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Comparative Education
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cced20

Youth citizenship and the politics of belonging: introducing contexts, voices, imaginaries

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Available online: 09 Feb 2012

To cite this article: Madeleine Arnot & Sharlene Swartz (2012): Youth citizenship and the politics of belonging: introducing contexts, voices, imaginaries, Comparative Education, 48:1, 1-10

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2011.637759

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Comparative Education
Vol. 48, No. 1, February 2012, 1–10

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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EDITORIAL

Youth citizenship and the politics of belonging: introducing contexts, voices, imaginaries

Over the past 10 years, citizenship has come in for a lot of attention in the academic sphere. Those in political studies, development studies and comparative education have been particularly interested in investigating and understanding its importance and role in nation building, in building social cohesion and democratic citizenship. Contemporary occurrences, such as the recent Arab Spring (Zakaria 2011) and UK riots in 2011 (*The Guardian* 2011), also encourage us to consider young people's contemporary social movements, activism, their sense of belonging and their new understandings of citizenship.

We also know that we live in an ever growing young world. According to the United Nations, there is now a record 1.3 billion youth aged between 12 and 24 in the world – many of whom (130 million globally) cannot read or write. Child and adolescent cohorts make up between 40 and 60% of the total population in South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where there is increasing talk of a 'demographic dividend' (Bloom, Canning and Sevilla 2003; Lundberg and Lam 2007). This youth bulge has the potential for an acceleration in the rate of economic growth due to the fact that young people are more numerous, better educated and healthier (with lower rates of fertility) than at any other time in history. However, scholars argue that there is a limited window of opportunity for eliminating poverty. While some laud the presence of the youth bulge, recent commentators have shown how such phenomenon frequently foment conflict and how young people themselves have provided the groundswell for sea change in many cases (Urdal 2011).

The *Growing Up Global* study (Lloyd 2005) argues that youth are the most vulnerable to poverty – they are in a limbo between childhood and adulthood. What happens in this period, affects their lives in ways that often seem to be irreversible. Youth, especially those who are from the poorest families, are most likely to experience violence, little or low income, to be homeless, to face dangerous diseases such as AIDS, to be outside formal institutions (even education), to be unemployed, to be the target of criminal activity and drug cultures, to have little participation in civic and political life and are less likely to vote. Young people also face considerable discrimination in the transition to economic independence. Even though many might have the right to vote, nevertheless they make up half of the total number of the world's unemployed and are employed often in low skilled, casual and often dangerous work. Many are involved in child labour or as carers of their family members (parents, siblings, relatives and children).

Globally, youth are being called upon to help carry the burden of forging a political or 'civic order that must be attuned as much to the evolving future whilst sustaining and adapting the past' (Youniss et al. 2002, 123). This political order of the new century is currently framed by the two structuring forces of democracy and capitalism, both of

ISSN 0305-0068 print/ISSN 1360-0486 online
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http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2011.637759
http://www.tandfonline.com

which have focused attention on the civic competence of youth. On the one hand, young people are expected to acquire some sort of knowledge, capability and awareness of their civic responsibilities and rights so that they can actively promote democratic principles (Youniss et al. 2002, 123). The United Nations General Assembly in 2010 proclaimed that it was 'convinced that young people should be encouraged to devote their energy, enthusiasm and creativity to economic, social and cultural development and the promotion of mutual understanding' (UN 2010). On the other hand, in the new world order, youth are being called upon to become active stakeholders (see World Bank 2006) in a system that requires a mixture of consumer activism campaigning for good governance, challenging market or government failings as well as promoting world peace:

> Youth citizenship is crucial for development outcomes. The youth experience of citizenship is formative and has lasting effects on the extent and kind of political participation throughout life. Citizenship affects development outcomes through three channels: by enhancing the human and social capital of individuals, by promoting government accountability for basic service delivery, and by enhancing the overall climate for investment and private decision-making. (World Bank 2006, 161)

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The role of schooling within these local and global agendas is therefore necessarily complex. Schools can model good citizenship and teach civic knowledge and orderly values; they can encourage young people into active engagement in their communities, families and in politics itself. However analyses of the contributions which schooling makes to the transmission of such citizenship knowledge, identities and the promotion of particular values have been shaped predominantly by philosophical interpretations of what should be achieved in citizenship curricula (see, for example, McLaughlin 1992; Keating et al. 2010). Here the emphasis is upon normative democratic values; attention is rarely given to the controversiality and the political framing of civic virtues and values by unequal power relations and social inequalities in relation to education. The use of citizenship education as a political strategy to unite populations characterised by social inequality and division, or to promote particular gendered power relations, is rarely addressed in such writing. Indeed even the inequalities of access to education and formal schooling itself are often neglected by such proponents of citizenship education, even though these are outcomes of unequal citizenship. There is some evidence that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with lower levels of achievement are likely to have less civic knowledge and engagement in civic action even in developed countries (Youniss et al. 2002). On the whole though, this link between social class, ethnicity and gender, and citizenship knowledge and the shaping of citizenship identities has been seriously neglected.

Yet in many societies not all youth attend school and therefore do not have access to such political education. Undereducated youth are positioned outside the 'citizen space' where poverty and marginalisation contribute to their exclusion from civic entitlements and democratic participation. Rather than being the focus of research, the existence of a large pool of such undereducated and underemployed 'lumpen' youth is represented as potentially apathetic or disengaged and as weakening the foundations of stable democratic societies (cf. Youniss et al. 2002, 136). The unequal gendered and social transitions and civic conditions under which young people attempt to build their citizenship, trying often but not always succeeding in using the school system to help them achieve their entitlements, are not well understood.

In contrast, the starting point for recent sociological studies has not been the citizenship education curriculum (arbitrary and erratically taught as it is in schools, often by undertrained teachers) but rather the experience of young people themselves. Here young people are regarded as 'citizens in the making' living in frustrating spaces of 'exclusion, of non-belonging, of not being heard or of superficial consultation' (Weller 2007, 163). Rather than locate young people's citizenship narrative within the national project, Kennelly and Dillabough (2008, 494), for example, explored the ways in which young people living in a Canadian city mobilise citizenship. They offer a sociological analysis of '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 equivalent of subordinated or even 'non-citizens'.

As we can see from this Special Issue, such studies of youth as citizens are nationally located – nevertheless their findings resonate across national boundaries and specificities. Key theoretical, methodological and empirical themes indicate the need for even more sustained engagement with the variable concept of youth citizenship. The observations of, and insights about, young people's educational experiences and citizenship practice indicate the need to consider critically and in depth the political not just the economic role and impact of formal schooling. Education, whilst being closely associated with the provision of opportunities, choices and freedoms, is integral to the hierarchical structuring of diverse populations of citizens and 'non-citizens' (Benhabib 1992) within national borders. Schools, particularly post-independence or in the context of nation building, are challenged to create a sense of belonging and entitlement, a common identity and patriotic project 'in the name of the nation'. These unifying educational goals are critical in societies that have experienced civil war, military occupation, mass immigration of refugees and displaced people or social conflict. Schooling therefore carries much more than the task of preparing young people for the workforce and 'investing in talent' – it has pressing duties which are to ensure that those who are least likely to benefit from society remain transfixed by a common national identity, with a common history. As Durkheim (1973) argued, schooling has to create a *conscience collective* to legitimate and reinforce social solidarity, maintain social rules and aid young people in fulfilling social roles. Education provides the mechanism for connecting disparate groups to such a collective conscience.

In many societies, however, individuals and groups have strong loyalties to their own communities in which they have a role and a contribution to make, and a set of relationships that they can draw upon when in need. These civic identities are often outside the nation state being located within, for example, ethnic or family structures. Mamdani's (1996) analysis of the division between the community-based 'subject' and the 'citizen' defined in relation to the state is relevant here. This separation generates particular conflicts in the context of party loyalties and election battles, and the allocation of resources. Yet these conflicting tiered loyalties and political identities of contemporary youth are rarely researched by educationalists. We know little of how the tensions, particularly between rural and urban cultures and religious communities, play out in the context of young people's experience of citizenship education, whatever its form.

More attention could also be paid empirically to the connections between gender and citizenship identities. Gender inequalities within education are a matter of international concern. Since the 1960s, Western European, North American and Australasian feminist political theorists and educationalists have grappled with the gender

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limitations imposed by liberal democratic theory. The works of Carole Pateman (1988), Seyla Benhabib (1992) and Ruth Lister (1997) amongst many others have challenged the gender-bounded public and private spheres, the consequences of promoting a 'civic brotherhood', a patriarchal dominance over the definitions of what constitutes 'the political', the gendered functionings of political life and the marginalisation of women as second class citizens (Arnot 2009; Unterhalter 2006). Formal education has been, and can still be found to be, controlled by men thus distancing young women from reforming political projects even though women internationally have played such a significant role in political liberation movements. Within theocratic societies, what constitutes the national hero and patriot, the 'good citizen' and the defining of civic virtues becomes quite significant in defining gender relations.

Although citizenship education curricula (whatever the subject is called) tend not to be used as vocational training grounds, nor career advice, in effect they position young people as future contributors to the public sphere. The separation of schooling as an economic project and the family and community as a caring project becomes aggravated within neo-liberalism at the same time as the teaching of human rights raises expectations about the range of citizenship entitlements from governments. In the background, therefore, is the question about the role of government in mediating the difficult lives that young people have, particularly those living in acute poverty. Their transitions to adulthood are influenced by the massive population growth, by failing economies with severe losses of white collar, service sector employment, the withdrawal of state welfare programmes and entitlements to welfare support, environmental degradation through over-exploitation of the national resources and natural disasters, and through accelerating urbanisation processes. Before they can experience the advantages of citizenship, many young people, have to negotiate the structural violence associated with everyday living in poverty. Many of our contributors explore the civic experiences and identities of youth for whom global change has not necessarily brought social, economic or political rights. These are contexts where political rights appear to be validated at a time when, with increasing marketisation of society, social and economic rights are being lost.

Shifts in the position of youth can be found to have affected those living in income rich countries as well as in developing countries. The effect of economic and cultural globalisation has been to reshape the progression of youth to adulthood. Under pressure from forced global migrations, these processes have framed a new politics of belonging in which nation states redefine the notion of who can belong, who is defined as a citizen and who has educational entitlements and opportunities (Yuval-Davis 2006). For some, the processes of social change create new, potentially aggravated means of exclusion from mainstream society.

Youth voice, youth resistance and citizenship

Educational research internationally is only just beginning to address the power of youth citizenship empirically as part of the study of citizenship education. In the UK, there is increasing interest in understanding how disadvantaged youth can be encouraged to participate actively in the polity. The Commission on Youth Citizenship, for example, has taken up this cause.[1] At the school level, international research has focused on the potential of youth voice research to improve learning (Nieto 1994; Arnot et al. 2004; Ruddock and Flutter 2004). Within development contexts, youth voice is increasingly used to challenge the subjugation of indigenous cultures (see,

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for example Zeldin 2004; Honwana and de Boeck 2005; Kirshner, O'Donoghue and McLaughlin 2005; Swartz and Bhana 2009). Research presented in this Special Issue offers opportunities to hear the voices of young people within educational institutions and in poor communities, in refugee camps, and living on the street. Various contributors examine the ways male and female, as well as exiles, migrant and nationally-identified youth talk about their lives – their positionalities, engagements, identifications and belongings. Interpreting the symbolic meanings ascribed to citizenship by such youth (whether in their past or present) deepens the theoretical and methodological frames of reference for the educational study of citizenship. The Special Issue offers readers the opportunity to consider how, in different social and cultural contexts, researchers can tap the nuances of meaning and representation of young people themselves, and most importantly where, even in micro-moments and scenarios, young people define their own autonomy, spheres of agency and types of action.

The articles published here suggest that eliciting youth voice has much to offer in terms of moving forward the study of citizenship and education, away from normative goals for its educational processes and practices, to identify the contradictions within a range of state-led political education projects. A number of contributors have successfully identified the micro-processes associated with social change. The studies of urban young people suggest that they are particularly affected by shifting contemporary political agendas and discourses. According to Holston and Appadurai, cities catalyse processes which 'expand and erode the rules, meanings and practices of citizenship … Like nothing else, the modern urban public signifies both the defamiliarising enormity of national citizenship and the exhilaration of its liberties' (1995, 188). Urban citizens with their 'concentrations of the nonlocal, the strange, the mixed, and the public' engage most palpably with the 'dramas' of citizenship (1995, 200). When urban identities are conflated with territory, race, religion, class, culture and gender, they produce political reactions that are not always progressive. Such dramas have been particularly associated with African urban youth who are described as being at high risk of living in poverty, of being unemployed, of being infected with HIV/AIDS (UN 2007; UN-HABITAT 2007) and of being drawn into 'the very urban-based cultures of violence, crime and political radicalism that disenfranchised urban youngsters appear to be particularly prone to' (UN-Habitat 2008, 25).

Burgess (2005) points out in relation to Africa, that youth are directly affected by considerable social transformation, experiencing globalisation, individualisation, increases in rural/urban poverty and aggravated inequality, the rise of patriotic – or ethnically-based – political movements and the marginalisation of traditional communities. For some there are hard choices between becoming 'vanguards' of social reform or 'vandals' – the criminal element in society (Abbink and van Kessel 2005). As citizens, they (particularly young men) can be confronted often with encouragement to join radical nationalist, militarist movements in the name of political goals. The value of comparative research on the construction of the young citizen is that the reader can consider the conditions under which the state, the community or a religious movement intervenes in the creation of a new national imaginary promoting new allegiances, and identifications at a time when young people are also encouraged to be self-sufficient and in charge of their own lives. These discursive practices are not necessarily easy to research but they suggest the importance of empirical investigation of the relationship between young people's political identities and mainstream economic discourses and agendas.

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The politics of belonging

Young citizens' constructions of their subjectivity (c.f. Arnot and Dillabough 2000) are shown in the various contributions to this Special Issue to be critical to the 'politics of belonging'. As Yuval-Davis (2006) points out, in conditions of increasing diversity, we have to recognise the emergence of the notion of belonging as politically constructed. Belongingness is shaped by social location, identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political values. It is here that legal definitions of nationality and birthright come into play. In this context, this Special Issue explores the politics of belonging from the perspective of young people themselves.

Here citizenship is understood in the broadest possible way – not just as a status, but also as having cultural and emotional aspects. Formal equality as a concept has little meaning, like Education for All (UNESCO 2009), if individuals do not feel part of society, do not feel they have a right to education, or that they can ever fully participate in it. For this project to be achieved, the most important educational outcome is the inclusion of all citizens economically, politically, culturally and personally in the sense of belonging. New ways of thinking about young people's schooling focuses more on their identities and how they are positioned within the politics of belonging shaped by national governments and community cultures. Sadly the introduction of free primary education or the opportunity to attend secondary schools can confirm young people's status as marginal or outside the social frame. The empirical studies represented here throw light on what Yuval-Davis (2006) and others describe as the search for belonging through schooling.

In this Special Issue we offer a series of papers that achieve three main aims. First, they provide up to date engagements with a range of social theory – from Bourdieu's concept of social capital, Butler's theory of gender performativity, and Brown's notion of wounded attachments, to Lister's notion of rights, and Bourdieu and Waquant's concept of structural and symbolic violence.

Secondly, particular papers critically interrogate the role of schooling in creating citizens, and ask how or whether schooling contributes towards the making of citizens who can address global agendas around human rights, individual attainment and choice, tolerance and global peace, community improvement and self-help. Although not comprehensive in scope, since we did not have the space to include, for example, textual analyses of citizenship materials and teachers' engagements with citizenship agendas, we have nevertheless aimed to offer opportunities to readers of *Comparative Education* to consider the sorts of strategic coping strategies and reinterpretations of civic messages, or how anger, resistance and disengagement put youth in a difficult position.

Thirdly, we offer examples of the state of research on citizenship identities and education, and place these different theoretical perspectives in direct conversation with contemporary citizenship scholars. In doing so we aim to show how young people's citizenship learning can be understood in relation to new themes of *citizenship and vulnerability*; attempts to create or transform *patriotic national imaginaries* through specific practices of citizenship; and, empirical studies of *citizenship education in global contexts of exile and conflict*.

The first three papers tackle in different ways the relationship between vulnerabilities and citizenship. Certain youth are classified as 'vulnerable' by state agencies which increases their levels of surveillance and expectation. In Julie McLeod's article, young Australians' actual and constructed vulnerability becomes the lens through which citizenship identity, provision and practice can be and is understood. Such vulnerability in

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citizens implicates young people in struggles for belonging, often expressing itself in antisocial behaviour or violent protest. Local governments' attempts to address issues of youth vulnerability result in youth and community policies that McLeod describes as 'dividing practices' between virtuous and vulnerable citizens, instead of inviting compassionate dispositions and openness to difference.

Real vulnerability is shown in Sharlene Swartz, James Hamilton Harding and Ariane De Lannoy's analysis of young people's attempts to carve out agency and self-protection in the violent world of the township. Negotiating 'freedoms', South African township youth are shown to adopt alternative means of belonging, such as *ikasi style* – popular but antisocial gang culture. Here young citizens face the 'wounds' of Apartheid and the structural violence of poverty and state segregation, but also the chance to dream as citizens of better lives. Citizenship is associated with a 'politics of hope' that is often based upon the denial of unequal conditions and violent marginalisations. Georgina Oduro's study of the sexual identities, practices and dangers of Ghanaian street youth adds to this analysis by highlighting the almost irrelevant place of sexual/reproductive citizenship in the context of male sexual violation and sexual control of women. Yet in each case, although surveilled, disciplined or even left unprotected, young people are shown to have agentic notions of independence.

In the two papers that follow, the focus is on government attempts to create or transform national loyalty and exploit patriotism through specific practices of citizenship. In Tanja Müller's paper, for example, an important account is told of an educational and citizenship experiment as part of a socialist collaboration between Mozambique and East Germany during the Cold War. Roozbeh Shirazi's article, in contrast, offers an intimate account of young men's daily performance of citizenship and resistance to dominant national messages in Jordan and raises issues of belonging as Jordanian-Jordanians and Palestinian-Jordanians reinterpret state agendas. In both cases, state action attempts to redefine individuals' political identities and identifications to an imaginary nation, simultaneously creating emotional resistances, repositionalities and dislocations.

Although education can help both young men and women develop their capabilities, it does not necessarily encourage equal democratic participatory citizenship. The paper by Madeleine Arnot, Fatuma Chege and Violet Wawire shows how national membership is shaped through schooling attendance *per se*, and how unifying patriotic themes unite young men and women's sense of national inclusion, despite their poverty. However their findings from a Kenyan poverty study contrast young men's engagement with their right to vote and their frustration as citizens with political corruption whilst young women, put off by the violence of political life, employ rights discourses as women with strong caring roles in the family.

The final two papers consider the global contexts of exile and sites of religious conflict. Kathleen Fincham explores the lives of youth learning to be citizens in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon while Ulrike Niens and Jackie Reilly offer a perspective from children in a historically divided Northern Ireland city learning about global issues. In 'Learning the nation', Palestinian youth negotiate their marginalisation across multiple civil society institutions, destabilising the school as a primary learning site. More controversial issues of political instability and conflict such as this are not necessarily addressed by curriculum initiatives on global citizenship as Niens and Reilly found in their study. Overcoming ingrained cultural and religious divisions and the meaning of 'the global' requires particular attention if social stereotypes are not to be reproduced. Their papers, as do many others, suggest that youth as youth cannot simply be seen as 'bridges to the future'.

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Young citizens as more than 'bridges to the future'

The notion of young people as the 'bridge' to the future begs the question of whether formal school is preparing them for the challenging expectations of the third millennium (Nsamenang 2002). Studies of young people's transitions to adulthood continue to be framed solely within the public political sphere yet in practice, as the qualitative in-depth studies in this Special Issue have shown, many youth negotiate, resist and personalise their own national, public representations and discourses of citizenship. There is also evidence that transitions in the private sphere, triggered by schooling, have become particularly important as new social relations are forged, new modes of communication developed particularly through literacy, new challenges to traditional forms of authority and customs taken up by young people (Arnot et al. 2009). Such emotional transformations have the potential, even if microscopic and hardly visible to politicians' eyes, to reshape socio-political cultures, structures and relations.

We intend that this Special Issue should provide an opportunity – empirically, theoretically and methodologically – to consider the active engagement of young people in framing their lives. It offers a contribution towards identifying, in the context of a range of different countries, what are the agentic embodiments, identifications and performances of youth within state discourses and citizenship education policies. As Jeffrey and Dyson (2008, 1) in their introduction to *Telling young people's lives* point out,

> an important achievement of recent human geographic, anthropological, and sociological work has been to show that young people are not passive in the face of these threats to their livelihoods and self-respect; they actively and creatively shape the world around them.

This task represents the kernel of international youth citizenship studies.

Acknowledgements

The papers in this Special Issue, along with many others, were presented at a series of themed symposia organised by the guest editors at the biennial UKFIET conference held at the University of Oxford in September 2009. We are grateful to each contributor, from 11 different countries, for stimulating our thinking and provoking discussion that has ultimately led to this Special Issue.

Our referees were drawn from nine countries. We are grateful to all of the following for their constructive criticism and recommendations: Muna Amr, University of Jordan, Jordan; Rachel Bray, Research Consultant, South Africa; Dympna Devine, University College Dublin, Ireland; Lynn Davies, University of Birmingham, UK; Wim Hoppers, Association for the Development of Education in Africa, The Netherlands; Dina Kiwan, University of London, UK; Jacqueline Kennelly, Carlton University, Canada; Patricia Kubow, Bowling Green State University, USA; Peter Kallaway, University of Cape Town, South Africa; Fiona Leach, University of Sussex, UK; Relebohile Moletsane, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa; Robert Macdonald, Teesside University, UK; Halleli Pinson, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel; Jenny Parkes, University of London, UK; Hugh Starkey, University of London, UK; Lonnie Sherrod, Fordham University, USA; and Lester Taylor, Educational Consultant, New Zealand. We would also like to acknowledge research assistance from Duncan Scott at the Human Sciences Research Council and Andrew Webb at the University of Cambridge.

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Note

1. See the website, available at: http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/dnloads/youth_commisoners_final_report_dated_09.pdf.

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