Contesting the 'Active' in Active Citizenship:
Youth Activism in Cape Town, South Africa

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Abstract

In post-apartheid South Africa, efforts to encourage practices of citizenship and new citizens who will act in ways that support communities and the nation are promoted by government policies and networks of international organizations, civil society groups, and NGOs. In this paper, we analyse the pedagogy of citizenship that is common in these efforts and the role of 'active citizenship' within it. Relying on interviews with leaders of NGOs and activist groups and on participatory research with six organizations, we examine the ways in which different meanings and aspects of active citizenship are mobilised. Active citizenship is often dismissed depoliticising citizenship and dampening dissent. The activists we interviewed and with whom we worked, however, challenge that critique. A central issue in our analysis are competing views as to whether active citizenship should be evaluated in terms of 'effectiveness' or 'disruption.' While some agents might incline toward effective and incremental change, many youth activists understand active citizenship as a tool that enables radical, disruptive acts capable of decolonising South African society. Their use of active citizenship points to the need to avoid conflating citizenship with particular political goals and to not assume that active citizenship is necessarily and unequivocally enrolled in post-political consensus.

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In March 2015, activists at the University of Cape Town toppled the statue of Cecile Rhodes, one of the founders of the racist South African state, that had stood at the symbolic centre of the university for over 80 years. It was a surprising victory in many respects. While there had been activism around the statue – with its prominent position in one of the South African universities that represented white privilege – there was little to suggest that the statue would be dragged down and that massive protests aimed at decolonising the country and reinvigorating the struggle against injustice and inequality would be unleashed. Yet that is what happened.

One of the activists who pulled down the statue is also, in many ways, surprising. Mhlopi[1] is a leader of a national youth organization and someone who had attended a One World Youth meeting – described as 'Davos for young leaders.' When interviewed shortly before the protest, he seemed anything but revolutionary or radical. The interview was full of discussions about active citizenship as a pillar of the organization of which he was a member, of the need for personal responsibility, and the importance of small steps – such as picking up a bit of litter – in effecting change. He spoke, as well, of the ways that fun, of letting children from the townships play in a central park, worked as a form of political activism that was meaningful and in which everyone could play a part. Yet there he was, one of the people tearing down the statue. A few months later, he would also be one of a group of activists arrested for treason.

A great deal of effort has been devoted to creating new practices of citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa. These efforts have included a Constitution, a new school curriculum, youth development policies, and a host of NGOs and social enterprises intended to guide the development of young people as citizens of South Africa. Many of these efforts have been discussed elsewhere (see Fataar, 2007; Gouws, 2005; Jansen, 2009; Lemon & Battersby-Lennard, 2009; Staeheli & Hammett, 2012). Our focus in this paper is on the collective effect of enacting a 'pedagogy of citizenship' in which citizens are formed who will be active in their communities and who will work together to create a nation that meets the challenges of contemporary South Africa, and a more equal, just society.

Despite the hopes manifested in the new South African state in the late 1990s, there is growing scepticism there and elsewhere about the kind of citizenship that is promoted through the pervasive and dominant pedagogy of citizenship that circulates through government policies and networks of international organizations, civil society groups, NGOs, and social enterprises. This pedagogy is associated with explaining the basic rights and responsibilities of citizens, as well as with training in the ways that citizens should act and behave. In contexts in which 'proper' behaviours need to be learned, such as in newly emerging or reformed democracies and countries addressing division and structural violence, these kinds of programs and curricula are designed to teach young people entrepreneurial and leadership skills, as well as the importance of working within extant political structures, even as attempting to effect change (Stevic, 2008). Consistent with the emphasis on working within political structures to create change, civil behaviours are emphasised over identities. The pedagogy of active citizenship, then, focuses first on what individuals should *do*, rather than on questions of belonging or status (see also Skelton, 2007; Ilcan and Lacey, 2011)

As we explain in the paper, the pedagogy of active citizenship is associated with – or perhaps more accurately, is critiqued for – the creation of individualized, depoliticized, neo-liberal subjects who work to enhance self-sufficiency and to effect moderate reforms that will dampen dissent and stabilize governments. Yet a close analysis of the ways the pedagogy is implemented and the mobilizations initiated by young people suggests that the arguments against active citizenship may be overdrawn. Rather than necessarily closing down politics or creating an economistic, individualized manifestation of citizenship, we demonstrate that there is an openness and unpredictability to the ways in which citizenship is deployed in mobilizations and by individuals engaged in them. We argue that politics – in its many forms – emerge in the cracks and fissures in the pedagogy of citizenship, as demonstrated by the sometimes radical steps taken by youth in the name of active citizenship.

The argument is presented in four steps. We first outline the idea of a pedagogy of citizenship in the abstract and the ways that it circulates between international organizations, governments, and organizations that work directly with young people in divided and post-conflict contexts. A discussion of our methods for research on youth NGOs and youth activists in Cape Town follows in the second section. The third section of the paper describes the programs and policies to promote

citizenship in post-apartheid South Africa. Here we note the shift to entrepreneurial forms of citizenship that are couched in the languages of 'youth development', 'leadership', and of course, 'active citizenship'. The final section of the paper analyses the ways in which organizations and activists mobilize, appropriate, subvert and contest the meaning of active citizenship. A central theme in the analysis revolves around competing views as to whether active citizenship should be evaluated in terms of 'effectiveness' (in the sense of achieving goals within the context of the existing order) or 'disruption,' (which some activists see as necessary to meaningful change). As we will demonstrate, youth activists understand active citizenship as leading to more radical, disruptive acts intended to decolonize and transform South African society, thereby potentially being effective in a deeper sense beyond policy change. These differences point to the need to avoid assuming that active citizenship necessarily entails political goals or visions that are conformist, or that do not fundamentally challenge the status quo or a neo-liberal order. In other words, we demonstrate the need to disentangle the pedagogy of active citizenship from the mobilization of political values and goals.

Pedagogies of Citizenship

Citizenship is a complex term that carries many, often ill-defined, meanings and nuances. Around the world, there are efforts to create 'new' citizens who understand the rights and responsibilities that come with the legal standing of citizen, but who will also create new practices and ways of being together, and who will act in ways that support communities and nations. This is as true for countries where there might be 'clashes of culture and values' (as was said to be in the case in Britain and France in response to a perceived threat of Islamic radicalisation) as it is for countries where legal structures that divide residents are removed (such as post-apartheid South Africa) as it is in countries emerging from war through externally imposed 'peace' (such as Bosnia-Herzegovina). Regardless of the context, it seems there is often a felt need to teach or reinforce models of citizenship, particularly with regard to young people, and to affirm the common sense of peoplehood and purpose for a functioning – presumably democratic – government and society (Christodoulidis, 2000; Smith, 2003).

While the specific steps taken vary, a common approach circulates and is propagated by agents and institutions. These agents and institutions draw on an

established set of theories and programming to promote citizenship, or what we refer to as a pedagogy of citizenship. This is not an official curriculum with a single author or publisher, but instead represents a collective, 'common sense' understanding that is spread through publications by international agencies (e.g., UNESCO or the now-defunct Active Citizen program of the European Commission), civil society organizations (e.g., Youth Chamber International, Civitas), and agencies and organizations associated with national governments (e.g., USAID, National Endowment for Democracy, the British Council). It also circulates at international and regional conferences, through 'toolkits' produced by organizations and sold by consultants, and through the networks of academic practitioners who advise governments and civil society organizations (see Dobson, 2012; Ilcan & Lacey, 2011; Staeheli, Marshall, & Maynard, 2016).

Critical scholars argue that pedagogies can be a form of discourse deployed in open-ended, paternalistic efforts to instil behaviours and values in individuals and to legitimate state sanctions against 'misbehaviour' (Schram, Soss, Houser, & Fording, 2010). For countries that are reconstituting themselves after a conflict or an upheaval in social-political relations, such pedagogies may be advanced by international entities working alongside agents associated with individual countries in order to support peace and development along a path toward reconciliation (Edkins, 2003; Ilcan & Lacey, 2011; Stevic, 2008). In legitimating, and to some extent normalizing, expectations regarding the relationships between individuals, communities, civil society and the state, the pedagogy of citizenship can function as a common sense, unarticulated and often unchallenged set of assumptions about how citizens *should* behave and participate in their communities and countries. It functions at the level of norms and values, even if it is not assumed that they will be fully realized – or accepted – in practice (Pykett, 2010).

As mobilized through the pedagogy that is most pervasive or dominant, citizenship is thus not simply a category or label attendant on legal standing; it is a set of behaviours that may come to be seen as the marker of a citizen. Critical – and almost universal – in this regard is the importance of being active as a citizen and engaging in communities to advance a common weal, a common good. This common weal is presented as being achieved through the quotidian acts of people, as much as through the acts of governments or politicians. Indeed, when governments are seen as ineffectual – or worse, corrupt – such small acts that build communities may be seen

as a manifestation of the intimacy-geopolitics involved in state and nation formation, whereby spaces, relationships, and acts associated with daily life are intertwined so as to be inseparable from broader spaces and relationships that are more commonly labelled 'geopolitical' (see Pain & Staeheli, 2015).

Critical in this regard is the importance attached to individual behaviour that is responsive to the needs of others, but that also places few demands on the state. To some extent, this reflects longstanding conceptualisations of the autonomy required of citizens, including the ability to make decisions and to provide for self and others without being a burden; indeed, the capacity to function as an autonomous subject has been seen as a fundamental requirement of citizenship for centuries (Dahl, 1989; Shklar 1991).

At a very practical level, much of the effort associated with the pedagogy of citizenship teaches people about the structure of government, the venues in which citizens interact with the government, and the proper comportment of citizens in those venues. It also emphasises skills in research and analysis to build arguments for the government that are conveyed using the language and technical rationality of the state. In short, the skills conveyed in the name of promoting citizenship are intended to channel expression into forms that are intelligible within extant political structures. Active citizens should also be critical and hold the state to account through action, but the boundaries surrounding the appropriate form of action are not entirely clear. It might be obvious that a public hearing, for instance, would be an appropriate site for action in the form of talk, but what if action also involves shouting, displaying signs, or refusal to leave when asked? Protests in public spaces might also be a means of conveying dissatisfaction with the government, but what if the protests involve breaking the law? In many cases, such acts are required to draw attention to a cause, but they might violate norms of civility (see Boyd, 2006) and might not be consistent with the kinds of citizenship that are promoted through the pedagogy. This tension is acute in South Africa, where the founding myth of the new nation is rooted in a tradition of political activism. As Chipkin (2003, p. 26) suggests, "the substance of the nation does not simply bear a contingent relationship to 'the struggle for democracy.' It is derived from the very repertoire of concepts of the anti-apartheid struggle, its language and its metaphors."

The ability to act autonomously also implies the ability to sustain oneself and to not be dependent on others for livelihoods, ideas, and action. As the pedagogy of

citizenship has developed, employment and entrepreneurial skills feature prominently, with the argument that they provide the means to become self-sufficient and sustain individuals, family members, and communities. Similarly, in states characterised by clientelism, it is often suggested that individuals lack the financial autonomy required to make decisions that would oppose the wishes of their patrons or the parties the patrons represent (Chatterjee, 2011). Since the electoral victory of the African National Congress in 1994, the relationship between partisan loyalty, democracy and patronage has fed intense debates in South Africa (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2012; Piper and Ancioni, 2015). Without employment prospects other than through patronage, it is feared that citizens will not exercise their responsibilities to be critical, advocate for decisions in the public interest, and hold the state to account.

Furthermore, autonomy, rationality, and reasonable action are matters of perception and standing, not of fact. As such, processes and relationships of marginalization – present in all societies, and certainly salient in South Africa, given the scale of economic disparities and the rise in xenophobic violence – condition how individuals and groups are positioned with respect to a community, polity or nation, and thus their potential to be seen and to act *as citizens*. The exclusions that limit the ability of some agents to be recognized or to function as citizens or as members of the public are often named and critiqued by scholars (e.g., Lister, 1997). They may be the basis for the development of counterpublics (e.g., Warner 2002), of what Bayat (2009) calls 'quiet encroachments' on the established order, or even insurgent mobilizations (e.g., Holston 2008; Miraftab & Willis, 2005). The claims made through these mobilizations might be based on rights, but are perhaps more likely to be expressive, affective, and in some cases, unintelligible to traditional political analyses. As Merrifield (2013, p 67) argues, they may express "political ambitions before the means to realize them have been created or invented." Equally, because they are expressive and affective, they may be seen as disruptive, as not conforming to norms of civility, and serve as evidence of the irrationality of subjects who are not capable of acting as citizens. Yet these are also the kinds of movements that have pushed the boundaries of citizenship, at least in a legal sense, and that have been instrumental in highlighting the corruption or illegitimacy of states. And many of the activists who have led these movements in countries around the world have participated in citizenship education, promotion, or training programs (Dobson, 2012).

Herein lies the contradiction inherent in the pedagogy of citizenship that our South African case study illustrates so starkly: in advocating for reasoned discussion independent of politicians or officials, there is the possibility that citizens will take acts that challenge the stability of the state and broader socio-economic-political relationships. Indeed, rather than modifying state action to be more accountable, some mobilizations in the name of active citizenship may be intended to fundamentally transform the state and society. This makes citizenship promotion efforts ambiguous. While many agents and institutions want to effect change while also stabilizing the state, such an outcome cannot be guaranteed; creating autonomous, self-regulating citizens, after all, entails the ability to evaluate and judge situations and to make decisions in the face of uncertainty and new circumstances (Rasmussen, 2011). The pedagogy of citizenship, therefore, may have the effect of setting boundaries around what may seem to be 'reasonable' actions and solutions, but is not determining. And it is in this context that politics, including the visions, goals, and consequences of actions – matter.

Much has been made in academic debates about the 'post-political' moment in which we ostensibly live, in which dissent is minimized through the advancement of putatively rational, common-sense solutions to problems around which consensus is forged. This is to be achieved through participation and inclusion in pragmatic discussions about problems involving informed citizens who can work within institutional and discursive frameworks of governance, including the 'soft spaces' outwith the formal structures of the state (Haughton, Allmendinger, & Oosterlynck, 2013). These spaces – such as visioning meetings, public hearings, community meetings – are often described as being 'closer' to the public, but are also are difficult to assess in terms of transparency, accountability, and the ways in which the input of 'stakeholders' is incorporated in decisions. Importantly, there are codes of behaviour that confer legitimacy on participants who comport themselves in accordance with them; critics, however, claim these behaviours may dampen the possibilities that dissent will resonate with broader audiences. Calls for civility and the active construction of norms such as *ubuntu*,[2] for instance, are argued to label dissent as 'uncivil' and therefore inappropriate in deliberations over the public good (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010; Boyd, 2006; Clarke, 2010). As Dean (2009, p. 21) argues, this creates a 'fantasy of politics without politics." In this light, recent waves of protest (e.g., Occupy movements, the *Indignados*, protests against austerity, even

the protests in South Africa that we address) may be offered as evidence that consensus is not complete and resistance is alive. Indeed, it seems that some of the claims about post-democracy have been quieted. Yet the seeming ineffectiveness of these protests in leading to structural change is often attributed to the dominance of neoliberal governance. As the slogan goes, resistance may never be futile, but it may be difficult to trace its successes.

Active citizenship is argued to be an important technique in quieting challenges and redirecting resistance, making dissent seem unnecessary. As the concept developed in the United Kingdom, active citizenship was defined as the moral duty of citizens to care and provide for their own communities. Critics argued that it enshrined an individualistic vision of social welfare and led to the depoliticization of citizens (Clarke, 2010; Frazer, 2007; Kearns, 1995, Marinetto, 2003). This complaint resonates in South Africa, where the history of the Struggle and the sacrifices made in it stand in contrast to the 'normalisation' of politics in which participation is valorised while resistance is often viewed as a threat. It is in this political context that Isin (2008, p. 38) draws a sharp contrast between *active citizens* and political subjects who are *activists,* implying that active citizens are actually passive, in that they accept – rather than challenge – the status quo. He concludes: "While activist citizens engage in writing scripts and creating the scene, active citizens follow scripts and participate in scenes that are already created. While activist citizen are creative, active citizens are not." In this way, active citizenship can be seen as a tool to advance legitimacy and order, but not transformation[3].

Yet many feminist critiques see a potential in active citizenship that scholars such as Isin do not. Lister (1997, p. 32), for instance, argues that active citizenship encourages and empowers disadvantaged groups to "do for themselves" rather than having things done for them by the more privileged or the state. The process of claiming and enacting, she argues, is critical for the recognition of marginalized groups and individuals as subjects with agency, rather than as objects that are acted upon. Furthermore, arguments about the ways that the modes of participation foster consent and discipline dissensus assume that techniques that channel *participation* also channel *political views*. In so doing, they overlook the extent to which the decision to support government policies is itself a political act (Mitchell, et al., 2014). To assume that acting in accordance with the training offered through active citizenship programs will necessarily lead to consensual, 'post-political' actions is to

miss the very opportunities that activists – and sometimes radical activists – may seize.

Questioning the 'Active' in 'Active Citizenship'

To explore the understandings of citizenship amongst young people, we conducted interviews between October 2013 and March 2015 with over 40 directors and managers of organizations that provide some form of funding, training, or activities related to citizenship amongst young people in Cape Town and the surrounding areas. We also engaged in a variety of meetings as participant observers, and developed participatory research projects with six individual organizations whose work was focused on youth. Most of the organizations with which we interacted focused on the townships and settlements in the Cape Flats or drew most of their participants from that area.

We asked the directors of the organizations (many of whom are themselves young[4]) and the participants in their programs about several issues: the concerns and barriers facing young people, as well as their dreams and aspirations; the kinds of activities sponsored by organizations and the values they attempted to impart; the definitions of citizenship – if any – that were most meaningful to organizations and youth; the ways citizenship was experienced by youth; and how young people understood the ways that life in neighbourhoods, cities, and the country shaped their views of what was possible to achieve. Some of these questions were asked directly, particularly of NGO directors or youth leaders, but these issues were also raised through repeated informal interactions in the course of participatory research projects. In addition, we reviewed curricular and programmatic training materials produced and used by organizations. We also reviewed South African policy documents related to young people and citizenship.

In reporting on the interviews and ethnographic material, we do not use the names of individuals or organizations. While we try to preserve confidentiality by not disclosing information that would directly identify participants in the research (e.g., by using pseudonyms, rather than real names), all were aware that the distinctive nature of their work and activities could make it possible to identify some respondents and organizations.

Development of South African Citizenship Policies

In South Africa's long and complex history of racial division and political oppression of the black majority, the decade 1990-2000 undoubtedly constitutes a key moment for the founding of a new national imaginary. From the negotiations between liberation movements and the white government in 1990-1992 to the adoption of a new Constitution in 1996, and from the proclamation of the Citizenship Act in 1995 to the closure of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2002, the 'New South Africa' was born out of the will to build a Nation on a foundation that was in opposition to the values and practices of apartheid. Erasmus (2010, p. 53) argues, this means that the Constitution, courts and local government authorize "a new order of everyday things: non-racialism, nonsexism and social justice. When these institutions act as allies of the citizenship of the vulnerable and historically excluded, they empower these communities to perform their citizenship more effectively." In so doing, however, a contradiction is built into the very essence of citizenship and democracy in South Africa. Achieving this new democracy requires destabilising social and economic relations, even as consolidating the state and nation.

In the spirit of this 'new order of everyday things', the Constitution of 1996 defines democracy in terms of the pro-active role citizens ought to play to hold the government accountable, such that the *exercise* of citizenship is indistinguishable from the *status* of citizenship. An emphasis on the direct participation of the citizens in the everyday political life of their country can be found in most policy documents and pronouncements, especially those aiming at the youth. The Bill of Responsibility, for instance, addresses young people, who are expected to acknowledge 'the sacrifice and suffering of those who have come before [them]' (South African Government, 2009)[5]. In emphasising the responsibilities of young people, however, the Bill reframes citizenship in important ways. Significantly, it shifts from a rhetoric of liberation to a rhetoric of governmentality, calling for individuals to be responsible for self and others but not calling on the government to be accountable or responsible. Moreover, this framing of citizenship overlooks the question of shared identity and who can claim rights. In some passages, it refers to rights granted to 'everyone' and in other passages, speaks of rights granted to 'every citizen.' This difference takes on a menacing possibility in the context of rising xenophobic violence. The Bill of Rights is, thus, ambiguous when it comes to defining the community it protects (Federico, 2012).

Institutional developments in the post-apartheid period have also worked to reframe citizenship for young people and to consolidate normative values of citizenship and entrepreneurship. Initially, youth affairs were delegated to the National Youth Commission (NYC, created in 1996) and the South African Youth Council (SAYC, created in 1997). In 2001, however, the Umsobomvu Youth Fund was created as a conduit between the Department of Labour and young entrepreneurs/citizens, signalling that citizenship and an economistic rationality were integrally linked. Then, in 2008, the government launched the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), eliminating the NYC and SAYC entirely. The NYDA is intended to operate on the basis of corporate models of efficiency, and citizens are referred to as 'customers', rather than 'the people' of the Struggle. In keeping with this shift, citizenship is reframed as grounded in 'development', rather than 'democracy,' and the role of the agency is to identify customer needs and to deliver a series of outputs to maximize customer satisfaction. This is the current governmental framework by which projects and young citizens are supported, working in concert with NGOs and civil society organizations. On the surface, at least, it seems that *Homo Politicus* of the Struggle has been completely supplanted by *Homo Oeconomicus* (see Brown, 2015).

Depoliticizing Citizenship?

On the surface, it would appear that the transition to neo-liberal, responsibilized, depoliticized citizenship was validated with the establishment of the NYDA. In this new policy environment, the 'problems' faced by youth are not a lack of opportunities to act politically, but rather a lack of development, which hinders youth's abilities to act as self-supporting, self-regulating citizens. Many of our respondents in youth oriented programming seemed to support this view. Over and over, respondents noted that everyone is now recognized as a South African citizen and that everyone has a vote; what they do not all have is economic opportunity. In our discussions, however, respondents differentiated between political citizenship, social citizenship, and economic citizenship. As Laura, the founder and director of an educational organization, put it:

> "The political battles have been fought. Like I say, it's now on the economic
> and educational frontiers where the battle sits in the country. And each

young person has to fight those pretty much for themselves now; collective effort is needed, but at the end of the day, a young person needs to sit with their books and get a good education. That is a proven route." (Interview, 27/11/2014).

In Laura's view, social inclusion and citizenship would follow economic inclusion.

Laura was not an isolated example in her belief that the question of political citizenship had been settled. Most were also sceptical that advances in citizenship or the reduction of inequality could be made through institutional or party politics. Mhlopi, for instance, is involved in university and youth activism and champions young people's political engagement, but argues:

"This country's constitution is fantastic. It has all the mechanisms for citizens to use, but it was made for multiparty competition. Now, with one party dominating, it stagnates. It needs to be claimed back and you can't have ordinary citizens using those mechanisms. You need to actively engage people's minds" (interview, 12/02/2015).

This engagement with young people's minds and the belief that economic inclusion is the key to a more equal and democratic citizenship reflects an understanding of citizenship that begins with an individual developing his or her personal skills and convictions. Most of our respondents believe it is therefore necessary to extract citizenship from the political realm (i.e., political parties and government) and engage youth through small, individual acts. They recognize this is a slow process, but argue that it is necessary to let this process play out. Constitutional change, they noted, did not lead directly to social and economic change; the extension of rights was important, but not sufficient to ensure that youth could ever function effectively as citizens[6]. Furthermore, they seemed to argue that change occurs through the accumulation of individual acts, rather than collective action. It occurs as part of transformations in individuals who see the broader significance of their actions in the spaces of neighbourhoods and family, such as by picking up trash or engaging in non-violence. These quotidian, ostensibly apolitical, 'soft' spaces and actions are seen as more likely to support change than is action in parliamentary or party politics. And so Mhlopi's organization sponsored a party for African children in a public park. He argued that seeing and experiencing fun would broaden young people's horizons and be a foundation for change in the future. Left unsaid, however, was that African

children having fun in a park that was coded as a 'white space' was profoundly disruptive, and thereby challenged both state and society.

Most of the NGOs we interviewed set about the long task of trying to instil characteristics and a knowledge base/skill set so that individuals could make changes in economic and social realms. Importantly, the characteristics and skills necessary for those changes were seen as being broadly the same, irrespective of whether interventions were economic or social, and irrespective of whether they were aimed at individuals or a group. Specifically, organisations attempted to instil the ethos and skills for entrepreneurialism and leadership. Entrepreneurialism implies creativity in approaching and addressing issues, an ability to garner necessary resources, and a sensibility about the responsible management of resources to maximize effectiveness. As such, the knowledge base and skill sets they addressed in their training programs covered the structure of the economy and government, research and analytical skills, and creative problem solving. Leadership involved a willingness to take responsibility for self and others, and networking, listening, and communication (often inter-cultural) skills, but not necessarily engagement with parties or with state institutions. In practical terms, leadership and entrepreneurialism were intertwined and most organizations talked in terms of leadership that would encourage young people to develop themselves and their communities.

While actively participating in this model of entrepreneurial leadership in the economy and society, most NGO leaders were aware of the difficulties ahead for the young people and for effecting broader change. In particular, they recognized that they were only able to work with a small range of young people, when there was a need for much broader involvement in the programming they offer. Even more, however, they struggled with encouraging participants in their programs to be effective without blunting the transformational elements of their work. In other words, they struggled with the ways to empower youth to effect change within the contexts in which they worked, but without reinforcing the status quo. These difficulties were made manifest in several ways.

One concern was that the organizations, despite their best efforts, were only reaching youth who were already rising to the top. One NGO director, for instance, tried to broaden the base of youth with which they worked:

"A lot of the youth leadership programmes do take the cream of the crop:
kids that are already showing potential in schools. They have to prove that

they have made an impact before they get taken on the programme… And often, these programmes do a lot of pampering, and a lot of like 'You are the future leaders we need to cultivate.' But for us, we didn't feel like there was a lot of youth organisations that took those that were falling through the cracks" (interview, 29/10/2014).

The difficulty for this and other organizations was that the funding was inadequate to reach all young people and they needed to demonstrate the value of their programming in order to continue their work. So organizations tended to focus on those who were most likely to be successful, as demonstrated by young people's achievements *before* they entered the programmes.

Some of the organizations, though, struggled to redefine 'leadership' and to separate it from its association with corporate competitiveness and economism. Here, the issue was how to lead in ways that led to development for both the individual and for the community. Leadership, from this perspective, involved awareness of self (as distinct from confidence) and awareness of one's relationship with others. One respondent put it this way:

"[L]eadership is also from within. You need to be able to authentically know who your authentic self is and what you want to do. So having your goals, visions and aspirations and being able to move to a space where you can realise those. So that is my approach to it, that's not necessarily your traditional type of leadership where you think 'I'm the one that's always in the forefront with a loud banner.' It's also about leading at home or leading from within" (interview, 06/11/2014).

For this and other respondents, there was a fundamental conundrum in leadership training: while all the programmes focus on developing strong individuals, many reject the idea that leadership involves acting heroically at the forefront of change. The problems with imagining change as requiring a heroic individual led some of our respondents to reject the vocabulary of leadership altogether, even as they used some of the ideas and curricula of leadership training. The reason is that the language of leadership implies a separation between 'leaders' and 'followers' that contradicted their vision of the relationship between self-development and the community that they believe is required to address marginality and powerlessness:

"This whole big thing about self-appointed leadership; that's irritating. Because it also comes back to that we're all now talking on behalf of other

people who [so-called] cannot talk for themselves. If they can't talk for themselves, then you are supposed to create a space so that they can talk for themselves. Why do you then talk for them?" (interview, 24/10/2014).

The tension between individual and collective awareness takes a particular undertone in the context of South Africa. Whether an organisation explicitly focuses on inter-racial dialogue and reconciliation or not, all the respondents noted the need to build 'trust' within the group; and to create 'safe spaces' where participants can engage with each other honestly and without being forced to play a particular role. For many of our respondents, developing self-esteem and self-awareness is a tool that puts the individual in relation to others, rather than isolates them or makes them stand apart. Some might see this as reflecting romanticism or naiveté, but organisations said they attempt to work with activists in the context of the communities in which young people live and work – perhaps in the context of *ubuntu* – to develop leaders who see themselves as part of a collective, rather than acting on values of corporate competiveness.

Significantly, the hallmark of 'success' in the minds of some of our respondents was not the extent to which young people engaged in active citizenship; as Judith, the director of a granting agency fulminated: "People are active!" She continued:

"'Active citizenship' is a buzzword in South Africa at the moment, very much so. And I hate it. Partly because it doesn't acknowledge how active we are, because it doesn't see the fact that we had 12,000 protest marches last year as 'active citizenship.' It sees that as hooliganism and rioting. And to me, that's millions of people saying that we matter and we care and we contribute, and take us seriously. And so it prescribes 'good' ways of being a citizen that I think are very paternalistic, white, liberal notions."

Rather than relying on notions of active citizenship, Judith spoke of the need to enable 'effective' citizenship. Effective citizenship focuses on being able to seize opportunities that arise and to open new doors when needed:

"We've used the term 'effective citizenship,' which is particularly around concepts of public accountability. So how do you learn to navigate systems to get results from your representatives and how do we understand where the policy levers are?" (interview, 29/08/2014).

For Judith and others, active citizenship is already a value and a practice amongst South African youth and there is little need to encourage it. The challenge, instead, is to ensure that activity leads to change, even to transformation. Yet Judith did not imagine or promote a singular or predetermined path to change or a uniform model of how young activists should comport themselves. Instead, she and others emphasized flexibility, opportunism, and the confidence to take action *with others*, not simply as individuals.

These organisations described their work as being 'tool-based', rather than 'message-based,' in that they work to suggest tools that will enhance effectiveness, rather than a specific message or policy change. In one case, the tool was 'self-reflective dialogue' amongst activists (interview 24/09/2014). On the surface, it might seem that attention to self- esteem, self-confidence, and self-reflection would lead to invidiualised forms of action, but this was not the intent. At a retreat sponsored by one organisation, for example, a participant reflected on how he could influence service delivery in the area in which he lived without being a member of or engaging with a political party. The question he asked himself – and others – was how to mobilise in ways that were true to the community and that would not draw on the resources of the parties. Over the course of several days, participants engaged in informal, often very short conversations that spoke directly to core questions of social change and social justice (fieldnotes, 27/09/2015). What they called self-reflective dialogue, then, was not the kind of reflection on self that might be associated with individualised forms of citizenship or action. It was reflection *with* others about how change could be effected, while recognising and respecting the different ways they might chose to act.

This is a very different use of the tools associated with entrepreneurship and leadership than critics often assume. The activists' view of the relationship between individuals and the collective is itself political, even if not partisan or involved with government. Furthermore, the debates and disagreements at the retreat mentioned above suggested that activists neither came to the table nor left it with a unified message about how to effect change; they brought different political views and tactics to the table. This was evident in discussions about the roles of identity, emotion, and confrontation in advocacy. Rose, for instance, felt it was important for her advocacy to restrain her anger. She was challenged by a female colleague, however, who asked: "But what if you *are* an angry black woman?" Rose responded that the perception of

her as angry foreclosed further interaction and dialogue, which was the opposite of what she wanted to achieve. These and other exchanges over the course of the four-day retreat were indicative of an approach to leadership and entrepreneurialism that relied on an individual's sense of how they could be effective in generating collective action and social change, as compared to personal satisfaction (e.g., showing a righteous anger) or personal gain. The significance is two-fold. First, it suggests the tools of active citizenship should not be equated with the message of neoliberal, responsibilised citizenship. Second, political goals, values, and judgement remain critical, even in what may seem to be individualised and depoliticised training.

Active citizenship, as mobilised by some groups, thus plays a more complicated role than might be expected. The pedagogy circulated by international organisations, consultants, and governments might prescribe an agenda that is consistent with neoliberalism and that serves to legitimate retrenchment of the state in the name of personal responsibility and self-sufficiency. If that is the intent of the programming, however, it is not necessarily the way it is used in practice by organisations working directly with youth or by young people themselves. Perhaps the clearest example of this involves some of the activists involved in the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall mobilisations.

Mobilising Active Citizenship: #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall

Young people in South Africa see, live, and experience the legacies and continued injustices stemming from apartheid. Young people in townships are entering universities in unprecedented numbers, but they remain under-represented in the most prestigious universities, such as the University of Cape Town. For many years, they have faced difficulties in gaining admissions because of the poor quality of the education in many township schools and the resulting credentials that are relatively poor, and they often drop out or suspend studies because they cannot afford their education. And all the students with whom we spoke describe the pressure they feel to 'blend into' what they call a 'white institution.' To make it at university meant to hide their roots in townships and to dodge the everyday and overtly racist acts that remind them that they are out of place in the university.

On 9 March 2015, a young man spread faeces on the statue of Cecile Rhodes – a visible and emotionally charged icon of the apartheid past – in the symbolic heart of the University of Cape Town. Private security forces immediately apprehended the

activist, but his provocative act triggered a mass meeting on campus. Drawing links between apartheid, on-going protests against the lack of basic infrastructure in townships, the uneasy position of African students at universities, and the continued colonisation of South African society by white and northern cultural politics, activists demanded that the statue be removed. #RhodesMustFall, which seemed specific to a statue on the steps of the University of Cape Town, quickly spread across the country. It was a broad protest against the government and the unfinished business of dismantling structures of inequality and the vestiges of colonialism.

Then in October, the government announced cutbacks in funding for tertiary education, and governors of most universities proposed increased fees. Young people and many youth-oriented organisations mobilised again, this time with a more focused emphasis on blocking the rise in fees and under the new name #FeesMustFall. Street protests proliferated, tear gas was used, arrests were made, and a few activists were charged with treason.

We first interviewed Mhlopi, one of the activists instrumental in the mobilisations – or as he preferred to call it, the 'political force' – a few weeks before the protests started. As previously described, the interview focused on Mhlopi's role as a leader in a national youth organisation in which 'active citizenship' was viewed with some wariness. When asked what citizenship means, he responded:

> "We definitely use the word 'citizen' and combine it obviously with 'active citizen.' And we are constantly debating this. It is not that we've come to a set conclusion of what is an active citizen. Because what exactly does that mean? And it's a debate we have everyday" (interview, 12/02/2015).

A few sentences later – and in response to the same question – he declared:

> "Active citizenship is one of the main pillars of the organisation. The pillars of the organisation are to deepen democracy, enhance social cohesion, and create innovative solutions to socio-economic problems in the country. Now, those three pillars essentially beg you to become an active citizen. You can't do any one of those without being someone who is actively involved in your community."

It would be easy to read these comments as incorporating commitments to civility in debate and action, rather than disruption and the responsibility of individuals to become engaged. Yet a month later, there he was: calling mass meetings on campus

and helping to pull down the statue of Cecile Rhodes. In October, he would be on the frontline marching to Parliament, and would eventually be charged with treason.

Mhlopi was not the only person we spoke with who was also involved in the protests. At an evening discussion session billed as an 'intergenerational dialogue,' one person gave a moving account of the toll that the protests and mobilisations exacted. He spoke of being exhausted, of being separated – physically, politically, emotionally – from his community and family, and of standing to lose the "social and cultural capital" that a university degree would offer. He was worried about being arrested, and what that would mean for the sacrifices that he and others who supported him had made. As a high school student, he had been part of an educational NGO that provided tutoring for young learners; after matriculating, he returned to give back to his community as a tutor. This was a practice and value encouraged by the NGO and that they discussed as an element of active citizenship. Listening to his comments, it seemed that all he had been working for – his own education, his community, their ability to claim their rights and act as citizens – was at risk. And then he challenged the older people in the room, many of whom had been active in the Struggle, asking why they gave up the fight before it was over and why they were not supporting the youth. Acting a citizen with rights and with goals of raising his community created tensions, a loss of social capital, and isolation, that stood in contrast to the goals and values of active citizenship.

Thus there are tensions and seemingly conflicting uses and effects of 'active citizenship' that put individuals and communities in ambiguous, and often uncomfortable, relationships. As the mobilisations developed, activists engaged as citizens, even if it was not what the government and many civil society organisations promoted as active citizenship. But recalling Mhlopi's words, the youth were 'begged' or compelled to become active citizens. Their actions were radical, threatened to pull them from their communities, and were at odds with much of the messaging about active citizenship in the organisations in which they participated. Their politics had not been dampened – if anything, they were more evident – through the use of the tools of active citizenship.

Conclusions

The stories and analysis presented in this paper suggest that 'active citizenship' is mobilised and contested in complex ways. We have argued that there is a pedagogy

of citizenship that circulates and that is part of the political strategies and tactics of various groups and agents. While some have associated active citizenship with a practice of depoliticisation, we argue that its role is more complex.

The stories of activists and activism that we have recounted indicate that politics are not necessarily diffused or quieted by the pedagogy of active citizenship. Indeed, the tools that are taught – tools such as the use of media, of fun and humor, of seemingly small acts, in addition to research skills and communication – may enable activists to become more effective in radical action; at the very least, they have been successful in helping some activists draw attention to their demands. It is undoubtedly the case that active citizenship is enrolled in neoliberal governance; some of our respondents subscribed – or at least did not challenge – that outcome. But as Dean (2009) cautions, the lack of 'good ideas' does not imply the end of politics. Politics – even political goals to which we do not subscribe – still matter, and acting on those politics is in itself political (Mitchell, et al, 2014). To ignore that possibility is to assume away the agency of young people and to overlook that which critical scholars generally laud.

While we have identified a dominant pedagogy that is circulated and used by organisations, it is not the only set of ideas that circulate or that is articulated. There are ways in which the pedagogy we have identified incorporates ideas from Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed; these include the reliance on theatre and performance in quotidian spaces and of acts that highlight the absurdity of oppression. Once again, politics matter.

We have also noted the ways that the emphasis on self (e.g., self-esteem, self-development, self-confidence) can take on a different meaning than might be assumed in the West. Rather than self in the context of competitiveness (as implied in many entrepreneurship and leadership models), the attention to self was often in relation to others, and more specifically, in relation to care for others. This was often, but not uniquely, described through the notion of *ubuntu*. To the extent this relational notion of self could be acted upon, active citizenship was not necessarily associated with individualised citizenship. Yet there was tension, and even pain, expressed, as action pulled some people from the very communities and families in which they were located and for whom they cared so deeply.

'Active citizenship', therefore is characterised by contradictions and contestation. Not all organisations and activists mobilise it in the same way or toward

the same goals. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the ways that some activists used the concept as a tool, while others focused on a particular message. The big questions they faced were how to engage with the issues of justice, both in terms of tactics and in terms of their broader, normative views of how the society should be transformed. These were fundamentally political issues, and many activists relied on – even begged – active citizenship to advance political agendas, rather than to suppress or dampen politics and action. As Enright (2016, p. 6) argues, there is no singular politics. Rather, relationships are "constitutive and contingent and create the people and places of which they are a part…" Active citizenship is but one element of this complex web of relations in which politics are waged in a multiplicity of ways.

Endnotes

[1] As discussed in the third section of the paper, the names of individuals and organizations have been changed. Individuals were aware that the distinctive, and occasionally high-profile, nature of their work meant that it was possible they could still be identified.

[2] *Ubuntu* has been widely promoted in citizenship education and training programs as a specifically African way of being part of a community of humans. In these programs, *ubuntu* is presented as a set of norms that incorporate respect, responsibility and common bonds that link all of humanity. While presented as coming from southern African traditions, Jansen (2009) argues that the specific forms and practices that were promoted in the name of *ubuntu* have more to do with the need to imagine new ways of living together in a non-racialist society than they did with the forms that *ubuntu* takes in traditional societies.

[3] See also Ranciere (1999) and Dean (2009) who present a similar argument with respect to democracy more generally. Dean is more cautious and qualified in her analysis, however. It should also be noted that in the South African context, the word 'transformation' is used specifically to speak about the unmaking of racial hierarchies and divisions that are structurally embedded in society.

[4] In South African policies, the category 'youth' includes people under 35 years of age.

[5] The 'Bill' of Responsibility was produced by the Department of Basic Education in 2008. The Bill is not a law, but instead is a guide for students and teachers outlining the responsibilities that come with the rights enumerated in the new constitution. In 2011, LeadSA, a civil society organization, partnered with the Department to launch a campaign to spread the Bill and the values its promotes more broadly through public events, social enterprises, and NGO programming.

[6] For a theoretical discussion, see Parnell & Pieterse (2010).

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