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## Thinking through Political Subjectivity

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### Abstract

In the introduction to this special volume the editors focus on the analytical value of “political subjectivities” in emergent social fields that are characterized by multiple diasporic overlaps. They emphasize the central role played by various forms of governance in producing, confirming and contesting politics of transnational incorporation and diasporic participation and consider how these political projects often target members of historically differently situated groups. In particular, they draw attention to moments of exclusion and non-incorporation. The analytical concept of political subjectivity helps to understand how people relate to governance and authorities. It denotes how a single person or a group of actors is brought into a position to stake claims, to have a voice, and to be recognizable by authorities. At the same time the term points to the political and power-ridden dimension within politics of identity and belonging, encompassing the imaginary as well as the judicial-political dimension of claims to belonging and citizenship.

### Keywords

political subjectivity, belonging, citizenship, Africa, diaspora

### Résumé

Dans l'introduction de ce volume spécial, les éditeurs se concentrent sur la valeur analytique des « subjectivités politiques » qui existent dans les champs sociaux émergents, dont la caractéristique est de connaître de multiples chevauchements diasporiques. Ils insistent sur le rôle central

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joué par les formes variées de gouvernances qui s'y forment, et par les politiques qui confirment et contestent l'incorporation transnationale et la participation diasporique, mais ils examinent aussi la façon dont ces projets politiques visent souvent les membres de groupes qui, historiquement, sont situés différemment. Ils attirent particulièrement l'attention sur des cas d'exclusion et de non-incorporation. Le concept analytique de subjectivité politique aide à comprendre les relations qu'entretiennent les gens avec l'administration et les autorités. Cela montre comment une personne isolée ou un groupe d'acteurs est mis dans la position de se risquer à faire des revendications, pour avoir une voix, et pour être reconnaissable par les autorités. En même temps, le terme se réfère à la dimension politique et de pouvoir qu'il y a dans les politiques d'identité et d'appartenance, comprenant l'imaginaire autant que la dimension politico-judiciaire des revendications d'appartenance et de citoyenneté.

#### **Mots-clés**

subjectivité politique, appartenance, citoyenneté, Afrique, diaspora

### **Mobilities and Subjectivities**

Mobility has been a longstanding feature of African societies – from early migration movements to vast trading networks, including the trans-Saharan and trans-Atlantic as well as inner-African slave trades. However, we can observe that the movement of people from, to and within Africa has significantly increased in the last decades (van Dijk et al. 2001). On the one hand, this can be said to be partly the result of the dispersal of people due to civil wars, political turmoil, and poverty, but, on the other hand, we also have to take into account the intensification of transcontinental networks through changing migration regimes (van Hear 1998) as well as the emergence of new (Koser 2003) and the return of old (Holsey 2008, Schramm 2010) diasporas on a global scale. Alongside the increasing experimentation with globally constituted social forms and regimes of governance that have a major impact on the organization of daily life in Africa, questions of belonging, inclusion and exclusion have gained a new momentum (Nyamnjoh and Geschiere 2000; Nyamnjoh 2006; Geschiere 2009). While this development is surely enforced by conflicts over the distribution of resources and entitlements in situations of acute economic distress (Dorman et al. 2007: 23), it is also produced by the increasing pluralization of political actors. Next to the state we find a network of institutional arrangements, including NGOs as well as so-called 'traditional authorities'<sup>1</sup> and organizations based on diasporic connections – a network

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<sup>1</sup>) We are aware of the fact that political institutions and cultural practices termed 'traditional' are mostly the result of 'political extraversion' (Bayart 2000), in particular of efforts to create

that offers new subject positions for people in their quests for recognition, access to land or other kinds of support.

With this special issue we aim to shed light on newly emerging forms of political subjectivity as they come to the fore in various diaspora-constellations related to Africa. Here, we have at least three forms of diaspora in mind: the African diaspora that emerged out of the violent dispersal of the transatlantic slave trade (especially Balkenhol, Delpino); the 'new' African diasporas that have developed out of more recent migrations (especially Riester, Rutherford), but also the various movements to and within Africa that are connecting these.<sup>2</sup> As Paul T. Zeleza (2005) has argued, it is important to take these various diasporic constellations into account in order to avoid the reification of both 'Africa' and 'diaspora'. However, it is not sufficient to simply recognize these various movements. If we want to understand contemporary political relations in a transnational social field, we also need to pay attention to their many points of intersection (see Akyeampong 2000; Schramm 2008). While all these cross-cutting mobilities defy the notion of Africa as a bounded entity and thus call for the consideration of deterritorialized political subjectivities, they are nevertheless profoundly shaped by historical, juridical and socio-political forces and institutions that are impeding the very idea of mobility and call attention to the specificity of local situations. It is here where relationships of belonging are most fervently articulated as well as contested. This tension is expressed most acutely in conflicts over citizenship, autochthony, and other claims to rights and, to some extent, territory (Dorman et al. 2007: 4; Geschiere 2009; Rutherford 2007).

The contributions to this special issue acknowledge the entanglement of state institutions with traditional authorities, transnational organizations, including NGOs, as well as the aforementioned diasporic configurations, thereby pointing to the necessity of conceiving of the state not as an abstract unit 'out there', but as an assemblage of diverse institutions, sites, procedures, techniques and practices (Mitchell 1991: 78; cf. Benhabib 2004: 64). The focus on practices enables us to analyze how people actually negotiate their access to resources and networks of belonging plus their recognition as subjects with 'the right to have rights' (Arendt 1975 [1951]: 260) in various

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political units for governance in the colonial encounter. Here and in the following we understand the attribute 'traditional' as a strategic term used in relation to institutions termed 'modern' (cf. Bayart 1993: 11-12).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the term diaspora related to migration movements within Africa, see Bakewell (2008).

contexts. If Arendt, in view of the extremely insecure status of people who were denied national belonging and status during the Second World War, conceptualized this claim-making subject-position as intrinsically bound to citizenship and the nation-state, she was at the same time highly sceptical of all forms of nationalism and called attention to the exclusionary practices that usually went along regimes of national belonging. This ambivalence is the opening ground for Seyla Benhabib's focus on the ways in which the right to have rights comes into place or is enacted. Benhabib is interested in 'the ongoing process of transformation and reflexive experimentation with collective identity in a process of democratic iteration' (2004: 64).

Drawing on this understanding of processuality, we now consider new assemblages<sup>3</sup> of traditional authorities, community organizations, local administration, diasporic groups, state institutions, faith-based organizations and NGOs that all have a stake in the struggles over rights and belonging. In doing so, we recognize the historical connections that have shaped their interrelation, and most significantly the fact that they are both, 'products of determined colonial and postcolonial interventions' (Geschiere 2009: 21), as well as results of longstanding exchange processes within Africa (Bayart 2000).

As we have outlined above, we are interested in understanding political situations where multiple relations among different groups of actors coexist – and also shift, depending on the prevailing practical enactment. We suggest examining this arrangement through the lens of political subjectivity, which we understand to be distinct from, yet closely connected to, the notions of belonging and citizenship. Over the last decade or so, the latter two terms have been expanded widely, so that their underlying distinction between emotional attachment and legal incorporation has become blurred. At the same time, the terms still transport older connotations – of primordial attachment in the case of belonging and a kind of instrumentalist (and state-focused) discourse in the case of citizenship. Inflating them to encompass each other therefore leads to analytical vagueness.

When we talk about political subjectivities, we have two things in mind. First, we want to draw attention to the practices through which political subject-positions come into being. These entail practices of inclusion or exclusion (as they are often emphasized in citizenship debates), but also dimensions of

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<sup>3</sup> Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier suggest the Deleuzian term 'assemblage' to grasp new global forms and sites of influence, which consist of heterogeneous elements, encompassing institutions and discourses as well as individual actors, material objects and infrastructure (Collier and Ong 2006).

longing and desire (as they are expressed in belonging). Political subjectivity enables us to think these domains together. Secondly, we want to keep the distinction between citizenship-status and non-citizenship sharp because in the cases that we discuss (and in general), many social and legal distinctions proceed along the lines of formal state-membership. At the same time, we acknowledge that citizenship is not everything when it comes to inclusion, voice and rights. Other forms of incorporation may coexist with (or be in conflict with) citizenship regimes. The focus on political subjectivity also allows us to take these other forms into account.

So what is at stake when we talk about belonging, citizenship and, ultimately, political subjectivity?

### **Belonging, Citizenship and the Rights-Bearing Subject**

#### *Practices of Belonging*

One of the core themes of the contributions to this special issue is the question of belonging, encompassing both its emotional appeal as well as its shifting political significance. In order to grasp the complexity of the term, we follow Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) who has suggested a distinction between three analytical levels. Firstly, belonging refers to a social location from where subjects speak, constructed intersectionally 'along multiple axes of difference, such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, stage in the life cycle, sexuality, ability and so on' (ibid.: 200). Secondly, there are forms of identification that do not necessarily match the ascribed social identity a person carries and that are rather performed by self-identifications and the production of emotional attachment and desire (ibid.: 202f). Lastly, we can think of belonging in terms of the politics of belonging, i.e. the institutions, laws, and regulations that construe belonging in a particular way, embedded in ethically framed judgments about who belongs and who will be excluded (ibid.: 203ff). In other words, the politics of belonging is mainly concerned with 'the dirty work of boundary maintenance' (Crowley 1999, quoted in Yuval-Davis 2006: 204). Belonging understood in this threefold manner can, but need not encompass citizenship as political membership. It can thus be called a 'thicker concept', since it 'is not just about rights and duties, but also about the emotions that such memberships evoke' (Kannabiran et al. 2006: 189).

This characteristic entanglement becomes particularly apparent when we explore the various linkages between 'modes of belonging' (Rutherford 2008:

79f),<sup>4</sup> incorporation and politics of recognition (Fraser and Honneth 2003, cf. Taylor 1992) that are laid out in the contributions to this collection. As Englund (2004) has argued, a new aesthetics of recognition in Africa would have to pay attention to specific historical modes of subjectivity and subjectivation that cannot be grasped by an analytical mode of 'history by analogy' (cf. Mamdani 1996: 9) that would assume that citizenship or 'civil society' are universal concepts. This aspect is well-illustrated in the various contributions to our special issue. As authors consider the complex set of actors in their various case studies, they demonstrate how the coming together of different modes of belonging and demands for recognition may in fact lead to new forms of misrecognition. For example, in the first two papers by Balkenhol and Delpino, the politics of recognition is dominantly related to ideas of historical connectedness as they are articulated by members of the old African diaspora. Claims of belonging in different social spheres are here linked to the historical experience of the transatlantic slave trade and the misrecognition and denial of political subjectivity that went along with it.

In analyzing the memory politics of slavery in the Netherlands and the interventions by Dutch-Surinamese artists and activists, Markus Balkenhol deals with a complex network of belonging and political aspiration that links the social positioning and self-identification of people to questions of embodiment and emplacement. In his analysis Balkenhol shows that projects which emphasize diasporic connections, such as roots tourism, eventually aim at creating a place of belonging in Dutch society, and not in Africa, thereby creating awareness about the entangled histories of the Netherlands and its colonies. By bringing the revitalized discourse on autochthony and place in the Netherlands in relation to politics of recognition, he explores how Dutch-Surinamese claim their own place as 'local subjects' in Dutch society.

How a diasporic return movement can impact on the politics of recognition in localities in Africa is shown in the article by Gaia Delpino. She presents a case of African American homecoming to Ghana, where the quest for belonging by these returnees becomes part of local political struggles as well as a matter of national concern. The case study demonstrates that belonging is constituted through mutually influencing processes. In her case, the Ministry of Tourism and the local political authorities in the 'homeland' are both involved in 'building up' the belonging of the returnees for their own vested

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<sup>4</sup> Rutherford defines modes of belonging as 'the routinized discourses, social practices and institutional arrangements through which people make claims for resources and rights, the ways through which they become "incorporated" in particular places' (2008: 73).

interests. The African Americans, although integrated into local families, remain outsiders to the national body of the Ghanaian state and do not have rights to vote or to stand for political office. Yet, as the analysis by Delpino shows, the capacity of traditional authorities to grant recognition through the register of 'tradition' and 'ancestry' assigns the returnees a decisive political position.

The articles by Andrea Riestler and Blair Rutherford deal with recent migration movements within Africa and their historical embeddedness in more longstanding migration regimes. In their case studies, the connections between belonging and politics of recognition are mainly directed towards access to resources.<sup>5</sup> Both authors show how modes of belonging are not always a desired state, but on the contrary can be imposed on people, who in turn attempt to convey their ascribed social positioning into an advantage.

Andrea Riestler focuses on the complex relationships between government interventions and integration of emigrants in the case of *rapatriés* from Côte d'Ivoire to Burkina Faso during the time of the civil war in 2002. She shows how the ascriptions assigned to the returnees as either needy victims or enterprising individuals provide alternative subject positions from which the migrants develop their strategies for incorporation. In analyzing the contradictions and conflicts which evolved around development projects that were initiated by the government and international donors, she sheds light on how the state interacts with people through institutional resources and policies. Moreover, she shows how traditional authorities, *chefs de la terre*, play a decisive role in this negotiation, especially with regard to the crucial question of access to land.

Blair Rutherford's article focuses on different modes of belonging of Zimbabwean farm workers and female asylum seekers in the Limpopo province of South Africa. He analyzes the tactics by which migrant workers draw on the history of the area as a special production zone in which Zimbabwean migrant workers were assigned to particular farms. By accepting exploitative relationships which are based on the taken for granted loyalty of the Zimbabweans to the farm and the farmer to whom they 'belong', they are at the same time able to secure limited advantages for themselves and their relatives. Similarly,

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<sup>5</sup> This aspect of the politics of recognition has been highlighted by Nancy Fraser in her engagement with theories of recognition as developed by the New Hegelian philosophers Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth (Fraser 2003: 43ff). Fraser critically examines the tendency that struggles over distribution of resources have been 'displaced' by struggles for recognition of difference. To her, this shift eventually results in the reification of power relations which further exclusion, such as separatism, patriarchalism and authoritarianism (cf. Fraser 2000: 108).



mostly Zimbabwean women in the border town of Musina draw on networks of NGOs and governmental organizations to establish themselves as asylum seekers. This status enables them to build up a modest livelihood through access to shelters and jobs.

Belonging, in the cases presented in this volume, comes in many states and is articulated in relations among multiple actors. However, as our previous discussion has also shown, it cannot be completely isolated from the institutional and legal framework that is provided by the nation-state. In order to clarify this relationship, we need to understand the associations between citizenship and the state.

### *Citizenship and the State*

Originally, citizenship denoted the status of free, property owning and politically active men in the city states of ancient Greece (Bauböck 2003: 139f; Yuval-Davis 2006: 206) and later became closely associated with the nation-state in Europe after the French revolution (Wallerstein 2003; Yuval-Davis 1999: 120f). Although an exhaustive treatment of this topic is beyond the scope of this introduction, we can trace a slightly different historical genealogy if we look at developments in Africa. Most pre-colonial African societies knew various ways of integrating 'strangers' into their midst (Geschiere 2009: 22f) and African kingdoms like the Asante state had mechanisms in place by which people were either included in or excluded from the lineage-polity (Fortes 1972). However, the idea of membership of a society as based on a bounded territory was imported to Africa mainly via colonial rule. Yet, as Mahmood Mamdani has argued, 'Europe did not bring to Africa a tropical version of the late-nineteenth-century European nation-state. Instead, it created a multicultural and multiethnic state,' (1996: 287) with two parallel spheres of domination – that of 'customary law' or 'decentralized despotism' on the one hand, and that of the (colonial) state law, on the other. In Mamdani's ideal-typical description this led to the emergence of a 'bifurcated state' that, according to him, is characteristic of post-independent statehood in Africa as well.<sup>6</sup>

While acknowledging the specificity of the colonial constellation in Africa, Jean-François Bayart (1993) puts greater emphasis on the points of overlap

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<sup>6</sup> Mamdani has been widely criticized for providing too static a picture of developments in Africa. For literature which critically engages with his approach from the perspective of studies on agrarian change and the state, see Rutherford (2008: 78).

between the two spheres of ethnicized subjecthood and state-based citizenship and forms of rule, by looking at processes of reciprocal assimilation, especially of elites. Moreover, Bayart argues for a more encompassing view of Africa's placement in the world, acknowledging multiple forms of relations and, moreover, the active participation of Africans in African politics throughout. To him, 'the contemporary force of ethnic consciousness comes... from its reappropriation by local people, circumscribing the allocation of the State's resources' (1993: 51).

So whereas Mamdani focuses on political participation, Bayart emphasizes strategic gains, going as far as arguing that dependency can also be a strategy of subjectification in order to achieve one's goals. Despite their differences, both authors argue for the inclusion of historical trajectories in an analysis of contemporary citizenship (be it in Africa, or, for that matter, elsewhere). To us, these historical linkages are also vital. However, we do not attempt to generalize on these issues, but rather to look into specific historical as well as contemporary regimes and practices through which political subjectivities, including citizenship, are articulated and contested. Part of this analytical endeavour is to include diasporic and transnational actors and connections that have a profound impact on the definition and articulation of belonging and political subjectivity.

### *Expanding Citizenship beyond the Nation-State*

In order to do this analysis, it is important to consider the normative dimensions of citizenship, because they provide a framework in and through which citizenship is practically enacted. As Engin Isin has put it, 'citizenship as a status' and 'citizenship as a practice' constitute two poles around which the debates over citizenship have centred. They are connected to the question, 'whether [citizenship] is a controlling or empowering institution' (Isin 2009: 369); i.e. whether the focus is on rights or obligations, participatory or exclusive tendencies. In a similar way, Linda Bosniak differentiates an 'inward looking' perspective which is concerned with what happens within an already established political community, and a 'boundary focused' strand, which explores processes of exclusion and closure brought about by citizenship regimes (Bosniak 2006: 1-2). To summarize a very complex debate in a rather crude way it can be said that inward looking approaches are more concerned with citizenship as an empowering institution, achieved through civic behaviour and virtuous practices, whereas the boundary focused perspective pays

attention to situations in which people are controlled and put under surveillance in order to identify who is qualified for citizenship and who is not.<sup>7</sup>

Much of the recent increase in 'citizenship talk across the disciplines' (Bosniak 2006: 1) employs an inward looking perspective and conceptualizes membership based on ideas of participation. Even if attention is brought to exclusionary practices as they occur, for example, in the field of migration, citizenship appears to be a kind of 'gold standard' against which opportunities and aspirations are measured. Oftentimes, the concept is stretched to its limits in order to fit different perspectives, such as the everyday dimension of social participation (see The Gender and Cultural Citizenship Working Group 2009). In stressing the participatory aspect of citizenship, these approaches draw on the seminal writings of the communitarian thinker T.H. Marshall (1973, [1950]) and his distinction among three dimensions of citizenship, encompassing civil, political and social rights. Marshall's analysis was mainly concerned with the apparent contradiction in capitalist societies between the promise of equality entailed in citizenship and the practical inequality associated with class. To Marshall, the dimension of social rights was closely associated with the emergence of the welfare state in Britain and the principles of market control. It provided a solution to the above-mentioned cleavage by allowing for widest possible participation of people in the political life of the state via the institutions of civil society.

By encompassing a community dimension and emphasizing social participation, Marshall (quite unintentionally) opened the way to think about citizenship beyond the nation state (Hall and Held 1989, quoted in Yuval-Davis 1999: 121). Since then, several writers have taken up the idea to conceptualize citizenship on grounds of the social practices through which people are de facto incorporated, not necessarily through the legal status granted by a state. Yasemin N. Soysal, for example, in her study on guestworkers, shows how the foreigners' incorporation into European states worked on different levels and speaks of 'postnational membership' in order to emphasize these multiple dimensions. In correspondence to Marshall, who also observed a shift towards 'rights' in the establishment of social citizenship, Soysal argues that global 'human rights discourse provides a hegemonic language for formulating claims to rights above and beyond national belonging' (1994: 165), while also acknowledging the vital role of nation-states in enacting and implementing

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, these two aspects are never fully set apart – see our discussion of political subjectivity below.

such rights. So to her, claims for recognition and participation do not need to be formulated in the jargon of citizenship in order to be effective.

Other authors, however, draw on the notion of social citizenship, maintaining and expanding the terminology. Such approaches conceptualize inclusion beyond the state, stressing the flexible nature of citizenship instead of its exclusionary tendency (Isin and Turner 2007: 5; Fumanti and Werbner 2010). Thus, for example, we find writings on urban citizenship, based on place of residence and engagement in the neighbourhood (Holston 1999; Varsanyi 2006), alternative citizenship, derived from virtues played out in religious organizations (Levitt 2007; Fumanti 2010), cultural citizenship, as a means of enacting difference (Rosaldo 1994), workplace citizenship as expressed in struggles of contingent workers for inclusion into workplace relations (Kenny 2007), cosmopolitan citizenship at work in the engagement in hometown associations (Mohan 2008), supply chain citizenship, describing the corporate organized connections build up through new corporate ethics and outsourced production (Partridge 2011), or therapeutic citizenship, which in light of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is defined as a 'form of stateless citizenship whereby claims are made on a global order on the basis of one's biomedical condition, and responsibilities worked out in the context of local moral economies' (Nguyen 2005: 142).

While we can therefore certainly observe a shift from state-based to other forms of inclusion and incorporation, reflected, for example, in global health activism, the paradox of the promise of equality and the practice of inequality remains central to debates about citizenship and it is intrinsically connected to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in overlapping spheres (see Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999). This is all the more true when looking from a migration perspective where questions of belonging are contested and legal recognition through state institutions is frequently not granted. Therefore the questions remain, who is the audience for these different citizenship projects, and who responds to their claims and recognizes them as such? How do these various kinds of citizenship projects translate into tangible effects of incorporation? In particular it remains unclear whether extended citizenship discourses carry any meaning for people who lack citizenship – and therefore rights – by legal definition, as Linda Bosniak highlights: 'If citizenship is treated at the highest measure of social and political inclusion, can people designated as noncitizens as a matter of status be among the universe of the included?' (Bosniak 2006: 3).

Similarly, Blair Rutherford argues for limiting the conceptualization of citizenship as 'referring to a relationship between the individual and the state and

not to use the term to encompass other forms of social belonging, be they territorialized or not'. He cautions that 'an analytic of "inclusive citizenship" that reads all struggles of solidarity and against inequity through the lens of citizenship (Kabeer 2005) can miss out the distinctive implications of claims-making and recognition through the register of citizenship' (Rutherford 2011).

To analyze the processes by which people and groups negotiate their positions vis-à-vis authorities we therefore suggest one to think of citizenship through political subjectivity, which can, but needs not to result in the formal recognition of an individual as a rights bearing subject. According to Isin, conceptualizing citizenship as political subjectivity 'shifts our attention from fixed categories by which we have come to understand or inherit citizenship, to the struggles through which these categories themselves have become stakes' (Isin 2009: 383). 'Rather than asking "who *is* the citizen" the question then becomes "what *makes* the citizen?"' (ibid.). In order to clarify this question we will look more closely at political subjectivity and its relation to citizenship.

### **Thinking through the Lens of Political Subjectivity**

The terms citizen and subject are commonly seen as antonyms. Understanding citizenship as the enjoyment of rights, and subjecthood as the obligation to fulfil duties, the terms are also often used to describe the difference between being a citizen of a modern nation state, and being the subject of a king in monarchies or systems of so-called traditional rule (Werbner 2002: 3; Biehl et al. 2007: 6; Fischer 2007: 423).<sup>8</sup> Our understanding of the term is slightly broader, however. Following Richard Werbner, we see subjectivity encompassing the relations 'between the personal, the political and the moral' (Werbner 2002: 3), which is simultaneously about subjection to power, experiencing new agency and gaining recognition.

How to conceive of the subject and how human beings can theorize about themselves as acting agents has been a key problem of philosophical thought. In particular, the question of whether there can be something like a free rea-

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<sup>8</sup> According to Isin and Turner (2007), it was Baruch Spinoza who introduced the idea that citizen means to 'enjoy advantages' and the term subject refers to obeying 'ordinances and laws' (Spinoza 1958: 285, quoted in Isin and Turner 2007: 6). In this understanding a person who is a citizen is at the same time a subject. See also the title of Mahmood Mamdani's book *Citizen and Subject* (1996).

soning subject has occupied sceptical thinkers for centuries after Descartes' famous *cogito ergo sum*. Within social theory the notions subject/subjectivity regained importance in the 1960s, fuelled by the need to develop a better understanding of political agency and power relations.<sup>9</sup> Since then, the terms have often been used by scholars but in a rather fuzzy way, encompassing human experience and social life in general and the 'continuity and diversity of personhood' (Biehl et al. 2007: 1).

Michael Fischer (2007) identifies four registers in which 'the return' of the term subjectivity plays out: (1) psychological subjectivity, including affective states, inner processes and constructions of selfhood, (ibid.: 423f.), (2) the linguistic subject, ranging from grammatical functions in sentence construction to its role in post-structural theory building (ibid.: 424), (3) the biological subject, meaning 'the sensate folds where the body feels itself', or the 'reversible flesh' of phenomenological theory (ibid.), and finally (4) the political subject, as an effect of power relations and reoccurring focus of social theory (ibid.: 423).

Our take on political subjectivity is in line with this last register, inspired by writings on processes of subjectification in relation to political projects. Much of this work is based on Michel Foucault's understanding of subjectivity as produced by discursive regimes – as self-making and being-made by power-relations (Ong 1996: 737).<sup>10</sup> First and foremost, this means not to take the existence of subjects for granted, but to ask how political subjectivity emerges in the first place, that is, how individuals or groups gain a position which makes them recognizable as such. It is only through these forms of recognition that they gain voice and are therefore able to address authorities, but it is through the same processes that they can in turn also be addressed as subjects.

If we now put greater emphasis on these processes of subjectification, citizenship becomes but one aspect of political subjectivity, and a specific one, linked to legal and institutional practices and ultimately to the nation-state. Because, if everything is subsumed under citizenship (as it is a current tendency, see our brief discussion above), it becomes almost impossible to distinguish between competing or intersecting forms of institutionalized power,

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<sup>9</sup> See Blackman et al. (2008) and Reckwitz (2008) for comprehensive overviews of the different strands of theorization.

<sup>10</sup> While we endorse Ong's understanding of subjectification, we call for a more critical and precise analysis of the relation between what she terms cultural citizenship (which could be translated into practices of belonging in the sense outlined above) and legal recognition.

such as the state, faith-based organizations, and global pharmaceutical companies, or, as in our case studies, state institutions, NGOs, diasporic groups and traditional authorities. The focus on political subjectivity also allows us to pay closer attention to the relational dynamics through which power comes into being.

Here we come back to Foucault's understanding of political subjectivity as a process characterized by the double face of self-making and being made. Drawing on this dynamic distinction and combining it with Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation,<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler (1997) has argued that the subject does not exist before it enters into the relationship with an authority, but emerges by desiring to be addressed by that authority and by attempting to master a skilful response. Important for our discussion is the relation between desire, power and processes of subjectification that Butler calls attention to. The heuristic tool of political subjectivity enables us to consider the dimension of emotional attachment in formalized relationships with the state and other institutionalized forms of authority. As becomes clear in the contributions, most variants of governance are imbued with emotional and ethical dimensions. Thinking through political subjectivity allows us to encompass emotional attachment and formal relations to authorities in one term, while still retaining the specific meanings of belonging and citizenship.

Most significant in our context is the fact that people are interacting with multiple actors who may hold or compete for the power over access to resources and take on the role as recognition-granting-authority. In the case studies that are discussed in this special issue, relations of interpellation and subjectification emerge not only with the state, but with NGOs, international donors, diasporic interest groups and traditional authorities.

The positions that people claim for themselves (Balkenhol, Delpino), accept in order to get access to resources (Rutherford, Riester), or inhabit in the processes of negotiating belonging (Delpino, Riester, Rutherford), are assigned through multiple actors and emerge in specific situations alongside the intersections of race, class, gender and other social stratifications (Yuval-Davis

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<sup>11</sup> In his short essay on *Ideology and the ideological state apparatus* (2001[1970]), Althusser attempts to explain how the conditions for the reproduction of production happen within institutions, which ensure not only the reproduction of skills but also of the submission to a ruling order (Butler 1997: 118f). In the often quoted example of interpellation he describes a situation where a policeman hails at a man, who turns round, because he feels addressed and recognized as a subject. In Butler's understanding, this raises a paradox: the man can only feel addressed if he was 'in relation to the voice before the response' (Butler 1997: 111). Butler adds here the aspect of desire, which foregoes the response. For further details see Reckwitz (2008: 81-95).

2007). This aspect is particularly apparent in the contributions by Riester and Rutherford which focus on inner-African migration movements. In both case studies political subjectivities are forged through the interplay between different institutions and the moral discourse of 'humanitarian intervention' and 'development'. The authors explore how migrants make use of the possibility of becoming incorporated into localities by situationally accepting the terms of inclusion set up by relevant counterparts. They show how practices of regulation create different forms of political subjectivity in particular spaces. In mastering the skills of responding to the categorization imposed on them, both Zimbabwean women (Rutherford) and returnees from Ivory Coast (Riester) not only accept being regarded as needy victims but also bear the risk of (sexual) exploitation and humiliation. At the same time, the authors show how these actors use the slightest chances which emerge in the interstices of this positioning to change their situation to the better, thereby demonstrating powerfully that the ability to act and to claim stakes is not the result of revolutionary achievement but rather based on acts of submission to an order (Butler 1997: 2).<sup>12</sup>

The desire 'to be seen' and to be recognized as a subject in view of a life-long endurance of disrespect and racist devaluation is central to the projects of homecoming, as analyzed by Delpino, and commemorating the slave trade, explored by Balkenhol. In both cases, the desire to belong is strongly articulated, yet the categories of membership are highly ambivalent – 'Africa', 'diaspora', 'community' and 'nation' form a repertoire of belonging which is situationally foregrounded, so to speak. Both studies show how these projects necessarily remain incomplete, but can result in new and unexpected locations from where new acts of positioning are possible.

Balkenhol follows the multiple traces by which political subjects are constituted and categorized: from the historical record of colonialism and the visible presence of people of colour in the Netherlands to the reconstruction of possible lines of genetic ancestry. By exploring the contested and ever-shifting emplacement of black bodies in the national imagination of the Netherlands, he shows how the Dutch Surinam activist Roy and the artist Jetty transform the experience of Dutch history being written off into powerful interventions,

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<sup>12)</sup> See Rutherford's contribution in this issue, where he takes inspiration from Saba Mahmood's work on pious women, in which she also draws on Butler for understanding agency through acts of submission (Mahmood 2001). Related to this is the point that recognition needs to be understood as constant misrecognition, that there is no 'true' being seen and being recognized as such (Butler 1997: 197).



which generate new subject positions which locate them even stronger within the Netherlands.

In the case study presented by Delpino all actors (African American home-comers, Ghanaian state-representatives and local chiefs, including those aspiring to the office) unwillingly accept to be used by others for their purposes: the chiefs and local community representatives allow themselves to become the subject of projections and an insatiable desire for home on the part of African Americans. Even though an African home remains elusive to the latter, it is their very request of belonging that serves to bolster the prestige of one of the parties in a long-standing chieftaincy conflict. Due to their different perspectives and interests, both parties are not recognized on the grounds they argue for, but for other reasons: the chiefs are not regarded as rivals who are entangled in a complex struggle about royal inheritance, but as traditional authorities who can grant belonging. The African Americans are addressed as 'family' by one side of the conflicting parties, yet this address does not play along the same registers as African Americans themselves may envision: they are viewed as representatives of 'the West', providing opportunities for investment and travelling abroad, but also as descendants of slaves, which in the local context does not necessarily match their self-ascription as ascendants from slavery or as returnees. Finally, their presence also has quite unintended consequences with regard to local and national politics.

## **Conclusion**

All in all, the assembled contributions speak of the necessity of a broader frame of analysis in thinking about citizenship and belonging in Africa and its various diasporas. To us, the conceptual framework of political subjectivities provides a useful starting point for understanding the dynamics of opening and closure, and incorporation and exclusion underlying these processes. Our aim in this special issue is to make explicit the double face of processes of political subjectification, which grants people or groups positions to claim rights, but at the same time forces them to accept being subjected to the rules and governing practices of those authorities they address. By thinking of citizenship along these lines we attempt to emphasize the central role played by various forms of governance in producing, confirming and contesting politics of transnational incorporation and diasporic participation, often targeting members of historically differently situated groups. In our understanding political subjectivity is a helpful notion to describe how people relate to

governance and authorities. It denotes how a single person or a group of actors is brought into a position to stake claims, to have a voice, and to be recognizable by authorities. At the same time the term points to the political and power-ridden dimension within politics of identity and belonging, by encompassing the imaginary and emotional, as well as the judicial-political dimension of claims to belonging and citizenship, including moments of exclusion and non-incorporation.

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