

Section overview

Young people's voice, agency and participation 'beyond borders'

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RELOCATING 'CITIZENSHIP'

Traditional definitions of citizenship as a legal and social status rely on the exclusion of specific categories of individuals from political membership and rights. As such, the starting point for critiques of these definitions often focuses on the experiences of these groups and what they show about the practice of citizenship (Wood, 2022). In recent years, growing population flows, statelessness and mass displacement due to global challenges such as conflict and climate change have been met by increasingly authoritarian and militarised border regimes to regulate citizenship and to monitor citizens' behaviour in the interest of the 'public good' (Sassen, 2014; Choudhury, 2017; Besteman, 2020). Many scholars acknowledge the multiple facets of citizenship such as status, rights, participation and identity (Bloemraad, 2000; Bloemraad et al., 2008, Joppke, 2010). However, acknowledging these dimensions as interdependent allows a shift in focus away from the top-down relationship between the state and individuals to a more malleable understanding of citizenship that focuses on a bottom-up relationship, framing citizenship as a practice of participation and belonging (Bloemraad, 2018).

Building on this, a body of research has documented how communities of belonging and solidarity are being built among non-citizens, including migrants (Brocket, 2020; Blachnicka-Ciacek et al., 2021), internally

displaced populations (Järvi, 2021), refugees (Chopra and Dryden-Peterson, 2020) and stateless people (Belton, 2015; Tas, 2016), reconfiguring relations among citizenship, state and territory and illustrating the multiple scales and sites where citizenship is claimed, contested and enacted (Isin and Nielsen, 2008; Isin, 2012; Ataç et al., 2016). Similarly, within youth studies, research has drawn attention to the ways that the citizenship of children, adolescents and young people is constrained and their participation in social and political life at various scales is restricted due to their position in society, which is typically dictated by age and status. This places young people in a space of 'in-betweenness as they are neither fully adult nor fully child', undermining their status as citizens (Wood, 2022: 2; Lansdown, 2005; Uprichard, 2008).

The idea of citizenship as a dynamic and active practice through which individuals and groups articulate political identities is fundamental to critical studies of both young people's and non-citizens' civic practices (Yuval-Davis and Werbner, 1999; Isin and Turner, 2002; Lister, 2007; Skelton, 2013; Kallio et al., 2020). Yet, there has been very little work at the intersection of these literatures on the citizenship of children, adolescents and young people on the move, who are doubly 'non-citizens' by virtue of their age and their legal status as stateless or refugees. Indeed, outside of the Global North, there has been very little analysis of adolescent and young people's everyday, dynamic, lived experiences of citizenship, either independently or as they relate to wider political issues such as displacement. Studies from the Global South highlight adolescent and youth activism, collective action and improvisation in contexts of precarity and structural violence (Cooper et al., 2019; van Blerk et al., 2020, 2022; Wadhwa, 2021; Pincock et al., 2023). Yet, most likely for fear of reinforcing problematic representations of young men as dangerous actors, there has been little theorisation of negative actions (such as participation in armed violence) as a political expression of belonging in situations where there are almost no other options available.

Youth participation in conflict emerges in response to discontent arising from intergenerational disparities, marginalisation, lack of physical security or restricted or conditioned access to socioeconomic and political power. This imbalance creates an environment for youth mobilisation in armed conflict whereby prospects for change and empowerment outweighed the collective sacrifice (Özerdem and Podder, 2015). Youth engagement in different types of conflict has been widely debated (Özerdem and Podder, 2015; Haer, 2019), however, the emerging role of youth as proponents of change, able to trigger major shifts in the political landscapes, needs to be further examined. So too does the obscuration of gender within work on adolescent and youth participation in violence (Mazurana and McKay, 2001).

Adolescents and young people are recognised as leaders for social change, with work documenting their engagement and instigation of mass protests and political movements in both the Global North and Global South such as the Arab Spring (Jeffrey, 2013; Honwana, 2019), Strike for Climate (Bowman, 2020) and Black Lives Matter (Hendricks et al., 2022). A growing literature attends to social media as a locus of mobilisation and the amplification of marginalised voices in the Global South (Jansen 2010; Blum-Ross and Livingstone, 2016; Thant, 2021; Chilwa, 2022; Ghai et al., 2022). This reinforces the importance of relocating citizenship to incorporate the entirety of sites where citizenship is constructed (Wood, 2022). However, within these literatures too, there is limited attention to how gender (and other) inequalities shape participation in non-institutional spaces.

To this end, the introduction to this section offers three key questions to guide the reading of the pieces that follow:

- 1 How is the citizenship of adolescents and young people in the Global South constructed and/or constrained by borders?
- 2 How do gender, age and other social identities shape adolescents and young people's opportunities for voice and agency across different spaces and at different scales (locally, nationally, globally)?
- 3 What are the implications for how we understand 'citizenship'?

This framing offers a starting point for recognising the centrality of poverty and its intersections with other forms of marginalisation – especially those relating to age and gender – in young people's lived experiences and expressions of citizenship at the margins. Careful, nuanced and context-specific attention to the diversity of ways that adolescents and young people engage in 'being political' (Isin and Nielsen, 2008) can allow us to better understand the myriad interrelated, relational and structural factors that shape modes and opportunities of participation. Relational factors include the influence and affective role of peers, family, community and online networks; structural factors not only encompass social identities such as gender, age and legal status but also the wider socioeconomic and political contexts within which these are constructed.

MOBILITY, DISPLACEMENT AND STATELESSNESS

Grounded in the notion of 'lived citizenship', a wealth of literature has drawn attention to the ways that migration – whether voluntary or forced, internal or international – affects the civic identities and relationships of individuals on the move and the communities where they end up (Anthias, 2008;

Ataç et al., 2016; Maestri and Hughes, 2017). Work on forced displacement has emphasised its distinctive impact on youth transitions, as restrictions on refugees shape adolescents' and young people's imagination of their futures and the possibilities that are open to them, as well as their citizenship identities (van Blerk et al., 2022). Yet with only few exceptions (notably Jones et al., 2021; Oosterom et al., 2022; van Blerk et al., 2022), in-depth research investigating adolescents' and young people's navigation of life in displacement from a perspective that both centres their agency and conceptualises them as political actors has largely focused on young people from the Global South living in exile in the Global North and specifically on their acculturation practices as they become citizens in a new state (e.g. Carlton, 2015; Moran, 2019).

A small body of work has attended to the role of ongoing political instability and conflict in shaping young Palestinians' sense of identity, rights and belonging (Hart, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c; Fincham, 2012; Marshall, 2013). This work also emphasises the role of relationships and everyday lived experiences in shaping political identification. Indeed, for displaced and stateless populations, significant constraints on civic engagement and participation due to their legal status are inextricably linked to the material realities and conditions they face in the present. Growth in popular support for Islamist groups among encamped Palestinians in Lebanon has been argued to be influenced by the localisation of the Palestinian cause through factional politics confined to camp-based constituencies – a process enabled by the disenfranchisement and marginalisation of Palestinians in the country (Knudsen, 2005). More recently, Nilsson and Badran (2021) observed that a lack of livelihood opportunities fuels the participation of young men in camp militias, especially since the Syrian crisis and its economic impact on the job market for Palestinians. Precarity and militarisation are also mutually reinforcing; as noted in the piece in this section by 'Aous', militarised groups such as Fatah not only offer a salary and progression but also are legitimised by their ability to offer a source of authority in an environment where insecurity dominates everyday life.

It is also in the 'everyday' that social norms and exclusionary gender and age hierarchies play out, shaping the tactics available to and pursued by girls and boys in the constrained conditions of occupation and displacement (Marshall, 2013; Achilli, 2015). It is generally more acceptable socially for boys to participate in these kinds of activities as an expression of politics (Hart, 2008a; Marshall, 2015). However, much less is known about how girls find ways of 'being political' and how these experiences intersect with both gender norms and (an absence of) citizenship status. Gendered patterns are identified by Jones et al. (2022a) during the Covid-19 pandemic, which

had heterogenous effects on the well-being of Syrian refugee adolescents, stateless Palestinian adolescents and vulnerable Jordanian adolescents; girls and young women were less able to access services even though they were exposed to greater risks in terms of emotional, physical and sexual violence at home (in the overcrowded conditions of Jordan's refugee camps).

ONLINE ACTIVISM

A key site for the articulation of modern citizenship is the internet, which has enabled a shift away from political subjectivities bounded by the nation state and opened up ways of being (and being recognised as) a citizen that is informed by notions of globality and connectedness (Isin, 2012). Online spaces are often framed as a new frontier for adolescent and youth political participation. Honwana (2019) observes that the internet has been instrumental in energising and connecting young, disenfranchised populations, both through publicising events in real time (which enables mass participation) and in making communication and engagement less hierarchical and more horizontal and decentralised. Research on the Arab Spring, for example, highlights how youth movements used new social media platforms to share information and demand democratic accountability (Herrera and Mayo, 2012; Dutta, 2013; Jamali, 2014). This work also foregrounds the role of the economic context facing young people. Dutta (2013) suggests that local-level lived experiences of precarity and marginalisation were effectively connected through online communication to global counter-political processes. Tufte et al.'s (2013) edited collection on youth and media empowerment also highlights how young people and adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa have mobilised, through online spaces, on issues ranging from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights to HIV and AIDS peer education.

This shift is particularly important for adolescents and young people below the age of majority, who are marginalised within traditional definitions of citizenship. Globally, younger adolescents are not only unable to vote, but their age, economic dependence and socially marginal status have historically been used to undermine their capacity as civic actors (Wallace, 2001). Online spaces can offer access to a wide range of information sources that can help shape young people's political views (Mbure, 2013). A United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report found that around half of all 9–17-year-olds surveyed regularly looked for news online, and that digital civic engagement may be more equitable than traditional forms of civic participation (Cho, 2020). The virtual world offers a space for younger adolescents who are below the age of majority to engage with an ever-growing proliferation of ways to demonstrate support and concern for specific causes.

Research has hitherto not examined if and how adolescents and young people in the Global South bridge online and 'offline' political activities, and whether these spaces generate opportunities for leadership as well as expression of values. In this section, Mahpara et al., in their piece on adolescents' participation in activism around gender-based violence and road safety issues in Bangladesh, observe that none of the girls who reported sharing content and protesting virtually had been involved in protests in the physical world. However, they assert that online participation offers opportunities for adolescents and young people to learn skills such as critical thinking about injustice and social issues, and a different space for collective action and interpersonal care. With extant literature on the relationship between online and offline civic engagement focusing on the Global North, the context for these findings helps us to understand the significance of virtual activism in the 'everyday' as a mode of participation. Noted by both Mahpara et al. in Bangladesh and Aivazova et al. in Tanzania, adolescent girls face harassment, stigma, abuse and restrictive social norms that govern their actions in both the virtual and physical worlds and deter their participation in formal politics.

However, inequalities remain embedded within virtual political participation. Young people increasingly generate as well as share content on social media platforms but may not always have the skills, interests or knowledge about civic issues to connect politics to these activities (*ibid.*). Online participation in other forms of political discourse such as activism, citizen journalism and social movement organising in the Global South remains largely limited to those in connected capital cities and other urban centres (Jack and Suri, 2010). Urban–rural divides further reflect inequalities in terms of access to digital technologies, with young women and girls in rural areas and those on low incomes least likely to be able to engage with digital technologies (Galpaya et al., 2019). In Ethiopia, although young people in urban areas have better access to digital technologies than their rural counterparts, young girls have limited access, regardless of where they live (Presler-Marshall et al., 2020).

Work in Jordan during the Covid-19 pandemic also highlighted that girls and those from refugee communities are less likely to have the resources to access and utilise online spaces (Jones et al., 2022a, 2022b). This is also borne out in Mahpara et al.'s findings. Although youth-generated spaces for political expression and action are, in many ways, revolutionary, they can also be spaces of exploitation and commercialisation (through data capture and fraud) as well as harassment and abuse (CIVICUS, 2018). The semi-anonymity granted by online spaces also does not always mean young people feel safe to share their authentic selves, and this has gendered implications.

As Mahpara et al. note, even online, girls' internalisation of social norms about behaviour and looks and their fear of blackmail over the content they share also structure their engagement with their online communities.

CLIMATE ACTIVISM

Recently, most research on youth political agency and activism in the Global South has focused on climate activism. For the first time at COP27, children, adolescents and young people had an official space at a United Nations climate change conference, reflecting a growing consensus since COP26 that young people in the Global South are most affected by the global climate crisis and so must be supported to participate (Shymanska, 2022). Young people in the Global South are more willing and likely to act on climate change than their Northern peers, which they propose may be because the former experience its effects more directly in their everyday lives (Hickman et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2020). Some Southern contexts also have a rich history of youth collective action and protest, particularly in Latin America, where research has documented the vital role of youth politics that is increasingly decoupled from party politics in instigating social change (Alvarez et al., 1998; Cabannes, 2006; Coe and Vandegrift, 2015). This work seeks to counter a framing of climate change and disasters as problems that only adults can intervene in to 'save' children and young people from (Tanner, 2010). However, much of the extant work on young people's involvement in formal activism does not engage with analysis of gender- and age-related barriers to these forms of participation, or address less visible, 'everyday' modes of participation, resistance or engagement.

The growing body of work that explores 'young people's everyday climate crisis activism' specifically (including a Special Issue of the journal *Children's Geographies*), albeit still not foregrounding gender, is somewhat more useful in exploring the nuances of voice, agency and participation. As part of the Special Issue, Skovdal and Benwell (2021) ask how young people practise activism, what its contours are and how activism is affected by, and affects, their social relations. Subsequently, Borner et al. (2021) suggest that a new understanding of youth civic agency is needed – one that goes beyond visible and celebrated versions of youth activism and reflects the realities of young people who face structural barriers that limit both their perception of themselves as agents of change and their opportunities for participation. Envisaging a plurality of 'activisms' by young people, which unfold in diverse ways, offers space for the very different ways in which young people's experiences of belonging, acting and feeling in relation to everyday issues that affect them may vary, change and be contradictory (Kallio et al., 2015). It also allows

us to explore how young people exercise agency in relation to everyday concerns within different sociological spheres; for example, in the context of climate change, the public emergencies of resource depletion and food scarcity or worsened infrastructure unfold in different ways and with different effects for young people.

The increased focus on people's everyday realities has also led to the development of a concept of citizenship that is situated in relation to everyday spaces, 'from the town hall to the ghetto' (Yarwood, 2016: 467). With its emphasis on the pluralistic forms of civic engagement that adolescents and young people practice in their everyday lives, and explicitly encompassing radical, subversive and less intentional ways of 'being political' (Isin and Nielsen, 2008; Kallio et al., 2020), the concept of 'lived citizenship' can provide a framework for situating adolescents' and young people's involvement in counter-politics. In the piece by 'Aous', cultivated Palestinian nationalism and historic socioeconomic marginalisation provide fertile ground for Fatah, the Palestinian liberation movement, to recruit young men as camp security and military officers. 'Aous' does not see his involvement with Fatah as 'political' in the generalised sense; nonetheless, he describes participating in meetings to decide military tactics, recruiting friends and siblings, and engaging in discussions with other young people on political matters. These activities constitute important forms of situated and intersubjective political agency that are informed by the geographical and spatial context of the camp.

However, the social inequalities that structure 'everyday' participation by young people in the Global South still require more attention. Work by Prendergast et al. (2021) on young people's participation in climate activism also finds that biographical and structural 'availability' (e.g. having the personal freedom and networks necessary to get involved) shapes participation, as does their level of political engagement. Although research has suggested that education, gender norms and time shape participation (Martyn and Dimitra, 2019), Prendergast et al. (2021) find that being part of an organisation and already having civic skills were the strongest determinants of young people's participation in climate strikes in cities globally. The piece by Aivazova et al. shows how norms about the role and voice of young people prevent their participation, but so do the failure of organisations to account for their need to balance their political activities with education and family responsibilities. This is echoed by young people involved in COP26; although the event was meant to be inclusive, practical hurdles such as access to badges and visas and lack of funds prevented some young people from poorer backgrounds from participating (Gasparri et al., 2022). However, the authors also draw attention to the reality that the economic activities of young people in the

Global South are sometimes also in conflict with climate activism. These dynamics underline the need for a lens on young people's activism that recognises the ways that multiscale inequalities lead not only to climate change having the sharpest impact on the most marginalised groups but also constrain their participation in fora to devise solutions.

WHAT NEXT FOR CONCEPTUALISING CITIZENSHIP 'BEYOND BORDERS'?

The different spaces for participation that are documented in this introduction and across the pieces in this section fundamentally challenge the idea of political participation and civic engagement as being about a relationship between a recognised citizen and the state. The case studies in this section of the book show how people transcend this relationship to surpass the state and exercise voice and agency on global issues. They show how people establish belonging, identity or future security through both destructive and constructive forms of political expression and civic engagement, situating the state and institutional politics as antagonistic, irrelevant or a barrier to these goals.

A common theme across the contributions in this section is the lack of options and opportunities for voice and agency within borders by young non-citizens, reflecting wider literature on the premise of citizenship within hegemonic processes of exclusion and inclusion. Participation opportunities and experiences across spaces are also shaped by material factors, often connected to legal status. In all case studies, individuals from more privileged backgrounds are seen to be more able to access global fora and online spaces, whereas those from poorer or more marginalised groups have fewer options and opportunities to exercise voice and agency. These dynamics intersect with gender and age, and other factors highlighted by some of the pieces here, including sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity and religion. This also means it is necessary to avoid romanticising adolescent and youth participation and to unpack the inequalities that remain embedded within it.

As suggested by Skovdal and Benwell (2021), there is a need for a new understanding of youth civic agency that goes beyond visible and celebrated versions of youth activism and reflects the realities of young people who face structural barriers that limit both their perception of themselves as agents of change and their opportunities for participation. Envisaging a plurality of 'activisms' by young people, which unfold in diverse ways, offers space for the ways that young people's experiences of belonging, acting and feeling in relation to the everyday issues that affect them may vary, change and be contradictory (Kallio et al., 2015). This also attends to the role of community

BOX 24.1 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- To what extent has increased access to technology expanded adolescent and young people's voice and agency in the Global South? What are some of the advantages and potential pitfalls?
- What difference do you think the length of time in displacement or statelessness makes to adolescent and young people's political participation?
- In what ways does displacement further constrain the agency of certain groups of adolescents and young people (e.g. girls, adolescents and young people with disabilities, adolescents and young people from poorer communities)?
- This section has grouped together case studies on online and global participation with case studies on participation by refugees and stateless young people. What are some similarities and differences between these expressions of citizenship?
- How do adolescents and young people navigate systems of exclusion and inclusion to exercise voice and agency?

and interpersonal relationships and networks in shaping political orientations and opportunities for adolescents and young people.

A focus on 'lived citizenship' also allows us to explore how young people exercise agency in relation to everyday concerns within different sociological spheres; for example, in the context of climate change, the public emergencies of resource depletion and food scarcity or worsened infrastructure. These issues unfold in different ways and with different effects at the household or community level for different young people. This also allows a more thorough and nuanced observation of how the intersections of legal status, gender, age and location play out. As argued by Walker (2017), young people's agency and everyday activism must be located within these relationships because they are key sources of support, knowledge and motivation – or indeed the reverse.

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