focal point for our attempts to understand the complex configurations of authority and power in new democratic institutions has been the role of representation and its associated mediating and mobilising practices. Our own work has shown that these may be as much patterned by authoritarianism, clientelism, institutionalised hierarchies and the power relations that animate everyday sociality as by the kind of open democratic deliberation envisaged by advocates of participatory governance.

Third, it is necessary to unsettle the idea that 'citizenship from below' is the same as agency for democracy. It is important to delineate between the emergence of organisations 'giving voice', and the actual processes whereby the marginalised are enabled to enter organised political life and effectively take up wide-ranging issues and causes while entering higher order (more influential) political arenas and democratic institutions. The challenge is to understand better the alternative systems or models of authority that are in play in particular political societies, how they work in practice, how and why they last, how and why they transform, and how different forms of authority get differentiated. As Fiona Wilson points out:

> Models of authority are dynamic and have differentiated effects in terms of reinforcing or undermining along multiple dimensions of inequality (as in

gender, class, ethnicity, region, caste, religion, or whatever). During long periods, a particular model of authority remains dominant, capable of reproducing itself and legitimizing itself due to a working consensus between ruled and rulers and the existence of what James Scott called 'hidden transcripts' that, while expressing opposition, do not bring down the political edifice.[10]

We need to acknowledge more explicitly the paradox in the construction of citizenship practices: the unsettling of the old ground and its markers, and the attempt to introduce a range of political practices (democratic and non-democratic) that shape the identity of new polities in the context of its contestation by emerging groups and identities. The former moment involves challenges to the hegemony of a specific pattern of power relations. The latter involves the construction of a new hegemony of power relations through alternative (democratic) acts of power, and the attempt to build a new social contract. Both moments contain traces of each other. New democratic practices (and political contracts) are not simply the representation of pre-constituted interests, but often show traces of the exclusions from which they emerged. New identities and struggles emerge from a complex web of new and old power relations, all of which are constitutive of the social and the political. New participatory spaces arising in political landscapes charac-terised by older models of authoritarian authority and popular protest give rise to forms of engagement that may unseat elements of domination and provide the space for alternative expressions of democracy. But the nature of citizen participation may as often be patterned by existing relationships rather than conforming to the more abstract democratic promise of these new institutions.

A key point flowing from the idea that alternative forms of authority profoundly affect new democratic struggles and identities is the notion that all acts of political struggle are profoundly incomplete. In this view citizenship is not about the realisation of a fully coherent and harmonious rational contract, but rather about the temporary (and never fully achieved) stabilisation of the polity around a set of participatory practices and new agreements, rooted in democratic and non-democratic contracts and rule making. The main question for democratic citizenship is not how to eliminate power, but how to constitute forms of power that are compatible with democratic and participatory practices. Instead of trying to erase the traces of power and exclusion, as some of the citizenship literature seeks to do, democratic politics requires us to bring them to the fore, to make them visible.

Coming to terms with the profoundly constitutive nature of alternative forms of political authority implies adopting a view of democratic citizenship aimed not at the eradication of alternative forms of politics and identifications, but rather at their incorporation in the context of wider transformative struggles around the polity's reconfiguration. This entails a view of democracy not as a fixed set of institutions and practices, but rather as an ongoing and unfinished process to establish hegemony

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through the incorporation of old and new elements. This is exactly what many groups in the account we give below are engaged in: establishing the political legitimacy of their claims (their democratic claims) in contexts where these are contested at the local level. 'Power' is not automatically legitimate, given the complex political environments, and groups and networks have to struggle hard to establish the grounds of their claims to legitimacy. Democracy's claims to power and legitimacy must be viewed as purely pragmatic, given the constitutive nature of power and the political.

Where much contemporary political analysis has fallen short is in relation to the alternative forms that citizen engagement may take, and in particular in relation to the blurring of boundaries between 'citizenship' and 'clientship'. As Sian Lazar argues, clientelism may be seen as in itself constitutive of a strategy to substantiate citizenship. She cites Robert Gay:

> The problem is that we have become so accustomed to thinking of clientelism as a mechanism of institutionalised control—often referred to as corporatism—or the product of 'false consciousness'—often referred to as populism—that we have failed to consider the possibility that clientelism might be embraced as a popular political strategy.[11]

In his introduction to the discussion of popular politics in *The Politics of the Governed*, Chatterjee suggests that:

> there is an inherent conflict that . . . lies at the heart of modern politics in most of the world . . . It is the opposition between the universal ideal of civil nationalism, based on individual freedoms and equal rights irrespective of distinctions of religion, race, language, or culture, and *the particular demands of cultural identity*, which call for differential treatment of particular groups on grounds of vulnerability or backwardness or historical injustice, or indeed for numerous other reasons.[12]

Chatterjee argues that, while the idea of popular sovereignty has gained widespread acceptance, the proliferation of modern state security and welfare technologies to meet these *particular demands* has created governmental bodies that administer populations but do not provide citizens with an arena for democratic deliberation. Chatterjee adds that this opposition is 'symptomatic of the transition that occurred in modern politics in the course of the twentieth century from a conception of democratic politics grounded in the idea of popular sovereignty to one in which democratic politics is shaped by governmentality'.[13]

In the next section we examine the implications of engaging with alternative forms of political authority, in particular popular forms of clientelism. In doing so, we do not seek to dismiss or deconstruct the idea of liberal or radical democratic participation and rights talk; these are ideals to which we share a normative attachment. Instead, we draw attention to the conceptual blindspots that are the consequence of selective readings of citizen

engagement through the normative lens of 'democracy' as the only form of legitimate participatory practice.

Cultures of clientelism

While donor-funded NGOs, state functionaries and politicians are often mediators of discourses on liberal democracy, rights and citizenship, their programmes often run up against well entrenched political cultures of patronage and paternalism 'from below'. These clientelistic forms of 'participation' by the popular classes tend to be under-explored in much donor-driven citizenship and participation thinking because of the normative framing of participatory discourses. Indeed, one of the most glaring absences within the mainstream democracy and citizenship literature is adequate engagement with popular forms of state and non-state clientelism and patronage, political forms that are especially pervasive in everyday political life in most developing countries. There has, rather, been a tendency to valorise forms of citizenship and participation that resonate with researchers' normative preferences, ignoring less normatively attractive vertical relations of exchange and political practice.

It would seem, from this perspective, that to be a 'real citizen' it is necessary to refrain from being a client, as if clientelism were a deficit position, a form of negative or perverse social capital. In other words, only certain forms of citizen agency are recognised within this highly normative democracy discourse. While we may share some of the democratic ideals and objectives of this normative political project, we believe that it is necessary to interrogate these normative assumptions if we are to provide an adequate empirical and analytical lens onto everyday political life in the under-developed South and beyond.

Clientelism and patronage are very much part of the political cultures in many parts of the world today. While paternalistic regimes may indeed have negative and anti-democratic consequences, to deny paternalism's political salience on the basis of normative assumptions is clearly problematic. This obscures the complex ways in which citizens straddle 'civil society' and 'state' spaces. The significance of claim making as a client is particularly pervasive in developing countries, where strategies of survival and well-being depend on the ability to establish multiple strategic relationships and become legible to a number of powerful actors, be they state functionaries, NGOs, religious and occult leaders and organisations, kinship groups, 'big men' and traditional leaders. While to outside observers these relationships may appear to produce dependency and disempowerment—the antithesis of liberal individualist conceptions of citizenship—they can also create the conditions for access to vital resources.

The relationship between 'the citizen' and 'the state' in many Third World settings seldom resembles the kinds of deliberative democratic models of citizen participation promoted by donors and NGOs. Citizens are often the 'target populations' and subjects of state-driven development and welfare programmes and policies as well as the active agents of clientelistic political

relations. Under such conditions democracy is no longer about government of, by and for the people. Instead, it becomes a politics of patronage with unwritten rules of engagement that operates outside of conventionally defined spaces of 'civil society' and the formal legal institutions of the state. Lucy Taylor argues, for Chile, that 'clientship' is 'not about democracy but about negotiated authoritarianism; that is, the power relationships between the parties are acknowledged—and even accepted—as being inherently and steeply unequal but each needs the other in order to further their cause, and as such even the subaltern dealer can wield a little power'.[14]

Paternalistic relationships, whether they are with state functionaries, NGOs, donors, tribal elders or local power brokers, allow citizen-subjects to make demands as clients of powerful patrons. Furthermore, should patrons fail to deliver, clients can exercise agency by shifting allegiance to another patron or by acting to harm or undermine the legitimacy of the patron. Patrons need clients as much as clients need patrons, and this can produce a kind of mutual dependency, and a form of accountability within these relationships. In other words, patronage regimes do not necessarily obliterate individual agency. Taylor suggests that 'like citizenship, client-ship combines a capacity to act politically with a political identity which, when fused, creates political agency'.[15] People in poor communities often shift between clientship and rights-based citizenship claims. Depending on the specific contexts, these apparently contradictory discourses are often deployed by the same actors. It is not simply the case of one form supplanting the other according to a progressive and linear narrative leading to the realisation of liberal citizenship, in terms of which clients are liberated from relations of dependency and become capable of exercising agency as sovereign individuals. And politicians often present themselves as both patrons *and* democratic representatives, and the two may mesh quite seamlessly.

The limits of 'rights' and liberal notions of citizenship highlight the need to take seriously the daily practices of 'strategic clientelism', a variation of James Scott's notion of 'weapons of the weak'.[16] People in poor neighbourhoods throughout the world often stand to lose much by abandoning patronage politics and popular mobilisation and becoming the kind of compliant participants that donor and NGO-instigated programmes and institutions seek. Paternalistic regimes may indeed work for people in ways that a more abstract, distant citizen–state relationship cannot. This is especially evident in settings where the state's capacity to deliver is severely constrained. By establishing relationships with 'big men', including state functionaries and politicians, people may be able to leverage access to state resources. Participation under conditions of clientship can be as meaningful as under conditions of citizenship: what it lacks in terms of equality may be made up by the privileged access to resources that accrue to client-citizens.

While we call for more attention to be focused on paternalistic and patrimonial politics, we are also aware of the dangers of generalising this to the entire global South. Africa is, for example, persistently represented as being plagued by endemic patrimonialism and other political irrationalities. While citizens in 'the West' are portrayed as highly sophisticated,

individualistic, increasingly cynical or depoliticised, Africans tend to be represented in the media and academic literature as 'tribal' subjects of illiberal and irrational rulers. Analyses of the 'politics of the belly' and 'kleptocratic states' have become the staple of African studies.[17] In sum, Africa has come to be seen as a place of undemocratic and illiberal politics and 'failed', 'weak', 'partial', 'criminal' and 'shadow' states. Alongside this failed-state paradigm is a burgeoning scholarly literature that peddles images of the exotic otherness of Africa in which the continent is characterised by 'uncivil' societies awash in witchcraft, everyday violence, civil wars, disease, famine, and social, economic and political collapse and disintegration. While these phenomena do indeed exist in many parts of the continent, African states and political realities are far more complex and differentiated than these sweeping generalisations suggest. Neither are these political realities unique to the African continent.

From this perspective the prognosis for liberalism looks bleak indeed, notwithstanding the eagerness of Western donors, NGOs and governments to export this political system to the Third World. The paradox of this 'new civilising mission' is that, despite its desire to modernise and democratise the 'Third World', it reproduces images of its fundamental Otherness. Yet it should be obvious that politics in Africa, and elsewhere in the developing world, has been shaped by numerous modern political traditions, including colonial indirect rule, anti-colonial nationalism and varieties of liberalism, state authoritarianism and socialism. It is only by investigating the specificities of democratic cultures and practices in particular settings that it is possible to grasp the complex relationships between the local specificities of politics and its global or universal affinities. This recognition of the thoroughly hybridised character of African political cultures also applies to the rest of the developing world.

Rethinking democratic participation and deliberation

Current decentralisation rhetoric emanating from development and donor agencies emphasises the democratising gains of bringing government 'closer to the people'. Yet there is no obvious reason to presume that, in relocating and localising government, it will be any more possible to realise the liberal democratic idea of more horizontal and accountable relationships between citizens and the state. Decentralisation may, in practice, serve to extend and further embed the logic of state paternalism and patronage. Rather than encouraging forms of liberal citizenship, it would seem that the proximity of local government to 'the people' recreates forms of dependency that more closely resemble older forms of paternalism and clientelism. If 'the people' demand the provision of services and infrastructure by central government, how are decentralisation and other democratic innovations going to alter the vertical relations of everyday political life and citizen–state interactions in many parts of the developing world?

More provocatively, what if nobody, including the Third World poor, wanted to spend their time in endless deliberation about how the limited

range of services on offer are delivered; they just want (more and better) services. Middle-class people have the luxury of exit, the empowered consumer-citizens who can purchase what the state fails to deliver to them; poor people are often obliged to spend their own time and resources participating in order to gain, as one colleague put it, 'poor services for poor people'. What does this aspiration imply for current donor preoccupations with notions of 'active citizenship' and community participation? What does this tell us about donor conceptions of the virtues of 'civil society' and 'deliberative democracy', and how does this relate to popular political action, which is often characterised by quite violent responses? For example, post-apartheid South Africa has witnessed a proliferation of street demonstrations against poor service delivery. When services are not provided, communities tend to act; this action is often direct action. These responses are seldom calls for more deliberation, but instead often involve popular protest, including burning tyres and attacks on local government councillors. These kinds of actions are not confined to the poor. In a wealthy urban enclave in the UK, one of us observed neighbours frustrated with the inaction of the council discuss tactics for direct action: none had the stomach to attend a 'consultation' or take up other invitations to participate—knowing the time and energy these would waste.

A key problem with much of the donor-driven citizenship and participation discourse is its taken-for-granted assumption that people participate, or ought to participate, in 'civil society' because of pure altruism. While this generalised understanding of virtuous citizenship may seem plausible to middle class 'civil society' actors, it is less likely to hold for poor and working class people who tend to have mixed motives for participating, ie they desperately need services and whatever other resources they can get to improve their lives. It is wishful thinking to imagine that people struggling to survive would 'participate' simply for the love and virtue of participating. As we have suggested earlier, it would seem that the idea of participatory or deliberative democracy is profoundly middle-class in its overall conception and aspiration. Much like Jürgen Habermas' conception of the bourgeois public sphere and the consensual character of 'communicative action',[18] this model of liberal democracy seeks to universalise Euro-modern middle-class moral rhetorics. Yet it is ironic that, while participatory governance programmes may be designed and promoted by well meaning middle-class people, it is often others who have to perform this participatory ideal. Meanwhile, the middle classes usually simply pick up their mobile phones, complain and get what they want because of their cultural and financial capital and political clout.

These observations, speculations and criticisms of the limits of 'rights talk' and deliberative democracy can be expanded. For instance, deliberative spaces may be counter-productive as a channel for getting services, and people may gain greater opportunities for having their demands met through direct action or through mobilising client–patron relations. This is especially the case for poor people whose opportunities to exercise 'voice' in deliberative spaces may be especially limited. Other examples of the

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disempowering consequences of deliberative spaces include spaces that may be 'empty' by virtue of a disjuncture between the performance of consensus making and the ability to actually deliver services. Deliberation here can be seen as a palliative, as a way of deflecting social energy from protest, buying compliance and buying time. In other words, we need to question the 'virtuous circle' of 'better citizens plus better consultation equals better government', an equation that assumes both state delivery and citizen equity. It is also a formula based on assumptions about the neutral and benevolent nature of state power and accountability.

Could it be that the NGO and donor participation enterprise is fundamentally a middle-class project, imagined by middle-class people who valorise deliberative democracy even though they themselves rarely need to 'participate' because they have other class-specific ways of securing services?

Acting 'like citizens'

So what does it take to activate the state and behave like a citizen? Seeing and acting like a citizen is one way of engaging the state; using client–patron relationships and networks is another. This raises the following question: why, how and under what conditions do people 'act like citizens', and does being a citizen preclude being a client, or wanting to be a patron oneself?

In the scramble for livelihoods and security, poor people tend to adopt plural strategies; they occupy multiple spaces and draw on multiple political identities, discourses and social relationships, often simultaneously. For example, they may act like citizens of the modern state in one context, and subjects of traditional authorities in another. These context-specific processes of identification and political mobilisation can be referred to as 'tactical bricolage'. Francis Nyamnjoh describes such processes by drawing on the concept of 'conviviality', a concept that questions the idea of the lone citizen's struggle for rights in relation to the state.[19] These improvisational processes do not necessarily lock people into one political discourse, subjectivity or identity, but allow them to be connected through multiple relationships. This includes ongoing processes whereby people seek to make, remake and cement relationships with those within 'the state' and 'civil society'. This often involves getting to know people who can do you a favour, establishing personal relationships with bureaucrats to 'smooth the way' and to make things possible. This is a far cry from the binary established between the impersonal character of claims by rights-bearing citizens versus the obligation-performing functionary of the patron state. Both rights ap-proaches and patron–client politics are constituted by social relationships imbued with human qualities.

What space is there in the citizenship discourse for all this complexity and the messiness of social and political realities? Or is the liberal individualist conception of citizenship and 'the lone citizen' intrinsically inadequate for the task at hand? It would seem that the concept of liberal citizenship emerges from a historically specific set of normative, as well as normalising, political

discourses and pedagogical practices. Norbert Elias has written eloquently about how the European working classes became 'citizens' through mimicking the dispositions and tastes of the bourgeoisie.[20] Similarly pedagogies of cultural citizenship in Africa have also been about creating 'respectable' women and domesticating popular rebellion through the disciplinary practices of 'community development'.[21] In Africa, unlike in Europe, the bourgeois path has not been the only route to dignity and virtue, although this path was indeed pushed and promoted by missionaries concerned with the minutiae of everyday practices, for instance table manners, etiquette, architecture, agriculture, and so on.[22]

There are, however, African sources of respect and dignity other than those associated with colonial (and neocolonial) 'civilising processes'.[23] Citizenship as a 'respectabilising process' involves creating the virtuous citizen who conforms to the European idea of the universal, liberal citizen. This citizen is cast as someone who can be disciplined into 'What is best for society'. Yet it is quite evident that shaping citizens in this way never completely erases other possibilities and practices; Africans (like others) exposed to these normalising processes may resist, circumvent, accommodate and reappropriate these 'civilising discourses; they may also create alternative practices and strategies for producing respectability and for securing access to resources.

We have argued here that the modernist project of liberal citizenship draws on an unrelentingly positive and virtuous rendition of citizenship. However, as Michel Foucault, James Scott and others have pointed out, the modernist project has also been a quest for order and social control.[24] Governmentality—with its pedagogies and practices of disciplinary power— is not always empowering for citizens, and can, under certain conditions, produce normalising forms of surveillance, subjection and control. More-over, like state technologies of governmentality, citizenship is Janus-faced; it can be about empowerment or about control and domination, depending on the specific application and context. Neither are these discourses and technologies all-powerful and all-encompassing. Instead they often have to compete with other forms of authority and governance. Political life at capitalism's peripheries tends to be structured by indeterminacy and the contingencies of survival strategies. Everyday politics in Africa, and many other parts of the world, is highly provisional and improvisational. While the state seeks to sustain political legitimacy through paternalistic relations with the popular classes, the capacity of the latter to exercise agency is often severely limited and constrained. In other words, the middle-class and popular classes have differential capacity to exercise power when making demands on the state for resources, and this shapes their respective perspectives on, and performances of, 'citizenship'.

Contrary to donor-driven programmes promoting citizen participation, what most citizens seem to want is not more consultation, but services and resources. If people do not get what they are looking for, they tend to stop bothering to attend meetings and withdraw from 'citizen engagement'. Otherwise they resort to 'non-deliberative' forms of political expression,

eg street demonstrations and protest. These forms of engagement are construed as oppositional in the literature on participatory governance—as in, for example, Fung and Wright's point that 'vigorous methods of challenging power' undermine the effectiveness of Empowered Participatory Governance.[25] The expansion of invitations to participate makes the recourse to street demonstrations something for those who are unwilling to contemplate negotiation. But a dual strategy of entering and remaining outside invited spaces may well prove the most effective political strategy. And for some social groups protest remains a far more enabling way of exercising political agency than institutionalised participation.

Examining more closely what happens when people participate brings the cultural dimensions of participation into clearer view. Institutional spaces carry traces not only of particular embedded patterns of power relations, but also forms of conduct associated with them. These may be inimical culturally to those who enter these spaces. In Brazil, South Africa and the UK we have witnessed the prevailing culture within these spaces to be that of the middle-class professionals who often dominate these spaces. The extent to which 'civil society' spaces are also spaces in which elite cultural competencies, desires and aspirations come to be played out bears closer inspection. Non-governmental organizations seek to promote cultures of conduct that are, almost by definition, different from those existing in poor communities: they seek to introduce participatory technologies, ideals of voluntarism and, often, create new and at times insular 'communities within communities', some of which may then become representatives of 'the community'. The normative ideals of democratic governance may inspire the ways in which some such organisations work, although by no means all. Conditioned by engagement in workshops and meetings, those who engage in these spaces may find institutionalised spaces for participation far less culturally unfamiliar and hostile. And yet the imperatives of survival often compel the poor to engage with politics in a far more instrumental, improvised and contingent fashion; they tend to take what they can get, whether from the chief, the warlord, the NGO or the local government; tactical improvisation rather than strategic engagement tends to shape everyday political life among the popular classes.[26]

Donor, NGO and academic advocates of 'civil society' often portray expressions of instrumental, patronage politics as inherently problematic and anti-democratic. This position often fails to take cognisance of the daily conditions of poverty and inequality that contribute towards reproducing these 'non-deliberative' tactics for survival and security. This antipathy towards political patronage also finds expression in European and North American critiques of the institutionalised hierarchies that privilege scientific and technical expertise. Yet in many developing countries citizens insist that the experts should be in control. There is often not the same popular desire for the 'democratisation of science' and citizens do not always appear to want to reshape relations of expertise. Instead they appear to want their children to be taught by competent education experts and they demand to be treated by health experts when they are sick.

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There may indeed be many areas in which it is not to the advantage of the unemployed, poor and working class people to insist upon participation. In some cases, past experiences of citizen participation can mitigate against future engagement. This can result in community members entering such spaces for other reasons, for instance to gain access to sources of personal power, prestige, cultural capital and financial resources. In some instances people take part to make and consolidate patron–client relationships that can then be deployed to facilitate access to services outside these 'participatory' arenas. Or, indeed, they may deploy these relationships to exert their rights as citizens more directly. We need to pay closer attention to these everyday political practices, which are often more about conviviality, patronage, power plays, and networking than they are about rights-bearing citizens participating in deliberative democracy.

Rethinking the limits and opportunities for 'citizen participation'

Any analysis of the limits and opportunities for participatory governance needs to start from particular places and issues on which citizens *act*, rather than with abstract notions of citizenship and participation. This requires narrating and situating stories of citizen action, and working back from these stories to explore what was going on in terms of relationships and positioning, and what understandings and analytical tools might make best sense of these forms of engagement (and whether the notion of citizenship has any place in this at all). This ethnographically informed approach contrasts starkly with the discursive domains of planners, government and civil society organisations such as NGOs, which tend to seek and produce orderly technical reports and plans that are often far removed from the messy, inchoate forms of popular politics or 'public opinion'.

Citizen-clients deploy a repertoire of tactics that makes use of multiple political discourses rather than an ordered, linear process of negotiation, deliberation and consensus seeking. Tactical engagement in state-provided spaces requires knowledge of the codes and tools of official discourse that are not easily transferable. The forms of bureaucratic state discourse used within these institutions tend to be inaccessible to people without previous experience of engagement, and those who have not yet been trained to meet the demands of disciplined engagement may be regarded as incoherent and unruly.[27] Since the poor engage most effectively in official spaces after learning the developmental language of the state and NGOs, people generally prefer their representatives to be more 'educated' so that they can master this bureaucratic language. It would seem that democracy works for elites who already speak the language of bureaucratic state power, but is less efficacious for the rank-and-file of the popular classes. For instance, those within poor communities who are good at participating in development and governance programmes are also often those who have been schooled in the ways of the modern bureaucrat state. They then become those to whom community members look to in order to make the bureaucratic state legible to them, as

they make these communities legible to the state: mediating the state discourses of citizenship, governance and development to 'the people'.

Generally elite civil society actors imagine the popular classes as 'the deserving poor'. But there are glaring contradictions between development agencies' benign images of the deserving, participating poor, and the fear of violence, disease and contagion engendered in middle-class people by actual poor people living in townships and *favelas*. Clearly, middle class valorisation of citizenship and rights talk also has its shadow side: the racialised spectre of the dangerous underclass. Following Partha Chatterjee, we have argued that, in many parts of the global South, 'civil society' can be understood as an elite, middle class enclave that seeks to normalise and 'domesticate' the popular classes. These interventions involve 'civilising' citizens by teaching them how to 'participate properly'. However, training people for citizenship may both 'domesticate' them as well as educate and empower them; there is no political inevitability or teleological trajectory to this process. In other words, we also question claims that teaching citizens the 'ways of the state', in order that they may be more compliant to the state, inevitably ends up undermining cultural autonomy, thereby disrupting their potential to exercise agency.

Our analysis thus far suggests that normative analyses of citizenship and participation tend to obscure and erase the 'unruly' dimensions of civil society. While participatory governance is praised and promoted by donors and NGOs, these same NGOs appear to be introducing new technologies and practices that may undermine—rather than facilitate—the possibilities for democratic participation 'from below'. These questions are raised in a growing literature on the 'NGOisation' of social movements.[28] The whole paraphernalia of funding introduced by donor agencies is in itself paralysing social action, as people have to spend so much time servicing all this and performing to achieve desired outputs that they have little energy to be creative, spontaneous activists. NGOs are also routinely challenged for introducing processes of individualisation and depoliticisation that undermine the possibility of collective mobilisation and promote the interests of the state and neoliberal capital. Sangeeta Kamat (2005:148) argues that NGOs are often responsible for 'normalising' a form of rights-based politics that is only acceptable within a narrowly circumscribed liberal democratic framework.[29]

Alongside rights and participation talk there is an unabashedly vanguardist vision and ideology that underpins NGO, donor and state discourses on citizenship and participation in the global South. This discourse implies that it is the role of progressive civil society to 'civilise' the state, through 'partnership' and 'participation'. Donor visions of citizenship include elements of the normalising discourses of Christianity, welfare-oriented NGOs, and international NGOs claiming to be speaking about and for 'the poor'. But which elements of civil society actually get into the spaces constituted through these donor discourses? What do 'civil society' spaces actually mean to poor people? A closer look at practice in contexts where a progressive state seeks to use new democratic spaces to promote greater civic

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engagement suggests it may be the case that 'civil society' comes to be understood as the *object* rather than as the motor of democratisation.

In the light of both the 'uncivil' tendencies of some 'civil society' groups and the extent to which state-sponsored forms of engagement produces particular kinds of civil society actors and behaviours, a number of questions arise: who is democratising whom? Who is 'civil-ising' whom, and for what purposes? Under what conditions does 'civil society' come to represent an elite, middle class enclave that, at its best, seeks to 'civilise' and domesticate the 'unruly masses' through citizen participation. When does the role of 'civil society' in normalising conduct and teaching people the language of the bureaucratic state end up dampening, rather than deepening, the potential for political agency, for protest, disruption and efficacy in getting the things people demand? When do donor and state-driven pedagogies of citizenship contribute towards teaching people to tone down their demands, present these 'nicely' and responsibly, so that they will be able to benefit from the state's largesse? What are the implications of NGOs adopting, adapting and spreading new technocratic technologies such as the use of participatory appraisals, ZOPP, log frame plans and templates, flipcharts and cards, etc? What the consequences of NGOs focusing people's energies on cards, diagrams and GANTT charts, rather than on popular mobilisation?

Provisional conclusions and provocations

Talk of 'active citizenship' and 'participation', it might be argued, is primarily a pedagogical exercise initiated by donors, NGOs and the state. Many of those who promote citizen participation and rights can be understood as 'missionaries of modernity' who seek to 'civilise' the 'unruly masses' by drawing them into procedural democracy and its normalising and virtuous effects. However, people may enlist 'democracy talk' for a variety of other purposes. Pro-democracy initiatives can also have a shadow side: for example, 'democratisation' in Russia has, perversely, created the conditions for the emergence of an authoritarian and unaccountable kleptocratic capitalist class and *mafiosa*. Other twists in the tale include the endless ways in which economic and political power has been consolidated by postcolonial elites, or what Marxists once referred to as the comprador class.

These observations resonate with Frantz Fanon's point about why we should not expect the oppressed to behave any differently from their oppressors once they are in power. They also provide cautionary tales for those who valorise democracy talk without paying close attention to the political and economic realities 'on the ground'. For instance, what happens when people do not buy into the normative frameworks encoded in these hegemonic conceptions of liberal democracy? What happens when they make use of them for violent, anti-democratic and illegal purposes? The recent post-election developments in Zimbabwe are a case in point.

Analyses of citizenship and participatory governance often wish away the messiness and contingencies of everyday political life and social relations, as if it is possible to create pristine domains in which none of these personalised

relationships or patronage networks exist and in which they no longer matter to people. These analyses also often fail to address the legacies of colonial projects, which used modernist technologies of colonial governmentality and domination of colonised populations, that have uncanny echoes in today's donor-promoted 'citizenship and participation talk'.

Rather than importing normative notions with their own culturally located histories and reading people's identifications and actions through them, there is a need for more grounded forms of enquiry that investigate how different political and historical contexts shape these expectations. It seems that there is a very real question of how to figure out if there is anything more generic about these processes, and which contextual elements are the ones that make the difference. This would help us go beyond blueprints: not by deconstructing the very idea of the blueprint, but by highlighting the things that cannot be assumed as constants. This paper is a call for more attention to be paid to contextual understandings of the politics of everyday life, and to locating state, NGO and donor rhetorics and programmes promoting 'active citizenship' and 'participatory governance' within that situated politics. It is this kind of understanding, we suggest, that, by revealing the limits of the normativities embedded in these discourses, can provide a more substantive basis for rethinking citizenship from the perspectives of citizens themselves.

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