Rights, identities and belonging: Reflections on the everyday politics of urban citizenship in Delft, Cape Town

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## Abstract

By turning attention to the everyday spaces in a poor township in Cape Town, South Africa, the article explores the complex and contested politics of urban citizenship. The arguments build upon a decade of ethnographic research on community politics and organizing relating to housing in Delft, Cape Town,. Through illustrative examples, the author shows how housing rights and policies are mediated through and imbricated with racial identities, residential status and notions of belonging in the community. The author finds that these subjectivities are not inherent in conflict but often overlap and work simultaneously in community organizing and practice. These findings inform a critical engagement with ongoing rethinking of urban citizenship in the Global South. The author argues that attention to the ordinary and everyday practices of citizenship may lead to a better understanding of how political subjectivities and agency are produced and practised. She concludes by proposing three dimensions that could guide a research agenda on everyday politics of urban citizenship: reconstructions of political subjectivities through state–society encounters, implications of differentiated subjectivities for how urban citizenship is perceived and claimed, and what practices of citizenship are seen as expressions of political agency.

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## Introduction

In this article, I aim to contribute to the theorizing of urban citizenship in the Global South by drawing attention to the everyday politics of citizenship struggles. Through examples and experiences from housing contestations in Delft in Cape Town, South Africa, I reflect upon the following question: How can we better understand the construction, meanings and experiences of citizenship in places where urban citizenship is precarious, uncertain, and in many ways contested and gives rise to struggles?

Housing is a key issue in the everyday politics of citizenship in South African cities. The right to adequate housing was included in South Africa’s Bill of Rights (RSA 1996), and housing remains central to the developmental objectives of the African National Congress (ANC). However, the ANC government has struggled to realize ambitious housing agendas, and it has been a challenging task to manage the progressive realization of those rights within the state’s capacities to deliver. Housing remains a key issue through which residents have mobilized and claimed citizenship (Oldfield & Stokke 2006; Robins 2008; Charlton 2009).

Delft is a poor township on the outskirts of Cape Town (Fig. 1), and was built mainly through housing programmes for the urban poor after the country’s first democratic elections in 1994. Despite massive construction, housing grievances have been a central concern for community organizations. These grievances have ranged from struggles against evictions (especially in the period c.2000–2002), housing quality, and the allocation of housing opportunities, to the lack of information and participation in housing projects (Oldfield 2004; Millstein 2008; 2011; 2014). Since 2005, the construction of temporary relocation areas (TRAs) has played into the already complex community politics relating to housing. Resettlement to these TRAs are used in response to emergencies such as evictions, floods and fires, and as planned resettlement linked to informal settlement upgrading projects (DoHS 2009a; 2009b). There has been massive criticism of the TRAs in Delft due to their peripheral location, the uncertainty as to how long residents will stay, and the poor quality of housing structures and services (e.g. see Development Action Group 2007 for report on changing livelihoods for those resettled to the first TRA in Delft). The TRAs have also become part of localized contestation over resources, rights, and belonging in Delft. These struggles reflect multiple contestations over what it means to be seen and to act as urban citizens.

Urban citizenship in the Global South

Stokke (2013; 2017, this issue) notes that there has been both a global and cultural turn in citizenship studies. While the latter refers to the growing interest in identity and membership as the basis for citizenship politics, the former refers to the rescaling of sites and spaces of citizenship above and below the national level (Staeheli 2011). The turn to identity politics and rescaling processes has revitalized scholarly debates about urban citizenship. Emphasis has also shifted beyond the historical embeddedness in Western experiences to a focus on the politics of urban citizenship in the Global South. A rich interdisciplinary debate has emerged concerning the basis for, and necessity of, an urbanism that is non-Western (Edensor & Jayne 2012), Southern (Mabin 2014; Patel 2014), subaltern and postcolonial (Roy 2011; 2014), and global (Sheppard et al. 2015). In this article, I engage specifically with the literature on urban governance, governmentality, rights and citizenship (Chatterjee 2004; Pieterse 2008; Holston 2009; 2011; Roy 2009; 2011; Yiftachel 2012; Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield 2014; Oldfield 2015). Taken together, these contributions allow me to approach and discuss the politics of urban citizenship along three key dimensions: as a question of state–society relations, as participation and claim-making, and as experienced in everyday life.

In a Lefebvrian sense, everyday spaces are ‘instrument of state planning and control and an arena of creativity and political struggle’ (Butler 2012, 5). This everyday politics should be conceptualized as multiscalar and relational to other places, spaces and scales (Mohan 2007; Pieterse 2008; Staeheli 2011; Stokke 2013), and as constructed through dialectics of institutionalization and insurgencies (Roy 2009). The latter refers to the dynamics of, on the one hand, an institutionalization of participatory citizenship sometimes perceived as technologies of urban governmentality, and, on the other hand, insurgencies that challenge such invited participatory spaces (Miraftab & Willis 2005; Roy 2009).

Explorations of citizenship struggles need to move beyond the narrative of the revolutionary subjects engaging in collective resistance. As Oldfield (2015, 2083) argues, ‘Multifaceted and scaled, these practices trouble universal or singular stories of urban revolution and its politics that too easily dominate the theoretical and analytical registers of social movement and urban political scholarship.’ In line with a number of scholars (Robins et al. 2008; Staeheli 2011; Staeheli et al. 2012; Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield 2014; Oldfield 2015), I argue that there is a need to unpack the multiplicity of subjectivities, strategies and practices that make up this everyday politics of urban citizenship. An ‘everyday’ focus shifts attention to how political subjectivities and political agency are produced and practised. Subjectivities can be politicized in various ways, framed by governmental categories as well as local social identities, and can be simultaneously disciplining and empowering. They may overlap or be in tension, and activists and residents can draw upon them strategically in everyday life. Residents may engage individually and collectively, sometimes through mundane practices rather than open conflicts (Oldfield & Greyling 2015). Such multiple citizen–subject positions and differentiated experiences inform what it means to be seen and to act as urban citizens.

Background and methods

My reflections and arguments build upon research on urban governance, community organizing, and politics in Delft, which I conducted periodically between 2004 and 2015. This involved ethnographic fieldwork, combining participant observation, interviews, focus groups and document analyses. Initially, I focused on urban governance transformations and social movements (Millstein 2008). Urban citizenship became more central to my research while I was working with a research project on the TRAs from 2012 to 2015 (Millstein 2014; Teppo & Millstein 2015).1 As part of the project, I conducted interviews with TRA residents and activists who represented residential groups that had been relocated from various parts of the city, for various reasons. I also interviewed activists from a community network in Delft South called Delft Integrated Network (a network I have followed since 2004), and local councillors and officials (23 interviews in total). Further, I conducted document and policy analyses on changing national, provincial and local housing policies and strategies.2

This article is structured as follows. I begin by explaining how rights, identities and belonging characterize the everyday politics of citizenship in Delft. These observations inform the subsequent discussion of urban citizenship in the Global South. After discussing state–society relations in postcolonial cities and the tension between governmentality and citizenship, I move on to citizenship as participation, linking this to seeing urban citizenship as claims to a right to the city, mobilized through social movements and other expressions of insurgent citizenship. This informs the final discussion of citizenship and political agency in the everyday. In the concluding section, I summarize key arguments and identify three dimensions for a research agenda on the everyday politics of urban citizenship.

## Struggles over resources, rights and belonging in Delft, Cape Town

Delft is in many ways a microcosm of the post-apartheid state’s effort to provide housing for the urban poor. Since 1995, the community has been subject to continuous, changing housing programmes and projects (Oldfield 2004; Millstein 2008; 2014). Housing is central to the post-apartheid State’s project of citizenship as an expansion of rights and welfare to all South Africans. The realization of housing rights is about more than security of tenure and a roof over one’s head; it is a symbol of becoming a citizen, of being recognized and seen by one’s government, and it provides a sense of dignity and belonging. A TRA resident in Delft captured this sentiment very well when we talked about what it meant for her to have to wait for a house:

Oh my sister, I will tell you, I waited since. 1999 [on the city’s housing waiting list]. And from that time I was waiting. What it is to wait? It is a cry for freedom my sister, because you want to … like me, I need my kitchen, I need my sink, I don’t have it. That is a cry [for] help from the government to come and give me a sink. I need to take a bath, I don’t want to bath like this anymore, [pause] give me the bath … [laughs]. That would be very nice, or just to take a shower! …. If I had my house, I’d feel free, I can bathe, I can go to my kitchen, I can wash at my sink, which is very nice, and I can put on my light … I’d like to take my mop and mop my floors, take my polish and polish my floors, I would love that, my sister, really, I would really love that. .... I really think it is a cry for freedom, for the government to wake up, and listen to the people’s heart. You must have the heart for the people, because … they are your people, you can’t just let them die like this ... it is not right. So to wait, for me, is my cry for freedom. (TRA resident, 21 March 2013)

Waiting indefinitely in a TRA for housing is one specific experience of encountering the state in post-apartheid South Africa (Oldfield & Greyling 2015). As mentioned in the Introduction above, the establishment of TRAs in Delft has added to an already complex community dynamics relating to housing issues and rights, with many residents waiting for housing. As a tool of regulation, the state expects residents to be registered in a housing database. They must then patiently wait their turn for housing, which is allocated according to an increasingly complex set of criteria (Tissington 2011; CLC & SERI 2013; Oldfield & Greyling 2015). However, residents are not passive subjects in these relations: they engage in a range of strategies and practices, individually and collectively. Various subject positions linked to apartheid’s racial identities, residential categories and experiences, and shifting notions of belonging, have shaped this local politics in Delft. In the following, I present a brief history of TRAs and housing in Delft, before focusing on the shifting subjectivities in greater detail.

Housing interventions and local contestations: TRAs in Delft, Cape Town

The first TRA in Delft, named Tsunami (Fig. 2), was constructed in 2005 to accommodate residents from Joe Slovo informal settlement in Langa (a township closer to the city centre). Tsunami was initially constructed as an emergency response following a devastating fire in Joe Slovo. Since the settlement had already been identified for upgrading as part of a flagship national housing project (the N2 Gateway project), the relocated residents were collectively included as beneficiaries. Approximately 5000 houses were planned in Delft as part of N2 Gateway. Of these, 70% were set aside for residents from Joe Slovo and other informal settlements along the N2 highway, while 30% were reserved for people registered in the City of Cape Town’s housing database (i.e. a waiting list). Activists in Delft challenged this policy, demanding that 50% of the houses should be allocated to Delft residents on the waiting list, not to people from other communities, many whom were not named on the list (Millstein 2011). Currently, a parastatal actor, the Housing Development Agency (HDA), on behalf of the government of the province of Western Cape, is in charge of the N2 Gateway project. Since the construction of Tsunami TRA, the HDA has constructed several other TRAs in Delft to provide temporary accommodation for households from informal settlements. While some of the households have been allocated houses in other areas, many have been allocated N2 Gateway houses in Delft.

A few years after the construction of Tsunami TRA, Symphony Way TRA, more famously known as Blikkiesdorp (which means ‘Tin Can Town’), was constructed as an emergency TRA to house people who had originally occupied and then been evicted from newly built N2 Gateway project (‘N2’) houses along Symphony Way in Delft (Fig. 2). In December 2007, a ward councillor representing the Democratic Alliance (DA) orchestrated this ‘invasion’ by illegally distributing permits for occupation for the N2 houses. As a flagship of the then ANC provincial and national government, the N2 project became more politicized when the DA came to power in the City of Cape Town in 2006. The ward councillor saw his actions as a protest against the perceived preferential treatment of ‘outsiders’ from informal settlements who were allocated N2 housing, while residents living in overcrowded conditions and in backyard dwellings in Delft were bypassed. He was charged and later dismissed from the DA due to his actions (Tolsi 2010). While most of the people who had participated in the invasion were evicted and relocated to Blikkiesdorp in 2008, some 140 families refused to move. They organized themselves under the umbrella of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC), and lived in an informal settlement on the pavement of Symphony Way until they were eventually evicted and relocated to Blikkiesdorp in October 2009 (Voices from Symphony Way 2011). Since 2008, the City of Cape Town has expanded Blikkiesdorp into an emergency TRA for residents from all over the city.

In contrast to the N2 Gateway TRAs run by the HDA, the future of residents in Blikkiesdorp is not linked to any specific housing project, although activists tried to argue that a percentage of housing provided in another City-led housing project in Delft should be set aside to Blikkiesdorp residents (interview, Delft activist March 7 2013). The residents are required to register on the waiting list, and are allocated housing in turn if they qualify for housing support. This applies also to those living in the HDA-run TRAs (i.e. they are only allocated an N2 house if they are registered in the database and qualify for support). This has created an additional challenge of how to accommodate the ‘non-qualifiers’ in Blikkiesdorp and in other TRAs. Many fear that the temporary situation will become permanent. City officials have claimed that preliminary screening of residents in Blikkiesdorp in 2010 showed that only 10% fulfilled the criteria (interview, local official, 18 March 2013). In 2013, there were c. 1760 18 m2 structures in Blikkiesdorp, which were organized in a grid structure in which four units shared sanitation and water facilities. Officials claimed that the TRA housed c.10.000 people, while residents and activists claimed that the number was much higher, closer to 20,000. The question of eligibility and future plans remains a contested issue between Blikkiesdorp residents and the City of Cape Town officials.

Residents and activists in Blikkiesdorp were dismissive of political parties, local councillors, and participatory forums such as ward committees. The role of the above-mentioned ward councillor in the invasion of the N2 houses had further delegitimized their position, and in 2013, there was no working relationship with the local ward councillor (who was an ANC representative). A DA councillor (proportionally elected and thus not seen as representing a ward in the same way as ward councillors) had tried to bring together all of the organizations in the TRA, but claimed that the effort failed due to internal leadership struggles (interview, 28 March 2017).

To residents and activists in Delft, the local officials seemed to be more important in their daily engagements with the state. Community leaders negotiated with residents in their blocks, other community activists, and city and provincial authorities. Local officials also described some of the informal ways in which, within their limited capacities, they had tried to assist residents prior to, during and after relocation. Thus, there were multiple informal as well as formal instances of networking, organizing and practices through which residents and activists exchanged information, negotiated with local officials and sought solutions.

The above-described brief history of TRAs and housing in Delft reveals how housing rights and regulations form a complex field of governmentality. Poor residents experience state encounters through interventions by various state levels, eligibility criteria and waiting lists, and sometimes coercion too. The fact that ongoing provincial and city-led housing projects and the TRAs were managed by different levels of the state complicated the way in which housing resources were allocated and, importantly, how those processes were perceived and experienced. It also informed community efforts to organize in relation housing rights, which played into shifting identities and notions of belonging.

The politics of community organizing

The strength and capacities of community networks within Blikkiesdorp as well as those working in other parts of Delft have shifted over time. These shifts reflect a fluid mode of community organizing in which legitimacy and representation is continuously negotiated (Millstein 2008; 2014). The Symphony Way group that remained on the pavement before being evicted and relocated to Blikkiesdorp played a key role in the community leadership of the TRA, and linked their struggle to other community struggles as part of the Western Cape AEC. However, expansion of the camp brought in groups with different experiences and interests, although some of these groups had linked up with the AEC in their own struggles against evictions. The residents whom I spoke with had lived as, for example, ‘backyarders’, homeless, informal settlement dwellers, hostel dwellers, and/or tenants in inner city blocks. Many had moved between informal settlements and backyards, depending on their life situation. Once in Blikkiesdorp, many groups continued to keep to themselves and worked to find permanent solutions for their group. Hence, people from different areas had very different residential histories and relocation experiences, although the dominant narrative of Blikkiesdorp remained linked to the Symphony Way struggle.

Prior to the invasion of the N2 houses in 2007, some activists of the Symphony Way struggle had worked with the Delft Integrated Network, that also had links to the AEC. The strength of this network varied substantially, and at times there were tensions within the network and among activists within and outside the AEC (Millstein 2008; 2014). In 2013, the network mainly mobilized backyard dwellers in Delft South. They also tried to build relations with TRA activists and residents, but some community leaders in Blikkiesdorp who represented the Symphony Way group challenged the network’s legitimacy to organize and speak on behalf of the TRA (Millstein 2014). However, several Blikkiesdorp residents and block leaders were part of the network, and represented other groups in the TRA. They had also linked up with a community group in Tsunami TRA.

Shifting subject positions in local housing struggles

In late 2012, the Delft Integrated Network filed charges against the provincial government of the Western Cape (which was in charge of the N2 housing project) and the City of Cape Town (in charge of Blikkiesdorp TRA and a new housing project). In its complaint, representatives of the network listed grievances concerning living conditions in the TRAs. They also cited the lack of clarity about allocation procedures in the housing projects, claiming this was in breach of the right to information. In March 2013, network members from Delft South and Blikkiesdorp met with officials from the provincial government of Western Cape and the City of Cape Town to deal with the complaint, and the following quotation is from network’s own minutes, which I have edited to improve the clarity:

Our delegate raised the point that according to his knowledge and understanding of our country’s history … prior to 1994 our Xhosa and other indigenous-language-speaking citizens [i.e. black South Africans] were not allowed to register their personal details [in the] government’s apartheid database to … access state housing opportunities on a fair and equitable basis. The point was then raised by officials [that] it is important [to] understand and balance our country’s racial mix … in relation to subsidy housing allocation policy. In response, our delegate referred to our democratic country’s constitutional ruling concerning the Joe Slovo community [informal settlement] vs. Thubelisha homes (now known as HDA) and others. The said court ruling held [that] after being evicted by government there [and] after being relocated by government to temporary residential accommodation [Tsunami TRA] the affected evicted TRA inhabitants [were] to automatically be allocated [state subsidy permanent housing] by government on a fair and equitable basis.

Government did implement the process, which is evident on this basis of the Tsunami Case study (predominantly Xhosa-speaking inhabitants). [But] our delegates argued, why are not the same norms [and] standards put in practice by this sphere of government in compliance with the said court ruling concerning the affected pavement dwellers [originally backyard dwellers in Delft and surrounding communities] and other evicted/relocated families from surrounding impoverished areas (mainly Afrikaans-speaking inhabitants) still residing at Blikkiesdorp TRA? Within the context of the court ruling/guidelines of fairness and equitability in relation of the N2 Gateway housing project. … the rights of the evicted relocated inhabitants to access permanent housing opportunities [in a] fair and equitable [manners] is deliberately violated by the above-mentioned sphere of government.

The views recorded in the quoted minutes are by no means representative of all views and perspectives in Delft, but the minutes do illustrate some of the key categories and identities that have shaped community organizing. They also illustrate how a local activist sought to legitimate demands by referring to key rights and state policies. Since 1996, the meaning of the right to housing as well as the role and responsibility of the state have been tried in several constitutional court cases (Tissington 2011). The courts have also been a major instrument for social movements involved in housing struggles. From the minutes quoted above, it is evident that the activist sought to legitimize people’s grievances and claims through a language of rights, expressing what he perceived as fair and just in light of the constitutional cases. The idea of injustice is linked with perceptions of how certain groups are included in these projects whereas others are excluded. Legacies of apartheid simmer in the background, with reference to the effects of the waiting list system and racial identities, although these are represented as language groups.3 These identities are linked to the different positioning of residents in the two TRAs, Tsunami and Blikkiesdorp, who are referred to as informal settlement dwellers and backyard dwellers, respectively.

Informal settlement dwellers relocated to Delft were often seen as outsiders or newcomers. This is reflected, for instance, in the contested resettlement of fire victims from Joe Slovo to Tsunami TRA in 2005 and the way that the invasion of N2 houses were legitimized as a reaction to the by-passing of local Delft residents in need of housing, described above. It is important to understand the historical linkages between racial identities and residential status to grasp how these identities have become part of post-apartheid housing policies, and how they inform community organizing in Delft. Before 1994, social housing support was racialized. Coloured residents, a category referring to those of mixed descent and who were granted limited rights during apartheid, could be registered in the City of Cape Town’s housing database.4 In the late 1980s, the first areas in Delft (in Delft North) were built to house poor coloured residents who were living in informal or overcrowded conditions in the townships on the Cape Flats (a low-lying area stretching Southeast from the city centre in Fig. 1). They were often referred to as backyard dwellers or backyarders – people who rented informal structures set up in backyards of formal housing. Black South Africans could not be registered in the database because they were not defined as citizens of South Africa. In Cape Town, some formal housing was built for this group, but thousands of people made their homes in informal settlements.

After 1994, low-cost housing projects in Delft became a tool for desegregation between poor black and coloured residents from all over Cape Town. The democratic government had to find ways to balance the expectations and needs of residents already registered in the database, while also making sure that black South Africans benefited from social housing. A certain percentage of housing in Delft was specifically allocated to informal settlement dwellers who were historically black South Africans. These residential categories have become to some extent institutionalized in post-apartheid policies and strategies. They are used to allow for project-specific allocation priorities in order to balance the needs of those living in informal settlements and ‘applicants identified as “backyard dwellers” and those in overcrowded conditions on the City’s housing database’ (City of Cape Town 2009, 11). These residential categories cannot be easily separated along racial lines (if they ever could), they are often still perceived as overlapping, as indicated in the quoted minutes above.

Although residential categories and their historical embeddedness in apartheid’s racial identities continue to play a role in the politics and practices of citizenship, they are not always in conflict; they overlap and can be mobilized simultaneously. When the N2 Gateway project was launched, and most of the houses were aside for people coming from other areas of Cape Town, the concept of a bounded Delft community emerged, with people claiming the right to housing built in ‘their community’, instead of the houses being given to ‘outsiders’ (Millstein 2008). In community meetings held in Delft South in 2013, Xhosa-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking backyard dwellers supported the claim about institutionalized racism that had been raised in the complaint to the public protector’s office. Their broader concern was their common struggle as backyarders of Delft, set against those coming from the outside and got houses in the community. The reference to language, as opposed to race, represents an interesting discursive shift. It was an attempt to avoid the racial constructs of apartheid, even though racial categories are still in everyday use and are sometimes employed explicitly to delineate between residential groups.

TRAs were not necessarily included in the bounded Delft community, even though many TRA residents had lived in the area for years. In statements about the plight of backyard dwellers, some Blikkiesdorp residents were included since the original groups were said to have been backyard dwellers from the community. However, in meetings with the Delft network, TRA residents were also sometimes simply referred to as ‘those over there’ or ‘those people’, thereby setting the legitimacy of giving houses to TRA residents against the ‘rightful’ claims of Delft backyarders. In these sentiments, the concept of ‘belonging’ in Delft was set directly against the TRA residents in local contestations over the right to housing opportunities, particularly those who lived in the TRAs linked to the N2 Gateway project. Put simply, if more houses had been set aside for TRA residents, fewer Delft backyarders would been allocated housing through ongoing projects.

The above described housing struggles in Delft illustrates the complex ways in which urban citizenship plays out in places where what it means to be a ‘citizen’ is uncertain, precarious and contested. State actors played various roles in these dynamics, and in the studied case, both state and non-state actors engaged in discursive practices that shaped political mobilization and practice. The state might seem to have been powerful, but it was also fragmented in ways that opened up opportunities for individuals and groups to mediate and negotiate (see also Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield 2011 for similar findings). By contrast, although TRA residents and backyard dwellers shared the experience of waiting for housing, often indefinitely, that was not sufficient to build a stable collective identity that could transcend other subject positions. The situation was exacerbated by tensions over leadership, legitimacy and representation, and made it challenging to organize a coherent community network within and between the TRAs and across Delft. Different subject-positions linked to the racial identities of apartheid, residential categories and experiences, and shifting concepts of belonging all informed the everyday struggles for rights and resources.

## Citizens and subjects: civil and political society in cities in the Global South

My objective of including the condensed narrative presented above is not to provide a comprehensive analysis, but to apply experiences and examples from Delft in order to theorize and rethink how politics of urban citizenship are understood. The theoretical arguments presented here have been developed through critical engagements with three different but overlapping theoretical discussions on (1) state–society relations in postcolonial cities, (2) the concept of citizenship as participation and rights-based claims, and (3) citizenship and political agency in the everyday sphere.

### *State–society relations in postcolonial cities*

Given their origins in Western political theories and experiences, ‘citizenship’ and ‘civil society’ are contested concepts. Similar to Mamdani (1996), Chatterjee (2004) sees civil society as a sphere of the colonizers. The colonial subjects were not seen as citizens in the colonial state, but were governed by other means. As Mamdani (1996) has argued, civil society was the sphere of the civilized white man, the colonial bourgeoisie, whereas the indigenous African people were subjects of indirect rule. Although later decolonization granted formal citizenship in the state, colonial social identities and relations continued to shape inclusions and exclusions in the project of citizenship.

Chatterjee (2004) argues that after independence the ‘governmentalization’ of the state in India shifted the concern from citizens’ participation in the sovereignty of the state towards defining populations as targets for welfare interventions. Universal citizenship in the postcolonial state is seen as accessible mainly for the elite in *civil society* who can engage with the state as individual rights-bearing citizens (Chatterjee 2004). By contrast, the informal and illegal status of the urban poor means that they are relegated to engaging the state through informal and precarious clientelist relations in what Chatterjee refers to as *political society*. Rather than seeing these relations as temporary, and something that can be overcome through struggles for full citizenship rights and inclusion in civil society (the sphere of rights-bearing citizens), he sees this as a permanent feature of informal residents’ relations with the state (Bénit-Gbaffou 2012, 179).

In Chatterjee’s approach, clientelism and citizenship reflect two distinct but related characteristics of state–society relations in cities in the Global South: one working through governmentality and clientelist relations in political society, the other working through civil society and formal political institutions of liberal democracy (Chatterjee 2004). However, this distinction between civil and political society has its limitations. Holston (2009) finds Chatterjee’s (2004) arguments empirically and conceptually flawed. He is critical of Chatterjee’s generalization from a study based on Calcutta to ‘most of the world’, and he questions the distinction between civil society as the domain of rights-bearing citizens, and political society as the domain of ‘populations for the state to govern’. Holston gives perhaps too little credit to Chatterjee’s (2004) point that there is space for a popular politics of democratization through political society. Still, Holston (2009, 264) argues:

governmentality and citizenship are not opposed as Chatterjee would have it but surely overlapping conditions. Citizens are both simultaneously and disjunctively targets of policy and participants in sovereignty, especially in contemporary cities where insurgent citizenship movements turn those who are subject to government technologies into agents of rights as well.

In this regard, what is important is Chatterjee’s (2004) underestimation of the imbrications of citizenship and governmentality (Holston 2009), or, as Roy (2009) argues, of the dialectics of institutionalization and insurgency. The contestations over TRAs in Delft reflect such dynamics. TRAs are part of state efforts to realize housing opportunities, but they are also experienced as a means of regulation and control that inform resisting practices. Also, although the role of the ward councillor in the invasion relating to the N2 houses could perhaps be seen as characteristic of a mediating actor in political society, the events were also linked to existing networks and movements in the city of Cape Town, which subsequently inspired the Symphony Way struggle. Thus, experiences from Delft support similar findings in South Africa and India, suggesting that civil and political society can be seen as a continuum rather than distinctive spheres (Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield 2011). Drawing on Indian research, Lemanski & Lama-Rewal (2013, 102) show how ‘numerous people and practices fall, and move, in between the political and civil society, the old and new politics, the insurgent and the entrenched’.

A key question is what thee dynamics mean for the everyday politics of urban citizenship, in which institutionalized participation and insurgencies often work simultaneously, informing and being informed by shifting identities and practices. As the contestations in Delft indicate, this is a messy field of politics in which residents, groups and networks may simultaneously draw on multiple subject positions and various strategies and practices through both civil and political society. In the following subsections, I explore this further, by examining the literature on urban citizenship and political agency.

### *The politics of urban citizenship*.

### The idea that citizenship is defined through membership in the state and a national community has been challenged and destabilized through new forms and practices of urban citizenship (Holston & Appudarai 2003; Purcell 2003; Holston 2011; Brenner et al. 2012; Rossi & Vanolo 2012). Holston (2011, 336) defines urban citizenship as follows:

### a citizenship that refers to the city as its primary political community and concerns an agenda of rights-claims that address city living at its substance – issues of housing, property, tenure, transportation, day care, plumbing, and so forth, largely understood to constitute a residential domain of social life.

### Similar conceptualizations underlie the Lefebvrian-inspired debate about the right to the city, wherein demands in everyday life are seen as expressions of a citizenship based on a right to live in and produce the city (Brenner et al. 2012).

Urban space has thus emerged as a central political terrain in tension with other spatial scales. In a situation in which the central state is seen as losing ground, failing or absent, the urban is sometimes perceived as the key space for the promise of citizenship – of democratic politics, of people’s mobilization, and of some kind of cosmopolitanism wherein residents can enjoy rights and belong regardless of their legal membership in a nation state (Rossi & Vanolo 2012). However, in South Africa the central state has continued to play an important role in shaping urban policies and politics (Parnell 2008; Parnell & Pieterse 2010). In Cape Town, national housing policies have shaped urban transformations through large-scale national housing projects, such as the N2 Gateway project (Millstein 2011; Jordhus-Lier 2014). Furthermore, since the right to housing is linked to eligibility defined by membership of the state, local politics over rights and resources (and rights to have rights) is an important feature of everyday citizenship contestations. The state still play a key role in reshaping and reconstructing urban citizenship, even when the individual’s legal relationship to a nation state is no longer is the sole defining characteristic of ‘citizenness’. This does not mean that Holston’s (2011) conceptualization is irrelevant. His definition is useful for exploring rights-based claims and how these are expressed as demands upon city government or how they function as a basis for community self-organizing beyond the state. However, while rights claims play an important role in urban contestations in South Africa and elsewhere, it should not be assumed that all struggles are always about rights to the city (Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield 2014). There is much more going on in everyday spaces where contestations might not be about rights-based claims or about demands to be included in projects relating to citizenship. This means that attention needs to be paid to everyday life and the ordinary, which may open up new avenues for theorizing urban activism and citizenship (Staeheli 2011; Staeheli et al. 2012; Oldfield 2015).

According to Staeheli et al. (2012, 650) ‘the everyday plays a powerful role in the way citizenship is structured, practiced, and enacted’. The call for seeing urban citizenship through the everyday experiences of citizens also requires identity to be approached as something in flux, as identifications, and not ‘static or simply acquired’ (Gervais-Lambony 2014, 363). This lack of attention to identification is evident in Chatterjee’s book (2004). He does not really focus on the reconstruction of identities involved in governmentality, despite his emphasis on heterotopic social fields in political society. When referring to African experiences, he makes rather sweeping generalizations about how colonial categorizations of African tribes have continued as the ‘dominant criteria for identifying communities among the populations as objects of policy’ (Chatterjee 2004, 37). Holston (2011) recognizes how certain positions, such as homeowner and worker, are associated with being good and honest citizens who are entitled to rights, and he problematizes how different concepts of rights inform contradictory citizenship practices in ways that might serve to entrench rather than challenge inequalities. Less attention is paid to the shifting and imbricated identities involved in everyday politics, such as those I have described as existing in Delft, and how these shape local inclusionary and exclusionary practices.

A slightly different take on identity and citizenship is found in the emphasis on politics of difference, whereby group rights are seen as legitimate means of redressing past injustices and ensuring the inclusion of marginalized groups (Rossi & Vanolo 2012). However, this also often rests upon a predefined conception of identities that can be mobilized and turned into legitimate group rights. Furthermore, categorizing eligibility among groups of residents may prove challenging. Holston (2011) argues that accepting special treatment rights as a way of redressing past injustices can just as easily be used to favour elitist privilege and reproduce differentiated citizenship.

*Insurgent citizenship* is in part a reaction to experiences of differentiations, although insurgent citizens may also sometimes reproduce key elements of differentiation if, for instance, they defend special treatment rights (Holston 2011). Holston (2011, 336) defines insurgent urban citizenship as ‘the political transformations that occur when the conviction of having a right to the city turns residents into active citizens who mobilize their demands through residentially based organizations that confront entrenched national regimes of citizen inequality’. In this regard, Holston’s (2011) work in Brazil has close parallels with research on urban social movements and citizenship struggles in post-apartheid South Africa (Miraftab & Wills 2005; Ballard et al. 2006; Robins 2008; Alexander 2010; Brown 2015). Many of these contributions draw on radical and civic and republican ideas of citizenship (Mohan 2007), sometimes implicitly.

Citizenship as participation

A large body of literature on democratization and development in the Global South explores and criticizes the concepts of participation and citizenship. Defining citizenship as participation has been a way of reclaiming a more radical and political development agenda (Hickey & Mohan 2004). In this perspective, participation is a means for not only development interventions but also realizing citizens’ rights (Hickey & Mohan 2004) through new forms of accountability politics (Gaventa 2002; Newell & Wheeler 2006). Participatory or active citizenship emerges through claimed spaces (Cornwall 2002) in which citizens are turned into makers and shapers (Cornwell & Gaventa 2002).

The potential of social justice lies in realizing citizenship through grass-roots struggles and insurgent action in invented citizenship spaces from below, in contrast to invited spaces ‘that often exclude their [marginal urban citizens] needs and priorities’ (Miraftab & Wills 2005, 201). In this regard, active citizenship does not refer to the self-governing individual produced through neoliberal regimes of governmentality (Raco & Imrie 2000), but is seen as *participation* in the collective of a community or a group, based on shared solidarities. Active citizens do not engage through the technologies of participatory governance in invited spaces of participation but by making claims and organizing collectively through invented and insurgent practices of grass-roots participatory democracy (Hickey & Mohan 2004; Kabeer 2005; Miraftab & Wills 2005; Davies 2011).

A main problem with some of the above-cited literature is that it tends to reproduce dichotomies of formal–informal, invited–invented, and tensions between multiple citizen subject positions and identities, even if their relationality is acknowledged. Ballard (2015, 220) argues that thinking related to agencies of the poor tends to follow mutually exclusive formulations between ‘inclusion and autonomy, ideas and practice, small and big social change, reform and revolution and collective mobilizations and collective of everyday practices’. For example, state-initiated invited spaces are sometimes pitted against grass-roots initiated insurgent citizenship constructed through collective action from below, in adversarial opposition to authorities and the status quo. This is problematic, because ‘it is the articulations between these dynamics that allow us to recognize a more complete empirical synthesis of the geographically and historically nested ways in which people shape their lives’ (Ballard 2015, 220). In the Delft case, residents, either collectively or individually, drew on shifting subject positions and engaged in various strategies and practices across such divides as formal and informal spaces, and invited and invented spaces. Exploring citizenship as manifested in the everyday life may help in the identification of the articulations that Ballard (2015) emphasizes.

There is also a risk in romanticizing ‘the local’ (Purcell 2006; Mohan & Stokke 2008) and ‘the bottom-up’ inherently adversarial character of insurgent citizenship as spaces of democratic politics. In the South African context, many analyses of social movements have rested upon a taken-for-granted analysis of the post-apartheid state (and the post-apartheid city) as a neoliberal one, in which citizenship struggles are seen as resistance to this project of neo-liberal urban governance. The approach renders invisible the complex politics of the democratic transformation, the local appropriations of neoliberal policies, and the mediations of discourses, policies and politics that shape urban citizenship (Oldfield & Stokke 2007; Parnell & Pieterse 2010; Parnell & Robinson 2012). This messy politics also rests upon a multiplicity of identities that are partially overlapping, negotiated, and at times contested *within* grass roots organizing, as evident in the many housing contestations in Delft. Similarly, Doshi (2013) argues that radical scholarship has ignored how urban land dispossessions have produced differentiated subjectivities among slum dwellers in Mumbai, India.

The ‘citizenship as participation’ literature risks underestimating the everyday politics embedded in clientelist networks and patronage that does not follow normative assumptions about the democratic citizen (Robins et al. 2008). Bénit-Gbaffou (2012) argues that the strength of Chatterjee’s (2004) distinction between civil and political society is that he avoids the tendencies to romanticize participatory and insurgent citizenship from below. Although Bénit-Gbaffou (2012) is critical of his dichotomous use of civil and political society, she points out that Chatterjee’s (2004) conceptualization of political society ‘seems closer to the everyday realities or urban governance in a majority of low-income neighbourhoods – where radical social or political change is not what is at stake’ (Bénit-Gbaffou 2012, 179). The triggering event that led to the Symphony Way struggle was an illegal action by a ward councillor in a community in which access to housing was deeply contested. Many of those who participated in the action did not necessarily consider themselves part of a collective insurgency, but simply saw it as way of obtaining housing. Interviews with people involved in invasions elsewhere and who had been relocated to Blikkiesdorp reflected similar motivations in cases where local actors had encouraged invasion among local backyard dwellers (interview, TRA resident, 28 March 2013). In a similar critique of the normative agendas in the citizenship literature, Robins et al. (2008) argue that there is a need to explore citizenship from the experiences of people themselves and to acknowledge that there is a fine line between clientship and citizenship in everyday politics.

South African civil society is perceived to be rooted in grass-roots struggles and movements, and not merely as Chatterjee (2004) perceives of it, a sphere for the middle classes and elites who can claim full citizenship and engage the state as legal and recognised citizens (Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield 2011; 2014). Residents use rights as a mobilizing tool and demand inclusion as rights-bearing citizens, but they may also move between their role as clients and citizens when accessing resources (Bénit-Gbaffou 2012). Clientelist and citizenship practices in the everyday are not necessarily opposites, but are imbricated and overlapping in everyday politics. In the following, I examine some implications of these dynamics for how political agency is understood.

Everyday urban citizenship and political agency

Holston (2011) sees political agency as insurgent collective practices, similar to the radical and/or civic–republican perspectives that see citizenship as participation. In my view, this understanding of political agency is too narrow because it fails to explore the multifaceted nature of agency as produced and expressed in the everyday spaces of politics. Paying attention to ‘the ordinary practices of citizenship’ means that it must be acknowledged that:

This complexity [of how everyday practices of individuals and groups shape cities and societies in unpredictable ways] may involve the formation of identities and the articulation of grievances that represent collective challenges through the performance of seemingly mundane acts or micropolitics (e.g. Bayat, 2010; Smith, 1990). While not the stuff of ‘big politics’ or perhaps not even conceptualized as political by some radical scholars (e.g. Rancière [sic.], 2001; Swyngedouw, 2011), these sorts of small actions, challenges, and the experiments to which they give rise can lead to varied forms of contact and engagement that hold the potential to nudge established patterns of control and authority and to anticipate new political acts (Holston, 2008; Simone, 2009). (Staeheli et al. 2012, 630)

Some of the literature on urban governmentality and citizenship leaves limited space for such everyday practices of agency (see for example, Parnell 2008 for a critique of the literature on urban governmentality). This is also evident in Chatterjee’s (2004) notion of political society. While Chatterjee may avoid romanticizing citizenship struggles as insurgent resistance, he operates with narrow understandings of agency. Agency seems to be enabled in political society if a group (population and/or community) has been categorized, and has then engaged with the regime of governmentality and managed to manoeuvre this field to gain concessions. Marginalized residents can thus engage in a popular politics of democratization only if they are able to reposition themselves as a population category that can demand welfare and protection from the government. Although not legal or rights-bearing citizens in the fullest sense, they can gain a certain status as eligible beneficiaries of welfare.

Chatterjee (2004) opens for the possibility that governmentality may be simultaneously disciplining and empowering, but his distinction is less helpful for explaining social and political change (Bénit-Gbaffou 2012). In Chatterjee’s argument, those who wait in uncertainty – where a community-based organization engaging the state for welfare provision has not emerged or a mediating leader is lacking – have not yet entered into political society and have not become governable subjects for welfare. This excludes people’s everyday practices from the political and provides a limited explanation for the quiet encroachments of the ordinary (Bayat 2010) that may also have political impacts (Yiftachel 2012; Oldfield & Greyling 2015). It also ignores how rights talks as a global project of democratization has redefined rights as basis for citizenship claims also from the margins of urban society (Holston 2011). In Mumbai, for instance, slum-dwellers have resisted or negotiated demands and claims not only through political society, but also by actively mobilizing global rights-based discourses of citizenship to negotiate them (Doshi 2013).

To some extent, post-apartheid democratization has turned South Africans into targets for welfare, as evident from the expansive field of housing development (Oldfield & Greyling 2015). This has not only made residents into merely passive subjects, but they have also claimed a role as active citizens in a democratic dispensation. As Jones & Stokke (2005) argue, the introduction of civil and political rights in South Africa opened spaces for realizing and claiming socio-economic rights through civil society mobilization. In Delft, claiming rights has been at the core of community organizing. Despite their often limited success, these processes have made it possible for residents to be political agents. This is clearly illustrated by the story of the invasion of the N2 houses in Delft that eventually led to the Symphony Way struggle, during which the actions of a local politician turned into a rights-based struggle against eviction and for the right to decent housing. While making citizens the beneficiaries of welfare interventions is a technology used for control by governments, being made eligible also provides citizens access to resources and spaces in which to make demands (Parnell 2008). As Parnell (2008) has argued, in South Africa this opened up important linkages between citizens and the post-apartheid state that cannot be reduced to a matter of disciplinary, neoliberal, urban governmentality working upon passive subjects.

Experiences from citizenship struggles in Delft show how difficult it is for marginalized groups to use rights as a mobilizing frame (Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield 2014). Some of the literature on urban citizenship and social movements conceals the messiness of everyday politics and too often sees all contestations inherently as struggles for the right to the city (Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield 2014; Ballard 2015). Many authors, in their analyses of social movement and grass-roots struggles have underestimated the role of differentiated subjectivities in their quest to identify revolutionary urban subjects (Doshi 2013) or have turned to a politics of difference as a normative agenda for radical democracy. Such authors have often underestimated the challenges of identity in rights-based struggles, and the very different ways in which rights and policies meant to realize those rights are themselves understood, reinterpreted and mediated in local contexts. In the Delft case, residential categories (some of which are embedded in the apartheid legacy and invariably reproduced in government policies and discourses) such as backyarder, informal, tenant, temporary, and even homeowner, were mediated political subjectivities. These subjectivities might seem to have been contradictory and in tension, but they often worked simultaneously to frame claims and actions, and negotiate access to state resources. However, as I have shown, various interpretations and experiences of inclusion and exclusion have continued to shape local senses of justice and lack of entitlements, and thus redrawn the boundaries of who belongs and who does not.

Thus, the following question arises: What might political agency look like when viewed through an everyday lens, when relations between civil and political society, the informal and formal and the legal and illegal are fluid and imbricated? There is also a need to understand how these everyday dynamics mediate and are imbricated with broader discourses and institutions of rights and citizenship. Oldfield & Greyling (2015, 1102) explore the micropolitics of waiting for housing in Cape Town as a ‘process that, in mundane and profound, short-term and life-long registers, shapes what it … means to claim rights and citizenship after apartheid’. In post-apartheid South Africa, people are recognized as wards of the state through the constitutional right to housing and other welfare services, and the government’s efforts to deliver on these promises. Living and surviving while waiting for housing requires ‘subversion, an agency that is sometimes visible, in mobilization and protest, and at other times out of sight, simultaneous contentious and legitimate’ (Oldfield & Greyling 2015, 1109). Through such encounters, people are also reconstructed as political actors (Oldfield & Greyling 2015).

Rather than seeing those who are waiting for housing as passive individuals (Auyero 2012), Oldfield & Greyling (2015) nuance our understanding of political agency, however constrained and provisional that agency might be. Like Krause & Schramm (2011), they explore how the state’s efforts to make citizens governable as beneficiaries through various regulations and interventions, intersect with, produce and shift political subjectivities in everyday life. In line with Borges (2006), Oldfield & Greyling (2015) hold that people strategically and actively mobilize eligibility criteria to manoeuvre access to state housing support, and play on shifting identities in doing so. In addition, drawing on Bayat’s (2010) concept of non-movements, they argue: ‘individual acts collectively scale up and mould perceptions of and encounters with the state’ (Oldfield & Greyling 2015, 1108). While acknowledging the power of governmental regulation and control, they show how these not only work on passive subjects, but also serve to inform active citizens. Importantly, Oldfield & Greyling’s analysis (2015) opens up for the possibility that such everyday practices may have political impacts – they are expressions of political agency.

The TRA residents in Delft, who shared similar waiting experiences, were not merely passive subjects of governmentality. Their political practices included highly visible collective actions such as pickets and tyre-burning, but also more ordinary and mundane practices through which they sought to circumvent or challenge Cape Town’s city regulations and policies related to TRAs, namely by extending housing structures at night or negotiating with officials to allow people to stay if they had moved into a structure without permission. These are examples of the less visible, informal and sometimes illegal practices through which the residents claimed some kind of agency as citizens, however precarious or mundane these practices might have been. Such residents also meet and engage through a range of informal daily practices and networks, also in periods when more visible protests and actions are absent.

## Conclusions

In this article I have explored the complex relationships between rights and urban citizenship, as well as how conceptions of rights, identities and belonging are mediated in everyday spaces of politics. Close attention to everyday dynamics may help understandings off what it means to be seen and to act as citizens in cities where such positions are uncertain, precarious and contested. I have described the multiple and overlapping subject positions in Delft that shaped the local politics of citizenship in the community, and how these were informed by dialectics between categorization, regulation and control in the housing sector and multiple local identities, perceptions and experiences.

In Delft, racial identities, residential status and experiences, as well as concepts of belonging, have at times been overlapping, and at times in tension. Previous and current experiences, such as being a backyard dweller, an informal settlement dweller, or a TRA resident, have been subject positions used in framing claims and mobilizing the people concerned. As residential categories such as ‘backyarder’ and ‘informal settlement dweller’ are historically embedded in the socio-spatial segregation of apartheid, racial identities have continued to played a role in people’s perceptions of being treated unfairly or unjustly. Such dynamics have informed perceptions around who belongs and who has rights in a community where housing is a scarce resource. From these observations, I have argued that attention to everyday life can better capture the articulations and dynamics that shape the politics of urban citizenship, and help when unpacking the multiple subjectivities that shape political agency. Such political agency may manifest itself not only through the collective, organized and visible, but also in the individual, mundane, and more precarious everyday practices.

My arguments point to three key dimensions that are important in a research agenda on the politics of everyday urban citizenship: (1) the reconstructions of political subjectivities through multiple state–society encounters; (2) further exploration of the implications of differentiated subjectivities for how urban citizenship is perceived and claimed; (3) and what practices of citizenship – individual or collective – are seen as expressions of political agency. These dimensions direct attention to the concrete ways in which urban citizenship is ‘constructed through the interactions of both status and positioning’ (Staeheli et al. 2012, 631) and how citizenship is shaped through ‘relationships between individuals, social groups, communities, and the state’ (Staeheli et al. 2012, 636). Attention to the everyday and the ordinary politics of citizenship can help when exploring the context-specific imbrications of state-defined eligibility, claim-making and identities, and practices of agency that are not readily apparent when the focus is solely on visible and organized struggles.

## Notes

1. The project titled Governing a housing crisis? Emergency housing programs and Temporary Relocation Areas (TRA) in Cape Town was based at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, and was funded through the Institute’s core funding from Nordic governments.

2. Unpublished paper titled ‘The temporary citizen: Disjointed incrementalism in Cape Town’s urban policies’ by M. Millstein and D. Jordhus-Lier, presented at the Nordic Urban Development Conference in Helsinki, 13–15 November 2013.

3. Xhosa is the most commonly used language among black South Africans in Western Cape, and used in official communication in the Western Cape province and the City of Cape Town along with English and Afrikaans. Afrikaans is the mother tongue of coloured residents.

4. While the City of Cape Town government used the term ‘housing database’ and dismissed the term ‘waiting list’, the former term continued to be used by officials and residents (CLC & SERI 2013; Oldfield & Greyling 2015).

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Figures

**Fig. 1.** Location of the study area Delft, a poor urban neighborhood (township) at the outskirts of Cape Town, South Africa

**Fig. 2.** The location of the two largest TRAs built in Delft : Tsunami TRA built in 2005, and Blikkiesdorp TRA built in 2008 (then called Symphony Way TRA)