

Citizenship Capabilities and Instant Messaging in Western Kenya: an Intersectional Approach

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Abstract

This doctoral research project contributes to understanding the role of WhatsApp—the most used social media platform in Kenya—in citizen engagement processes. Paying particular attention to inequalities, power dynamics, and the need to account for the postcolonial context of Kenya, the project develops a theoretical framework that combines the Capability Approach (CA) and critical citizenship studies to conceptualise citizen engagement as relational and multi-layered citizenship. It draws on the theory of affordances to understand WhatsApp as an artefact and uses intersectional feminism alongside the CA to study the interaction between WhatsApp and the citizenship capabilities. The project's methodology follows a situated knowledges approach that focuses on discourse and a digital ethnography that encompasses multiple methods across offline and online spaces. Based on research with young people in the county of Busia, this thesis first identifies a set of citizenship capabilities including mattering, belonging and respect, in addition to what may be considered more obvious citizenship capabilities such as participating in decision-making or exercising rights. Second, in addition to processes that serve as conversion factors that help to 'activate' citizenship, the research also highlights the role of performative citizenship practices as conversion processes in themselves. Third, the study identifies a set of WhatsApp affordances which interact with these conversion processes and can help to activate or enact citizenship. These affordances emphasise WhatsApp's social, discursive and agentic possibilities among private and relevant groups of people, helping to build and perform citizenship as an inwards and intimate process before enacting it in the public sphere. Finally, the thesis argues that the meanings attached to the capabilities as well as the conversion factors vary depending on where people are situated across axes of oppression. So do WhatsApp's affordances. Relying on instant messaging's affordances without taking these inequalities into account can further exclude people from valued capabilities.

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List of acronyms

ADP	Annual Development Plan
CA	Capability Approach
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CFSP	County's Fiscal Strategy Paper
CIDP	County Integrated Development Plan
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FRDA	Feminist Relational Discourse Analysis
ICT4D	Information and Communication Technologies for Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
MAVC	Making All Voices Count
MCA	Member of the County Assembly
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

Glossary

Baraza	Swahili term that refers to traditional village public meetings
Chama	Swahili term for self-help groups that work as informal cooperatives where members pool resources to help each other. Chama literally means 'group' in Swahili language. Unlike saccos (see below) they do not tend to be regulated.
Harambee	This term literally means 'let's all pull together' and refers to a rooted local practice of cooperation. The Kenya government adopted this practice in the 1960s as part of its national development policies. The term became a motto in Kenya's coat of arms.
Majimbo	Swahili term for 'regions'
Mwananchi	Swahili term for 'citizen'
Sacco	Savings and Credit Cooperatives. Saccos are more formal than chamas and tend to be regulated.
Siasa	Swahili term for 'politics'

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This doctoral research project seeks to understand how digital technologies, and specifically instant messaging, mediate citizenship in Western Kenya, with a focus on how this mediation interacts with inequalities and dynamics of power and oppression. The origin of this research question is two-fold. On the one hand, it originated in the context of my own experiences working in the field of Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D). The inequalities in access to and use of digital technologies I witnessed did not square with much of the field's optimism about the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for social change. On the other hand, it also stemmed from the recognition in the academic literature that although much of the work in ICT4D made the assumption that digital technologies can bring transformational change, there was in practice little evidence of this. This lack of evidence was especially clear in relation to the impact ICT had for women and other oppressed groups and in relation to governance and citizen engagement. As political analyst and activist Nanjala Nyabola has written: 'The economic benefits of increased connectivity are well researched, its democratic benefits less so' (2018: 81).

Kenya seemed a fitting context in which to explore the relationships between citizenship, digital technologies, and inequalities. It has long been considered a hub for ICT in the African continent, with a vibrant industry referred to by some as the 'Silicon Savannah', and ripe with investment and experimentation. It was the birthplace of technologies and platforms like Ushahidi, M-Pesa, BRCK or BitPesa, innovative not only for Kenya but for the rest of the world (Ndemo and Weiss, 2017). Yet, this hype and investment contrasts with, and can serve to obscure, existing digital and socio-economic inequalities in the country. In addition, these inequalities cannot be understood without first understanding Kenya's political context and the profound impact of European colonisation, which created and amplified divisions within society and produced understandings of citizenship still relevant today.

In the last few years, more studies have emerged from the fields of politics, media and communication, and ICT4D on the role of more public social media apps like Twitter or Facebook in civic and political engagement. However, research on instant messaging apps, also known as dark socials because they are less open, lags behind (Nyabola, 2018a). WhatsApp is the social media platform most used in Kenya and the social media platform most used by the group of activists that engaged with the research. My research, then, also aims to contribute to building the empirical evidence on the role of instant messaging in citizen engagement processes.

This chapter starts by situating this doctoral research study in the context of ICT4D research, policy, and practice. First, it reviews the literature on the evolution of the ICT4D field and the theoretical and empirical gaps that this study aims to address. Second, it provides an overview of the changes in the ways development has been conceptualised as a field of study. Third, it introduces citizen engagement as a development outcome, and reviews some of the literature on the use of digital technologies for citizen engagement. Fourth, it introduces citizenship as a concept to study citizen engagement processes and state-society relationships in ways that are contextual, nuanced, and multi-layered, focussing on the particularities of citizenship in Kenya. The chapter concludes with an analysis of Kenya as a postcolonial society, attending to its historical, socio-economic, political, and cultural factors, and rearticulates the research questions in this context.

1.1. Situating this thesis within ICT4D research

The field of ICT4D emerged in the 1980s to research the use of ICT in international development (Thapa and Saebo, 2014; Walsham, 2017). Its origins are linked to the diffusion of computers and, since then, ICT4D has grown as a distinct field of study as the use of digital technologies gained prominence in development policy and practice. This prominence was long underpinned by the assumption that digital technologies could lead to socio-economic improvements including in economic growth, education, gender equality or democracy (Avgerou, 2017). The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include the use of ICT in various targets, indicating its expectations for ICT in addressing inequalities. Target 5.B in the Gender Equality goal, for instance, is

to *'Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women'*.

The focus of the 2016 World Development Report by the World Bank on digital technologies under the title 'Digital Dividends' (The World Bank, 2016) was also illustrative of the growing importance of digital technologies in development policy. However, it also indicates a growing recognition of the need for more evidence on how digital technologies can improve lives. The report acknowledged the digital divide¹ and other inequalities related to health, education and the governance and economic context as hindering the potential of ICT. As another example of this growing concern about the impact of ICT from the point of view of development practice, in 2016 over 100 organisations agreed on a set of Principles for Digital Development to guide best practice for sustainable and effective use of technologies. The work on these principles was spurred by the recognition that many ICT4D projects had failed to address inequalities (Waugaman, 2016: 2).

When ICT4D started to emerge as a field in the 1980s it was dominated by information systems (IS) research. It has, however, evolved and been approached by different disciplines alongside changes in development studies as well as rapid technological change. Walsham (2017) discusses the several phases that ICT4D has gone through, which are relevant to the theorising of the field. After the first initial phase dominated by IS, a new phase started in the mid-1990s, when signs of multidisciplinary started to appear (Walsham, 2017). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) gained ground on the global political agenda, marking a move from development understood as economic growth to a more holistic view of what development is (Zheng et al., 2018). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) became the key actors applying ICT4D (Heeks, 2008). Walsham then identifies a new phase from the mid-2000s, largely a result of the proliferation of mobile phones, which opened up new possibilities relevant for multiple disciplines (2017). Multidisciplinary became central to this new

¹ The digital divide refers to the differences in society between those who can access and benefit from the use of digital technologies and those who cannot.

phase of ICT4D, spearheaded by a need to find answers when the sector was failing to provide evidence of impact (Heeks, 2008).

After a decade, from approximately the mid-2010s, an extensive body of academic ICT4D literature was taking stock and exposing the research gaps (De' et al., 2017; Qureshi, 2015; Sein et al., 2019; Unwin, 2017; Walsham, 2017; Zheng et al., 2018). This literature suggests a consensus that both ICT4D research and practice had failed the poor (Qureshi, 2015) and that ICT are no silver bullet for complex social problems. It also argues that ICT may amplify inequalities (Zheng et al., 2018) due to unequal access to digital technologies and because digitalisation can allow advantaged groups to benefit from technologies disproportionately more and at the expense of relatively disadvantaged groups (Heeks, 2021; Masiero, 2022; Unwin, 2017). In addition, there has been a growing recognition of the need to address the dominance of Western epistemologies and the colonial and modernist foundations of development and of ICT4D as fields of research and practice (Masiero, 2022; Mawere and van Stam, 2019).

A number of academics have put forward agendas for the sector (Avgerou, 2010, 2017; De' et al., 2017; Masiero, 2022; Qureshi, 2015; Sein et al., 2016; Thapa and Sæbø, 2014; Unwin, 2017; Walsham, 2017; Zheng et al., 2018). My assessment of this literature suggests at least three areas of consensus on the way forward for ICT4D research:

- (1) a need to theorise ICT4D, which has been difficult to do due to the changes in development theory, the constant evolution of ICT themselves, and the multidisciplinary nature of the sector
- (2) a need for evidence on *how* ICT contribute to specific and transformational development outcomes in different contexts
- (3) a focus on the most disadvantaged and oppressed groups.

It is in this context that this doctoral study was designed. The agenda proposed in the ICT4D literature has informed the approach to the theoretical and methodological framework, as will be covered in the next chapters.

1.1.1. What does 'development' mean?

Related to the calls in the literature for more theorising in ICT4D, there is a recognition that most ICT4D research has failed to critically examine what is meant by development (Masiero, 2022; Poveda and Roberts, 2017; Sein et al., 2019; Zheng et al., 2018). In this section I briefly review how development has been approached as a field before I proceed to focus on citizen engagement as a more specific development outcome.

The 1980s saw a gradual shift from an economic-centric and functionalist approach to a more people-centric view of development. This new phase represented an impasse for development (Booth, 1985), because it was characterized by a multiplicity of alternative views, which did not fit into a single paradigm. Despite the dispersion, there was a common thread based on principles of equity, participation and sustainable human and environmental development (Pieterse, 1998). This shift from economic to a human-centric approach to development is exemplified by the introduction of the Human Development Index (HDI), adopted by the United Nations in 1990 to measure the development of countries. The adoption of the HDI symbolised the gradual departure from economic-centric perspectives and GDP-based measures. The HDI was largely influenced by economist Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (CA) (Robeyns, 2005). Sen presented development as the process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. This approach conceptualises 'substantive freedoms' as human capabilities, or the possibility for people to live the lives that they have a reason to value (Sen, 1999a). It is a paradigm that fundamentally challenged Western views of development centred on growth (Tufte, 2017: 27).

Alongside human development, participatory development had also gained prominence as an approach which argued that people should be able to express their reality and be at the centre of assessments and decisions on their lives and conditions (Chambers, 1997). For Chambers, who was a major contributor to the participatory development approach, the end goal of development was responsible wellbeing, which is 'wellbeing that recognizes obligations to others, both those alive and future generations, and to their quality of life' (p. 1749). Chambers argued this could be

achieved if it was linked to capabilities and livelihoods following principles of equity and sustainability (1997: 1751).

As approaches to human and participatory development gained ground, so did a recognition of the importance of politics. Participatory approaches were criticised for their naivety in overlooking power relations and being complicit with top-down approaches to development (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Ferguson, 1990; Nelson and Wright, 1995). James Ferguson's 'Anti-Politics Machine' (1990) and Cooke and Kothari's 'Participation: The New Tyranny' (2001) are examples of calls for the politicisation of development. A common thread in these critical views is that development programmes were co-opting power by overlooking existing institutional arrangements and complex power dynamics in the communities they were meant to serve. Development programmes and practitioners were also contributing to this by overlooking their own power as Western stakeholders. Development scholarship gradually embraced these criticisms and the importance of politics (Hickey et al., 2015; Mohan, 2007; Teichman, 2016). Mohan (2007), for example, argued that 'for participation to become more transformatory we need to see it as a form of citizenship in which political processes are institutionalised and people can hold others to account' (p. 779).

More fundamentally though, scholars have been pointing out the colonial, oppressive and racist roots of development, the pervasive and ongoing 'white gaze' in the sector and the epistemic injustice it inflicts (Pailey, 2019a). As Pailey writes:

We continue to use problematic binaries such as developing vs developed, industrial vs agrarian, low income vs high income, Third World vs First World, global South vs global North, core vs periphery, sub-Saharan Africa vs North Africa, etc. We refer to endogenous, non-colonial institutions as 'informal' and compare them to 'formal' institutions of Western governance, failing to realize that those so-called informal institutions wield more power and clout than the formal ones. These binaries shackle us, they do not liberate. (2019: 6).

Discussions are increasingly taking place in universities across the globe to find new approaches that problematise and recognise these colonial roots. This is not only essential to address structural inequities and oppressive relationships but also for a better understanding of emancipatory social change (Langdon, 2013; Spiegel et al., 2017). Masiero (2022), for example, asks if we should still be doing ICT4D research today considering that the field was underpinned by assumptions of what development is that are increasingly problematised. She concludes, in line with the new agenda for ICT4D earlier discussed, that ICT4D research is relevant if reframed as justice and if it opens up to a multiplicity of theories and approaches. It is in this context that the next sections and the theoretical framework, discussed in the next chapter, are situated.

1.1.2. Citizen engagement in development theory, policy and practice

In development theory, policy and practice, the term 'citizen engagement' has been interwoven with notions of agency and empowerment, political participation, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, and situated within discourses of good governance (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 2005; Nanda, 2006). It is sometimes used interchangeably with terms that it can encompass such as civic engagement, political participation, participatory governance or social capital (Poncian, 2020; Skoric et al., 2016; United Nations, 2008). The 2008 UN report 'People Matter: civic engagement in public governance' argued for the importance of civic engagement in decision-making and service delivery processes to include the 'disadvantaged' and attain the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2008: 9). More recently, the Sustainable Development Goals deal with this outcome under SDG 16 ('Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions') and it is more explicitly reflected under the SDG target 16.7, which aims to 'Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels' (UN, n.d. under Goal 16 Targets and Indicators). As Poncian (2020) argues, the term 'citizen engagement' is commonly used but often escapes a universal definition. For Poncian, 'citizen engagement' can be broadly understood to be 'associated with a broad range of benefits including the potential to deepen

democracy by empowering the ordinary people to effectively participate in and influence policies which directly affect their lives' (p. 1500).

In the context of addressing the risks of the depoliticisation of development, participatory approaches to development have been exploring the meanings of citizen engagement and citizenship (Gaventa and Barrett, 2012; Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Kabeer, 2002). For example, Gaventa and Barrett (2012) conducted a systematic review of 100 research studies across 20 countries to map out the implications of citizen engagement for development. They categorised citizen engagement into four types, drawing on the typology outlined by Coelho and von Lieres (2010): participation in local associations, participation in social movements and campaigns, participation in formal governance spaces, and a fourth category based on a use of a combination of these mentioned types of engagement. They analysed the outcomes that these different types of engagement resulted in. The analysis identified a list of potential outcomes resulting from citizen engagement (2012: 2400). Their assessment concludes that many are positive outcomes, such as those related to 'constructing citizenship', which include increasing civic and political knowledge and a sense of agency, or those related to more 'responsive and accountable states', like improving access to services like health care, water, and education. Others can be negative, such as reprisals at various levels or a reinforcement of inequalities and oppressions. Ultimately, the authors asked for the study of citizen engagement to move beyond studying *whether* it makes a difference to understanding what conditions and processes are needed for it to do so.

The next section summarises some of the evidence on the use of ICT for citizen engagement, sometimes referred to as civic tech. It then expands the review of this evidence beyond the field of ICT4D and includes some of the literature on digital technologies and citizen engagement from the fields of politics, media and communication studies and sociology.

1.1.3. Using digital technologies for citizen engagement

In the context of ICT4D, there has been both public and private investment in technologies that can support participation and accountability and an effort to scale up these technologies (Peixoto and Fox, 2016: 2). However, evidence has pointed to a

limited impact of these technologies on governance processes (Peixoto and Fox, 2016: 4). A key issue identified in the literature of ICT4D for citizen engagement and in governance processes more broadly relates to the lack of definition of the outcome expected or the needs of citizens. For example, a study on the use of ICT for governance in East Africa, conducted by the research team at iHub, a Kenyan based organisation, defined citizen participation as constituted by both citizen engagement and government responsiveness intersecting in the space of public deliberation (Orwa and Salim, 2014). Their research identified that most initiatives using tech for citizen participation across Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania could fall under one of three categories: (i) platforms to listen to citizen voice, such as establishing toll free numbers or call centres; (ii) participation using SMS, such as with the UNICEF platform UReport, which also works as a data collection tool; (iii) and participation through social media, such as with Mzalendo in Kenya or Parliament Watch in Uganda, which use Twitter and Facebook to engage citizens in discussions covered in the countries' parliaments. However, it also found that tech initiatives lacked a 'comprehensive capturing of the pressing needs of citizens' and of their use of technology (2014: 30).

The multi-donor programme Making All Voices Count (MAVC)² financially supported many civic tech initiatives in a number of countries, including Kenya, and also conducted research to learn about their impact. A research priority for MAVC was to understand the ways in which ICT mediates how citizen agency is shaped and can shape and transform institutions, accountability and, more broadly, governance systems (Gurumurthy et al., 2017; Herringshaw, 2017). MAVC produced a synthesis of learning resulting from the programme. It concluded that the types of technologies that it used could help with mobilisation and collective action but could rarely on its own support the deliberation, trust and social norms needed in citizen-state relations and accountability. It also concluded that not all voices can be expressed through technologies and that the digital divide can deepen exclusions (McGee et al., 2018).

² MAVC is a partnership between three organisations (Hivos, Ushahidi and the Institute for Development Studies) and funded by DFID, USAID, SIDA and the Omidyar Network. It made a total of 178 grants to practitioners and researchers. <http://www.makingallvoicescount.org/about/>

Yet, beyond the ‘social engineering’ – to borrow Mbembe’s words (2001: 12) – of ICT4D projects and tech-based governance initiatives, more research has emerged from scholarship in politics, sociology, social psychology, and media and communication studies on the role of digital technologies in citizen engagement and social change. This body of research points at social and political change resulting from the ways people use digital technologies in everyday life. For example, earlier studies in Kenya already referred to the value of mobile phones for women’s empowerment and mobilisation. Sanya’s (2013) study of the use of mobile phones by women based in rural locations focused on the use of text-messaging via SMS as well as the use of mobile banking via M-Pesa, a mobile phone-based payment service which does not require internet access. It found that the use of mobile phones helped women assert their agency as well as create communities of support. Further research by Sanya and Odero (2017) also found that women’s groups were able to use mobile phones, especially text-messaging, to mobilise and engage women in ‘popular democratic participation’ on topics in relation to rights initiated by the new 2010 constitution.

Another aspect discussed in the literature is that internet-based platforms like Twitter enable an alternative networked public sphere where citizens can more easily access a range of discourses and debates and enter into conversation with them. This lowers the entry costs of citizens to participate, compared to participating in the top-down, centralised and unidirectional architecture of the traditional public sphere, dominated by a few established media houses and formal institutions (Benkler, 2006; Bosch, 2017; Nyabola, 2018a; Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). For example, Nanjala Nyabola’s (2018a) work on digital technologies and politics in Kenya explores how people are using technology to change political spaces. Nyabola warns of optimistic accounts that ascribe internet technologies with the power to solve problems that ‘people don’t want to fix offline’ (p. 204). However, Nyabola also finds that these technologies have been used by citizens creatively to facilitate their agency, experience trust across different groups, and to articulate and amplify ideas of those, like women and youth, whose voices are otherwise silenced offline. They have also been used to challenge power, create new identities and political spaces, and to expand definitions of democracy (2018: xxiii). Mukhongo (2020) similarly argues that through online activism people

have been able to express their creative ideas and visions for a new future and to demonstrate their worth and potential to the world.

There is less research, however, on more closed social media apps, such as instant messaging. Nyabola (2018a), for example, flags the need for more research on citizen engagement in WhatsApp and similar apps. Although conversations in these apps are more private and less available to scrutiny, more research on them can help to better understand how the articulation of ideas and mobilisation takes places in these spaces. In the context of county-level political participation in Kenya, Omanga (2018) finds that WhatsApp can be understood as a space for mobilising that can enable discursive practices and 'productive citizenship' through deliberation. As such, it has the potential for shaping political action. Omanga calls for more research to build evidence on how WhatsApp groups can constitute spaces for public participation in the devolved system of governance in Kenya.

In the different context of Malaysia, Johns (2020) found that WhatsApp and to a lesser extent Telegram provide a 'vital democratic function' and 'new political counter-publics' (p. 9), enabling activists to interact in social media spaces that are end-to-end encrypted, which Johns refers to as 'crypto-publics'. Johns argues these spaces provide an alternative to public social media, and to the risk of state legal action against the activists' public-facing activism. In their work on the use of WhatsApp in Mexico, Gómez-Cruz and Harindranath (2020) make the case for understanding WhatsApp not only as an instant messaging application but as 'collective infrastructure for social life' because the way it permeates people's communicative habits not only changes how people communicate but also how quotidian life is structured and experienced. Trerer's (2015, 2020) research in Mexico and Spain also found that WhatsApp enabled activists to build a collective identity as a social movement through internal deliberation and more light-hearted and intimate exchanges in comparison to the front-facing activism in social media.

In the context of this body of research, my doctoral research study aims to make new contributions by first, exploring understandings of citizenship rooted in the discourses of participants, and then exploring how the use of WhatsApp mediates citizenship. It

also aims to contribute by exploring these questions through an intersectional lens that accounts for digital and social inequalities. Studying digital inequalities requires a nuanced understanding of digital access and use (or lack of) but also an understanding of existing structural inequalities and how these interact with the use of technologies. As others have pointed out, these inequalities and axes of oppression intersect and manifest differently in different contexts and positionalities (Gurumurthy and Chami, 2014; Zheng and Walsham, 2021).

According to Kenya's 2019 census, access to the Internet is highest among those aged 25 to 34. Yet, only 44% of them used the Internet in the last three months despite mobile ownership being at 84% among this age group³. For those aged 15 to 24 years old, 49% own a mobile phone and 32% have internet access (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019c). These statistics are not dissimilar to levels of use reported in the Digital 2020 report for Kenya overall, which estimates an internet penetration of 43% (Hootsuite and We Are Social, 2020). These statistics are even lower in rural areas and among women as also captured in the census. Yet, there are additional factors which intersect and are compounded by other positionalities and axes of oppression rarely captured in statistics. For example, Komen and Ling (2021) found that the widespread use of mBanking, especially through M-Pesa, is a double-edged sword for women in Kenya because although it affords some control and power to them, it also creates tensions and backlash as husbands 'assume the right to review the communications and transactions carried out on their wife's phones' (2021: 4). Kibere (2016a) found in a study of mobile phone use by youth in Nairobi that mobile phones and mobile internet eased the way they could connect with young people from the same social class but did not make it easier to connect with networks from other social hierarchies, arguing that online interactions and networks can replicate or exacerbate offline ones. Therefore, understanding digital use and its implications requires going beyond and questioning statistics on access as these do not capture the inequalities that interact with access or use of digital technologies. This is a central aspect when exploring the transformational

³ The question in the census does not specify what type of mobile phone people own but data from the Communications Authority of Kenya from June 2022 reports a proportion of 54.3% smartphone vs 66.6% for feature phone penetration out of the existing mobile connections across the entire population (Communications Authority of Kenya, 2022).

impact of digital technologies and I will cover this in detail when discussing the research questions, the methodology, and in the empirical chapters.

1.1.4. From citizen engagement to citizenship

Both in reviewing citizen engagement as a development outcome (section 1.1.2) and the use of digital technologies in this context (1.1.3), the literature points to a lack of clarity on what is meant by terms like ‘citizen engagement’, ‘governance’ or the extent to which these terms include the needs of citizens. This section introduces the concept of citizenship to conceptualise the development outcome relevant to this research study. In development studies, citizenship gained traction as a concept in the late 1990s to critically examine discourses of good governance and participation and to ask who was represented in which spaces, who was participating and who was held accountable (Gaventa, 2002). Until then, as Mukhopadhyay (2007) argues, citizenship studies were largely part of Western political thought and focused on studying ‘state-society relations in primarily Western, liberal democracies’ (p. 264).⁴ Mainstream Western political ideas have been criticised for masquerading as universal and for excluding non-Western voices (Weiss, 2020). Sen (2003), for example, questioned the view that democracy is a Western idea, often linked to ancient Greece, and critiqued the neglect by the Western tradition of intellectual heritages of many other cultures and continents in the world.

Under this mainstream tradition of political thought, citizenship has largely been seen as composed of three related dimensions:

- firstly, it is constituted by rights and duties, often tied to a legal status which assigns social, political and civil rights (see Marshall, 1950);

⁴ Western political thought is not uniform, and it includes diverse approaches and genealogies. I use the term to encompass theories grounded on experiences in Western contexts (Weiss, 2020) associated to a tradition of political thought often traced back to Plato and Aristotle (Arendt, 2002). The term is used to refer to these contexts as dominant over much of the rest of the world through the structures of global power since ‘the dawn of Euro-North-American-centric modernity’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018: 8). Western contexts are frequently understood to refer to Europe and the territories settled by Europeans in America and Oceania, which share worldviews evolved from Greco-Judaic-Christian roots and a place of economic and political dominance in the world through imperialism and colonialism (Karan, 2017).

- secondly, it relates to active participation in the state within which the citizen holds legal status or membership;
- thirdly, it relates to identity and sense of membership (Lister and Pia, 2008; Tonkiss and Bloom, 2015).

This Western philosophical tradition often bounds citizenship to the state and has been developed under two overall branches depending on how they prioritise and interpret these denominations listed above (Honohan, 2017): the liberal one, more preoccupied with individual status and rights; and the republican, centred on citizenship as active participation. A third branch, the communitarian, developed more recently (although rooted in older philosophical traditions) as a response and critique to liberalism's emphasis on the individual (Lister and Pia, 2008). These theories have been increasingly challenged by scholars from postcolonial studies as well as critical and postmodernist discourses in the late twentieth century. These criticisms do not necessarily dispute that notions like active participation or rights apply, but they argue that Western notions of citizenship take a universalising approach that does not pay enough attention to exclusions such as those related to gender, class, or race (Lister et al., 2017; Pailey, 2019b) or to spaces of belonging that are not tied to the nation-state (Yuval-Davis, 1997). These critical approaches largely put an emphasis on representation and differentiation of groups and their different struggles for rights, as well as on the interconnectedness brought about by globalisation (Isin, 2002).

The next chapter will discuss citizenship theory relevant to this study's theoretical framework, but it is important to note here the need identified in the literature for more research on what citizenship means in different contexts, as this need has informed this study's research questions.

(...) the history of citizenship in both North and South has been a history of struggle over how it is to be defined and who it is to include. However, what is also clear is that a great deal of the theoretical debate about citizenship today is taking place in an 'empirical void' (...). We do not know what citizenship means to people -particularly people whose status as citizens is either non-

existent or extremely precarious- or what these meanings tell us about the goal of building inclusive societies. (Kabeer, 2005: 1)

The next section discusses historical, socio-economic, and political dynamics in Kenya to argue for the need for a theoretical and empirical approach to citizenship that takes into account different contexts.

1.1.4.1. Citizenship in Kenya

The multi-layered nature of citizenship is compounded in many countries by the impact of colonialism on existing social relations and political structures and the way it re-ordered them as part of the strategies of colonial powers for control. Prior to European colonialism, African states were complex and diverse in the cultures that formed them and 'polyethnic' in nature (Grillo, 1998). Citizenship in those early states has been described as being about membership of a territory where there is a complex organisation of the social relations in a society ruled by the principle of reciprocity (Claessen and Skalnik, 1978). Mamdani (2018) argues that, although there were cases of centralised dynasties and kinships, nineteenth century state traditions in Africa tended to be decentralised and power constrained through a peer approach between traditional structures and administrative chieftaincies. The European conquest and colonial impositions changed this constrained approach to decentralised power by instrumentalising local leaders and giving power to specific actors, creating a form of 'decentralized despotism' (Mamdani, 2018). In Kenya, pre-colonial governance was largely decentralised and distributed through constituent villages with local councils and clan leaders (Osborn, 2020: 299). Similar to Mamdani, Osborn also argues that the role of chiefs as local authorities was changed and given formal power by colonial authorities as 'positions of oppression and extraction', a role which then continued to be central in Kenya's governance after independence (2020: 301).

Driven by the European view of the nation-state, colonialism reordered and categorised societies. This had important implications for the role of ethnicity in the politics of African states (Grillo, 1998; Kinyanjui, 2013). Ndegwa (1997) argues that the salience of ethnic identity in Africa is a relatively recent phenomenon largely resulting from European colonial rule, and continued by post-colonial elites that used ethnic

identity to mobilise support. In addition, new borders arising from colonialism also had implications for belonging and citizenship. As Manby (2009) also points out, African states 'faced a particular challenge to create an "imagined community" among groups of people thrown together without their own permission' (p. 4).

Tamale (2020) notes that the colonial use of law for subjugation - as 'law and order'-suppressed 'the pluralism of competing legal traditions' (p. 135) dismissing, for example, community-based dispute resolution systems. As an epitome of this imposed system of law and governance, all former colonies adopted Western modern constitutions at independence despite the fact that precolonial societies already had rules to govern them (2020: 137). This entailed problems of legitimacy, appropriateness and implementation:

The lack of justice of the means, and the lack of legitimacy of the ends, conspired to allow an arbitrariness and intrinsic unconditionality that may be said to have been the distinctive feature of colonial sovereignty. Postcolonial state forms have inherited this unconditionality and the regime of impunity that was its corollary. (Mbembe, 2001: 25)

In the case of Kenya, citizenship has also been shaped by the particular colonial origins in which rights and entitlements were defined and granted, the multiplicity of memberships existing in addition to membership of the new nation-state, as well as by the country's political and economic development agendas after independence, largely influenced by Western conditionalities from institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF (Ndegwa, 1997, 1998; Wainaina et al., 2011). I develop these points below.

Firstly, with regards to its origins, Ndegwa (1998) observes two axes which define the particular nature of citizenship in Kenya. One axis is based on the duality between 'citizen' and 'subject', a distinction rooted in colonial society which has persisted and shaped political relations between individuals and the state. In Kenya, the rights and obligations within the new independent state were not a result of historical traditions and struggles but negotiated by colonial masters with a stratum of the colonial society, namely a politicised urban elite. This set of rights and obligations was largely based on

British common law and bill of rights (Ndegwa, 1998) rather than social and local traditions with the implications, Ndegwa argues, that 'a sovereign who invents and dispenses rights to subjects can equally take them away' (1998: 352). The second axis is based on a dual citizenship, also determined by colonialism, whereby Kenyans experience a citizenship linked to their pre-colonial belonging and one linked to a nation-state (p. 353). As Akoth (2017) writes, one never displaced the other and political debates after independence have continued to engage this duality of identities and produce competing narratives between state and local elites as a way to claim membership to the state. Borders changed several times during British colonial rule. People who now live across borders had not so long ago been fellow citizens (Peterson, 2020). This colonial artefact is important for this doctoral research study. In Busia County, which borders Uganda, this impacts a number of cultural and political communities. The Teso, for instance, are based not only in this county of Western Kenya but also in Eastern and Central Uganda (Wanyama, 2020). Similarly, the Samia people, also predominantly based in Busia County in Kenya, are also based in Eastern Uganda. As an example of the existence of contingent and multi-layered memberships before independence, a group of Samia activists campaigned for the Samia population to be united into one district, fearing they would be marginalised by both the Ugandan and Kenyan soon-to-be states because they would be minorities in both countries (Peterson, 2020). Although their desire for recognition as one district has not happened, the Samia of Kenya and Uganda still get together to celebrate a Samia cultural event annually (Abimanyi, 2013).

Secondly, citizenship has been shaped by the particular development policies after independence. According to Ndegwa's (1998) analysis, in the '60s and '70s, Kenya followed an economic planning model which involved free and universal education and health care. The Kenya government promised a series of entitlements that it was unable to deliver in the 80s, when it entered a serious fiscal crisis and was 'forced' to accept conditional economic packages from the World Bank. While elites struggled over the assertion of economic rights for the limited resources, an emerging civil society engaged in political struggles to demand the promises made in the '70s. In

addition, pressure for political liberalisation was emerging in the '90s across many postcolonial countries. Ndegwa argues that this left an imprint on citizenship because, on the one hand, elites were preoccupied with economic struggles between them whilst continuing to view citizens as subjects, and, on the other hand, a form of citizenship seen as making rights claims was taking place led by an emerging civil society.

There is an additional debate to consider when conceptualising citizenship in Kenya. This has to do with sets of cultural values that are seen as particularly African and as clashing with Western capitalist values imported through economic reforms and globalisation. Wainaina, Arnot and Chege (2011) have argued that there is a body of work by a number of African writers and scholars who support notions of citizenship different from those included in the traditional liberal and republican Western theories of citizenship. These include pan-Africanism, Arabic-Islamic influences, Western Christian legacy and Indigenous cultures. They share values which place more importance on the community and interpersonal relations, suggesting different ways of understanding citizenship, putting humanity, interconnectedness and reciprocity at the centre of citizenship (Avoseh, 2001; Njeri Kinyanjui, 2019; Tamale, 2020; Wainaina et al., 2011).

The concept of citizenship in Kenya is therefore contested, taking place in multiple spheres and in the midst of clashes between Indigenous and Western capitalist values, in a political and social context etched by colonialism and the postcolonial development agendas.

1.2. Research context

1.2.1. Kenya's 2010 constitution and the implementation of the devolution

As will be further explained in Chapter 3, the empirical work for this doctoral project took place in Busia, one of the 47 counties that were created following Kenya's 2010 constitutional reform. This reform is also known as devolution, because the new Constitution was a result of longstanding demands for power and resources to be devolved to smaller territorial units (D'Arcy, 2020; Lutomia et al., 2018; Wanyama,

2020). The demand for devolution of powers was the result of a long history of centralisation that began when the first president after independence, Jomo Kenyatta, quickly dismantled the federal Constitution under which Kenya had become independent (D'Arcy, 2020). This was the Independence Constitution of 1963, which had enshrined an 'ethno-regional devolution of power' known as *majimbo* (Uraia Trust, 2012: 1). Since this was dismantled, the increasing centralisation continued and worsened inequalities in resource distribution. It also worsened the politicisation of ethnicity because resources were allocated by each president to their ethnic base to retain power (D'Arcy, 2020; Hassan, 2020).

Devolution was intended to address this. It has been Kenya's 'biggest political transformation since independence' according to Cheeseman et al. (2016: 2). It has created new political actors and new elective seats, including the county governor, county senator, the elective ward representatives as members of the county assembly (MCAs) and the women representative Members of Parliament (MPs) for the national assembly. This was intended to reduce political tensions along ethnic lines; yet many argue devolution has failed to address these tensions, which, if anything, have been reinforced (D'Arcy, 2020; Hassan, 2020; Wanyama, 2020). The new county territorial units of the devolution are based on the districts established in the 1992 *Provinces and Districts Act* (National Council for Law Reporting, 2012; Oyugi and Ochieng, 2020). These are based on a colonial legacy of boundaries devised to redistribute or contain ethnic groups, so it has been argued that '[d]evolution has tied access to resources to territorialized ethnic identity based on the colonial principle of ethnic sovereignty in a context where many, but not all, counties have significant majorities' (D'Arcy, 2020: 261).

In addition to harmonising tensions rooted in colonial policies and the centralisation by the presidents of Kenya since independence, devolution was also meant to facilitate development across the country by improving accountability and the efficiency of service delivery. Yet, notwithstanding the resources that this has enabled to be disbursed to remote or marginalised areas, issues of clientelism, corruption and the weak capacity and limited experience of county governments in delivering services

like healthcare have made this a complicated process (D'Arcy, 2020). According to this view, devolution, rather than harmonising tensions, has perpetuated the competition for political representation (2020). Yet, devolution still has significant support among Kenyans as a way of redistributing resources and keeping the central government in check (Cheeseman et al., 2016). This also became apparent in the process of this research study, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, as devolution was the backdrop against which discourses for social change were articulated.

Busia county has remained politically heterogeneous, a diversity that is characteristic of the region, the formerly called Western province, which also includes Bungoma, Kakamega and Vihiga counties (Wanyama, 2020). According to Wanyama (2020), the Luhya and Teso peoples, the largest communities in the county, although not the only ones, have followed diverse voting patterns tied to both expectations of resource distribution and traditions of freedom, equality and autonomy ingrained in the cultures of these groups.

1.2.2. Busia County

Busia has a population of almost 894,000 people according to the latest 2019 census, which was conducted just a month after I left Busia following the completion of data collection. This is 2% of the total 47,564,300 people in Kenya. The capital, Busia town, is in reality 'a pair of lively and fast-growing towns' spread across both Kenya and Uganda and a major transport route between Nairobi and Uganda's capital, Kampala (Allen, 2013: 291). The Busia twin-towns were a result of the creation of a colonial border based on existing, much older systems of trade and market towns that connected goods from farming and mountain areas as well as the Nam Lolwe lake⁵ (Soi and Nugent, 2017). Some of the peoples in Busia County, like the Teso and the Samia, occupy a geographical area that includes both Western Kenya and Eastern Uganda (Allen, 2013; Wanyama, 2020). Crossing the border is part of the daily lives of many for work, family or leisure. The realities and meanings of living on the border can challenge notions tied to the concept of the nation-state (Allen, 2013).

⁵ Name in Luo language for the lake known globally by the colonial name of Lake Victoria.

In Busia, 77% of the population is aged 34 or below, similar to the 75% average for this age group in Kenya overall. Young people, defined as those between 18 to 34 years old by the Kenya's 2010 Constitution, represent approximately a quarter of the population in Busia (26%) and 30% in Kenya overall (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019b). Of the total population in Busia, 48% reported their sex to be male, 52% to be female and 28 people were recorded as intersex, a third category which the Kenya census included for the first time (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019a). These demographics are important to consider as context when exploring the discourses about and articulated by youth and women in this research. The proportion of youth in Kenya and Busia specifically is often referred to by the research participants in their claims for inclusion in decision-making processes.

Busia is a rural county, with only 13% of the population living in an urban centre. A majority of the households (75%) are involved in farming, largely subsistence farming, with many growing both crops and keeping livestock. Almost 21% of people left school before completion, a proportion higher than the national average of 16% (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019c). Most relevant to the research questions in this study, in Busia 61% of those aged 15 and above own a mobile phone, but only 21% used the Internet in the last 3 months (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019c). This suggests many people own a basic or feature phone but have intermittent or occasional internet access, something that became very clear from this research as will be explored especially in Chapter 7.

Given its multiple potential identities and layers of belonging within and across state boundaries, as well as state-society relationships related to decentralisation and rurality, Busia is an ideal context in which to explore citizenship. It is also a relevant context in which to explore digital and structural inequalities.

1.3. Research questions and thesis outline

Having discussed the rationale for this research study, this section outlines the main research questions and presents a synopsis of the thesis chapters.

The research questions that guide this doctoral project are as follows:

1. What are the citizenship capabilities young people and women in Western Kenya value?

The aim of this research question is to define citizenship as understood by participants in the study, based on the discourses identified in interviews and observations of online and offline events. I focus on citizenship as capabilities in line with the theoretical framework I use, which includes the Capability Approach (CA). I provide a rationale for and discuss this approach in the next chapter. Due to structural inequalities as well as social norms that contribute to their political exclusion, both young people and women are broad groups that the literature identifies as particularly marginalised from civic engagement and participation in Kenya (Nyabola, 2018b; The Youth Cafe, 2022). These experiences of marginalisation are however compounded or intersected by other oppressions, like those related to class or location. For this reason, I use an intersectional lens (see also research question 3).

2. How does WhatsApp mediate these citizenship capabilities?

A central aim of this research is to understand how digital technologies influence citizenship. I have discussed earlier in this chapter the rationale for focusing on instant messaging and, specifically, WhatsApp. This research question therefore aims to better understand how this technology may or may not support the citizenship capabilities that participants value.

3. How does the role of WhatsApp in mediating the valued capabilities vary across the various axes of discrimination that young people and women are experiencing?

As discussed earlier in this chapter, most recent literature on ICT4D has pointed out the need to better understand if and how digital technologies can contribute to transformational change especially for marginalised groups. This third research question responds to this empirical need and is guided by intersectional theory and methodology, as will be discussed in the next two chapters.

‘Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework’, explores the literature relevant to the theorising of development, citizenship, digital technologies, and inequalities, and presents the theoretical framework of this research. ‘Chapter 3: Research Philosophy and Case Study’ discusses the methodology followed in the research, which is guided by feminist and postcolonial approaches and a situated knowledges epistemological framework that prioritises a multiplicity of methods and a focus on language and discourse. ‘Chapter 4: Methods of Data Collection, Analysis and Ethics’ covers the concrete methods of data collection and analysis. These methods are used as part of a digital ethnography that covers multiple qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, across online and offline spaces. The chapter also discusses the ethics that have guided the research, particularly in relation to online methods.

‘Chapter 5: Citizenship Capabilities in Western Kenya’ constitutes the first of three empirical chapters and focuses on the citizenship capabilities identified in the analysis of the data. It presents a set of nine capabilities derived from discursive patterns identified in the analysis process. The set of capabilities reflects the multiple layers of citizenship and a need for individual and collective wellbeing in a context of multiple injustices. In addition to more expected capabilities, such as the capability to engage in decision-making processes, it includes capabilities that reflect the need for mattering, belonging, respect or social interaction. ‘Chapter 6: Activating and Performing Citizenship’ builds on the concept of ‘conversion factors’ of the Capability Approach to discuss the conversion processes through which citizenship capabilities are activated, such as by enabling a space of belonging, or enacted, such as by referencing the constitution in public participation meetings among other conversion factors. Together, these two chapters address the first research question: What are the citizenship capabilities young people and women in Western Kenya value? ‘Chapter 7: WhatsApp Affordances and Citizenship Capabilities’ is the last empirical chapter of the thesis and focuses on the findings in relation to the affordances of instant messaging and how they relate to the citizenship capabilities and conversion processes previously discussed. In doing so, it reflects on the importance of social, discursive and agentic affordances in addition to the more expected communicative and organisational

affordances of an instant messaging app. It therefore addresses the second research question, which asks how WhatsApp mediates the citizenship capabilities identified.

The intersectional lens of the study relates to the third research question and is integrated throughout the three chapters to discuss how the capabilities and technology affordances interact with different and compounding axes of oppression.

The thesis ends with a conclusions chapter (Chapter 8) which summarises the key empirical findings from the research and responds to the three research questions. It also includes a reflection on the contribution of the study both theoretically and empirically, as well as its limitations. Finally, it also suggests areas for future research.

1.4. Conclusions

This chapter has introduced the objective of this research and situated the rationale for it within the literature on ICT4D research, policy and practice, namely: the limited existing evidence of the transformational impact of ICTs in processes of citizen engagement and governance; the need for evidence on how the impact benefits or does not benefit marginalised groups in society; and the need for better theorising of the field.

The chapter has also introduced citizenship as a concept to theorise citizen engagement in ways that account for the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and multi-layered membership, and which are situated in the socio-historical processes of a non-Western and postcolonial context like Kenya. It has also introduced a discussion of literature relevant to the role of digital technologies in citizen engagement and in the creation of spaces for participation and social change.

It has then introduced the geographical and political context of the study by reviewing literature on the significance of the system of devolution in Kenya as well as political and socio-economic background about Busia County, where this research took place. Finally, it has presented the three research questions that this research project aims to answer. As a whole it provides a context and rationale as grounding for this thesis.

Chapter 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction: theorising ICT4D

This chapter focusses on the theoretical framework I have used, which has also informed the methodology. It takes an interdisciplinary approach that draws largely from literature in the fields of international development, citizenship studies, and intersectional feminism.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, literature in the ICT4D field has suggested that the field needs to be better theorised. It has also argued that the future of ICT4D lies in multidisciplinary (Walsham, 2017) because social change is nuanced and multifaceted and because of the ubiquity and impact of technology in all aspects of social life. Due to this contextual and conceptual heterogeneity, some ICT4D scholars suggest using conceptualisations and frameworks that can help understand pathways for social change rather than prescribing a narrow set of theories and methods (Avgerou, 2017; Zheng et al., 2018).

Sein, Hatakka, Thapa and Sæbø (2019) offer a holistic framework for a coherent theorising in ICT4D. They suggest theorising each of the three pillars in ICT4D: the 'D' in ICT4D (what is development?); the ICT itself; and the '4' (for) in the acronym, which refers to the 'elusive link' between the ICT and the development process or outcome. ICT4D scholarly work has often assumed a direct relationship between ICT and development (Gigler, 2011; Thapa and Sæbø, 2014) and therefore the emphasis on the '4' in ICT4D puts a focus on exploring how the ICT makes development happen (Sein et al., 2019). This is the framework I use in the following sections to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of this research.

Firstly, I discuss the Capability Approach (CA) and relevant literature on critical citizenship studies, and the rationale for using them as a framework to theorise citizenship as the 'D' in my study. I then focus on the rationale for using the Theory of Affordances to theorise WhatsApp, or the 'ICT'. Finally, I draw again on the CA as a framework to theorise the link between citizenship and the ICT, alongside the use of intersectional feminist theory to help focus the exploration of this link on inequalities.

2.2. Theorising the 'D' in ICT4D

As discussed in the introductory chapter, I use citizenship as the development outcome that encompasses citizen engagement processes in ways that put an emphasis on people's agency and representation and on processes of struggle and change. To theorise citizenship I draw on the Capability Approach (CA) and on critical citizenship studies, particularly postcolonial studies, performative citizenship theory and feminist intersectional approaches. In this section I discuss the rationale for drawing on these approaches and their contributions to the study's theorisation of citizenship.

2.2.1. The Capability Approach

In the last two decades, a large body of ICT4D research has drawn on the Capability Approach (CA) to theorise development (Kleine, 2013; Poveda and Roberts, 2017; Sein et al., 2019; Thapa and Sæbø, 2014; Walsham, 2017). . The CA is not a theory, it is an approach and, as such, it can accommodate different ontologies and epistemologies (Kleine, 2013; Robeyns, 2016). At its core it has the notions of *capabilities* and *functionings* to conceptualise development outcomes. Capabilities are 'a person's real freedoms or opportunities to achieve functionings', which in turn are a 'being or a doing' (Robeyns, 2016: 406) or, in Sen's words, 'actual achievements' (Sen, 1999b: 75). Thus, if the act of taking part in a protest is a functioning, the capability is the real opportunity for a person to take part in a protest if they reasoned to do so. Development, then, is about expanding the set of capabilities that can allow people to live the lives they value (Kleine, 2013).

The Capability Approach (CA) is not only helpful in theorising development in ICT4D but can also help to understand the role of ICTs in the process of social change. This is because of its relational and evaluative nature. The CA, then, not only frames development as 'the process of expanding substantive freedoms that people have' (Sen, 1999b: 297) but is also a framework for designing or evaluating programmes, policies or proposals for social change (Robeyns, 2005: 94). Although social change can be evaluated in terms of achieved functionings (what people can or cannot do or be), Sen (2003a) emphasised the importance of focusing on capabilities (the opportunities to do or be) for two main reasons. Firstly, this allows us to assess the freedom to achieve as

valuable in itself. There might be different reasons why people do or don't do something but what matters for assessing development and wellbeing is that they have the possibility to. Secondly, using capabilities as the starting point is more conducive to achieving desired social change because functionings are associated to sets of interconnected capabilities. This means that focusing on capabilities first means multiple functionings might be achieved as a result.

A third key concept in the CA are the conversion factors. A conversion factor enables a person to tap into resources to turn a capability into a functioning. Conversion factors are therefore central in processes of social change as these can be altered or promoted through, for example, policies. Robeyns (2017) groups conversion factors into three broad categories: personal factors, such as skill or physical condition; social factors, such as social norms or power relations; and environmental factors, such as the climate or built infrastructure. Conversion factors are therefore closely related to resources. For example, owning a mobile phone, and being able to afford data bundles, are resources that can help someone turn a capability into a functioning, such as participating in a decision-making process by signing an online petition. Yet, other structural resources like discouraging social norms and government policies can prevent the person from doing this. Kleine (2013) provides an operational framework, the Choice Framework, to assess the role of technologies in development and lists a typology of resources. This typology includes material, financial, natural, geographical, human, psychological, informational, time, cultural, and social resources. It is important to note that resources in the CA are desirable only as a means to capabilities and functionings rather than ends in themselves. This is because the CA offers a holistic and normative approach to development, meaning based on values and what is morally just, unlike other functionalist, utilitarian approaches which measure development in income or material terms.

The flexibility of the CA applies not only to the different ontologies and epistemologies in which it can be used but also to the geographical contexts. Sen (1999a) argues that by understanding development not as income deprivation but capability deprivation, the CA is a helpful framework for policy analysis and assessing development across all

contexts, including high-income countries. Nussbaum (2000) refers to the language of capability, what people are able to be and do, as better suited to a diversity of contexts as opposed to the language of rights, which Nussbaum argues has been accused of having Western-centric connotations (p. 239).

One of the questions asked by scholars using the CA is whether there can or should be standard sets of capabilities and how to decide on a list. Nussbaum (2000) for example, attempted to offer a normative and universal list of central capabilities that is abstract enough to be adapted and work across contexts as a basis for human dignity and a guide for governments on central constitutional principles. Yet, others, like Robeyns (2003), have argued against universal lists because capability lists can be normative and respond to moral justice and yet still be drawn differently from different positionings, purposes, and contexts (Robeyns, 2003). As I will further discuss in the next section, I consider the CA to be valuable in exploring citizenship as rooted in particular historical and socio-political contexts and linked to multiple spaces and layers of belonging and interaction. This doctoral study therefore proposes a set of capabilities specific to the context of this research.

For Robeyns (2016), who has offered one of the most recent and detailed discussions of what the CA should be as a theoretical approach, a key characteristic at the core of the CA is human diversity and the understanding that people might value different functionings and capabilities and also have access to different resources and conversion factors. This diversity is also due to the existence of structural factors and constraints, such as institutions and social norms. The acknowledgment and consideration of these structural factors is then another characteristic relevant to this research, especially considering my focus on understanding inequalities. A final characteristic of the CA is the acknowledgement of the role of agency in processes of social change, although the extent to which this plays a role can vary depending on the philosophical framework in which the CA is used. Below I explore in more detail contentions between agency vs structure and between the individual vs the collective to clarify how these contentions are approached in this doctoral project.

2.2.1.1. Contentions between agency, choice, and structure

The place of agency and structure in the capability approach has been an area of debate (Robeyns, 2005). Despite the CA being inherently flexible, relational, and explicit about the importance of both the individual as well as structure, it has been criticised for its methodological individualism and emphasis on choice and agency (Stewart and Deneulin, 2002).

The agency and structure dilemma is not one debated solely in the CA but is a central dilemma in social theory (Archer, 2009: 65) to the point, as Paul du Gay (2008) argues, that the history of sociology can be seen as two: the sociology of action and the sociology of structure. However, there is a strand of sociological enquiry which questions the tendency of both of these sociologies to see agency as self-contained in the action of human beings even when recognising the role of structures and systems in limiting this agency. McFall, Gay and Carter reclaim the need to ground sociology in a heterogenous but also distinct strand in sociology organised around the concept of 'conduct' (McFall et al., 2008: 7). The authors build on Weber's work on people as cultural beings, Foucault's views on the influence of authorities in governing how people act, or Bordieu's concept of 'habitus', emphasising the non-reflexive, as well as reflexive, nature of agency. At the more constructivist end of the debate, social theorists like Callon (2006) and Latour (2005) have emphasized the multiple spheres of agency, including its non-human elements, in actor-network theory (ANT).

Yet, whether reflexive, non-reflexive, purposive, based on routine, constrained, or influenced by structures or discourses, exploring the agency of the human subject is critical both normatively and methodologically in an approach that seeks to understand human capabilities and transformational social change. This argument is also relevant for critical citizenship studies and feminist theory, which put an emphasis on representation and resistance.

First of all, the capability approach is compatible with an acknowledgment that human development and social change are relational and a result of irrational and non-reflexive assemblages and conducts. Concepts such as resources and conversion factors are a core part of the approach and refer to structures as elements that can stop or help

people and societies from accessing capabilities. For example, Kleine (2013) makes it clear in the design of the Choice Framework that agency is constituted by multiple aspects or resources. These can be further developed and analysed in relation to the multiple structural factors that the framework also includes, such as institutions, discourses, policies, or social norms. The categorising of discourses as structures acknowledges that agency can be non-reflexive, irrational or moulded by collective value judgements and discourse.

Sen (1999a) defines human development as someone's substantive freedom to live the life they have 'a reason to value' (p. 74). Kleine (2013) notes Sen's emphasis on reasoned choice rather than rational choice and Sen's and Nussbaum's acknowledgment that individuals internalise oppressive norms reflected, for example, through 'adaptive preferences', a term that refers to self-censored choice due to structural factors that constrain agency (p. 30). In relation to this balance between agency and structure, Nussbaum (2001a) concludes:

The capabilities approach, rooted in a respect for desire as well as in an account of human dignity and other substantive human goods, balances these concerns well, refusing to take existing preferences as a benchmark of social policy, but refusing, as well, to dismiss utterly the psychology of imperfect human beings. (p. 87)

An approach that entirely dismissed the existence of choice or agency could evaluate the ways in which technology has contributed to a person's functionings rather than their capabilities. The CA's flexibility allows for a focus on achieved functionings (the achievements or, in Sen's words, 'what a person is actually able to do'), rather than the capability sets (the 'real opportunities') to achieve the desired functionings (1999a: 75). For example, one could explore the role of technology in relation to an outcome, such as a woman campaigning for a healthcare facility in her community (a functioning), rather than the ways in which a technology has contributed to a woman having the opportunity and freedom to campaign for the healthcare facility if she chose to. Robeyns (2016) argues that a focus on functionings can help to account for 'systemic irrationalities' in choice making (p. 401). Indeed, both Kleine (2011) and Robeyns (2016)

note that many evaluations focus on functionings, or development outcomes, rather than capabilities, although this may not always necessarily be because of a disregard for agency but because of the focus of impact evaluations on more apparent tangible outcomes or specific dimensions of social change.

Finally, acknowledging agency allows for a critical study of empowerment and transformational change processes that involve the creation of spaces and resistance, political consciousness or negotiation of power (Kesby, 2005; McNay, 2000), which is important for research that explores the role of ICT in social change. Although concepts like adaptive preferences help to recognise that individuals and groups can perpetuate patriarchal and oppressive norms and structures, this acknowledgment is compatible with the recognition of people's autonomy and agency in unjust conditions.

Internalising or adapting certain behaviours does not per se deny the existence of different preferences or values or an openness to these different preferences should other options exist or be perceived as possible (Khader, 2012).

Agency is also an important area of inquiry in critical citizenship studies. Kabeer (2002), for example, proposes identity and agency to be critical areas of research into inclusive citizenship in non-Western contexts because these concepts have implications for people's capacity to act as citizens (p. 31). Others, like Mbembe (2001), have been critical of Western analyses of African societies for being simplistic, engineered, and dismissive of agency:

What African agents accept as reasons for acting, what their claim to act in the light of reason implies (as a general claim to be right, *avoir raison*), what makes their action intelligible to themselves: all this is of virtually no account in the eyes of analysts. Since the models are seen as self-sufficient, history does not exist. (p. 12)

This study's theoretical framework takes into account that exercising agency in a social world is, as Cleaver (2007) argues, inherently relational. The methodology used in this doctoral research also takes into account this relationality by taking a situated knowledges epistemic approach, which I cover in the next chapter. In addition, this

study contributes to the understanding of this relationality by adopting an intersectional lens. This lens helps to explore the interactions between structure and agency by considering how structural constraints like gender, race or class condition the capabilities of individuals (Zheng and Walsham, 2021). I discuss the intersectional approach in more detail in section 2.4 in this chapter. Moulded by feminist and citizenship theories and a focus on discourse, this study can critically accommodate the role of agency as relational in the CA whilst exploring the intersecting oppressions in which the aspirations for capabilities are situated.

2.2.1.2. Contentions between the individual and the collective

The emphasis on individual freedoms over social groups or structures has been another contentious area in the CA (Kleine, 2010; Rosignoli, 2018; Smith and Seward, 2009; Zheng and Stahl, 2011). The CA assumes methodological individualism to the extent that it is concerned with the real opportunities of every person to lead the lives they have a reason to value. This is related to the principle of treating each person as an end (Nussbaum, 2001b; Robeyns, 2016). For example, Robeyns (2016) argues, using as an example the reputation of a nation, that a CA should not look at aggregate levels without asking how it affects the persons within this aggregate. This requires a certain individualism methodologically but not ontologically (Oosterlaken, 2011).

Nevertheless, some scholars have argued for the importance of giving groups a more central role in the CA (Rosignoli, 2018; Stewart, 2005). Group membership affects the wellbeing of individuals because being part of a group can limit or enhance the set of capabilities people can have (Stewart, 2005). In addition, exercising a collective capability depends on an individual's capacity to be part of said collective or group (Rosignoli, 2018). The understanding of the collective, then, is still based on the relationships between the individuals that constitute it (p. 831).

The relational nature of the CA allows for the study of agency in collective terms through the study of the norms involved in the interaction between the individual and the group (Thapa et al., 2012). This also makes it suitable to study different contexts, even contexts where more emphasis is arguably put on collective rather than individual values and freedoms, such as those influenced by pan-African values or

Ubuntu ethics (Hoffmann and Metz, 2017). This point on the importance of collective values is relevant to this research study and the context of Kenya as an African society. The concept of Ubuntu sums up a world view shared by many African societies based on interconnectedness, solidarity and reciprocity (Tamale, 2020). As Tamale argues, Ubuntu places the emphasis on the value of the community but ‘does not deny the importance of individuality’ (p. 224). Similarly, in her study of the Utu-Ubuntu business model among traders and artisans in Nairobi, Kinyanjui (2019) also emphasises the importance of interconnectedness and the ties that bind individuals into communal approaches:

Utu is a Swahili word meaning ‘humanness’ and ubuntu is a Zulu word for ‘solidarity’. As a philosophy, utu-ubuntu serves many purposes in the social and economic realms of many communities in Africa. It rests on the principle that all human beings are interconnected and interdependent. (...) Most of this activity is based on principles of reciprocity and sharing that weave individuals into a net of shared personal, social and religious ties. (p. xiii)

Kinyanjui (2019) argues that this interconnectedness and solidarity ‘does not imply an absence of individual agency’ (p. 116). The methodological individualism of the CA, then, supports the principle that collective capabilities should not be in detriment to the wellbeing of individuals. If anything, they should serve to enhance the wellbeing of people and the communities they are part of. This suggests the CA is therefore also suitable to study non-Western contexts where values of interconnectedness and the importance of the community over the individual are particularly relevant.

As I will outline in the methodology chapter, the multi-method digital ethnography approach, the design of the interview guides, and the focus on discourse are intended to account for the contextual and relational aspect of capabilities, situating personal accounts within collective narratives, and for a multi-layered notion of citizenship situated across spaces (individual, household, community, state) and time. In addition, the focus on discourse also recognises the interactions between the individual and the collective and the relationality of agency, as I further discuss in the next chapters.

2.2.2. Critical citizenship studies

As noted in the introductory chapter, Western political theories have been criticised for being universalising and static in theorising citizenship as state-society relationships, rooted in modern philosophy and largely applicable in what are considered liberal democracies. Marshall's (1950) sociological account of the universalisation of rights in Britain and the formation of the welfare state has been highly influential in the conceptualisation of citizenship (Kymlicka and Norman, 1994) because it has helped to consider inequalities and exclusions in access to citizens' rights that political theories assumed or overlooked. Although it put the issue of class in focus, this account has however been critiqued for its exclusion of a broader set of rights, such as those related to gender, race or colonialism (Kabeer, 2002) and for its lack of applicability to contexts other than Britain (Turner, 1990).

Critical citizenship studies from a variety of fields in addition to politics and sociology, such as international development, feminism, or postcolonial studies have attempted to offer new frameworks. As Tamale (2020) states: 'given the history of the continent and the lingering legacies of colonialism, imperialism, racism and neoliberalism, theories and paradigms formulated in the West do not necessarily apply in Africa' (p. 43). As discussed in the introductory chapter and exemplified through literature on the shaping of citizenship in Kenya, notions of citizenship developed in the West have been found to be inappropriate in postcolonial contexts because colonialism suppressed or exacerbated existing differences and processes in societies, resulting in exclusions and divisions (Kabeer, 2002: iii). New states resulted from the 'machination of colonial powers' making the notion of citizenship particularly complex (Diener, 2017: 47). To support a conceptualisation of citizenship that can overcome these fractures and exclusions Kabeer (2002) suggests a research agenda for *inclusive citizenship* built on three pillars: (I) identity and agency; (II) institutions and access; and (iii) associations and collective action. Firstly, Kabeer observes the importance of identity as social recognition and a sense of agency, requiring a conscious process. She states: 'How people view themselves, how they view the issue of citizenship, the processes by which they acquired these views and what accounts for changes in their views which promote their agency as citizens are some of the questions that research

might address' (p. 32). Gaventa (2002) also observes that how and whether people are perceived by others and perceive themselves as citizens has implications for how and whether they claim their rights. This relates to the use of the Capability Approach, which centres people's aspirations in the definition of citizenship. Secondly, Kabeer emphasises the importance of researching how formal and informal institutions are excluding groups from governance processes, including being able to hold accountable those responsible for service delivery and upholding rights. Thirdly, Kabeer argues for research into processes of collective action in order to expand the boundaries of inclusive citizenship. She observes it is often through collective struggles that individuals can gain the capacity to exercise agency. Similarly, Thompson and Tapscott (2010) have argued for the importance of social movements and forms of collective action to understand citizenship in contexts where its meaning is more 'nebulous and contested' (p. 5). This is relevant to framing the case study of this research, which follows a group of young activists engaging collectively in processes of civic education for social change.

Critical citizenship studies also became more prominent as a result of the challenges presented by postmodernism and globalisation. Isin (2002) argues that international and human rights law, regional forms of governance, international flows of migration and capital, the emergence of new ecological, sexual and indigenous rights have called into question the modern concept of citizenship. Isin (2009) has also pointed out an 'emergence of new "sites", "scales" and "acts" through which "actors" claim to transform themselves (and others) from subjects into citizens as claimants of rights' (p. 368) and proposes a definition of citizenship as relational and dynamic:

Citizenship is a dynamic (political, legal, social and cultural but perhaps also sexual, aesthetic and ethical) institution of domination and empowerment that governs who citizens (insiders), subjects (strangers, outsiders) and abjects (aliens) are and how these actors are to govern themselves and each other in a given body politic. Citizenship is not membership (Isin, 2009: 371).

Isin (2017) further develops the conceptualisation of citizenship as praxis rather than status and coins the concept of 'performative citizenship' to refer to citizenship as people doing and enacting as political subjects regardless of whether they are authorised or not, in ways which can follow rules, challenge them or transform them, claiming rights or exercising them (p. 516).

This relational conceptualisation in critical citizenship studies expands citizenship beyond the legal realm of rights and of recognised membership to a nation-state to the political and sociological, and takes a multi-layered approach (Pailey, 2016; Yuval-Davis, 1997). For Isin (2017), this challenges the binary that defines citizens in democratic contexts in contrast to subjects in non-democracies and raises the epistemological question of whether citizenship can be studied without its political subjects. A performative and inclusive approach to citizenship, therefore, is not only relational and suitable to study non-western contexts but also requires a methodological approach that is sensitive to the subjectivities of its political subjects. By complementing these critical citizenship theories with the capability approach, this study can centre people's aspirations, representation, and multiple sites of belonging and interaction, as well as account for processes of social and political change. As Bloom (2018) and Pfister (2012) have argued in their application of the capability approach to the study of citizenship, the flexibility of the CA makes it suitable to study changing contexts and helps to include in the notion of citizenship exclusions and inequalities.

2.2.2.1. Citizenship and feminist theory

We need new frameworks. We need new ways of thinking about Kenyan politics that have more utility because they are more representative of our lived realities. A feminist methodology can be this new framework. It highlights the many silences embedded in the prevailing discourse. A feminist methodology allows us to democratise the study of Kenya, include a diversity of perspectives in our analysis, and climb down from exclusionary, elite level analyses. (Nyabola, 2016)

As previously mentioned, there has been a lack of evidence in the ICT4D field on the transformational impact of digital technologies for marginalised and oppressed groups, especially in relation to citizen engagement and governance outcomes. Feminist theory and studies on gender justice have emphasised the need for new ways to explore citizenship which take into account marginalised groups and different realities. These analyses find in the concept of citizenship the potential to bridge processes of agency and empowerment with the structures and institutional arrangements that oppress people or can enable their access to rights and capabilities (Kabeer, 2012; Lister, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

For example, Lister (1997) and Yuval-Davis (1997) have argued for the value of citizenship as a political tool for women (and marginalised or oppressed groups more broadly) which is grounded on diversity and the dialogue required by a politics of difference rather than static and universalising notions of citizenship. The dialectic between notions of citizenship as status -legal recognition of rights and responsibilities- and notions of citizenship as practice -acts of struggle and contestation- can help bridge notions of empowerment with those related to justice, structures and institutions through pathways that are locally-grounded and constantly constructed rather than fixed (Kabeer, 2012; Lister, 1997).

In this process it is central to understand the effect of colonialism and postcolonialism on society-state relations and the implications these have had for oppressed groups, including women's citizenship (Pailey, 2019). As an example of how colonialism has shaped women's citizenship, several authors have noted that in the process of codifying custom into law, colonisers recognised the authority of male chiefs but ignored the authority of female ones. Their negotiations with male elites positioned women as dependents of men and, with this, their relationship to the state as subordinated to their community (ethnic, religious, kinship) (Mukhopadhyay, 2007; Tamale, 2020). In Kenya, Wainaina, Arnot and Chege (2011) also describe the political marginalisation of women resulting from the colonial legacy, which they argue is still sustained and intertwined with ethnic oppression. A body of scholarly work which focuses on citizenship as legal status or formal citizenship observes the relegation of

women to second class citizens for being explicitly excluded from full citizen status when compared to men. For example, until recently, in most countries in Africa that inherited patriarchal European laws or oppressive colonial practices, women could not pass their citizenship to their children unless the father was also a citizen (Manby, 2012: 45).

Recognising the different positionings and intersecting oppressions is another key argument made in literature on citizenship and feminism in African contexts in particular. Scholars have argued that the universal subordination of women depicted by a view of gender justice based only on sex differentiation does not adequately capture the African reality and it overshadows other axes of subordination such as race, class, ethnicity, or religion (Nyamu-Musembi, 2007: 172). Similarly, it also ignores the various sites of interaction and power that women can draw from or be limited by, such as kinship and seniority (Nyamu-Musembi, 2007) in multiple spaces like family, various communities, the nation, or the state (Pailey, 2019b). This binary depiction, which overlooks complex local realities, is related to the problematic dominance of Western development discourse. African scholars have argued that this dominance has provided concepts and definitions designed by commissioning research agencies, which has resulted in the empirical dominating over the conceptual (Nyamu-Musembi, 2007; Touré, 2011). Similarly Tamale (2020) refers to the way in which Western dominated scholarship on women in Africa has led to 'victimization and/or objectification' (p. 48) and calls for an intersectional approach to understanding African women's experiences of subordination.

Overall, conceptualisations of citizenship and gender from the point of view of some African scholars have emphasised the importance of multi-layered and intersectional approaches. Citizenship is seen as a concept that can establish a dialectic between processes of consciousness and exercise of agency with oppressive structural arrangements that cause, aggravate, or perpetuate inequalities. I discuss the implications this has in the design of this doctoral research further below and in the methodology chapter.

2.3. Theorising the ICT: the Theory of Affordances

Following the three-pillar framework to theorise ICT4D, based on the ICT, the 'D', and the link between the two ('4'), this section provides an overview of the literature in ICT4D that focuses on studying the ICT as an artefact itself situated in processes of social change. It discusses the theory of affordances as a way to theorise the technology that finds a balance between essentialist or deterministic approaches to studying ICT and constructivist approaches that can overlook the technology itself.

If development and citizenship are contested notions, so is the process of ICT innovation (Avgerou, 2010). The literature on ICT4D has been critical of the lack of theorising of the technology itself (Roberts, 2017; Walsham and Sahay, 2006). The role of the ICT artefact in development and in the process of social change has either been taken for granted or seen as deterministic and 'monolithic and homogeneous', which risks overlooking its multiple impacts on development (Sein and Harindranath, 2004: 17).

The constructivist approach in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) attempted to challenge technologically determinist views, still present in the public discourse (Cherlet, 2014), as well as the view of technology as neutral by emphasising how technologies were both socially-shaped and shaped society (Henwood et al., 2000). However, the essential focus on the way social reality constructs technology and how this technology constructs reality can run the risk of overlooking the ICT artefact itself. Orlikowski and Iacono (2001) argued that the technological artefact had been under-theorised in the STS literature, being 'either absent, black-boxed, abstracted from social life, or reduced to surrogate measures' (p. 130). This is not only a theoretical problem but also affects the effectiveness of ICT4D programmes on the ground. For example, a learning synthesis of the 4-year long Making All Voices Count (MAVC) programme, which funded the use of innovation and technologies for better governance and has been mentioned in the previous chapter, refers to the 'black-box' of technology to describe the failure of many organisations to understand the characteristics of technologies and innovations: 'Like many transparency, accountability and open data projects of this kind, they struggled to use technologies

effectively. This situation is exacerbated by the tendency (...) to see “technology” as an undifferentiated “black box” (McGee et al., 2018: 10). Another research study in Kenya and South Africa conducted as part of MAVC emphasised that ‘sometimes it is about the tech’ and suggested ‘that choosing the right tool requires an organisation to understand (1) the problem a tool needs to address; (2) the users who are expected to use the tool; and (3) the strengths and weaknesses of the tool itself’ (de Lanerolle et al., 2016: 44).

Therefore, there is a need to unpack the technological artefact itself, but without removing it from the context in which it is situated and interpreted. Sein and Harindranath (2004a) argued for the need to see technology not as a ‘tool’ but as an ‘ensemble’, meaning the technology is more than an artefact that needs to be produced or be made available; it needs to be understood (and policies for social change designed around) as situated in a cultural and political context. In line with this situated approach, and in the specific case of mobile phone technology in Africa, Zegeye and Muponde (2012) ask for a research agenda that focuses more on how the mobile phone as an asset relates to how people find what they value or what they give value to ‘and expand the scope of social relations and subjectivities’ (p. 123).

Hutchby (2001)⁶ argues that all technologies do not lend themselves to the same set of interpretations and that they have specific affordances that constrain or enable how the technology can be interpreted and used (p. 447). Affordances, then, are possibilities for action but they need an actor and their subjectivity to perceive these possibilities and a purpose to trigger or actualise them (Pozzi et al., 2014). In addition, the use and effects of these affordances are not only contingent on human agency but also situated in historical and social settings (Zheng and Yu, 2016).

Many scholars have drawn from the theory of affordances to address this need to consider digital technologies as relational and situated without ignoring their materiality. Roberts (2017), for example, reminds us that ‘matter matters’ and explores the particular affordances of participatory technologies in development. Zheng and Yu

⁶ Although the Theory of Affordances originates from the work of ecological psychologist James Gibson, it was introduced to the study of technology by Ian Hutchby (Pozzi et al., 2014; Zammuto et al., 2007).

(2016) draw on the theory to explore the affordances of social media in processes of collective action. This is also the theory that Sein et al. (2019) propose in order to cover the gap in the theorising and research of the ICT in the ICT4D field. As will be discussed in 'Chapter 7: WhatsApp Affordances and Citizenship Capabilities', affordances are explored and classified in different ways in the literature depending on the extent to which they refer to more functional and material aspects of the technology or to its more relational aspects. For example, in their study on the affordances of social media for collective action, Zheng and Yu (2016) start with the functional affordances, more related to the features of the technology, such as editability or multimediality, but then shift the analytical focus to their relational aspect, by exploring how these functional affordances are socialised and become 'affordances-for-practice', such as the affordance to mobilise resources or to enhance accountability (p. 307).

The theory of affordances has been used in a number of studies. In their research on the potential of mobile phones to help women in the UK overcome structural inequalities, Faith (2018) identified the materiality of the technology to be a more central factor than initially anticipated. The small screens and text input of some phones, for example, was identified as an affordance that meant some women had more difficulties in completing job applications (Faith, 2018). This resulted in the author supplementing the theoretical framework, initially based on the Capability Approach, with a theorising of affordances. As another example, in a study on the role of digital technologies in the journey of Syrian refugees to Europe, Gillespie, Osseiran and Cheesman (2018) argue that the affordances of smartphones, such as navigation or being able to document the journey through multiple media, played a crucial role in enabling and constraining the mobility of refugees.

The relational nature of affordances allows for a more sophisticated study of the ICT artefact but it also recognises that the technology cannot explain it all. Technology effects change through social mechanisms, reinforcing the point that 'affordances are only action possibilities, not sufficient causes' (Roberts, 2017: 6). It therefore remains important to theorise the process through which a given technology interacts with a

development outcome in a specific context, and with citizenship capabilities more specifically in the context of this study, which is discussed in the next section.

2.4. Theorising how the ICT mediates citizenship capabilities

This section addresses the need for a better theorising of how technology mediates development outcomes, which in Sein, Hatakka, Thapa and Sæbø's (2019) framework refers to the '4' in the ICT4D acronym or to the 'elusive link' between the development process and the ICT (p. 8). The opportunities that digital technologies created to establish spaces for mobilising demands for social change are well documented; yet the literature is also clear that social media, and digital technologies more broadly, can further amplify existing inequalities, as argued in the previous chapter (Kibere, 2016; Nyabola, 2018a; van Dijk, 2020). The role of digital technologies in addressing transformational change at different levels needs to be further explored (Gurumurthy et al., 2017) and theorised (Thapa and Sæbo, 2014). This section presents the Capability Approach and intersectional feminist theory as part of this study's theoretical framework to address this gap.

2.4.1. Harnessing the evaluative nature of the Capability Approach

The evaluative nature of the Capability Approach can be helpful in theorising this link between the technology and the development outcome or process. This is so because at the core of the CA lies a consideration of how resources and structures such as institutional frameworks, infrastructure, social norms, and social capital affect the extent to and ways in which conversion factors can enable capabilities (freedom to achieve, such as the opportunity to engage in politics if reasoned to do so) and functionings (achievements, such as engaging in politics).

As Thapa and Sæbø (2014) argue, many ICT4D studies and scholars have applied the CA implicitly. However, others, like Kleine with the Choice Framework (2013), have explicitly theorised and operationalised this approach for evaluating the link between the technology and the development outcome. A number of studies exploring the role of ICT and development have used the Choice Framework, enriching it by adapting it to different research questions and contexts (Attwood and May, 2015; Chew et al.,

2015; Zelezny-Green, 2017). Kleine (2013) has highlighted the live nature of the framework and the need for it to be adapted to different contexts and research needs. Kleine has also highlighted some of the potential avenues for further research, such as those coming from sociology and psychology or the need for a better understanding of how discourses play a role in the conversion factors that enable capabilities: 'Discourses and indeed counter discourses form a critical element of the social structure' (2013: 204). Thapa and Sæbø (2014) emphasise the need for a deeper focus on inequalities related to the digital divide such as those related to gender or location.

Understanding the various axes of oppression that affect how a technology mediates a development outcome, in this case citizenship, is the reason why I use an intersectional feminist lens as part of the theoretical and methodological framework. Using it alongside the CA, drawing on core concepts such as resources and conversion factors, will help to focus the study of how the technology, in this case WhatsApp, mediates capabilities across different positionings.

2.4.2. Applying an intersectional lens

The term 'intersectionality' was coined and originally theorised by legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989, in the context of a trajectory of Black feminism going back to the 19th century (Carastathis, 2016). Crenshaw (1989) argued for the need to provide a theoretical framework that could address the vulnerability, lack of legal protection and perpetuation of oppressing systems for women facing multifaceted discrimination, in particular Black women. In one of the legal cases that Crenshaw uses to illustrate her argument, five Black women accused General Motors of employment discrimination. The court ruled that the company hired women (although white women) as well as African Americans (although men) and that there was therefore no ground for discrimination, ignoring the discrimination experienced by Black women in particular. Crenshaw highlighted how this single-axis analysis ignores intersecting forms of discrimination, therefore perpetuating existing hierarchies: 'Black women are protected only to the extent that their experiences coincide with those of either of the two groups' (1989: 143). Crenshaw also used the metaphor of the basement to illustrate that intersectionality is not only about the overlapping of multiple identities but about

the structures that use these identities to perpetuate oppressive hierarchies. This latter point has received less attention as intersectionality gained prominence as an approach (Carastathis, 2016), a point that Crenshaw herself made in more recent work with Carbado, Mays and Tomlinson (Carbado et al., 2013: 312). This point is important in the way intersectionality is understood in this doctoral project, which seeks to identify intersecting oppressive dynamics in language and discourse.

Intersectionality has been argued to be the most important theoretical contribution by women's studies (McCall, 2005), firmly 'rooted in Black Feminism and Critical Race theory' (Carbado et al., 2013: 303). Crenshaw's conceptualisation of intersectionality has a social change, structural and political dimension (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991). As feminist theorising expanded, so did the interpretations, definitions and applications of intersectionality. With this attention, however, intersectionality risks being 'disembodied and depoliticized' (Carastathis, 2016) or, as Bilge (2013), argues, it can result in an appropriation and whitewashing that needs countering by constantly highlighting the roots of intersectionality in critical race theory. Moreover, there are a number of theories of intersectionality that have developed since the term originated (Lykke, 2011). It is therefore critical to conceptualise its use and purpose within this research study's theoretical framework.

A number of feminist scholars have attempted to map an overview of the different approaches to intersectionality (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Carastathis, 2016; Carbado et al., 2013; Carbin and Edenheim, 2013; Collins, 2015; Lykke, 2011; McCall, 2005).

Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays and Tomlinson (2013) argue that intersectionality is 'a method and a disposition, an heuristic and analytic tool' but also open to applications and interpretations that share the common purpose of interrogating 'the inter-locking ways in which social structures produce and entrench power and marginalization' (p. 312). Collins (2015) examines intersectionality as a field of study, as an analytical strategy and as critical praxis but also offers a frame that reflects a broad consensus of the term:

The term intersectionality references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not

as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities. (p. 2)

Intersectionality originated as situated in social justice and anti-discrimination projects and developed from standpoint epistemology (Mann, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2011). This means its theorising is based on the standpoint of the oppressed as the perspective that privileges the understanding of oppression and hierarchy (Lykke, 2011). However, different feminist epistemologies have presented dilemmas in how to approach categories and discriminations. Post-structuralism, aligned with postmodern constructionist epistemology, defends a complex approach to the formation of categories and identities, which is dynamic and constantly given meaning (Lazard et al., 2016). Post-structuralism deconstructs group categories arguing they are essentialist and hide differences within categories but this can be in contrast with intersectionality that departs from categories as the unit of analysis (Mann, 2013).

However, when Crenshaw described the concept of intersectionality as provisional in 1991 she argued it is a concept 'linking contemporary politics with postmodern theory' because, although it engages with categories in the process of mapping race and gender, the concept hopes to suggest a methodology that ultimately disrupts the essentialism of these categories through the process of 'tracing the categories to their intersections' (Crenshaw, 1991: 1244). Intersections, then, can unearth invisibilised realities. Collins argues that one of the key guiding assumptions of a project guided by intersectionality is that differently situated individuals view their own and others' experiences differently and therefore the knowledge projects that result are different too and reflect the power relations in which they are located (Collins, 2015: 14).

An epistemology of situated knowledges, a concept introduced by Donna Haraway (1988), can help reconcile the risks of relativism with those of essentialism (Lykke, 2011). This approach requires an emphasis on situated partial perspectives, which avoids universalising a perspective without making everything relative (Haraway, 1988). Similarly, Yuval-Davis has argued that in intersectional projects it is important to account for different positionings without homogenising how political projects

might affect people differently because they are differently located even when sharing the same spaces of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

This research study seeks to understand how different intersecting categories or identities mediate people's understandings and experiences of citizenship capabilities and how these positionalities mediate the ways in which the digital technology affordances shape these capabilities. It is important in this doctoral research project to be mindful of the risk of homogenising categories, a tendency that has been criticized in the context of international development in relation to, for example, the depoliticisation and homogenisation of communities (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Nelson and Wright, 1995). Thus, using intersectionality in this study needs to allow the exploration of the invisibility of experiences that single-axis analysis cannot identify.

The next chapter further develops how this approach translates epistemologically through a situated knowledges and postcolonial feminist methodology.

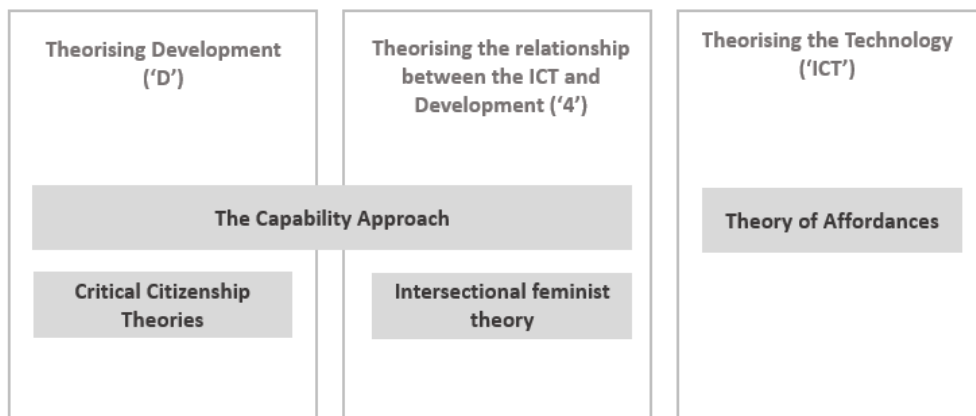
Intersectionality, like the capabilities approach, is both a normative and empirical paradigm (Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005). It therefore offers a theoretical framework in which to conceptualise how power relations play out in the interaction between technology and women's citizenship capabilities but it also offers an empirical framework to operationalise the study of these relationships.

2.5. Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the literature and theoretical approaches relevant to this study's research questions, framed within the need identified in ICT4D literature for a more detailed theorising of ICT4D research. These theoretical approaches have been informed by literature across disciplines, namely ICT4D, development studies, citizenship studies, and feminist theory, although drawing also from theoretical and empirical evidence from politics and international studies, sociology, and science and technology studies. The approaches have also been informed by the normative and epistemological need to decentre Western theory considering the impact of colonisation on Kenya's state-society relations, and to account for my positionality as a white European researcher doing research in Kenya, a point I cover in the next chapter.

The chapter has been guided by Sein et al.'s (2019) holistic framework to theorise ICT4D, which involves theorising the 'D' or development outcome, in this case citizenship; the 'ICT', in this case WhatsApp; and the link between the two ('4') or the ways in which the technology mediates citizenship. The figure below synthesises the theoretical approaches suggested under each pillar (Figure 1) that have been discussed in the chapter.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



To theorise citizenship, the Capability Approach allows for a non-universalising framework which is epistemologically flexible and which centres people's aspirations whilst acknowledging they are relational and situated in structures and institutions that shape them. Critical citizenship studies help to expand the concept of citizenship to multi-layered and intersecting experiences whilst accounting for processes of enactment, struggle, or social change. The theory of affordances is proposed to theorise WhatsApp as a technology, in a way which acknowledges the materiality of the technological artefact but which also recognises that the possibilities that this materiality offers are not determined but relational and socially, politically, and historically situated.

To understand the link between the technology and citizenship, or how WhatsApp mediates citizenship capabilities, the study harnesses the CA's evaluative nature. Concepts such as resources and conversion factors help to understand in what ways the technology can help individuals and groups convert resources to access the citizenship capabilities they value. An intersectional lens is used to study this

interaction. The study needs to account for inequalities, oppressions, identities and situated ways of experiencing in order to explore how digital technologies mediate citizenship in different ways for different people and groups. Single-axis analysis or assuming categories of difference can overlook experiences and representation and perpetuate existing oppressions. To avoid this, an intersectional feminist lens is proposed.

The next chapter discusses the epistemological approach and methodology used to operationalise this theoretical framework.

Chapter 3. Research Philosophy and Case Study

How we see a thing -even with our eyes- is very much dependent on where we stand in relation to it. (wa Thiong'o, 1986: 88)

In this chapter I provide the normative and empirical rationale for the epistemological approach of this research project, which follows from the theoretical framework and research questions already outlined in 'Chapter 1: Introduction' and 'Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework'. The chapter then focusses on the methodological implications of this epistemological stance. It then introduces the case study on which this research is based, including a description of the process that led to selecting the geographical area, the civil society organisation and the activities and participants that became central to answering the research questions. The chapter also includes reflections on my own background and positionality as the researcher.

3.1. Research philosophy: interpretativism, epistemic injustice and situated knowledges

This research study takes an interpretivist ontological approach because it normatively and empirically understands reality as constructed and given meaning through historic and relational dynamics based on power and discourse. This attention to power and discourse is particularly important considering my positionality as a white researcher based in Western academia doing research in Kenya. It serves not only to question Eurocentric assumptions in understandings of citizenship and the role of ICT but also to question processes of knowledge production, including the power dynamics and issues of representation that my positionality brings into the research process.

Epistemologically, then, this study also takes both a normative and empirical stance. Normatively, it acknowledges the logic of epistemic oppression and injustice entailed in the colonial dominance of Western researchers doing research on ICT in African

countries (Mawere and van Stam, 2019). It also recognises the empirical flaws of Eurocentric research that ignores or fails to take into account a diversity of realities and ways of knowing and being, or what de Sousa Santos (2014) calls the 'abyssal line' of colonial, hegemonic, modern Western thinking, which renders other knowledges 'incommensurable and incomprehensible' (p. 120). This hegemonic colonial dominance, then, is both a social justice and empirical issue.

This preoccupation with epistemic and social injustice and the contradictory logic I am part of has guided the theoretical framework and the methodology. Many decolonial thinkers have argued that recognising this contradiction and seeing the 'colonial difference' (Lugones, 2010: 753) may be a first task for a decolonial engagement (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Sium et al., 2012). However, decolonial theory and practice come from grounded experiences and struggles over colonial dominance and make a radical call for ontological and epistemic disobedience (Ortiz Ocaña and Arias López, 2019). The co-opting of decolonial theory language in Western academia runs the risk of diluting its radical call (Noxolo, 2017). Far from trying to co-opt and dilute the important and radical task of decolonising research, then, and considering my contradictory positionality, I do not claim that this is a decolonial research study. Yet, the research is guided by an epistemology that forces me to recognise the unjust dominance of Western theory and epistemology and my positionality and assumptions in the process of knowledge production.

As seen in the previous chapter, the theoretical framework seeks to balance the relativism of constructivism with feminist and postcolonial notions of agency, representation, and resistance. Across the theorising of citizenship, the technology, and the interactions between the two, this study's theoretical framework recognises the materiality and consequences of knowledge, narratives and actions. At the same time, it also recognises their relational and dynamic aspect, as they are situated in and constructed by socio-historical processes, structures and discourses of power and meaning-making. This includes my role as a researcher in the research process. Because of this, it is a key principle of postcolonial and postmodern feminist approaches that accounts are situated and partial (Gannon Susanne and Davies, 2012).

Epistemologically, then, this study uses a situated knowledges approach, meaning it understands knowledge to be partial, located and in a relationship with other standpoints and knowledges (Haraway, 1988). In the next sub-sections I discuss the methodological implications of this approach as informed by postcolonial feminist methodology and intersectionality.

3.1.1. Postcolonial feminist methodology

Both postcolonial and feminist research capture intersecting concerns with the colonality and oppressive power dynamics of knowledge production and representation, and with critical and reflexive practice (Devault and Gross, 2012; Manning, 2016). They also acknowledge the role of discourse and language in the construction of representations, oppressions or resistance to them (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012).

In its search for accountability, deconstruction of Eurocentric colonial representations, and recognition of multiplicity of realities, postcolonial feminist research and a situated knowledges approach require being open to a diversity of research methods. Pluralism of methods facilitates the search for a diversity of meanings and encounters (Livholts and Tamboukou, 2015; Lykke, 2011). Within this openness and diversity, feminist ethnography, discourse and narrative methods, and participatory action research are some of the methods often encountered in postcolonial feminist research (Bhavnani and Talcott, 2012; Livholts and Tamboukou, 2015; Naples, 2003). In line with this, a digital ethnography that includes a multiplicity of methods and spaces, and discourse analysis, are central to this study's methodology as will be discussed in the following chapter.

In acknowledging that the research process is a dialogic encounter between researcher and research participants, postcolonial feminist research sees ethics as inseparable from the epistemological stance. For a situated knowledges approach these ethics entail accountability and the moral responsibility of the researcher in acknowledging that the realities we 'see' are partly a result of our participation in them: '(...) ethics is about accounting for our part of the entangled webs we weave' (Barad, 2007: 384). Barad's posthumanist approach, similar to Haraway's, emphasises material-discursive

practices, which is particularly important in relation to the ethics of knowledge production itself, but also relevant in recognising that ethical decisions and dilemmas are always set in particular moment, place and interaction and therefore are dynamic and always unique (Preissle and Han, 2012).

Yet in a dynamic and relational process, values and principles are important in guiding how to act on ethical dilemmas. Collins (2002) refers to the ethics of caring as going hand in hand with personal accountability in Black feminist thought and practice and as being composed of: 'the value placed on individual expressiveness, the appropriateness of emotions, and the capacity for empathy' (p. 264). Another approach that has guided feminist research alongside the ethics of care is the 'ethics of principle' (Preissle and Han, 2012), which anchors decisions on ethics in principles of social justice. Yet feminist scholars have pointed out that this reliance on principles can ignore the differences in values and social justice projects between researcher and the 'subjects' of research and therefore reinforce Eurocentric Western values and issues of representation. To complement and account for the risks of the ethics of principle, then, Preissle and Han (2012: 19) suggest an 'ethics of relationship' to always consider the connections between the research participants and the researcher in the decision-making process (Preissle and Han, 2012: 19). Thinking about ethics in this research study from the point of view of the ethics of care and relationship has helped me to frame ethical dilemmas throughout this research project in a way that prioritises empathy and respect, as will be described in the ethics section of the next chapter.

In the sub-sections below I discuss in a bit more detail the importance of discourse, representation and reflexivity for a postcolonial feminist methodology. This will help to contextualise the decisions made on the methods used in this research study.

3.1.1.1. Language, discourse and representation

In their need to examine the politics of representation and meaning-making, intersections of postmodern, postcolonial, and feminist theories have driven a discursive turn in research methodologies (Livholts and Tamboukou, 2015; Lykke, 2011). The use of language and discourse is central to the view that knowledge and representation is constructed and interwoven in power dynamics, subjectivities, and

complex social relations. For example, Tamale (2020) notes that language and discourse have been central in the colonisation project and the construction of narratives of white and male supremacy by, for example, using mass media or education to portray Africa as inferior. This focus on the construction of meaning and power through language is also relevant to the concept of performative citizenship outlined in the theoretical framework. For example, Isin (2017) states that rights come into being through acts and conventions, and these acts and conventions include rituals, practices, declarations. Language, then, is also central to the process of claiming and enacting citizenship and to the process of decolonisation.

This interaction between language use and social realities is at the core of discourse research despite it being a diverse field in its origins and approaches to analysis (Wetherell et al., 2001). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one of the approaches to researching discourse which, alongside Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, is particularly relevant to postcolonial feminist research. CDA analyses meaning making through language because it sees it as one element of the many that construct social realities in dialogue with other elements such as cultural values, identities, relations, or productive activities (Fairclough, 2001). As Fairclough explains, CDA seeks less obvious connections between the use of language and how it underpins power relations. This is not dissimilar to Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, which situates discourse in the context of how power is negotiated. Foucauldian Discourse Analysis sees discourse not as a specific instance of language use, in for example an interview, but as a rule or system that constitutes a type of knowledge that states what is true or not and which develops and evolves historically (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008). Drawing on Foucauldian discourse analysis therefore puts the personal in the political (Thompson et al., 2018).

Language produces different social realities and identities that demand or result in different actions, making discourse also critical in the study of social change (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2012). Some strands of discursive psychology, such as Wetherell and Potter's, combine Foucauldian with critical discourse analysis based on the view that although subjects are constituted through discourses, subjects are also able to position

themselves in or across discourses, reproduce them or challenge them (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2012). In their influential work on discourse and social psychology, Wetherell and Potter (1987) have explored the conceptualisation and researching of the subject from a constructionist point of view: 'There is not one "self" waiting to be discovered or uncovered but a multitude of selves found in the different kinds of linguistic practices articulated now, in the past, historically and cross-culturally' (p. 102).

Discursive psychology, then, offers an analytical approach aligned to this study's epistemology which understands social realities as constructed through discourse. It does so without relinquishing the role of the subject in interacting with, negotiating, and positioning itself in these discourses, with the consequences this has in resisting or actioning change. For this reason, I use discourse analysis in this doctoral research project. In the next chapter on methods, I outline in detail the method used to operationalise this discursive approach.

3.1.1.2. Reflexivity

Reflexivity is central to the idea of research as an encounter where knowledge production is mediated and situated. If understood as a holistic practice, the reflexive process by the researcher starts before data collection, from the point of formulating the problem, theoretical framework and methodology all the way to analysis and dissemination (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli, 2012; Sultana, 2007).

Yet reflexivity is neither an easy nor transparent process (Rose, 1997). Rose has argued that if reflecting helps to change our actions, then reflexivity may be a process of building, rather than discovering, the self. Our relational positionality with history, space, experience, discourses and others means that we cannot objectify ourselves, just as we cannot objectify others. Reflexivity, then, should help recognise and acknowledge the 'messiness' rather than trying to untangle it (1997). However, this complexity begs a methodological question on how reflexivity is done (Lazard and McAvoy, 2017). In their account on the point and ways of doing reflexivity, Lazard and McAvoy (2017) point out the need to link the self with the epistemological positions of the research, which means reflecting on how assumptions made in the theoretical and methodological approach shape knowledge production. This chapter reflects on the

ontological and epistemological stance of this project and the rationale for the theories and methods chosen as an attempt to be reflexive in how I shape the production of knowledge. Lazard and McAvoy (2017) also warn of the risk of descriptions of the self that end up being presented as objective lists of qualifiers, because they risk falling back into positivist views or personal accounts that centre and over-analyse the self at the expense of attending to the research question. Instead, they suggest that doing reflexivity is an ongoing questioning of our assumptions through conversation or dialogue with oneself or with research participants, colleagues and peers. The questioning involves the choice of research topic and why the researcher thought they should pursue it as well as the theoretical and epistemological positions taken. It then extends to the methods used, the way they have been designed and deployed and the relationships with the research participants in this process. This involves reflecting on the assumptions made about the methods, the participants and oneself and how they may have changed during the process.

I started to engage in this ongoing questioning in a relatively conscious manner from the start of the PhD as I was thinking about how to research citizenship in a postcolonial country and feeling increasingly aware of the contradictions embedded in the logic of my positionality as a white researcher doing research in Kenya. It was only after further engaging with the literature on feminist and postcolonial epistemologies that I made conscious choices about the methodology and how reflexivity would be embedded in it. Previous chapters and sections in this chapter have implicitly included these reflections when justifying the rationale behind the research questions, the theoretical framework and epistemological stance. However, I will more explicitly develop the narrative around the reflexivity in this study below and in the next chapter when discussing the case study, methods and ethics, and throughout the remaining chapters as interwoven in the narration of the analysis and conclusions.

Finally, the use of the first person 'I' when writing is also central to reflexivity (Lazard and McAvoy, 2017; Lykke, 2011). This is in contrast to the use of the third person, typical of positivist epistemologies, which can imply assigning neutrality and objectivity to the research. The plural first person 'we' is used in structuralist research

to represent a collective political category such as 'we feminists', although this comes with the risk of essentialising groups and 'mak[ing] claims to speak for others' (Lykke, 2011: 165). For this reason, a situated knowledges epistemology that relies on reflexivity uses the first person, the 'I' (or 'we' in the case of multiple authors) to emphasise the positionality of the researcher(s) and their role in the process of knowledge production.

3.1.2. Intersectionality: methodological implications

The rationale for an intersectional approach to framing this research study has been discussed in the previous chapter, as part of the theoretical framework. Yet, intersectionality is not only a normative theory but also an empirical research paradigm (Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005). It is both an 'analytical and political' project (Yuval-Davis, 2015: 637). As McCall (2005) argues, acknowledging multiplicity and complexity brings in methodological challenges as analysis includes multiple dimensions and categories.

McCall (2005) offered three approaches to operationalise intersectionality as a method: (i) anticategorical complexity, which rejects categories and focuses on deconstructing them to understand the complexity of social life; (ii) intercategorical complexity which uses existing categories (i.e. gender, race, class) strategically to explore unequal relationships; and (iii) intracategorical complexity, an approach in-between the previous two, which takes a critical stance towards categories but uses them provisionally to unearth the lived experiences of invisibilised realities. Whereas the first approach, anticategorical complexity, has been associated with postmodern and poststructuralist research, the intracategorical approach is relevant to Crenshaw's metaphor of the crossroads and the work of Black feminist scholars who led the work on intersectionality.

McCall does not present these three approaches to doing intersectional research as comprehensive or exhaustive and also recognises the overlap across them. She suggests, however, that they help direct the attention to the researcher's stance towards categories, and therefore the research philosophy behind the method. Yuval-Davis (2015: 640) suggests an approach to situated intersectionality that takes both the

intracategorical and intercategorical approaches as the point of departure and recommends that any intersectional approach combine the 'sensitivity and dynamism' of the intracategorical approach with the 'socio-economic perspective' of the intercategorical one. Yuval-Davis also adds, however, that people can have different political and value systems whilst belonging to the same social categories and therefore only an intracategorical approach can account for this nuance and facilitate the task of enabling the visibility of realities that are both hidden and oppressed by categories and resisting them at the same time. For this reason, Yuval-Davis (2006) also argues that intersectional research and analysis needs to separately examine the different levels in which differences operate, from the institutional to the personal and across subjectivities. This multi-layered analysis also resonates with the framework suggested by Naila Kabeer (2002) to study citizenship in postcolonial contexts which includes the exploration at the subjective personal level, the institutional level and the collective level.

In this research study, I attempt to operationalise intersectionality in two ways. Firstly, the research and interview design accounts for multiple spaces and layers of belonging (the personal, community, regional and national, as well as online and offline spaces of interaction). The next chapter will discuss in detail the multiplicity of methods used as part of this research's digital ethnography approach to capture these different layers and spaces of belonging and interaction. Secondly, intersectionality will be operationalised following this study's approach to analysis by exploring how these positionings and relationships are reflected through language and discourse. However, based on existing evidence on groups facing discrimination in the context of political engagement, categories like age and gender, specifically youth and women, are used as provisional entry points in the formulation and addressing of the research questions.

3.2. The case study

Postcolonial feminist research has problematised ethnographic research that objectifies the research *subject*, erases voice at the service of Western world-views and epistemologies, and reinforces power asymmetries in the *field* (Kapoor, 2017; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). Yet, ethnography is also a common methodological approach in

postcolonial and feminist research because it can enable in-depth and dialogical encounters in time and space (Bhavnani and Talcott, 2012; Naples, 2003; Skeggs, 2011). Skeggs (2011) points out that feminist ethnography can represent the 'repositioning of ethnography from colonial method to liberatory strategy. It is the deployment rather than the methodology itself that makes the difference' (p. 433). When done under a feminist situated knowledges epistemology, then, with a focus on the ethics of relationship, solidarity, language, and a multiplicity of methods, it can allow for voices and dialogue to represent, position and contest realities through narrative or discourse as mentioned earlier.

To allow for the depth that an ethnographic approach requires, the research focused on a specific case study in the county of Busia, in Western Kenya. This focus was made possible thanks to the access and support offered by the Kenyan civil society organisation Siasa Place. In the next section, I discuss in more detail the choice of case study, which I approach from a point of view of the need for reflexivity discussed earlier.

3.2.1. Case study context

The choice of Kenya from a theoretical point of view has been justified in the introductory chapter, where I argued that the discursive positioning of the country as a technology hub has been fertile ground for optimistic assumptions about the transformational potential of ICT. However, there were also other, methodological motivations for choosing Kenya. Before starting the doctorate, I had been working in the international media and development sector for a number of years, four of those with a focus on Kenya, alongside other countries in the region. I had travelled to the country several times and worked, remotely or in Nairobi, with Kenyan research colleagues. In addition to working relationships, personal ties also meant I had an emotional stake, personal interest, and a support network in the country. I first started studying Kiswahili⁷ in 2008 and continued intermittently with additional lessons and self-study a few years later. This intermittency and the difficulties of immersing myself

⁷ Kiswahili is considered the national language of Kenya according to the Constitution as well as the official language alongside English (Uraia Trust, 2010: 26).

in the language whilst in the UK meant I never progressed far beyond a basic level. This basic level, however, was helpful during the research in facilitating interactions and broadly following meetings and conversations. I cover language aspects further below.

To narrow down the case study in Kenya, and following a scoping phase in 2017, I learnt about and became interested in the work of Siasa Place, a civil society organisation founded in 2015 and registered as a non-governmental organisation in the same year. I was interested in Siasa Place because they were a relatively new and youth-led Kenyan organisation focused on civic engagement from a political activism angle. This seemed a very relevant place to start in order to explore citizenship among youth from a Kenyan point of view. In addition, Siasa Place explicitly include technologies as central in their strategy and, at the same time, their work covers both online and offline spaces of activism. This was important in order to explore the research questions as well as to allow the research to be open to different spaces of interaction and dialogue, in line with an intersectional and digital ethnography point of view. Similarly, Siasa Place works with young people but also engages formal and informal government structures and representatives, also important for the research to explore discourse and representations within and across levels, like the individual, the community and the institutional. I therefore got in touch and I am grateful to Siasa Place for answering my first email, from where we continued with conversations first on Skype and later on at Siasa Place's offices in Nairobi. I do not take for granted the possibilities that their collaboration opened for this research.

Siasa Place's mission is: 'To Promote the Peoples' Participation in Democratic Processes through Research, Trainings, Civic Education, Networking and Strategic Partnerships'(Siasa Place, 2020). In its website and strategy documents, Siasa Place uses terms such as 'civic engagement', 'active citizens' and 'responsible citizenry'. The organisation sees 'civic education', including community meetings, and online communication as essential tools to facilitate this participation in democratic processes. They emphasise the importance of online spaces as expressed on their strategic plan: 'We pride on using social media to host regular important discussions on the

constitution because we recognize that it is a space that is not heavily invested in terms of governance education yet majority of youth occupy this space.' (Siasa Place, 2017: 8). Stating that a majority occupy the online space, however, suggests assumptions of digital access that contrast with statistics on online use. This resonates with the narratives that pushed me to do this research and which reinforce the rationale for this study in trying to understand invisibilised realities and exclusions.

Siasa Place's early activities included organising forums in Nairobi to engage students in political decision-making processes, particularly in the run up to the 2017 elections in Kenya. Due to limited funding, the meetings would take place in local cafes where Wi-Fi was available in order to broadcast the discussions live on Facebook. In addition, Siasa Place had been organising weekly Twitter chat-ups on Wednesdays under the hashtag #SiasaWednesday. After securing steadier and international funding, particularly from 2018 onwards, Siasa Place started to expand their civic engagement activities outside of Nairobi with the aim of reaching young people from diverse backgrounds. The Kenya Accountable and Inclusive Political Processes (KAIP) programme is an example of this. It seeks to address the exclusion of youth and women in decisions made on policies in their relevant counties. It uses two main approaches to do this, as outlined on the organisation's website. Firstly, Siasa Place builds the 'strategic capacity of youth groups and leaders' to interact with their county's government in including them in decision-making and policies that affect them (Siasa Place, 2020). Secondly, it focuses on providing young people with mechanisms to engage with their government representatives.

One of the locations where this programme was being implemented was Busia, a county in the former Western province of Kenya, bordering Uganda. Narrowing down the case study to Busia made sense when considering the timelines of my study, but it also allowed me to explore citizenship and intersectionality in an area characterised by political heterogeneity, with a different socio-economic configuration than the often more researched realities of the capital, and with the peculiar characteristics related to being by a border, as discussed in the introductory chapter.

The work of Siasa Place occurs in a political system shaped by Kenya's 2010 Constitution and the implementation of devolution as a reform that is meant to decentralise power. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the Constitution resulted in the creation of new county level parliaments (county assemblies), new political and administrative roles at the county level, and structures for political participation such as the implementation of public participation meetings to discuss county budget plans. The Constitution (2010) includes specifications for applying these rights to specific groups in society and states that the duty of the legislature is to promote the representation of marginalised groups, which include 'women, persons with disabilities, youth, ethnic and other minorities, and marginalised communities' (p. 93).

In this context of the new opportunities for participation offered by devolution, Siasa Place's activities in Busia County had at its core equipping young people to better understand the mechanisms of participation in democratic processes, ensuring their perspectives and priorities are included in the design of policies and budgets, and holding governments to account for service delivery.

3.2.2. Participants

Siasa Place introduced me to their civic engagement programme in Busia at the time it was starting to bring together a group of young people from across the county. This group was starting a series of sessions with the organisation to learn about the Constitution, devolution, and the mechanisms in place for public participation and accountability. This core group would in turn engage peers in their sub-counties and communities. Many were also members of youth or women's groups and were actively involved in their communities, which will be discussed in the following empirical chapters.

This initial introduction to the group allowed me to establish relationships with a group of young people and access a wider network of youth and activities across the county. In navigating this network, I prioritised depth over breadth and was guided by the relationships I established. Some of the participants would ask me to visit their communities and on other occasions I also asked others if they would be happy for me to meet some of their peers. Guided by the ethics of care and relationship approach, in

these decisions and conversations I prioritised a respectful spontaneous interaction, rather than a drive to reach a specific number of interviews. The sampling approach was therefore inductive and ongoing (O'Reilly, 2008) based on how encounters and events evolved within a framework based on age and diversity of locations.

To provide an account of the profile of the participants, I will focus on the one-to-one audio-recorded interviews. However, it is important to note that, as a digital ethnography, this study included observations at events, as will be detailed in the methods section. Some of them were large, open, public participation meetings in rural areas that brought together communities with county government officials. Others were stakeholder meetings in Busia town. The study also included observations in existing WhatsApp groups, which included a larger number of participants than those interviewed.

This study focuses on young people and women, for reasons outlined in the introductory chapter. Although the Constitution of Kenya considers a young person to be between 18 and 34 years old, I did not want these age limits to restrict the opportunity to enable encounters with women that occurred whilst I was in Busia and that were relevant to the context and to the study's research questions, as long as they were not below 18 years old as stated in the ethics protocol of this study. In total, I conducted audio-recorded interviews with 25 participants in Busia over a period of 8 months. Three of them were staff at Siasa Place. Participants completed a Participant details form (appendix E) where they were able to voluntarily identify their gender, age, student or work status, education level, nationality, ethnicity, the language they felt most comfortable speaking and an approximate monthly or weekly amount spent on phone airtime and/or data if they wanted to share it. This information, which was optional, was intended to allow participants to self-identify their own socio-demographic characteristics. As described in the methodological approach, it is the discourses in the participants' accounts during interviews or observed conversations in meetings, events and online discussions that have informed the understanding of categories and intersections in this study. Yet, this self-defined demographic information helped me to understand the extent to which the group was heterogenous.

As described earlier, this responds to the use of an intercategory approach to intersectionality in combination with an intracategory approach, which uses categories provisionally as a start to then explore more complex invisibilised realities and intersections.

In the end, most participants in the interviews were between 20 and 35 years old, with three of them being women above 35. The group of interviewed participants included 17 women and 8 men. Formal education varied from those who did not complete secondary education, those who completed secondary education and some who completed college or a university degree. A few were studying at university at the time but had paused their studies for economic reasons. Some were unemployed and others had a formal job, although most were engaged in multiple economic activities, largely informal or short-term. Subsistence farming was also common for many alongside other activities. At least three different ethnic groups are represented in this study and everyone who completed the form identified their nationality to be Kenyan.

Participants came from all seven electoral constituencies of Busia County. Although not everyone was directly involved with the civic engagement activities facilitated through Siasa Place, my encounters with them stemmed directly or indirectly from my initial engagement with the young people involved in the activities facilitated by the organisation. In addition to the interviews, I had ongoing spontaneous conversations with some of the participants during events I was observing. Some asked to meet me if they happened to be near Busia town, where I was staying, or invited me to their homes. As discussed earlier and as I will refer to going forward, I was guided by an ethics of respect, care, and relationships to navigate encounters that did not strictly fall under the constraints of planned interviews or observations. My reflections on these conversations were captured in my researcher's diary.

3.2.2.1. Language

Language is central not only for practical reasons but, more importantly, to this study's epistemological stance. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) discusses language as a tool of oppression. The Kenyan writer refers to the 'cultural bomb' as the biggest weapon of imperialism as it makes people 'want to identify with that which is

furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own' (1986: 3). Language, wa Thiong'o argues, is used in colonialism as a way of subjugation not only by imposing the colonial language but by making people feel their own languages are backward (1986: 9). Considering its coloniality, and yet it being an official language and the language of instruction in schools, the use of English in Kenya carries both a history of erasure as well as a more recent history of postcolonial national identity.

At least 42 languages are spoken in Kenya, including Kiswahili and English. Kiswahili, acquired informally by exposure and also learnt as a subject in school, is the unifying and national language and the co-official language alongside English (Ogechi, 2009). It is a Bantu language with Arabic influences, spoken by the Swahili people and spread from the coast through trade in East Africa. Although it is the national language, it is often used alongside English in communication between people from different communities (Ogechi, 2009) which results in varieties of Kenyan English (Otundo, 2015). English is the main instruction language in schools from grade 4 (primary education in Kenya includes grades 1 to 6). In rural areas, the local native language is prescribed as the language of school instruction for the introductory years before grade 4, but, in urban areas, English, or in some cases Kiswahili, is the language taught from the beginning of primary school (Ogechi, 2009; Otundo, 2015). English is also the language used for national examinations.

It being both an official and instruction language, English is largely and fluently spoken by young Kenyans. It has also become the dominant language in official or government communication and 'tacitly' considered key for social and economic mobility (Otundo, 2015: 3). However, cautious of making assumptions, I consulted with Siasa Place about the appropriateness of using English to interact with young people in Busia. The staff at Siasa Place confirmed that doing the research in English would not be a problem. Indeed, English was also commonly used as the language of discussion in the training activities that I observed, although interchanged with Kiswahili. It was also the language of the training materials as well as the government official documents often circulated among young people in their WhatsApp

discussions, and the main language used for discussion in the WhatsApp groups I was observing, although also interchanged with Kiswahili.

Participants were given the option to write in the Participant details form (appendix E) -which was written in both English and Kiswahili- the language in which they felt most comfortable speaking. Most wrote either 'English' or 'English and Kiswahili' with only three writing 'Kiswahili' alone. I conducted the interviews in English although I always checked whether this was ok with the participant first, even when it was obvious that both myself and the participant were fluent in English. Yet, it was also clear that, for a minority, they would have expressed themselves better in Kiswahili or their native language, so I always asked the question to avoid making assumptions about how much or how little English was part of their communicative habits, preferences or identity, particularly in a linguistically complex context like Kenya. In the interviews I made sure to let the participants know that they could express themselves in Kiswahili if it helped them better communicate their views and feelings, which some did although very occasionally.

My level of Kiswahili was too basic to have a fluent, in-depth conversation, but it allowed me to have brief exchanges and to introduce myself in informal and formal settings. I could explain in Kiswahili the reason for my presence during events in which I was doing observations. It also meant I could follow conversations and meetings, particularly as these often mixed both English and Kiswahili. Overall, however, English was the main language used during the encounters with participants in this research study.

3.2.3. Researcher positionality

I share the 'discomfort with reflexivity as personal biography' raised by Bhavnani and Talcott (Bhavnani and Talcott, 2012: 7). Hussen (2019: 4) warns about self-descriptions such as 'I am a white woman, living in the global north, working in technological research in the global south' as they limit the reflexions on hierarchy, power and labour. I have explained how my positionality (past professional experience and personal ties) influenced the choice of Kenya for this research, alongside the theoretical justification for Kenya as relevant to the research questions. Yet, as per Lazard and

McAvoy's approach (2017), it is important to reflect on why I pursued these research questions.

As a former journalist based in Catalonia and as a volunteer in international cooperation programmes, I was particularly influenced by the work of Catalan economist, professor and activist Arcadi Oliveres, whose work focused on inequalities and injustice in the distribution of resources in the world (Marimon and Ortega, 2021). Studying an MSc in Development Studies at SOAS (University of London) further exposed me to a critical gaze on international development and my understanding of it in the context of (neo)colonialism and the political economy of states and international relations. In 2010, I started working as a researcher for international NGOs and specialised in researching the role of media and communication in social change and in state-society relations. It was during these professional years in the UK that I was exposed to a mismatch between narratives in the international development sector about the benefits of using digital technologies and the less optimistic evidence on this. As a researcher, I had access to voices and statistics that reflected inequalities in access to, and use of, digital technologies and the Internet. Yet, it was common in my professional interactions to hear or read that digital technologies were the best way to reach young people without any reference to the inequalities in access for youth in many contexts. At the same time, I was also deeply uncomfortable with approaches to development that assumed what 'good governance' was for other countries when the literature used in the sector was in my experience largely, sometimes uniquely, based on analyses and authors from English-speaking Western countries.

A scholarship at The Open University as part of an ESRC funded Doctoral Training Partnership opened the door for me to take a pause from the development sector to pursue a PhD. I was exposed to the work of academics at The Open University who specialised in citizenship studies, which I saw as a valuable lens to decentre the Western gaze of development on issues of governance as well as the inequalities in use and access to digital technologies.

During the doctoral research process, I became increasingly aware of my whiteness and the complex power relations it carried. Ahmed (2007) explores whiteness as the

comfort of not noticing your body because it fits the space. Disorientation happens '[w]hen the arrival of some bodies is noticed' (2007: 163). In Kenya, during the period of data collection, I was particularly aware of my presence, the space it took, its meanings attached to colonialism, power, wealth, and the many more possible associations that escaped me. This awareness conditioned me to always be paying attention to how I behaved and communicated to the point that I often felt I was not able to be 'myself', as I noted down in my research diary. Some participants wanted to take photos with me or invited me to their homes and communities. As a researcher this created dilemmas on how to be transparent about when I was 'researching' or not. Following a situated knowledges approach, based on reflexivity and an ethics of care helped me to approach these dilemmas by prioritising the human connection and being transparent about my role there, yet respectful to expectations related to hospitality and solidarity. On the other hand, I shared with participants a passion for politics and social justice in my own context as a Catalan in Spain and as a European in the UK, which led to rapport and interesting conversations with some research participants. As a woman, I also shared a level of understanding and empathy with female participants in relation to patriarchal social norms and structures. These helped to establish bonds in the research encounter despite our very different positionalities.

3.3. Conclusions

This chapter has discussed and reflected on the epistemological approach of this doctoral research project and introduced the case study, the participants, and my positionality as a researcher. In line with the theoretical framework, the methodology builds on interpretivist ontological positioning, which understands reality as constructed and given meaning through power and discourse, whilst at the same time acknowledging the importance of agency and representation. Feminist and postcolonial approaches and intersectionality have guided the epistemological stance of this research, which is based on a situated knowledges approach. A situated knowledges approach recognises the different knowledges in the research encounter and the power of the researcher in shaping and interpreting the knowledge that is produced. To account for the power dynamics in the research encounter, this study

borrowing the following key aspects from feminist and postcolonial methodology: the importance of a multiplicity of methods and spaces through the use of digital ethnography, a focus on language and discourse, the importance of reflexivity, and an ethics of care and relationships. The next chapter discusses the more concrete data collection and analysis methods that follow from this epistemological stance.

Chapter 4. Methods of Data Collection, Analysis and Ethics

Following from the overall epistemological and methodological approach discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter introduces and discusses the concrete research methods used to collect and analyse the data. It then covers the ethics process that I followed. The chapter opens with a discussion of the digital ethnography approach that has guided data collection and offers a rationale for each of the methods used as part of this ethnography: semi-structured interviews; offline observation in meetings and public events; online observation in WhatsApp groups; a focus group discussion (FGD) in WhatsApp; and a researcher's diary. It then describes the analytical approach I took to identify discursive themes. Finally, it discusses the ethical concerns and protocol I followed, with an emphasis on online research ethics and the ethics of engagement and representation.

4.1. Methods of data collection

4.1.1. A digital ethnography approach

This study uses digital ethnography because, alongside in-person meetings, events and discussions, the online space was also part of the 'natural habitat' of many participants (Hallett and Barber, 2014: 306). In addition, key to this study's research questions is to understand how WhatsApp mediates participants' citizenship capabilities. I therefore considered it important to understand how participants interact in WhatsApp groups that they created as part of the civic education and engagement programme they were part of.

I draw on literature on online ethnography, but I choose the term 'digital ethnography' to reflect a more recent understanding of online ethnography that approaches the research as done not exclusively through digital media but also about it and in interaction with other communication spaces. Digital ethnography allows researchers to travel across platforms and offline and online spaces because online interactions do

not happen in an online vacuum but in relation to offline realities (Hine, 2017; Postill and Pink, 2012; Sumiala and Tikka, 2020). When doing digital ethnography, defining the 'field' becomes a complex and open-ended endeavour because new sites emerge as the researcher traces connections and moves between 'territories and socialities' (Postill and Pink, 2012: 124).

Since its emergence in the mid-1990s, digital ethnography has evolved through its use across disciplines and as technologies, and the social realities and interactions they constitute and are constitutive of, continue to emerge and evolve (Abidin and De Seta, 2020; Hine, 2017; Robinson and Schulz, 2009). Abidin and Seta (2020) refer to the confusion regarding the terminology in the field or 'the lexicon of "buzzword ethnography"', which includes labels such as online ethnography, virtual ethnography, cyber ethnography, netnography, social media ethnography, or cyber anthropology, among others. Abidin and Seta choose 'digital ethnography' as an encompassing term that refers to ethnography 'through and about digital media' (2020: 5). Other authors mentioned here might use other terms.

Prior to travelling to Kenya I anticipated the following methods of data collection: in-person semi-structured interviews; offline observations in meetings related to the participants' activism or civic engagement; online observations of participants' communication as part of their activism and/or civic engagement; a focus group discussion in WhatsApp as a relevant online space of interaction; and a researchers' diary. In addition, I also gathered relevant documentation such as training handbooks or government policies as part of the digital ethnography. The rationale for this multiplicity of methods is aligned not only to the postcolonial feminist methodologies, as discussed in 'Chapter 3: Research Philosophy and Case Study', but also to the multiple ways of approaching the field site in online ethnography (Hine, 2017). Hine (2017: 23) outlines these multiple approaches, which among others include the 'multi-modal' approach, which refers to studying multiple modes of communication; the 'multi-sited' approach, which bases the ethnography on multiple sites of interaction; or the 'networked' approach, which means the ethnographer follows interconnections of a group of people and discovers new sites as a result. The digital ethnography in this

study is 'multi-modal' as it seeks to include the different communication modes that participants use, be it face-to-face meetings, or conversations in WhatsApp groups. It is also 'multi-sited' as the activities and experiences by the participants can take place in multiple sites. Finally, it is also 'networked' as I moved between the different sites and modes of communication based on the connections that I observed or that were revealed by participants.

The value of digital ethnography and of taking a networked approach between methods, sites and socialities became apparent to me on many occasions. For example, there was a day when there were two public participation meetings organised by the county authorities in two different sub-counties at the same time. I could only attend one, but I was able to get an insight into the other one through comments that the young activists shared in one of the WhatsApp groups. Following online discussions and seeing the pictures shared in the WhatsApp group of other events allowed me to be 'present' to an extent in multiple sites and establish connections between offline discussions, online discussions and the one-to-one conversations through the semi-structured interviews that related to these events, whether I had been able to attend them in person or not.

4.1.2. Semi-structured interviews

I chose qualitative semi-structured interviews to allow for a space of encounter with participants in which I could explore and listen to their accounts about civic and political engagements and their use of technologies. Ethnographic interviews aim 'to explore the meanings that people ascribe to actions and events in their cultural worlds' (Roulston and Choi, 2011: 4). Roulston and Choi argue that what distinguishes interviews in ethnographic interviews from other type of interviews in qualitative research is that the analysis includes additional forms of data from the same participants and can also involve interviews over a period of time and on more than one occasion.

Using a semi-structured interview meant that I had a list of topics and potential questions to guide the conversation in line with the theoretical framework and the study's research questions, yet open and flexible enough to allow for a respectful

encounter where a conversation could develop by both the interviewer and the interviewee. The interview guide (appendix F) covered the following key discussion areas.

- *About the participant.* I asked the participant how they became involved with the relevant organisation or activities and how they hoped this involvement would benefit them. This generally not only worked as an icebreaker but also helped the participant position themselves in the context in which we met. Answers to the questions in this topic area were helpful in crystallising the importance of the community and the relationship between the collective and the individual, and in helping to situate participants in interactions with discourses identified in other spaces, like the WhatsApp group conversations or the civic education trainings.
- *About the participant in relation to their environment.* The questions under this topic sought to provide an opportunity for the conversation to connect individual aspirations more explicitly with both the more immediate community and with the country more broadly. This is in line with the theoretical framework's multi-layered approach to citizenship and intersectionality as already discussed, from the individual, to the collective and the institutional. The questions included, for example, understanding the participants' role or rationale for joining groups or organisations. These engagements could be related more specifically to activities facilitated by Siasa Place or to other activities the participant emphasised in the interview, such as engagement with groups they were part of. For example, most participants were members of women's groups, youth groups or *chamas*, which are very wide-spread informal cooperatives where members pool savings to help each other (Njeri Kinyanjui, 2019). These discussions were then followed with questions related to their engagements at the county and country level. They included, for example, questions around how they engage with decision-making process or whether they considered themselves Kenyan citizens and what this meant to them.

- *About the role of technology.* In this third category, I tried to understand whether and how participants used mobile phones, the Internet and social media, both generally and as part of their civic engagement more specifically. I also asked in what ways they thought the technology or online platforms they used were helpful in achieving their objectives as young activists. Similarly, we also discussed whether they thought it was a good strategy for organisations to use social media and WhatsApp for civic engagement activities. I was transparent in my aim to better understand the intersecting reasons why some members of the community might be left out, if at all, if certain technologies and online platforms were used. As Roulston and Choi (2011) argue, it can be appropriate in a feminist research project for the researcher to state their own views and perspectives during an interview. Being clear with participants about the importance it had for the research to understand experiences of digital access helped to probe for different positionings and sites of exclusions. Questions related to inequalities in access and use of technologies often led to a discussion on how participants thought their activism could be more effective at including more people from their communities.
- *Questions by participants.* Finally, I always made sure to leave space at the end for a discussion guided by the participants' questions. On many occasions, this led to what I perceived to be a rebalancing of power. The conversations that emerged at the end crystallised the different positionalities in the research encounter. For example, it was common for participants to ask about how my research would help them, which gave me an opportunity to be transparent about my motivations and about the research engagement plans. On the one hand, I reiterated the objectives of the research in the context of my PhD studies, my motivation for the topic and the reasons for conducting the research in Kenya. I expressed my desire for policies and activities by organisations to use digital technologies in a way that addressed inequalities in access and use and that the views and aspirations of citizens were taken into account. Yet, I was also clear about the limits of my contribution, any benefit for participants or any tangible impact beyond sharing this research to the extent it was

possible for me. These exchanges gave me some reassurance that I was welcomed as a researcher even with the contradictions my presence carried and without raising false expectations. This discussion at the end, led by the participants' questions, also allowed participants to position themselves in ways that the question-driven conversation did not make space for. For example, some would ask about my views on politics in my country or would talk to me about their degree or interests, like a participant who was interested in the fishing and agriculture industry and asked about this sector in my context.

Based on the relationships established during the time in Busia County, I had follow-up interviews with some participants. These follow up interviews were more unstructured, closer to an informal conversation than a guided interview, yet still audio-recorded and adhering to the ethics protocol. In these follow-up interviews I used a notebook with topics I had written down based on my perceptions and reflections gained from other methods, such as the observations and the focus group discussion, and following a re-listening of previous interviews and a re-reading of my researcher diary. These interviews were more informal and longer, as the rapport had also become stronger. They helped to explore changes that occurred during the data collection period, such as some participants losing or gaining online access, as well as to explore potential new meanings or views related to their engagement with Siasa Place and the activities they got involved with over time, like taking part in public participation events.

4.1.3. Participant offline observation

My stay in Busia spanned a total of 8 months during which I attended a variety of in-person events. Siasa Place welcomed me to their initial trainings and activities and, from there, I accessed additional events across the county resulting from conversations and relationships I established. I also got to know about relevant events through information shared in the WhatsApp groups that I was observing, which I found to be an example of the value of digital ethnography in allowing me to navigate sites and socialities, as argued by Postill and Pink (2012) through both the offline and online

realities of research participants. These offline observations included the following types of events:

- Training sessions on the rights of youth and women, the Constitution, public participation mechanisms, and accountability mechanisms
- Stakeholder meetings between young people, civil society representatives and a range of decision-makers and representatives, including village chiefs, ward administrators, and county government officials
- Women's groups and women's table banking groups (an informal type of micro-finance managed by the group members themselves)
- County public participation meetings
- Social audits conducted by some of the research participants.

During these observations, I was a participant to the extent that I was present, sharing an activity and space with others. As Honer and Hitzler (2015) state, in participant observation, 'participation takes place because, and to the extent that, it is necessary in order to be able to conduct observations' (p. 552). These were all relatively formalised events where I had the opportunity to introduce myself, explain the reason for my presence and request permission to be there as a researcher either through the organiser or to the entire group. Yet, I was an observer more than a participant. For example, I would not contribute to discussions unless I was invited or asked to, primarily out of respect, because I did not want to centre myself in discussions, especially in a context in which the young activists were fighting for representation and voice. On some occasions, I was invited to take part in training activities that the participants attended, from helping to scroll down a document in a projected laptop whilst the facilitator was taking the group, to sharing my experience in research methodologies in a training on social audits. Overall though, I would generally take, quite literally, a back seat, except during lunch breaks or at the start or end of sessions, when I would socialise with the rest. Yet, even then, I never stopped being an observer, to the extent that I would reflect on my lived experience of those moments. Honer and Hitzler (2015) refer to this as 'observant participation', a supplement to 'participant

observation' in which participation takes priority over observation but without relinquishing reflection.

During the participant observation, I would take notes in a notebook when the events were in remote rural locations or on my laptop when the events were in a conference or training room. These would be descriptive accounts of the activities and conversations that were unfolding, including verbatim sentences that I thought to be relevant. Descriptive writing involves a process of interpretation and reflects particular purposes or intentions (Emerson et al., 2011). In this process of quasi-instant sense-making whilst describing the events, I was guided by the research questions, paying particular attention to how youth expressed or enacted their aspirations and claims as citizens. I also paid attention to the power dynamics with authorities and other stakeholders or representatives, as well as any discourses or uses of language related to different groups of people or which reflected inequalities. I would also note any impressions related to my presence in the event, as part of the reflexivity of the methodology.

In addition to these formalised events, I also was part of informal gatherings and discussions with participants during the interludes of the formal events or in other informal and often spontaneous encounters. In those instances, I would write my impressions of those observations or interactions in my diary at the end of the day. In this case, the notes were less descriptive, and more a result of my reflections on how these encounters related to the research questions as well as the power dynamics in the process of knowledge production.

4.1.4. Non-participant online observation

As I got introduced to the network of young activists, I learnt about the WhatsApp groups that they used as part of their activism. Following the ethics protocol described in section 4.3 in this chapter, I joined three WhatsApp groups, one grouping activists from across the county that had been initiated by Siasa Place to help the group mobilise and communicate, and two which served the same function but in relation to peers in two different sub-county areas, one in the northern part of the county and one in the south.

I had planned for my presence in the WhatsApp groups to be strictly observational in order to avoid disrupting power relations and the conversation dynamics in the groups. When seeking consent from the group, my messages included this statement: “Ukiniruhusu nitashiriki katika kundi hili la Whatsapp kama mwangalizi” [If you allow me, I will take part in this WhatsApp group as an observer] (appendix J). I have therefore labelled this method as non-participant observation. Non-participant observation seemed appropriate especially as the online space made me more invisible, unlike offline observations where my presence was more obvious because it was embodied. Therefore, and as much as I was tempted to participate in some of the discussions, particularly as my rapport with the group or some of its members grew, I held back to avoid centring my presence in the group. Only occasionally, some participants would send photos of events I had attended or mention me if I had visited their groups or communities as part of a common dynamic in the group of sharing the activists’ engagements.

I observed the groups for a total of 8 months, which resulted in data that included not only text but also a large amount of images, movies and PDF documents, among other type of files that the group members would share between them. I would export each WhatsApp group conversation every two weeks, using the ‘Export chat’ option in the WhatsApp settings. At the end of the data collection period, I reconciled all the .txt files (including the text) into one, ensuring that the font was able to represent the emojis in the original chats. The export option in WhatsApp allowed me to export the media files too, which I then mapped back onto the conversation using the relevant media file number that appeared in the .txt file.

The affordances of using WhatsApp as a research method allowed for the research to continue during the weeks that I was not in Kenya. Following agreement with the groups, I remained a member as a peer rather than an observer, which would allow me to share my research with participants in due course in line with the ethics of relationship and care.

4.1.5. WhatsApp Focus Group Discussion

The study's methodology included a focus group discussion to enable a space where people's views and experiences could be articulated and explored in a social setting. By contrast to one-to-one interviews, focus groups are designed to explore a research topic from the interactions of a group of 6 to 12 participants (although the number can vary) facilitated by the researcher or trained moderator (Abrams and Gaiser, 2017; Liamputtong, 2011).

In line with the digital ethnography approach, I considered it was appropriate to have this discussion in the social setting that participants used frequently as part of their organising and activism, which was WhatsApp. Some of the participants met occasionally face-to-face but this was often to attend training sessions facilitated by or related to their engagement with Siasa Place. I did not feel comfortable taking up this time for a focus group because this time was limited and valuable to the group's learning, bonding, and organising. In addition, having the focus group in the same day and place of a training or meeting could mean that the content and dynamic of such a day could more easily frame or sway the dynamics of the focus group discussion. Moreover, WhatsApp was convenient not only for me as a researcher, reducing costs and enabling the gathering of participants from different parts of the county, but also for many participants. They already were members of various WhatsApp groups, both related to Siasa Place but also to the many youth, women, and self-help groups or *chamas* they were part of. It was therefore a natural environment that participants shared, and an example of what Postill and Pink refer to as 'digital socialities' (2012: 125). This did not require participants to download any app they did not already have on their phones. As such, using WhatsApp helped to adapt the research to the participants daily routines, schedules and communicative habits, rather than participants adapting to the researcher's tools. Therefore, organising a focus group on WhatsApp seemed an appropriate option not only in line with this research's methodology but also in line with the ethics of respect for time and participants' research labour.

I created a WhatsApp group specifically for the focus group discussion and added those who had consented. In total, 5 women and 5 men took part in the focus group⁸. To make the most of the spatial and temporal flexibility of WhatsApp, I designed the focus group to last for a day but the starting time was decided collectively. Before starting, I informed participants that the group would be closed after 24 hours to allow them to add any further thoughts and reflections after the last topic was discussed. I introduced different questions or topics throughout the day, signposting them using numbering and bold font to make it easy for participants to catch up if they were joining back after a break, which allowed for a combination of synchronous and asynchronous discussions. The synchronous discussion on the last topic introduced ended approximately at 5pm, although the discussion extended beyond and included views on the experience of taking part in the research activity on WhatsApp. For example, one participant said: “It has been quite interactive and a platform full of knowledge and wisdom. Though I've been on off (katika harakati za kutafta unga⁹), I must admit that I've enjoyed”, and another one said, “Its more Impressive that my thoughts have been represented here thanks to all”.

Conducting this focus group on WhatsApp was a new approach for me and I had not found guidance in the literature either. I approached it with some uncertainties. I was concerned, for example, that participants would be too busy or would not find the discussion on WhatsApp engaging enough, even if WhatsApp was the online platform that they used the most and on a daily basis. I was also concerned that the discussion would not be sustained for a day. Despite this, I thought this approach was appropriate in adapting the method to participants' times and harnessing the ubiquity that characterises WhatsApp. As I was facilitating the discussion, I perceived participants were keen to take part and hear from each other and women seemed to be more forward in contributing compared to some face-to-face meetings I had observed.

Overall, based on my experience, I concluded that the FGD in WhatsApp was working as a comfortable space for collective reflection and deliberation. To empirically explore

⁸ As mentioned in section 3.2.2., participants self-identified their gender in the Participant details form (appendix E) which they had the option to complete during the one-to-one interviews.

⁹ An expression that means 'I was working'.

this, I conducted a discourse analysis of the WhatsApp conversation. I used Black et al.'s (2011) definition of deliberation as a theoretical reference. They define deliberative discussions as 'decision oriented conversations in which a group weighs pros and cons of different options, articulates core values, and makes choices in a way that is respectful, egalitarian, and open' (2011: 597). In addition, I conducted a thematic analysis of the topics discussed in the WhatsApp focus group related to participants' views on the affordances of WhatsApp. I used *literature* on online focus group discussions to frame the study of WhatsApp for focus groups. The conclusions from this empirical study were published in the journal *Qualitative Research* (Colom, 2021).

4.1.6. Researcher's diary

As I began primary data collection, I started a diary to support the process of reflexivity. The diary included the following types of data:

- *Reflections on interactions with participants.* This included reflections on rapport and the nature of the relationship, power relationships, and related ethical dilemmas. For example, during my stay in Busia, participants would sometimes message or visit me. I would always be open to this as part of the ethics of relationship. Yet I initially faced dilemmas around how to approach these interactions in the context of an ethnographic study where any interaction could be valuable to understand the study's research questions. On the one hand, I always made sure my role as a researcher was clear. For example, if the participant mentioned during an informal chat anything that I thought was relevant for me to understand as part of the research I would be explicit about the value this had for me as a researcher. I would usually explain why that comment was relevant to the objectives of the research and suggest the possibility of discussing it further in a recorded interview at another point in time if they wanted. The diary helped me capture these interactions and ethical dilemmas and how I navigated them in the context of a feminist and postcolonial methodology.
- *Data management.* The diary also included notes related to how I approached data management, particularly when the context required alterations to the data

management plan. For example, I had planned to email the audio recording of interviews into a Protonmail email address before saving it in my university encrypted laptop due to the security and privacy that Protonmail allows. Yet, I realised the file size limit of the audio recordings exceeded the limit that this service allowed. The diary helped me to reflect on and document the alternative strategies adopted for data transfer.

- *Reflections relevant to research design and analysis.* I used the diary to write down reflections from observations, interactions or literature read during the data collection period that related to the research design and analysis. This would include questions to ask, potential participants to approach for an interview or lines of enquiry related to my theoretical framework or analysis approach.
- *Data about me.* Under the situated knowledges epistemological framework of this research, I am part of the research encounter and, as such, it was important to capture my own feelings and behaviours during observations and interactions. For example, during one observation I felt power being very explicitly enacted over me for being a woman by an armed guard at an event who requested my number for no official reason. In the diary I describe how I handled the situation, the anger I felt, and the complicity experienced with a research participant, also a woman, after the incident. At the time, I considered this was valuable data in relation to the research encounter.
- *Links between online and offline spaces and data.* The diary helped to crystallise the 'multi-modal', 'multi-sited' and 'networked' approaches (Hine, 2017) of digital ethnography as I used it to document interactions between the different sites and modes of data. For example, during the lunch break of a training day for young activists that I was observing, some were vividly discussing a video they were watching together on their phones. They told me it was a video of a TV news piece which was circulating on WhatsApp in which government officials warned of the responsibilities of WhatsApp group admins to control and report hate speech and 'fake news'. I made a note of the link to the video as well as of

the reactions of the young people whilst they were watching it together on the phone.

4.2. Analytic approach

I was initially guided in my analysis approach by Feminist Relational Discourse Analysis (FRDA) (Thompson et al., 2018), although I adapted the approach due to the amount and type of data that resulted from the multi-method digital ethnography. Thompson, Rickett and Day (2018) outline a method for feminist discourse analysis that captures both experience and discourse. Their approach draws on participants' personal accounts to avoid their voice being hidden in the interpretation and discussion of discursive patterns: 'Feminist Relational Discourse Analysis aims to shed light on structural systems of power and the voices of those who go unheard within these' (2018: 99).

In line with my epistemological approach guided by postcolonial feminist methodology and intersectionality, I approached the analysis with two aims. On the one hand, I wanted to interpret not only what participants said but also the function it served to construct realities, such as making citizenship claims, and positioning themselves in relation to these claims or other discourses. On the other hand, I wanted to give space for the voices of participants themselves to be prominent for the purpose of representation and as a way to hold my interpretative process to account. To bring voice within discourse, Thompson et al. use I-poems made by piecing together statements each individual participant made in the first person. Others have followed different approaches with the same intention to ensure voice is not erased. For example, Saukko stitches accounts from participants by themes rather than by individual participant (Saukko, 2000).

Due to the digital ethnography approach taken in this study, there was a breadth of data in terms of participants and methods (not only interviews but also participants' accounts in WhatsApp groups and in events observed). Considering this and the number of themes identified, I opted for an approach similar to Saukko, which pieces together participants' accounts within themes rather than by individuals. My approach differed, however, because these accounts were presented through a heavy reliance on

direct quotes in combination with and weaved in my discussion of the themes. The choice of using quotes within my text prioritises my own involvement as a researcher in the analysis and interpretation of these voices over each participants' representation, which differs from the way 'voice' takes a prominent place in the work by Thompson et al. or Saukko. At the same time, it reflects the reality of my own entanglement in the research and in giving meaning to these voices. In addition, the intersectionality lens of the study has forced me to look for and highlight in the analysis differences in power and positionality, which helps to avoid the risk of flattening the diverse positionings and meanings in the process of identifying broad discourses. Therefore, although it meant that I departed from the approach to FRDA by Thompson et al., I opted for a heavy reliance on direct quotes weaved in the text to magnify voice. This reliance on quotes also helped to support the intersectional lens by highlighting different positionings and to question or add nuance to broader discursive narratives. Quotes from participants are embedded in the text using double quotation marks (to differentiate them from quotes from literature, which use single quotation marks), unless they are longer than approximately three lines, in which case they are indented and italicised. When including quotes from WhatsApp observations and the WhatsApp focus group discussion, the language and grammar is not altered or changed to standard English—other than typos to help with legibility—so that they reflect the characteristics of instant messaging communication.

To conduct the analysis, I followed these steps:

- 1- Familiarisation with data.

This stage is in line with Thompson et al.'s first step in their FRDA process, called 'Reading and listening to talk' (2018:102). I manually transcribed all interviews which helped me to get familiarised with the content and make annotations on themes as I was transcribing. I also re-listened to the interviews during the fieldwork and I had also kept notes on participants' accounts and recurrent themes identified during the period of data collection, which I used to list preliminary themes for the validation session with participants as discussed in section 4.3.2. in this chapter. Finally, I also carefully read and annotated all transcripts from the WhatsApp groups that I had

observed during the process of data management of the transcripts (which included matching the file names in the transcript with file names saved in my computer drive). I was therefore familiarised with the data and language used across the various data sources.

2- 'Chunking' and labelling interview talk into sections (2018:103).

Using NVivo, I clustered the text within each interview into 'chunks of talk' based on the topic each chunk was about. I used descriptive codes to label these clusters of talk which often followed the different topics covered within the interview. I also accompanied the descriptive code with a NVivo quote to capture language that I interpreted to be relevant in capturing the meaning of the code. For example, the following are three chunks of talk, out of the ten created from one of the interviews:

'showing the youth that space is available' – motivation for involvement
'we are giving them a voice' - benefit [of activism on] others
'political bias' – challenges

3- Identifying recurring codes.

For each chunk of talk within each interview, I started identifying codes or patterns of meaning. As Thompson et al. (2018) state, this is a step that requires interpretative work. At the end of this step, the recurrent codes are grouped into theme folders. I used NVivo's hierarchical node structure to create these 'theme folders' by creating broader nodes within which the relevant recurrent codes were grouped. For example, I created an overarching NVivo code called 'The demographic dividend' in which I grouped the following recurrent codes: (i) Youth are majority yet don't have a say which results into their needs not being addressed; (ii) Youth being a majority we have a demographic dividend that will go to waste if not used; (iii) Youth and women are the majority; (iv) Youth are the majority so can achieve change if decide to. This was an iterative process. As coding progressed, some codes were similar and were collapsed or the broader node re-labelled with a wording that better reflected the theme of the codes in it.

4- Identifying discursive patterns.

This step is about identifying how the theme is being constructed. It entails looking at the theme as a statement or series of statements that give a meaning or function to an object or phenomenon, or samples of text that show how an object is described or explained (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008: 19).

At this stage, I moved from NVivo to an Excel sheet to use as a working document where I could identify discursive patterns that helped me start to think about how these linked with the theoretical realms of the research. This helped me to start grouping the codes in NVivo into the broader patterns and theoretical realms. These theoretical realms were: discursive patterns within the realm of the capabilities that participants valued and which have informed Chapter 5; patterns within the realm of 'activating and performing citizenship', which have informed Chapter 6; and patterns within the realm of intersectionality, which I weaved in across all analyses chapters. For example, I identified a discourse that I called 'Our community deserves better but the lack of education and knowledge in rights results into discrimination, abuse, poverty,... and I want to help' and another one that I named 'Fighting corruption and holding our leaders to account so they deliver'. I then grouped these into a provisional discursive pattern which I called 'Injustice – working for change' and which I provisionally placed in the realm of citizenship capabilities, as the 'Capability to drive social change'.

5- Iteration and additional coding.

At this point, I started an iterative phase. I returned to NVivo to code the rest of data sources (observation notes, fieldwork diary, WhatsApp groups' transcripts and the transcript of the WhatsApp focus group discussion). This means that the original nodes in NVivo and the hierarchical structuring slightly changed as more data was coded, which added more nuance to themes.

6- Final theoretical accounting.

Once I coded all the data, I revisited the discursive patterns and theoretical realms, which included the collapsing or rearranging of themes into a final set of citizenship

capabilities (Chapter 5) as well as a structured approach to discussing the processes linked to conversion factors represented by the themes, which I refer to as conversion processes as discussed in 'Chapter 6: Activating and Performing Citizenship). With regards to the chunks of talk that related to WhatsApp's functionalities, I opted to follow a thematic analysis approach. This is because the statements were less related to positionings within broader narratives that explain, contest or legitimise power or identities and more about descriptions of use. I therefore followed steps 1 to 3 and then linked these themes with the conversion processes and capabilities to understand how the technology or lack thereof mediated participants' citizenship. I also heavily relied on direct quotes to weave in the voices of participants.

4.3. Research Ethics

This study followed The Open University's Code of Practice for Research and the OU Ethics Principles for Research involving Human Participants (The Open University, 2022). I obtained ethics approval (appendix A) after the due review process by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), included in the Appendices section. I also obtained a research licence from the National Commission of Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) of the Government of Kenya (appendix B). The ethics protocol also included an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Data Management Plan.

All participants interviewed were given an information sheet (appendix C) which outlined the following:

- the aims of the research
- my responsibilities towards them, including protecting their privacy, respecting their wishes, answering their questions, and informing them of the results of the research
- what was involved in participating, including the expected length of the interview, the audio recording of the interview and transcription as part of the analysis process
- emphasising that they did not have to participate if they did not wish to

- the confidentiality and how it would be ensured throughout, including in dissemination
- the process for signed consent.

Whenever possible, potential participants were given the sheet in advance, either via email or in person. Whereas in some cases participants preferred to read the document on their own and in their own time, others preferred I explained the information contained in the document. If participants showed interest in taking part after receiving this information about the study and the process, they would then be asked to sign a consent form (appendix D) where they could confirm, before signing, that they had:

- read (or have it explained) the information about the study
- had the opportunity to ask questions
- received enough information about the study
- understood they could withdraw from the study at any time before analysis started
- understood that short anonymous extracts of the interview could be used for research reports or other type of publications
- agreed to take part in the research.

As described in the previous chapter, in alignment with feminist and postcolonial methodology, the ethics of relationship, respect and empathy have guided ethical dilemmas that emerged during the research process. On some occasions, asking a participant to sign the form felt too formal and procedural, and risked the trust that was built through our rapport and relationship. In these cases, I emphasised the importance of these documents to show to my university that I was respecting people's wishes whilst doing the research and protecting their rights. This helped to contextualise the need for this formal process.

Below I discuss in more detail the ethics process in relation to two aspects that I consider particularly important in this research study. First, I discuss online research

ethics, because of the complexity they entail as they challenge traditional boundaries of what is considered public or private as well as the boundaries of time and space. Second, I discuss issues of research engagement and representation, as they are particularly important for a feminist postcolonial methodology.

4.3.1. Online research ethics

Online spaces and practices have raised new ethical challenges for research by blurring not only time and space boundaries but also the public and private spheres. They also pose challenges related to data security and management. In addition to legal frameworks varying according to states or regions, views and norms on privacy and ethics are culturally-specific (Eynon et al., 2017) and expectations on privacy also vary by platform (Housley et al., 2017). Most recent guidelines and literature on online research ethics highlight the case-by-cases in which decisions on what is ethical need to be made. Golder et al. (2017) state that '[e]ach Internet research project requires an individual assessment of its own ethical issues' (p. 2) and the Internet Research Ethical Guidelines 3.0 of the Association of Internet Researchers refer to a need for 'judgement calls' by providing 'Guidelines, Not Recipes' (Franzke et al., 2020: 6).

The systematic review of social media ethics by Golder et al. emphasises the importance of ethical considerations that go beyond regulation in order to consider the context of the social media platform and its users (2017: 17). Barbosa and Milan (2020) emphasise the need to avoid 'a one-stop checklist' and advocate for a 'recursive, iterative and dialogic process' to research ethics in doing ethnography in WhatsApp (p. 49).

Like other chat apps, WhatsApp can be considered a (private) public sphere (Barbosa and Milan, 2019; Myers West, 2017). This is because these are spaces that are owned by for-profit private companies which dictate the discursive practices that are possible through the app architecture, and which control the terms of privacy data ownership. Transparency on the methodology and data management are very important in online research ethics and participants need to be aware of the risks of data exposure and that 'there is no completely secure interaction online' (Buchanan and Hvizdak, 2009: 45). The reviewed ethics protocol for this study acknowledged and attempted to cater for

this complexity during the consent process, data collection and data management process as described below.

Doing a focus group in WhatsApp: recruitment, consent and data protection

The option to take part in a focus group on WhatsApp was shared in the three WhatsApp groups I was observing. I posted a message explaining the purpose, the date, and the age bracket for participation (appendix G). Aware of the challenges related to the cost of internet data that many participants with a smartphone faced, I also mentioned that mobile data costs would be compensated in advance of the discussion for those who chose to participate. The group members were asked to contact me privately if they were interested in taking part, with the option of sending me a missed call for me to call back so that they did not have to spend on data, texts or minutes. Giving missed calls, or 'flashing', is a common practice in many places, including Kenya (Sanya, 2013) to navigate the cost of mobile communication.

A private consent process via WhatsApp was followed for those who expressed interest which included the following types of information (appendix H). Firstly, the potential participant was informed that the group discussion would take place in a WhatsApp group that I would create for this purpose and which I would close after 24 hours. I explained that I would export the conversation for analysis. This information also included more details regarding the compensation in Kenyan Shillings for covering the cost of mobile data.¹⁰ Secondly, the process to seek consent included the steps taken to protect participants' privacy. I explained that names and phone numbers would be anonymised in the transcript. I also emphasised their right to not participate or to withdraw and my commitment to clarify any further questions. Thirdly, the information covered participants' responsibilities towards me and the other participants with regard to data privacy. WhatsApp conversations are end-to-end encrypted so that only a sender and recipient can access the messages but this is not incompatible with the function to forward messages to others outside a group or with the function of many phones to take a screenshot of a message or conversation. Using

¹⁰ This transfer was done via MPESA, a renowned mobile money transfer service in Kenya that works on any mobile phone and does not require Internet connection or a smartphone. All participants had access to it and it was a preferred method for financial transactions.

an existing and ubiquitous mobile app like WhatsApp for a group discussion therefore means that the researcher has no full control on privacy and it is important that everyone understands the risks of participating and their responsibilities. The risk of spreading information about what others have said is of course also typical in traditional focus group discussions, mostly via word of mouth, but, in WhatsApp, opinions written by others can spread at a much larger speed and scale. Participants were requested to be responsible for not sharing or discussing information shared by others and to be respectful and avoid any offensive language. The information for obtaining consent (appendix H) stated that although everyone consenting assumed these responsibilities, there were risks of information leakage outside of my control. I also reminded potential participants that they were using their phone number to engage in this focus group and that they would therefore have personal information visible to others. They were reminded they would be assuming this risk if they consented to take part.

All participants were using WhatsApp already and, based on some reactions when seeking consent, especially when going through the informed consent process over the phone, it seemed that this level of detail was unexpected or deemed unnecessary. This was perhaps because the information was obvious to participants or because of the formality of the process. It was another example of the need to balance ethics protocols and information on data protection regulation with participants' sense of agency and judgement. It is also an example of the contradictions and tensions embedded in Western-led research in a non-Western context. Procedural written consent and ethics protocols come from a Western tradition, can be seen as procedural and can be offensive, like a form of auditing that does not take into account contextual cultural norms and which is more interested in protecting the academy than the participants (Hayward et al., 2021; Sempere et al., 2022). Yet, I prioritised caution and went through all the information (appendix H) particularly since risks related to using mobile apps and the 'datafication' of social life more broadly are complex and ambiguous even among political activists (Dencik et al., 2016: 1).

The same information on my and participants' responsibilities (appendix H) was then repeated in the group setting before starting the group discussion and then pasted again twice during the day as two more participants were added later in the group. I also sent reminders in the group throughout the day that mentioning names should be avoided and that everyone's privacy should be protected, which was repeated by some participants. This is in line with the recursive and dialogic approach proposed by Barbosa and Milan (2019).

Observing WhatsApp conversations

To join the three WhatsApp groups that I observed, I first contacted the group administrator. Although they were already familiar with my research as we had met face-to-face in events that I was observing, I explained the purpose of me joining the groups and also clarified that, once added to the group, I would introduce myself and request the group members' consent as per the ethics protocol of the research study (appendix I). When I did not know the administrator, the connection with them was first done via the member of the group that I had a stronger connection with.

Once added, I 'publicly' thanked the administrator, which helped to emphasise the connection and trust between myself and them, therefore reassuring others about my presence in the group. I then sent the information for consent in the group using a text translated into Kiswahili (appendix J), which I split into smaller messages to make them suitable for a WhatsApp conversation. This information explicitly stated the objective of the study and that I would be observing the interactions, exporting the conversations, and analysing them. It also explained that all names and phone numbers would be removed from transcripts held and I emphasised my commitment to protecting participants' privacy. Consent was therefore sought in two stages, first privately with the group admin, and then again in the group.

The observation in the groups also required to plan for my departure. In line with the ethics of relationship and respect, it did not feel appropriate to abruptly leave the groups, as I had established a connection with the group members and I cared about participants' activism and progress. In addition, it was important to follow an ethics of engagement also at the point of sharing the research findings (Pickering and Kara,

2017). I therefore sent another message to the group, thanking them for allowing me to be a member as an observer, explaining that data collection was over, and requesting their permission to continue in the group as a peer so that I could share my learning and research conclusions with them.

4.3.2. Engagement and representation

This research's situated knowledges approach understands the interaction between the researcher and participants as dialogical. There is no one truth that I can observe or capture as a researcher but realities that are mediated by the encounter and that I interpret as a researcher from the lenses of my own standpoint. Representation is therefore central when considering the ethics of a postcolonial and feminist study.

In the context of representation, some studies have questioned whether anonymisation is always an ethical choice as a name can be central in someone's voice or preference to tell their story (Clark, 2006). Yet, in a context where young people's civic engagement was still seen as a threat by some in positions of authority, I considered that a blanket approach to anonymisation was important not only to follow expectations from academic ethics protocols but also to protect young activists more broadly, even if some may have opted to have their name visible. Indeed, concerns of threats were raised by some of the participants (not in relation to the research directly, but in relation to their activism) although this would not stop them from publicly holding governments to account in public face to face meetings or on social media platforms.

Siasa Place was central to my access to the county's network of young people and anonymising the organisation or the county in which the research took place would have hidden a context that is important to understanding and communicating the research. During a discussion with Siasa Place, they confirmed their preference for being visible in the research as an organisation. Considering this and having been told about and observed the pride participants had in their open activism, I considered it was a good balance between privacy and representation to anonymise individuals but not the location or the organisation which provided access to a network of young people and civic engagement activities.

Beyond anonymisation, I reflected and attempted to address the ethics of representation in three ways:

- I. *Insights validation session*: At the end of my stay in Busia, during one of the training workshops for young activists that was organised by Siasa Place, and having checked time availability in the day with the organiser and facilitator, I offered the young people taking part the possibility for me to share my initial interpretation of the research in the form of preliminary themes. After the presentation, the group had time to discuss these themes among themselves. This approach was suggested by Professor Kleine during an interaction at an academic event and guided by Dearden and Kleine's *Minimum ethical standards for ICTD/ICT4D research* (Dearden and Kleine, 2018). These standards include as a principle 'to report findings back to the participants and communities who have engaged in the work, in a form and in language that is useful and accessible for the participants and partners involved' (p. 3). This session, then, alongside a presentation to Siasa Place at the end of the project that I mention below, was part of the debriefing to participants as part of the project's ethics. The preliminary themes were listed as a series of statements organised in the following categories. I suggested to participants that they discussed amongst themselves which ones they agreed with, which ones they disagreed with and what they thought was missing:
 - a. "As a citizen, it is important for me to..."
 - b. "As a citizen using a mobile phone..."
 - c. "As a citizen using WhatsApp..."
 - d. "As a citizen, not having a smartphone means..."
 - e. "Government officials and NGOs/CSOs which rely only on social media need to know..."
 - f. "Government officials need to learn..."
- II. *Follow up interviews and discussions with participants*: the digital ethnography approach meant I would sometimes interact with the same participants more than once either one-to-one or in the context of a group discussion. I would use

these iterations to be transparent with participants about the direction of my thinking and interpretations of previous conversations or observations, what Pickering and Kara (2017) refer to as explicitly acknowledging 'interpretive authority' (p. 300). In doing this I also made space for them to question my interpretations or clarify what they meant.

- III. *Sharing research outputs:* When the Covid-19 pandemic started, and discourses on the digital divide became more prominent in the public sphere, I saw a window of opportunity to share the research findings in relation to digital exclusion at a time that was relevant and in a format that could reach diverse audiences. I wrote a blog post that was posted at The Open University's International Development and Research page¹¹ and shared on social media. Following a request by HEART's Technical Assistance Framework,¹² the blog was also posted on their website. I shared the blog with Siasa Place as well as participants via WhatsApp. A Kenyan student and a Kenyan founder of a non-governmental organisation, both contacted me two years after and expressed it had been helpful for them to find relevant research on digital exclusion in the context of Western Kenya specifically.

In addition, in March 2022, I did a virtual presentation of the research to a staff meeting of Siasa Place, including a round of questions. I then shared back a summary of the main points discussed. Alongside the insights validation session done whilst I was still in Busia, this presentation was intended as the debriefing to participants as part of the research ethics. I also published a paper during the course of the PhD, which I also shared with them (Colom, 2021). I presented at a total of ten conferences and speaker series in addition to several

¹¹ Colom, A. (2020) COVID-19 and what the digital divide means for people's livelihoods in Kenya. The Open University. Available at: <https://www.open.ac.uk/ikd/blog/covid-19-and-what-digital-divide-means-people%E2%80%99s-livelihoods-kenya> Accessed 21 April 2022.

¹² HEART serves as a resource centre for staff at the UK government's Foreign Commonwealth Development Office and other development actors. Available at: <https://www.heart-resources.org/blog/covid-19-and-what-the-digital-divide-means-for-peoples-livelihoods-in-kenya/>

internal presentations in different departments at The Open University throughout the course of the PhD to share the research methodology and the empirical findings. This type of engagement was important for me as part of my learning, the reflexivity process, and as part of an ethical approach to doing the research and representing and engaging with participants.

4.4. Conclusions

This chapter has addressed the concrete approaches to data collection, analysis and ethics used in this research. In doing this, this chapter has showed how the methodological framework discussed in the previous chapter has informed concrete methods.

I applied multiple online and in-person methods using a digital ethnography approach. Specifically, I used in-person semi-structured interviews with young people and women from different parts of the county of Busia; in-person observation in seminars, group meetings, and public participation meetings; online observations in three WhatsApp groups; and a focus group discussion done in WhatsApp. As part of the reflexivity approach, I also used a researcher's diary to document and reflect on the research encounters, my interpretation of the data and immediate themes in relation to the research questions and the research design, or my positionality in the research process. The importance of language and discourse has been taken into account in the analysis approach. I have discussed the steps taken to identify discursive patterns in the data alongside a reliance on quotes to magnify participants' voice. Finally, I have also discussed the ethics approach taken, with an emphasis on online research ethics and research engagement.

Chapter 5. Citizenship Capabilities in Western Kenya

This chapter explores the citizenship capabilities that participants in the study had a reason to value based on the themes identified across the semi-structured interviews, the conversations in WhatsApp groups, the WhatsApp focus group discussion (FGD) and the observations in offline events. It therefore addresses the first of the three research questions of this study: what are the citizenship capabilities young people and women in Western Kenya value?

The chapter presents a set of capabilities alongside the discursive patterns that relate to each of the capabilities. It then proceeds to discuss each capability and the different discursive patterns that give meaning to them in a way that is nuanced and takes into account the diverse positionings and experiences of participants.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the intersectional lens in this research has been applied in the instrument design as well as in discourse analysis, identifying patterns of resistance or oppression in the language. The intersectional analysis in relation to citizenship capabilities will therefore be weaved in the description of the citizen capabilities and the various discursive patterns within them rather than discussed as a separate section.

5.1. A set of citizenship capabilities

This section contributes to a contextual understanding of citizenship in Western Kenya based on a set of capabilities. As a qualitative digital ethnography based on a case study, this set results from my interpretation of recurrent codes and patterns identified following a careful and iterative discourse analysis approach as discussed in 'Chapter 4: Methods of Data Collection, Analysis and Ethics' and is one of the main empirical contributions of this doctoral project. This set of capabilities is not intended to be exhaustive or claiming to be representative of the valued citizenship capabilities of all young people in Busia County or the rest of Western Kenya. As discussed in the previous chapters, the research process is situated in a specific time and context and shaped by my positionality as a researcher. Capabilities need to be understood as relational and situated in an environment and this is particularly relevant in the context of citizenship, as Pfister (2012) points out: 'Especially, when looking at

citizenship we are confronted with deeply social and political environments consisting of law, politics, cultures and private interpersonal relations' (p. 248). The set discussed in this chapter, then, provides a point of departure to inform approaches to civic engagement or to rethink citizenship in ways that account for specific historical and socio-political dynamics as well as inequalities and processes of inclusion and exclusion. However, what people have a reason to value can change across contexts in space and time.

As stated by Robeyns (2003), capabilities are 'people's potential functionings' or opportunities to achieve certain outcomes whereas functionings are 'beings and doings' or the actual outcomes. (p. 248). Tapping into resources, such as finances, information, or social networks, can determine people's capabilities. Some capabilities are in turn resources for other capabilities. For example, I have identified access to information as a capability in itself because of the importance it had in its own right for participants, yet it is also referred to as an important resource for other capabilities, such as meaningful engagement in decision-making. Similarly, I have identified affiliation and social interaction as a citizenship capability, but it also serves as a resource for other capabilities, such as those related to respect and integrity or to accessing information.

In addition, capabilities are also constituted by collective action, social structures and institutions (Ibrahim, 2006), meaning that the valued capabilities are shaped by the discourses and institutions that participants engaged with, directly or indirectly, during the research phase, including the civic education received from Siasa Place. In relation to this, there is a common thread in this set of capabilities which reflects a need for justice and wellbeing that can be articulated and claimed in the political context and legal framework and participation mechanisms of the devolution and the 2010 Constitution, which was also a common thread in the seminars and trainings by Siasa Place. However, in this section I discuss the discursive patterns that have informed my interpretative process in identifying and labelling each capability. This can help to reveal the nuances in meanings associated with each capability and the different ways people or groups differently situated themselves in relation to these capabilities and

collective discourses. For example, across various capabilities, I identified discursive themes that showed the specific value some capabilities had for women, such as in the case of capabilities like affiliation and social interaction or exercising rights. Age and class are also important sites of experience and meaning-making that influence what participants have a reason to value and which reflect deeply rooted social norms and experiences of exclusion. Capabilities related to the need for mattering, voice and belonging or the need for respect and integrity are examples of this. They show the importance of capabilities that go beyond material aspects of aspirations. As King argued, ‘psycho-cultural’ aspirations are often overlooked in dominant discourses of youth aspirations (2018: 136). These capabilities also provide an insight into the relevance of conceptualising citizenship as relational and multi-layered with an emphasis on dynamics of inclusion and exclusion.

Table 1: Citizenship capabilities in Western Kenya and discursive patterns

Capabilities	Discursive patterns
1. Mattering, voice and belonging	Youth being dismissed from public spaces of discussion Lack of political representation and voice Intersecting sites for (lack of) mattering Economic disenfranchisement Low confidence
2. Aspiration and purpose	Economic or career prospects Wanting to make a positive contribution in the community
3. Respect and integrity	Protecting one’s integrity as a way to challenge dismissive views Reclaiming ‘siasa’ [politics] as a positive space for citizen engagement Involvement in the community as a marker of respect
4. Information	Information as enlightenment

	<p>Information as power for social change</p> <p>Information for accountability</p> <p>The responsibility to share information with others</p>
5. Affiliation and social interaction	<p>Affiliation as community 'self-help' [mutual aid] and development</p> <p>Social interaction as a resource to access information</p> <p>Social interaction as healing, care and solidarity for women</p> <p>Negotiating power in the private sphere</p> <p>Interaction as source of leadership and respect</p> <p>Affiliation and social interaction as political empowerment</p> <p>Harmonious co-existence</p>
6. Fair access to basic services and resources	<p>Wanting a thriving community with basic services</p> <p>Resources that cover the needs of young people</p> <p>Injustice and corruption</p>
7. Drive change / improve people's lives	<p>Supporting the wellbeing of communities</p> <p>Spearheading the country's development</p>
8. Exercise sovereignty and democratic rights	<p>Sovereignty resides in citizens</p> <p>Defending citizens' rights</p> <p>Defending women's rights</p>
9. Meaningful engagement in decision-making processes	<p>Engagement as meaningful dialogue</p> <p>Engagement as power to decide</p> <p>Engagement as accountability</p> <p>Engaging on behalf of others</p> <p>Voting for the right leaders</p>

Mattering, voice and belonging

The need for young people to be taken into account and to have a place and a voice in society was a recurrent theme voiced by participants. I borrow the concept of 'mattering' from Chew, Ilavarasan and Levy (2015) who studied the role of mobile phones in women entrepreneurs' sense of mattering and who see it as a key agency asset and a development outcome in itself. Mattering refers to 'the perception that who they are and what they do matters to others' (p. 524). The capability of mattering encompasses the perception of being valued and the feeling of belonging to a space where one's voice counts and is listened to. The quote below refers to this need to have "a say" and to "belong" and connects the lack of opportunity to do so to a risk of being "disconnected":

I think we will see a lot more disgruntled youth, and so the general feeling for young people right now I would say is that they have no say. Is that they don't quite belong. So they sort of just live every day, in this space. But, you know, if a young person doesn't feel like they make a contribution, my fear is that they are going to become a distraction. And so that's what we are working away from. And I think right now if you ask young people is like 'meh'. And that's the part that is worrying. Yeah, as long as they are disconnected, it's, it's not ok. We should have passion, we should have hope, it should be young people's hope. (Interview P23)

More specifically, the following discursive patterns were identified under this capability: youth being dismissed, a lack of political representation, intersecting sites for (lack of) mattering, economic disenfranchisement, and confidence.

Youth being dismissed

Young people expressed not feeling welcome in political discussions or public spaces of engagement or feeling that their contribution was seen as problematic or not valid enough. This can be situated in traditional community dialogue and governance structures in some parts of Kenya, which are traditionally dominated by male adults, particularly elders, to whom young people are expected to show respect and be less vocal as a result (Chubb et al., 2022). A participant, for example, said:

Ok, for us, youth, in most cases, these projects are done without our knowledge. We as youth, like, for example, when you go to those meetings, and maybe you have something to say, they'll say no. You are a youth, you are just a disturb, you have just come to disturb the meeting... (Interview P8)

Another participant who had been mobilising and training young people in her community said the following when I asked what she felt had been achieved through the civic education and engagement activities, suggesting the first step in change was improving the feeling of worthiness among some of the youth in her community:

I have seen some change like... by sitting with the youth, they... they've come up with... ok they feel they're worthy to be consulted, participate publicly, so I think there is that change and they know, given just some time, we'll achieve something. (Interview P19)

Political representation and voice

Mattering also encompasses the need for representation in policy-making. This was argued in the following ways: for adequate policies and services, for social change, and as a democratic justice demand considering that youth account for most of the population in Kenya.

... a youth knows his or her own priority. So, when you are on that table, decision-making, or on that platform, we were able to say, this is my priority. This is our priority, as a youth. This is our problem. Put his [young person's priority] first, the allocation should come to the youth. If it's [the allocation] not given, you ask, on that table, as a decision-maker, a young youth would say no, ours has not been agitated [demanded] for, where is our share? (Interview P20)

During a workshop facilitated by Siasa Place, a participant shared her views on a recent public participation meeting that took place in her sub-county and mentioned that the youth representative was a “mzee” [elder] “above 70”. She added that the views of young people were therefore not represented and that in the planned trainings with young peers from their communities they would put youth in “the frontline” (Observation—March 2019). The lack of representation and voice was also

raised by participants in the WhatsApp focus group discussion: “Being a Citizen today means to be Seen and not heard #BitterTruth, Unless you are influential in terms of resources and Finance.”¹³ The quote shows how class and nepotism intersect with this, suggesting that the experience of dismissal as a young person changes depending on your socio-economic background and connections to power. Differentiations based on people’s positionings relate to another discursive pattern I identified, which I labelled as ‘intersecting sites for (lack of) mattering’ and discuss next.

Intersecting sites for (lack of) mattering

Participants talked about feeling dismissed not only because of their age but also because of their gender, their social class, and although less frequently mentioned, because of their “ethnicity”. Mattering, then, had different dimensions depending on young people’s positioning across these various social structures and identities.

With regards to gender, women talked about not having a voice and this was linked in their accounts to “culture”, sometimes in reference to Kenya and often to “African culture” more broadly:

P18. (...) I can also say that, that eh, wanasema wale wanawake [they say women] they are not, the women are not...

A. Mobilised?

P18. No... they don't have voice in the community.

A. Ok, why do you think that is?

(...)

P18. Because they know that they are... in our culture they say that a woman does not have a voice. (Interview)

These intersecting reasons for dismissal in public participation or community meetings meant that mattering was not only a problem in relation to being taken seriously by political representatives but also by peers from the same community. Various

¹³ As mentioned in section 4.2, excerpts from WhatsApp are reproduced here as they were typed by participants, without correcting the writing to standard English, except for typos or for intelligibility.

participants talked about the challenges faced as women when mobilising others through civic education in their communities: “(...) you know, men, people fear them. But as women, a person can answer in the way he or she wants” (Interview P6).

Another participant referred to the same issue during another interview:

P17. Ok, mostly... ok, in Kenya, I don't know in other countries, but mostly in Kenya most of the women they are underrated. Even if you say something they can't take it seriously. But with somebody like a man they take it seriously. But, for we women, we are underrated.

A. Have you faced that when you have been training other people?

P17. Mostly... yeah! Even during my monthly training! Even you can tell people, at least be silent, we want to talk, we want to have some training. Some would just shout for you: 'aaaaah'. You know, because if you are a woman, somebody just shouts for you, 'aaaaah you leave me alone, we are all mature people, we are 18 and above'. Eh? Aaaaah, we women, we are really underrated.

A. They wouldn't say that to a man?

P17. Ah-ah, for a man, they can't say it. (Interview)

Another woman referred to the concept of class as a reason she did not feel her voice was worth it although this was also described alongside fear of politicians and the view of politics as a disrespectful “vice”:

P19. It [engaging with civic education] has helped me already because there was a way I was viewing...like... things. Ok... let me not call them things. There was a way I was viewing politics, like it was for some people.... Then, at some point... yes, I know my rights as a citizen but sometimes I... I used to ignore my rights, and then I just used to believe that there is only one, like, there... politics is for specific people... and maybe you don't have a voice... and even if sometimes [...] I feel I should speak about it, talk to the government and all those leaders, I would retrieve because I... because of fear... fear and then... fear and the feeling that, the feeling that I'm not worthy and I can't just talk.

A. So you think going through this process will change that.

P19. Yeah, it has actually changed.

A. Ah.

P19. *It has given me a new beginning, different face of things. I just started seeing some difference.*

A. *And you said first you thought that politics was for some people. Who are these people... like? [mild laughter]*

P19. *Like [Laughter]... ok, these people.... Ok I don't know how to describe it... for... ok... for people with a class. There is class. Some... Ok, I come from a humble background so I was like [tsk] I think this is for the rich and is for... then, ok, I used to view it both...mmm... ok I never viewed it positively. I used to see it as a negative thing because of the things politicians do especially here in Africa.... They fail... sometimes... so... I used to see it as a negative... as a vice... (Interview)*

A participant made reference to ethnicity as a reason for exclusion from public participation: “the county is very rigid. When something comes [a public participation event], only a little people may hear of it. There is something of ethnicity.” The same participant added that this also happens in job panels, where one has fewer chances because of their name (Interview P3).

Low confidence

The lack of a sense of mattering was expressed also in terms of low confidence, which the language shows is also related to different positionings like class or gender. One participant explained that one of the benefits of engaging in the civic education training and in mobilising others was that she grew in confidence: “I am not as shy as I used to be. The level of confidence has gone a degree higher” (Interview P19) and another explained that one of the challenges in mobilising others was that “some women” are “very shy”. She added: “but not me. Ah for sure, me no. For me, why am I to be shy? (...) if I have something to say I will just say sababu [because] I am also a human being” (Interview P18). This statement indicates the relationship between the sense of mattering and agency in civic engagement or political participation (Chew et al., 2015).

Economic disenfranchisement

Participants also referred to the lack of economic opportunities as one of the ways in which they have felt left out, as this participant wrote during the focus group discussion:

The youths have been left out in many spheres of life like economically they are not supported.no enough employment opportunities for the youths and because revolution starts with the person who feels the pain then the youth have felt [it] and [are] taking engagement. (WhatsApp FGD)

The economic disenfranchisement was also spoken of as an injustice that affected youth disproportionately despite being the majority of the population and was also linked to corruption. This view is also associated with the need for young people to find a sense of purpose, which I cover under the next capability below.

Aspiration and purpose

The second capability is related to the sense of mattering but puts more emphasis on the need for participants to have a purpose, to aspire and be able to make plans and build a career as exemplified by one of the WhatsApp status updates of a participant which said: "Identify your Purpose and persistently Pursue it unapologetically... [OK emoji]" (Fieldwork diary).

In their study on youth transitions and social change across four countries in Africa, Honwana (2014) used the concept of 'waithood' to refer to the state of suspension that many young people are faced with. Honwana argued that this state impedes them from fully transitioning into adulthood as they are 'grappling with a lack of jobs and deficient education... unable to obtain work and become independent—to build, buy, or rent a house for themselves, support their relatives, get married, establish families and gain social recognition as adults' (p. 28). Honwana (2014) also argues that this state of 'waithood' relates to citizenship because this failure to transition comes from a broken socio-economic system: 'What is broken is the social contract between the state and its citizens' (p. 29). I identified two main discursive patterns in relation to this

capability: economic or career prospects; and making a positive contribution in the community.

Economic or career prospects

The lack of jobs was a predominant theme and was not only associated to a lack of self-worth but also to engaging in “unpleasant activities” (WhatsApp FGD) because it was discouraging for young people to see that there are no job opportunities for them and to be “left just roaming” (Interview P5). Others spoke about being involved in organising activities in their communities like talent shows and awards so that young people could find self-worth and “moral support” (Interview P22) in their skills and make them visible to others.

In one of the WhatsApp groups I was observing, a participant forwarded a message on how unemployment affects people and on the importance of supporting friends without jobs. Below is an excerpt of this longer forwarded message, which refers to the loss of confidence:

Unemployment is very deep (...)

You have no say in family matters because you don't bring in anything, even your nieces and nephews don't respect you.

Friends don't even check on you because you're that 'unemployed friend' who's always asking for a favour. For a guy, naturally, you're a provider and if you can't, that kills you slowly inside - the feeling of inadequacy; you lose your dignity too.

(Observation—WhatsApp group 1)

Positive contribution in the community

The sense of purpose among participants was not solely related to the need for jobs but also to helping others. This resonates with research done by King (2018) on young people in Nairobi: ‘The desire of participants to give back to Kenya, to their neighborhoods and communities, was strikingly common, and additionally functioned as the motivation for their aspirations’ (p. 146). One of the participants explained how

making a difference in other people's lives kept her focused in building a career and reputation:

So, you want to get to the position whereby you can also look back and say 'I have a story to tell', 'I have a testimony'. So, if a young girl is looking up to me, I tell her, you are struggling but not in vain. It will reach a point God will award your hustles or your struggles. (Interview P22)

Participants described their involvement in the community through different types of activities, like engaging in civic education and mobilising others, being part of theatre groups, organising talent shows, volunteering as community health workers, helping others set up *sacco* groups (cooperative societies), leading women or youth groups, championing human rights or being involved in church activities. The need to help others was a prominent discourse in the data, not only in relation to having a purpose as an individual but as an end in itself, tied to the need for cooperation that comes with poverty and struggle; the need for organising in the absence of state support; and related to African 'shared values of communal life and group solidarity' (Tamale, 2020: 11). This will therefore be further discussed under the capability to drive change and improve people's lives, which I have identified as a capability in its own right. The need to help others appears to be closely related to these shared values of reciprocity and was often described as a way of getting recognition. This shows the interactions and overlap across capabilities: whilst helping others was talked about in relation to aspiration and purpose, it is also relevant to understand other capabilities such as the need for respect and integrity and the need to drive change and improve people's lives.

Respect and integrity

Participants' accounts not only reflected a need for mattering but also a need to resist and reframe narratives that feed this sense of dismissal, such as norms that portray young people as unreliable or troublesome. It was important for participants engaging in civic education and decision-making processes to claim and enact their integrity and be respected. This is a capability also included in Robeyns' (2003) list in relation to gender inequality in Western post-industrial societies ("Being respected and treated

with dignity”) in a context of a systematic devaluation of women (p. 83). It is also an aspect identified by King (2018) in research on aspirations of young people in Nairobi: ‘Youth who participated in this research were very much motivated in their aspirations by the desire to be respected and to improve their social status’ (p. 146). Three discursive patterns were identified that support the importance of respect and integrity for participants in the context of citizenship. Firstly, a discourse that speaks more directly to the dismissal of youth – and intersecting positions like being a young woman- and that seeks to challenge it by protecting and proving one’s integrity. Secondly, a discourse that seeks to reclaim the word ‘politics’ and the act of engaging in it so that it is seen as positive citizen practice. Thirdly, one that suggests that being actively involved in the community is a marker of respect and integrity as alluded to when discussing the capability of aspiration and purpose.

Protecting one’s integrity to challenge dismissive views

The need for respect and integrity appeared to be important for participants as young citizens as well as activists for their demands to be taken seriously. This participant described how being active in fighting for rights was viewed as being “all over the place”, implying viewed with suspicion or not taken seriously:

The environment really it needs the strong at heart to be able to run up and down and say I want to fight for this right, I want to do this... some people give up because they are thinking: ‘If I go to this office, they’ll feel like I am... I am like... I am all over the place.’ But... if you know yourself too well, I know, I am not all over the place, I am only fighting for what I think is right, what I think I deserve. (Interview P22)

This need to protect reputation and trust as young people was at the core of Siasa Place’s approach to civic education and it shaped the way the organisation is run and organised as one of the participants mentioned:

A lot of, especially older organisations, didn’t quite trust us because they were like, youth organisations have a reputation for not being consistent, for not lasting, for... for not really having solid plans, structure, ideas, so, coming in, [there was] a lot of pressure to sort of build this organisation that is above par... like we have to be almost

perfect (...) and so we had to have this reputation of being transparent and solid so even some of our organisational culture is to be very structured. And I feel it has sort of been forced on us and it's kind of unfair... (Interview P23)

As discussed, participants not only felt dismissed as young people but also due to their gender or class. Gaining respect was, accordingly, important not only as a young person but even more so as a young woman.

...so there's youth as a challenge and then women is even more of a challenge. I think that, being a young woman, you already have a general stereotype of what young women should do and me being in a space that's political governance you are constantly fighting stereotypes. And not only that, barriers. So you have to build this... this reputation of being... being hard and not too hard, being graceful but not to be taken advantage of, so you are constantly measuring. But for a man, he can be brilliant, arrogant, young, he'll receive a lot of support. (Interview P23)

In a public participation meeting, a male political representative alluded, when introducing another young female political representative, to the way women political representatives are dismissed: "As much as we shoot down wanawake [women], she is very aggressive [to be understood as positive assertiveness¹⁴] she is very focused" (Observation—July 2019). A participant stated during an informal conversation how a woman engaging in politics is "trapped between a rock and a hard place" (Fieldwork diary) as one's intentions and integrity are always questioned. She reiterated the importance of respect and integrity to which she often referred to in her WhatsApp status updates: "Integrity is an Expensive but Affordable Weapon to Achieving the Best" (Fieldwork diary).

¹⁴ Aggressive in the context of this study has a positive connotation, as it is used to refer to someone who is courageous and assertive. A female participant explained to me how others in her community were impressed by her for being 'aggressive' for meeting a white woman like me, as this was seen as brave and something that gave her "a good name" (interview P18) in terms of reputation. I therefore interpret the use of 'aggressive' in this context as positive assertiveness.

Reclaiming 'siasa' as a positive space for citizen engagement

The delegitimisation of political debate through a community and development lens is a feature common in the East Africa region. As Cross (2021) notes in her work on dissent, cybercrime and development in Tanzania, '[e]ngaging in politics is conversely cast as an anti-developmental distraction' (p. 451). Participants referred to the baggage that the word 'siasa' [politics] carries and the implications this had for their reputation. One of the members of the organisation Siasa Place said in an interview: "For us to say we are called politics and [also say] we are unbiased... people are like, there is no way..." (Interview P23). As mentioned earlier, a participant described how politics was viewed as a "vice" and, in a workshop that I observed where young activists were being trained on advocacy and media engagement, one facilitator advised participants not to use the word 'siasa' because it could be misconstrued (Observation—July 2019).

Changing this narrative was part of the civic engagement strategy of Siasa Place as a way to reclaim young people's integrity. In one of the visits to a village in Busia County as part of a social audit, a representative from Siasa Place said to community members: "we are telling people siasa si mbaya. [we are telling people politics is not a bad thing]" (Observation—February 2019). The same point was made also at a stakeholder meeting with government and civil society representatives: "We keep saying siasa but we are doing it to change the narrative... Politics it not a bad thing. They should embrace it positively and know that it is not the politics that it is bad but it is the individuals" (Observation—February 2019).

Other participants reiterated this discourse when justifying their political activism: "they will take me like somehow I am in siasa. But I am helping the community" (Interview P18). This participant emphasised the same in an informal conversation a month later: "You know, this is not about politics, it is about the community" (Fieldwork diary). By emphasising that politics is about the community, this participant was engaging with the discourse to reclaim politics as positive and legitimise their involvement.

Involvement in the community as a marker of respect

Engaging to support their communities was seen by participants as a way of gaining respect. A participant talked about how being a role model for young girls kept her “in check” and how she “received blessings from the community” by “getting involved in the community in a positive way” (Interview P22). She also used the expression “having a name” and said: “I always make sure I leave my name on a positive note. I am very careful with my name, so I am making an impact.”.

Another participant also explained how her involvement with civic engagement activities “has led me somewhere” and given “that urge, eh? in my heart so that I can look somewhere in order to benefit me or to benefit the community. For example, we had another meeting in the primary school near my home, so I was chosen as a youth as a committee member. I was chosen by the members, the parents that were present that day” (Interview P18). Similarly, another participant also described the importance of recognition, also linked to the value of purpose mentioned in the previous capability: “I feel good. I feel I get publicity, and I feel, in my heart I feel there is a certain achievement that I have made. And... there was a certain legacy. In the future I will have left the family, the society, yeah I feel there is a certain stage that I have achieved” (Interview P14).

Another participant referred to how being actively involved was associated with leadership when explaining her role with women groups and often being elected for leadership positions: “Maybe leadership comes from God, or how active you are. (...) When you go at a place electing people you are just found to be elected, as a leader” (Interview P12). Another participant also said “If you are active, you are selected” (Interview P4) in relation to how the leaders of the youth group in her sub-county are chosen. Associating active involvement in the community with respect was therefore a common discursive pattern that I associate with the capability of respect and integrity.

Information

I identified being able to access and receive accurate and timely information as a central citizenship capability. As a study that engages with activists undertaking civic

education and imparting this civic education to others, the importance of information is a dominant recurrent theme that is not only a valued citizen capability but a resource for other capabilities. As such it will be further covered in the next chapter on processes associated to conversion factors. This capability relates to issues of 'low civic awareness' and difficulties accessing information in the context of public participation in Kenya (Mbithi et al., 2019: 54) but is discussed in the data as going beyond participation in public participation meetings and being important in addressing power imbalances and to inspire social change. Specifically, the following key discursive patterns have been identified in relation to the importance of information: information as enlightenment, information as power for social change, information for accountability, and the responsibility to share information with others.

Information as enlightenment

Participants often talked about the civic education they were receiving as a key juncture in how they engaged or viewed themselves as citizens and the word enlightenment was used explicitly in various instances to refer to this change.

A participant explained having learnt "so many things" as a result of the training in civic education they received and mentioned the various policy making and budgeting processes in the county as well as the mechanisms for citizens to be involved in them: "I have learnt the public participation, CIDP (County Integrated Development Plan), ADP (Annual Development Plan), budget making process, social audit, so many things! I am grateful because I have been enlightened on so many things!". When asked how peers in the community react to the civic education and the mobilisation that they are part of, the same participant explained how it is well received because it is enlightening: "They are agreeing with it because also they did not know what is on the ground. So they are like appreciating because they are being enlightened on matters affecting them" (Interview P12).

Another participant used the word "civilised" to refer to how information was helping young people be aware of their rights: "it will make us be civilised and once we already know our rights it's going to make things easy for us" (Interview P17). When

asked why peers in the community attend the trainings, the participant used similar language: “Because they want to get information, number one, and they want to be civilised”. The participant also used this word to refer to the importance of better living conditions and opportunities and, again, in follow-up interviews six months after. I then asked what she meant when she said that young people “are not favoured because we are not civilised” to which she answered it meant they are “not enlightened” or “still behind” (Fieldwork diary—July 2019). Others also referred to being behind and the importance of education for progress: “if you have education you are not behind” (Interview P18).

As a researcher from Europe working and studying in international development the use of the word ‘civilised’ felt extremely uncomfortable due to its association with imperialism and colonisation. I considered it important to discuss this as part of the reflexivity approach. Ugandan academic Sylvia Tamale (2020) refers to this association when arguing that the European colonialism was ‘couched in the language of “civilization” and “development”’ (p. 19). Similarly, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) also refers to how colonial direct rule was ‘predicated on a civilizing standard’ (p. 148). The same participant who used this word several times during interviews also asked me if I knew any “missionaries” that I could connect her with in case they could offer financial support to the women and youth groups the participant was engaged with. The word “missionaries” also felt uncomfortable as I associated it with coloniality. Tamale (2020) refers to the role of Christian mission schools as ‘centres of civilization and modernization’ during colonialism (p. 177). I reflected on this encounter and how it materialised the way my whiteness and European origin could be perceived by participants during the period of data collection. However, the language on civilising was not present in other interviews, in trainings I observed or public participation. Instead, mentions of power and the right to information were more frequent as mentioned below.

Information as power for social change

Closely related to viewing information as enlightenment, information also was valued as a source of power and, as a result, as a catalyst for social change. In one of the

trainings on civic education I observed, a young participant was facilitating a session for other young activists and taking them through the county Annual Development Plan (ADP). The participant pointed to an example of a sum of money allocated under 'other' that needed to be questioned through a petition. He then proceeded to ask "information is what?" and everyone responded "Power", which helped him make the point that accountability and adequate service delivery might not happen due to "ignorance of the law" by citizens (Observation—February 2019).

Addressing this lack of knowledge on the existing laws in the country was a key part in the mission of Siasa Place as one of the participants explained: "we knew that we are a country that has magnificent laws, but most of the time we don't even know these laws exist, and so we know, now, that it's an area that we also have to strengthen in terms of youth understanding what their rights are, what the laws are, and pushing for implementation of those very things" (Interview P23).

Power was explicitly mentioned by another participant in an interview when explaining why he thought it was important to educate his peers on their rights as citizens and the constitution:

You know, I believe information is power. Yeah. If somebody has the right information, at the right time, yeah? I believe these people will use this information, because if I teach one person, he will also teach somebody else (...) so that by the end of the day we have an educated, a well-informed society, come 2022 and the years to come, people will not see an election as something that is just to be done for formalities (...) I've also come to learnt that, social evils, like corruption, tribalism, are thriving in our country because, we, as citizens, are not united. And are not having the same in... the right information. (Interview P21)

As this quote shows, being informed about their rights as citizens was seen by participants as a key step for social change. One of the young activists said during a training: "Even the bible said: my people are perishing because they lack knowledge" (Observation—February 2019). Others also said that information on their rights would

help people “make decisions for themselves in the community” (Interview P18) or provide “self-reliance” (Interview P12). Information on their rights and responsibilities was also seen as giving a sense of belonging for young people. Considering the feeling of dismissal and marginalisation, information was empowering to the extent that it reaffirmed young people’s place in society through their constitutional rights and responsibilities: “Is important to be informed so that at least I can know where I belong, what I require... also as a youth, my portion” (Interview P5). This shows how information is also a resource for other capabilities, like driving change or meaningfully engaging in decision-making processes as it will be later discussed.

A member of Siasa Place explained why information is so important as a catalyst for civic engagement, especially in a context where citizen rights and mechanisms for engagement are recognised in the country’s constitution yet not implemented: “we realised in the constitution, it gives so much power to citizens, to participate in budget processes, to even disagree with them, to even hold leaders accountable... But people have no clue!” (Interview P23).

Another participant also highlighted the importance of information to know that people as citizens have the right to engage and to know how to do it:

(...) engaging in civic education is to ensure that all our community members get information, get information to know their rights, to know their rights, to know what’s their role, to understand the community well (...). and specifically where to get a certain solution and whom to engage (...). (Interview P11)

A similar view was mentioned by another participant: “It has been a challenge to us to get platforms where our issues can be addressed. And, again, we did not know on how to advocate for our own issues” (Interview P20).

Information for accountability

Political knowledge is considered an essential element for governance under Kenya’s devolution because information is associated with the ability of citizens to oversee the

behaviour of governments, including service delivery and allocation of funds (Opalo, 2020). Information for accountability was another theme in participants' accounts and is closely related to the capability of meaningful engagement with decision-makers. In the events observed, and also during interviews, participants often referred to the need to be informed so that decision-makers can be monitored and questioned by citizens, who participants also referred to as the taxpayers:

I am a taxpayer (...) I must be informed so that I see how am I being affected directly by the government activities. If I remain in my ignorance it means that I'll be suffering because of ignorance and lack of knowledge. (Interview P10)

There was a view that with knowledge, political representatives could be challenged and some participants gave examples of how their peers were able to hold their representatives to account for specific issues such as fixing roads. However, the lack of knowledge about the rights of citizens and the mechanisms for engagement and accountability was not only a problem among young activists but also among those with leadership responsibilities. A county ward administrator, for example, said during a public training organised by Siasa Place that he was very happy this meeting was happening so that "we can get new knowledge" (Observation—July 2019).

It was common for participants to refer to the way in which decision-makers withheld information or took advantage of people's lack of knowledge to avoid accountability. During my stay in Busia County, a series of public participation events¹⁵ on the county's fiscal strategy were advertised in a newspaper. A photo of the advert was circulated in one of the WhatsApp groups I was observing. Some of the activists that participated in this research attended these public participation meetings and so did I. The meetings I attended started approximately 3 hours later than the announced starting time. Some of these meetings were happening in parallel across different

¹⁵ Article 196 (b) of the Constitution of Kenya states that the County Assembly 'shall facilitate public participation and involvement in the legislative and other business of the assembly and its committees.' In addition, article 201 (a) refers to the principle of 'public participation in financial matters' (Uraia Trust, 2010).

locations and the young activists were sharing messages in the WhatsApp groups reporting similar delays in the start time in the various locations. Some of the young activists expressed to me their frustration with these delays and suggested that this was intentional ("They are playing with our minds") and that they started late so that people would be "psychologically too tired to contribute" (Observation—March 2019). This has been raised in other research in Kenya which states that 'the government tries to lock out citizens during participation process by giving a short notice and not designating venues for public participation events' (Nyaranga, 2019: 56). In the WhatsApp group, participants complained that only a few copies of the county's fiscal strategy paper (CFSP) had been shared. The same issue was mentioned to me by another participant who attended a public participation meeting in a different location. Others mentioned other strategies used by leaders like sharing the information about the public participation through a loudspeaker the night before the event whilst most people are sleeping or along the main road only. This was also referred to at a stakeholders' meeting organised by Siasa Place, where an attendee said that "the MCA (Member of the Assembly) asks the ward manager to call a few friends". An elder ["mzee"] also referred to the intentional delays: "this is also a trick, because, we have to be honest, they do it so people don't have time to ask many questions" (Observation—February 2019).

Similar issues were raised by participants in interviews: "information is given only to the office bearers and office bearers share [it] with their families and relatives only, but in public they don't do it. So you have to work hard in order to get information" (Interview P17). Another participant also complained that some of the leaders they need information from "are most slippery" (Interview P14). The withholding of information by some political representatives who wanted to escape scrutiny, according to these discourses, shows the role information played in accountability.

The responsibility to share information with others

A recurrent theme under the capability of information was the responsibility to share information with others. Participants associated their involvement in civic education with the need to make others aware about their rights and mechanisms for engagement

with the hope that this collective ‘enlightenment’ would lead to social change: “many people are not informed, and people don’t know how to demand for their rights, I just saw the need for me going out to get the information and bringing to them” (Interview P14). Similarly, a participant talked during the WhatsApp focus group discussion about the responsibility to share information for the benefit of the wider community if “privileged to have or know what others don't know” (WhatsApp FGD). Another participant in the same FGD used the term “torchlight” to justify their role as activists: “Definitely to give a Torchlight on Youth issues and make youths understand what they miss out when they don't Speak out”. This resulted in discussions both in offline meetings and WhatsApp groups on how to reach those without access to WhatsApp. The findings that relate to these discussions will be covered in the next two chapters on conversion processes and on how WhatsApp affordances mediate these and the related citizenship capabilities.

Affiliation and social interaction

Interacting with others and being a member of various groups was a recurrent theme in participants’ accounts of their aspirations and activities in the community as well as more explicitly in relation to their civic and political engagement. This is a capability that has been identified in more universal or well-known capability lists. For example, ‘affiliation’ is one of the capabilities in Nussbaum’s (1995, 2000) universal list of basic human capabilities and Robeyns (2003) lists ‘social relations’ in her list of relevant capabilities for gender inequality in the context of Western societies. Nussbaum refers to affiliation in two ways; the first relates to being ‘able to live with and toward others’, involves empathy and interaction and relates to freedom of assembly and of political speech; the second relates to protection for self-respect and from discrimination (p. 232). Robeyns refers to social relations as entailing social networks and social support (p. 78). Stewart (2013) has argued that social interaction plays an important role in civic engagement and it is an important resource for people’s social capital. For Stewart, social interactions are essential in human life and determine ‘what we might call a person’s relational capabilities’ (p. 15). As identified in participants’ accounts, this capability is also a resource for other capabilities as it provides emotional and psychological support, economic support or enables political representation.

I identified the following key patterns in discourses related to affiliation and social interaction: as community “self-help” and development; as a resource to access information; as a source of healing, care and solidarity for women; negotiating power in the private sphere; leadership and respect; affiliation and social interaction as political empowerment; and harmonious co-existence.

Affiliation as community self-help and development

Participants often described the groups they belonged to as “self-help” groups. In the context of Kenya, self-help does not refer to helping oneself but to what in some English-speaking Western societies might be described as mutual aid. These include women’s groups that run table-banking¹⁶ or merry-go-rounds¹⁷ or, in broader terms, *chamas* -informal cooperative groups- to which most participants belonged, and which are central to Kenya’s social fabric, as Professor Njeri Kinyanjui (2019) discusses:

(...) individuals often pool their savings in a chama (cooperative), thereby enhancing their ability to afford certain kinds of transactions. In less formal ways, networks of friends, relatives and colleagues surround individuals with the social fabric within which they can strengthen their confidence to undertake economic actions. People transact economically, secure in the knowledge that they are both an individual and a member of the community. Being part of supportive networks and engaging collaboratively in work is seen as a way to guarantee thriving (p. 117).

These groups are not only central to social and business relations but also related to values of collective solidarity and reciprocity encapsulated by African philosophies of

¹⁶ These are saving and credit groups largely built on mutual trust and reciprocity where members pool savings and access credit at interest rates that meet their needs better than banks or micro-finance institutions (Gichuki and Mulu-Mutuku, 2018; Khakasa, 2015)

¹⁷ Members of the group pool savings every week, which are then given, in turns, to one member each time in order to support them with their financial needs. Some participants, for example, were able to fund some equipment for their hairdressing business or slowly buy items for their kitchen thanks to the funds from the merry-go-rounds of the groups they belonged to.

being and justice such as the Utu and Ubuntu value systems.¹⁸ The response of a participant when asked about the reason behind being a member of various self-help groups resonates with these value systems: “Well... coming together is power. We put ideas together, helping each other. It’s a social responsibility to help the community. That’s basically what we are doing (...) we have a small merry-go-round, you come and visit a friend, we put some contribution to her, that’s what basically we do” (Interview P20).

As such, this type of affiliation is central in how citizens engage in society and with -or in the absence of- the state. In one of the women’s groups I attended, its members explained that they are “uplifted” through these groups and “they learn from each other” about, for example, “how to do your business” (Observation—July 2019). Another participant described in an interview the support that the women’s groups she belongs to provide to their members and families: “You go there for just making somebody when is down to lift her up (...). For example me in my house, here, they can bring for me little money, eh? Maybe everyone one thousand, one thousand, and we are around 20. That’s 20k. Or you can go and buy maybe a TV” (Interview P18). Another participant also explained she had been able to set up her small business thanks to the groups: “You see? So, the business is expanding. From that *chamas*, yeah” (Interview P15).

Young men were also members of self-help groups or informal cooperatives that supported, for example, *boda-boda* drivers (motorcycle taxis). However, based on the accounts by participants, the importance of these groups had an additional dimension for some women who were either depending financially on men or single mothers. One of the participants referred to this in an interview: “Normally many of them mamas are not working classes [not working] so they depend [on their husbands] mostly. To depend on your husband is not very, it’s not good. So you have to look for the group to depend from so you can get little to support yourself” (Interview P1). Another participant’s response also highlights the importance for young women of

¹⁸ “Utu” is a Swahili word for the state of being human and acting humanely. Ubuntu is a philosophical concept from southern Africa that refers to the inextricable interconnections between all human beings (Tutu 1999) (Njeri Kinyanjui, 2019: 113).

joining not only youth groups but also women's groups: "I decided to join that group coz I am also a female, eh? (...) we have some vulnerable women [with] kids who are there and they don't have money, so we started this group in order to start things maybe like weaving, mat-making, ok, and we also do table-banking... so that we can have money to... at least to make the living standard of those women rise" (Interview P17).

The importance of community engagement for participants through these self-help groups, especially for women, suggests that social interaction and affiliation for mutual support is paramount in understanding citizenship needs and practices whether it is because of, or in the absence of, the state. In the context of research on citizenship-making in Lusaka, Zambia, Schylter (2009) refers to this involvement in self-help groups as citizenship practice: 'Although women's unpaid work and social networking cements community, it is not recognized as political work, neither by the state nor by women themselves. (...) Through community work, they have developed a strong sense of citizenship that emphasises contribution to the common good rather than claims on the state' (p. 40). In the context of Uganda and Tanzania, Tripp (1994) argued that these type of associations, even when economically-oriented, contributed to the political consciousness of women and had the potential for more political participation, even if they emerged as a result of economic and political exclusion:

By organizing to meet their everyday needs, women in self-help groups, voluntary associations, savings associations and other such groups are responding to the fact that they have been excluded not only from formal economies but also from formal politics. They are ultimately redefining politics by seeking tangible solutions to problems caused by vagaries of the market and the failure, negligence or outright repression of the state. (Tripp, 1994: 127)

In his work on African democracy back in 1991, Claude Ake referred to this 'thriving associational life' in relation to the state: 'People are organizing themselves in order to limit their vulnerability to a predatory state, to improvise rudimentary social welfare

networks through community efforts, and to improve their material well-being. We get a picture of a thriving associational life, of a turning away from the state, of ordinary people assuming greater control over their own destinies' (1991: 37). Ake goes on to mention the 'advanced' grassroots organising of Kenya specifically and the many self-help development projects ('Harambee'¹⁹) as an example of how these groups supported economic development despite what Ake argued was a limited democratic potential at the time: 'These grassroots organizations do not appear to have brought about, as of now, any substantial decentralization of power, and they have not diminished the state's arbitrariness and coercion.' (1991: 37).

However, the state was present in relation to the functioning of some self-help groups as the necessary mechanism to access government funds. A participant who belonged to more than six groups referred to the rules of the Uwezo fund.²⁰ The Uwezo fund requires self-help groups to prove their formal structure (with a chairperson, secretary and treasurer) and produce a signed commitment by its members on their loan repayment contributions. The participant mentioned being affiliated to many of these groups because there is a limit to how many members there can be in order to access the funds. The existence of the fund incentivised the formality and structure of self-help groups although the access to the grants did not necessarily materialise: "I try to apply, let me say I try to apply for... over si... right now is over six years, but we haven't got any single grant" (Interview P16). Another participant also referred to the fund and how it offers grants to women groups: "As women in our society we can just come up with something... we want to do this we go to the maendeleo na wanawake [development by women], yes, as a group. And you are given some money. The Uwezo funds, then you can repay it within a given time" (Interview P15). Others also

¹⁹ Ngau describes *Harambee* as an 'indigenous tradition of self-help' which means 'let's all pull together'. It is a tradition grounded in most communities in Kenya and consists of 'collective and cooperative participation of a community in an attempt to fill perceived needs through utilization of its own resources' (Ngau, 1987: 523). The Kenya government incorporated this rooted local practice into its national development planning policies in the 1960s, following independence, in order to promote economic and social development (Mwiria, 1990; Ngau, 1987). Yet, Ngau argues that this process of appropriation by the state resulted in bureaucratic overregulation that ended up disempowering communities.

²⁰ The Uwezo fund was set up in 2014 by the Government of Kenya and is part of Kenya 2030's Vision development plan. It aims at enhancing employment and entrepreneurship among young people, women and people with disabilities through access to finances (<https://www.uwezo.go.ke/>).

referred to the importance of being in groups in order to access a loan: “the loans are just through groups, you cannot apply alone. Most banks they don’t need those who are not civil servants” (Interview P3).

Beyond economic development in the absence of or with the support of the state, these groups and associational life around them may offer democratic potential in the current context of Kenya’s devolution and through civic engagement and public participation movements. The participants involved with civic engagement and community mobilisation were also members of multiple youth and women self-help groups and these therefore offered a potential space for sharing information on rights and processes of civic and political engagement and accountability, as will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

The types of social interaction and affiliation and their value as a citizenship capability were not only constituted by gender but also class. Participants with more stable jobs and qualifications, such as a teacher and a medical practitioner, described their work with the community mainly as channelled through their jobs. For example, when asked whether they engaged with the community, a participant referred to a policy in the school where he worked that supports parents who cannot afford school fees. He also explained that he did not belong to any group himself but that he financially supported his brother so that the brother could contribute to the *chama* he belonged to. Similarly, another participant with a formal job said: “basically, here, not directly, because I am a trainer by profession. So, [the work] that I do in the community is something to do with just health assessments (...) But I used to be on the field but currently I teach students who are doing the same” (Interview P7). The use of ‘the field’ also suggests a professional jargon to refer to interaction with the community and a positioning that indicates different spheres of belonging that I interpreted through a class angle.

Social interaction as access to information

Social interaction and affiliation were also important for accessing information and therefore a resource for the capability of information. Participants described the importance of self-help groups, local chief *baraza* (village public meetings), church

gatherings and other spaces as important for sharing and receiving information. “I just enquire with close friends when I am in a group like this, maybe I find others who are also in the same shoes like you, find teachers, when I go and meet we share: ‘did you hear this, oh there was something like that’ then I get to be enlightened that there is something happening, there is a recruitment, such things (...)” (Interview P3). The use of WhatsApp and other social media platforms has added new forms and spaces of affiliation and interaction with specific affordances. Yet, inequalities in meaningful access to digital technologies have also highlighted the importance of these traditional offline spaces of social interaction to access information. The role of online spaces in relation to this capability will be covered in detail in ‘Chapter 7: WhatsApp Affordances and Citizenship Capabilities’.

Affiliation as care and women’s solidarity

The *chamas* and groups to which women belonged were not only important to save, access loans, or learn, but they were also described as important spaces for social bonding and emotional healing. During a women’s group I observed (Observation—March 2019) a member mentioned to me that the day of the meeting was their preferred day of the week as women ate and drank tea together. Another participant also referred to the social bonding that takes place in another women’s group she led: “So that’s why, they are here, they are happy, we can take a soda, we can take milk, then later... so, now, [...] it’s merry-go-round, today is you, tomorrow is her... so we come, we come with the money, give it to you” (Interview P3). When asked about the value of these groups, their members referred to men being difficult, implying the need for these encounters not only to support each other financially but also emotionally.

Across a number of interviews, women described the prevalence of gender violence in their communities and how the groups they belonged helped them share their experiences and discuss ways to cope:

So, women get those challenges from their husbands. So, we come up and share. So, we can share and say if you know your husband dislikes doing this and this, you have to do this and this. When you are late and you know that your husband doesn't like when you come late, then you can change. You see? This is the biggest challenge in women: husbands! (Interview P15)

Another participant more explicitly referred to the value of the groups as healing: “Coz now when you come here and share you get at least you get uplifted, you get healed rather than just seating the house alone, and then thinking all day, yes” (Interview P3).

Negotiating power in the private sphere

As seen so far, social interaction can be considered a central valued capability for its empowering potential, enabling access to financial support, information, learning, and emotional support. Yet, this empowering potential from public engagement intersects with gender power dynamics in the private sphere. During interviews, participants referred to men feeling jealous or suspicious of women's social interaction, even though this time outside was crucial for women to access support to pay for school fees, food, medicines, house items, or run small businesses. This was also mentioned during the focus group discussion on WhatsApp: “Its hard as an African Woman to Actively engage in Community activities because of perception that you will be seen by other Men 😊”. In her study of women's active citizenship in Zambia, Schlyter (2009) referred to these gender dynamics and how they can be overlooked in the theorising of citizenship or women empowerment programmes: ‘These realities are shaped by and reflected in men's attitudes and their power to restrict women's public engagement and active citizenship. Generalised theories of global citizenship and of women's empowerment, however, write over these harsh and challenging realities’ (p. 41). Access to new online spaces of interaction through mobile phones has compounded this issue. This will be covered in more detail in ‘Chapter 7: WhatsApp Affordances and Citizenship Capabilities’ when discussing how WhatsApp affordances mediate citizenship.

Social interaction as leadership and respect

As seen under the capability of respect and integrity, community engagement was considered a marker of leadership and status. Therefore, the capability of affiliation and social interaction is closely related to the capability of respect and integrity and one can be a conversion factor for the other.

One of the members of Siasa Place explained that identifying potential candidates for civic engagement programmes as activists and mobilisers was done through existing local structures such as the counties' branches of the National Youth Council. Although the candidates were selected by peers in their communities, this approach meant those interacting in local groups could be more likely to access leadership positions to then train or engage their peers in their communities: "we were encouraging that, as they select the youth, they target groups, youth groups, youths that are... are together doing something be it an economic activity or doing table-banking, something they are doing within their community. Yeah, that is how they were selected" (Interview P24).

Another participant also referred to the importance of being connected in order to be recognised and to progress in their career: "you need those networks to be able to open even more doors to give you more weight in terms of what you are looking for" (Interview P22).

Affiliation as political empowerment

The importance of connecting, interacting and working together for youth to be listened to and be able to engage in decision-making processes was another key discourse among participants in relation to the reasons for coming together. The importance of organising was often present in the training on civic engagement that I observed: "Bring them to the assembly. Organise. (...) It is the same thing that is affecting you that is affecting someone from the whole county" (...) "How do we tackle this problem? We can only tackle it by organising and planning" (Observation—December 2018).

Interactions on the WhatsApp groups that I was observing also referred to the need to come together, attend forums, public participation meetings or get others to sign

petitions: “Let's join the forum and advocate for effective PP [public participation] and not just wastage of Public resources” (Observation— WhatsApp group 1). Others also brought up the need for affiliation during the interviews: “after getting this knowledge, I need just to go to the lay people, down there to give them this knowledge. Yeah? After there, we make a movement. We come together as a group, then we make a movement. We claim for our rights” (Interview P16). Some said that they observed the results of this affiliation and collective work: “these youths have come together (...). They are now pushing, for this social audit, they are now doing the social audit on their own. They are pushing for public participation forums. And they are now trying hard” (Interview P13).

Harmonious co-existence

In relation to social interaction, the importance of harmonious co-existence was also mentioned by some participants. The instigation of divisions for political gain and as an election strategy has been well documented in Kenya, especially after the intense violence following the 2007 elections (Hassan and O'Mealia, 2018; Jenkins, 2020). The historical distribution of power alongside clientelist and territorial lines has resulted in a 'zero-sum' based politics where elites scramble to maintain their privileges and citizens for their livelihoods (Jenkins, 2020: 370). There was a view in participants' accounts that civic education could help people to understand the importance of engaging in decision-making processes, electing leaders to serve the needs of citizens and work together to hold leaders to account rather than accepting to be confronted by leaders due to geographic and historical differences. For example, a participant wrote during the WhatsApp focus group that “Civic participation is important because it teaches us how to co-exist and work harmoniously, appreciating different opinions, values and beliefs in a tolerant manner” (WhatsApp FGD). A participant referred to the values of “peace, love, unity” as a positive aspect of being a Kenyan citizen but also referred to the occasions when this harmonious co-existence is derailed: “that's the philosophy too, peace love unity. But then there's sometimes when there is no unity and especially when we are approaching elections, people are really scrambling, quarrelling, petitioning, there is no peace” (Interview P3). And another one referred

during an interview to the politics of divide and rule: “Stereotypes, presumptions that people have, at what a given, a given community or a given region. So politicians are siding on that. The politics of divide and rule” (Interview P21).

Fair access to basic services and resources

Fair access to basic services and resources was a recurrent discourse in participants accounts of the need for civic and political engagement. More specifically, participants referred to: the need for their communities to access basic services, the need for more resources to cover the needs of young people, and the need to address injustice and corruption.

The need for a thriving community with basic services

Young participants’ accounts suggested that they were driven in their activism by the need to ensure their communities had access to basic services: “what I personally need, is to see that services are readily available for that common mwananchi [citizen] in the village” (Interview P13). Participants complained that “people are suffering” (Interview P19) and have no basic access to water, medicines and hospitals, roads, markets or schools that are equipped. This was referred to as an important reason for their engagement in processes of accountability such as through petitions.

During the period of data collection, the need for access to water was identified by participants as the main issue for them to prioritise in their activities to follow up with their political representatives: “the main and biggest challenge we have is water, which if you go to every constituency everyone will tell you our hunger number one is water” (Interview P22). This surprised some of the facilitators who trained them on civic engagement and who expected youth employment to be their main issue: “It turns out they say their priority is water. To them, yes, employment is important. Other things are important, economic empowerment is important. But they feel before they go there, they are lacking this basic thing, of which they call is life for them, like, with water, they can do many other things” (Interview P24).

Another participant highlighted the class differences in youth priorities, with those with education prioritising employment as a need but those with less resources

thinking more in community terms and prioritising basic services: “I do think that when you talk to youth who are educated their concern is opportunity. They want jobs. But if you talk to youth who are not educated their concern is access to water. You know... Emm... yeah, so it also talks about classism. And... and the fact that there’s a huge divide between those who have and those who don’t” (Interview P23).

More resources allocated to young people

In addition to the needs of their wider communities, participants also emphasised it was unfair that their needs as young people were not considered in policies because young people were not included in the decision-making processes. This view was often put in the context of the 2010 Constitution and the resulting implementation of the system of devolution, which raised the hope for Kenyans to a fairer reallocation of resources as covered in the introductory chapter and as participants themselves said. Article 21(3) in the Constitution explicitly mentions the importance of addressing the needs of young people, women and other ‘vulnerable groups’ (Uraia Trust, 2010).

During a training, the core group of young activists were going through some key topics that they would cover during their advocacy work in radio stations. In the process, a participant asked the group if devolution had assisted young people and proceeded to say: “the answer is no (...) Youth have been allocated roughly 10 million [KSH] for the entire county” (Observation—March 2019). In addition, the discourse that youth are the majority of Kenya’s population yet not being consulted often appeared in participants’ accounts of the importance of being listened to for fair budgeting: “But, now, when it reaches now to decision-makers, you’ll not find a youth there. So you’ll find that most of our issues are not budgeted, are not put in plans, because something that’s not in plan, it cannot be implemented” (Interview P11).

Justice and corruption

Injustice and corruption were often mentioned in discourses related to a fair access to resources:

(...) we are just doing manual jobs... you need [to pay] fare to go somewhere, maybe all your money goes to the fare, you need to educate your children, you need to do... you know, this person is really struggling and the people who are doing this are politicians, they take our money, then, them, they live comfortably and, for us, we continue to suffer (...) (Interview P19)

In Kenya, deep inequalities persist, which the devolution could replicate rather than resolve due to persistent structural issues such as the accumulation of power by the state and impunity of the elites (Harbeson and Holmquist, 2020). The anger due to poverty and inequality and unchecked predatory capitalism have been considered a source of ongoing tension and discontent, and rife corruption a stumbling block towards accountability and a just and effective distribution of resources (Gĩthĩnji and Holmquist, 2012; Harbeson and Holmquist, 2020).

Participants also referred to the ways in which service delivery is influenced by corruption and nepotism: “when they bring a development project, they take it closer to the people who supported them. You did not support me, we have this project, we are not bringing it closer to you” (Interview P13). Similarly, young activists often referred to injustice and corruption when reviewing the county budgets in both offline and online discussions as this exchange in one of the WhatsApp groups indicates:

08/03/2019, 17:49 – Group member A: This issue with 60M for Governor’s residence raised eyebrows almost everywhere

08/03/2019, 17:51 – Group member B: This is misuse of resources and poor planning. we should focus on community based priority. (Observation – WhatsApp group 1)

Another participant referred to the need to end with corruption in a discussion during the WhatsApp focus group on what makes them engage as active citizens: “I believe we share with other to do away with corruption” (WhatsApp FGD). Participants also blamed political representatives for taking advantage of and perpetuating people’s lack of knowledge. As will be covered in the next chapter, the discourse of unjust governance served as a resource to catalyse engagement from participants and

therefore using this narrative had the potential to work as a conversion factor to activate citizenship.

Drive change / improve people's lives

As the previous capability already suggests, participants were motivated in their activism by the need to help others and drive social change. I considered it to be a separate capability from 'Fair access to basic services and resources' because the former alludes to a structural injustice and capability deprivation caused by unfair or unequal governance, whereas this one ('drive change and improve people's lives') carries a normative element that alludes to the moral responsibility, values and agency of citizens. In other words, the previous capability relates to the responsibility of the state to deliver services to all citizens, whereas this capability relates to the responsibility or virtue of the citizen playing an active role in driving change. Two main patterns were identified in relation to this capability: the importance of supporting the wellbeing of communities; and the contribution in spearheading the country's development.

Supporting the wellbeing of communities

Participants often related their activism to the need to support the wellbeing of their communities. This has already been implicit under previous capabilities, such as the responsibility that participants felt to share information with others, or the narrative to reclaim the word *siasa* by stating that politics is about the community. Participants talked about the importance of helping to address the problems in their communities: "you know, when I see the problem in my community, I just... the first thing: I have passion in my community. Then I own [it]" (Interview P14). Another participant said: "I need a better community (...) at least people who can help others" (Interview P4). A comment by another participant during the WhatsApp group discussion also shows the links between active citizenship, community and social change: "Civic participation is an avenue of becoming aware of difficulties, social problems and moral questions in your society, thus aware of the fact that there are possibilities to change and build a community. Only through active citizenship do people get involved in their communities to change for a better future".

During the focus group discussion in WhatsApp I probed the importance that helping others had for participants as citizens because this had come out strongly in the interviews conducted up to then. During the focus group discussion, this was confirmed as important with additional clarifications by participants that helping others was to be understood in terms of civic education as well as through accountability of leaders but not to be understood as a provision of services as this is the “government’s task”. A participant differentiated their role as citizens as included in the constitution from their role as citizens in the context of a value-system: “In my opinion, helping others is a virtue and it's something anyone should do but constitutionally it's not a role it's just an act of kindness and it's done out of good will ...my opinion 🗣️” (WhatsApp FGD).

Spearheading the country’s development

Participants not only described their desire for engagement for social change in the context of the community but also in the context of Kenya as a whole. Some talked about engaging “in order to uplift our country (Interview P17)” and wanting “the country to improve, in terms of development” (Interview P4). Many expressed a strong pride in being Kenyan despite all the issues they said the country faced and saw their work on civic engagement as the way to change the country by electing the right leaders: “our struggle now is who are we electing next because, the better we elect right people, if we elect the right people, very soon nobody will want to leave Kenya” (Interview P25).

This sense of pride and hope was also often put in the context of Kenya’s devolution system, the devolved system of governance implemented following the approval of Kenya’s 2010 Constitution which has decentralised governance across the forty-seven counties: “I am really proud of this country because, there is hope. Though, we have people (...) who lack the good will in the offices... but the system, the system itself is good. But the players are the ones who are trying to taint it or delay what the system can really achieve. (...) I am proud of the new constitution, I have gone through the new constitution and its components” (Interview P21). Some participants talked about change in terms of “transformation” or “sanity”. For example one said “we are the

people to make sure that we bring sanity to our country” (Interview P22) and another described how transformation would come from knowledge and collective action: “that’s the transformation for me. Also this will help us to put our government or officials, the top organs, to realise there is some people down there, that they are seeing what they are doing. So, they won’t go around trying to play with the minds of Kenyans” (Interview P16).

Exercise sovereignty and democratic rights

Participants’ civic training and engagement were situated in the context of Kenya’s devolution and the mechanisms for public participation included in the constitution. The Constitution of Kenya (Uraia Trust, 2010) as well as the *Citizen Handbook* by the organisation Uraia Trust (Uraia Trust, 2012) were documents used by facilitators during the civic education trainings. The content and implications of this legal framework, however, were not fully known - as seen under the capability of information- or fully implemented. It is in this context that participants framed their reasons and aspirations behind their civic engagement across the following discourses: sovereignty resides in citizens; defending citizens’ rights; and defending women’s rights specifically.

Sovereignty resides in citizens

Sovereignty was referred to by participants through expressions such as ownership or power being with the citizen. This discourse relied on the existence of the constitution, which participants often referred to in order to support this claim.²¹

I am looking forward to a time when one, the government, governance, becomes citizen-owned, owned by the citizen. From policy-making, that the citizens have their voice, to the supervision of this project, yeah? To own the government, to own the leadership. To own the country. So that the power, as subscribed or outlined in our constitution, is, should be in the hands of the citizen. The only way I am trying out to do that, is by educating these people. (Interview P21).

²¹ Constitution of Kenya – ‘Sovereignty of people’ section, article 1 (1). (Uraia Trust, 2010: 28)

This quote, in which the participant refers to the importance of educating others as a way to achieve this sovereignty, also shows the importance of information as a resource to access capabilities, which has already been mentioned and will be discussed in the next chapter.

These discourses also show that the existence of the constitution is an important context to justify this capability. Some participants attached pride to the principle of citizen sovereignty conferred by the constitution:

P16. First of all, I must be proud of being a Kenyan, first of all. Because being Kenyan I have that privilege to be called as a Kenyan by [the] Kenyan government and from being there I have the privilege to have my rights in this country as a Kenyan. And the protection that must have in this Kenya as a Kenyan is fully and must be given. And more so the power of [...] of [the]Kenya government lies in my house.

A. Ok...

P16. Yeah! According to the Constitution. So bearing that in mind, I must be proud. (Interview)

Sovereignty was framed as something yet to be fully achieved despite being recognised in the Constitution: “We still have little Control on County Government Issues that affect us” (WhatsApp FGD). A participant talked about current leaders not applying this principle of citizen sovereignty and hoping future leaders would respect it: “And I also believe, one day, one time, the leaders who are going to be elected soon are going to be those ones who understand the law very well and are ready to serve the interests of the common man” (Interview P20).

During the focus group discussion in WhatsApp participants also offered a historical perspective on the different relationship between citizens and governments: “Our parents and grandparents didn't understand citizenship since past governments did not want people to understand what the government was doing no public participation things were controlled from [the] national government” (WhatsApp FGD). Another participant’s comment in the discussion also indicates that information on the rights

and role of citizens was more accessible now: “Babu zetu [our ancestors] had limited access to information regarding their rights. At least with our generation we have a little to appreciate because for once, with the enlightenment that comes with the access to modern education and globalization, we are able to know what we ought to know and also freely air our views, expectations and aspirations, even though the gap between the haves and the have nots is still alarming” (WhatsApp FGD). As stated earlier, this again highlights the importance of information as a resource for other citizenship capabilities.

Defending citizens’ rights

Participants spoke about the importance of fighting for their rights as citizens: “You know, some, some people don’t know their rights in the country. Yes. So, like, like the way we are really in that group, we are fighting for our rights. And we are fighting for those rights because we are Kenyans” (Interview P6). Often, these accounts referred to the realisation or recent learning about these rights thanks to the civic education received: “[In the past] I have not been going to public participation because I knew it is wasting my time. Let me just go for something to do, maybe go to the market and sell my product [laughs] but, for now, [I] have known it’s good, to fight for my rights. Yeah” (Interview P18).

Defending women’s rights

As seen under the capability of affiliation and social interaction, some participants were particularly involved as women in communities and groups to support each other. The oppression experienced by women also appeared in accounts of the need to defend the rights of citizens, as this participant explains:

I think for the women they do it [civic engagement] because they want a share into it because they’ve been limited in the past, they’ve really suffered, they... they’ve been denied a lot of rights, and really advocate for it and so they really advocate for women representation in politics and all that.

(Interview P19)

Other participants talked about the challenges faced by women in accessing leadership positions. During a training I was observing, two of the young participants were having an informal discussion with the facilitator about a female leader in their sub-county who had not received support because of her advocacy on women's rights. At various instances, references to oppressive gender norms were often situated in the context of African²² -not exclusively Kenyan- current gender norms: "our African society, it's a man's world. That's why even getting a leadership position it's not that easy. It comes with a lot of restrictions. It comes with a lot of pressure" (Interview P22).

When the focus of rights was on women, this was a capability contested especially by some men. During the WhatsApp focus group discussion a male participant thought there had been a "misuse of this freedom" in reference to women's active engagement and added that women were "now out to compete men rather than working in collaboration for the betterment of the society" (WhatsApp FGD). This is an example of the importance of multi-layered and intersectional approaches to understanding citizenship. Although participants shared a common space of belonging and marginalisation as young people, they themselves experienced different positionalities and marginalisation within this shared membership. Not accounting for these differences can further invisibilise citizenship capabilities, in this case of young women.

Meaningful engagement in decision-making processes

As seen under the capability to access information, the young people in the study talked about being "enlightened" from learning not only about their rights as citizens but also about the existing mechanisms for them to engage in decision-making processes. Having a say in decision-making processes was important and expressed through the following discursive patterns: engagement as meaningful dialogue; engagement as power to decide; engagement as accountability; engaging on behalf of

²² Literature on colonialism, such as the work of Sylvia Tamale, has highlighted how gender relations were changed by processes of colonialism across Africa, including disregard for customary law, which created new 'structural drivers of inequities' that 'worked to alienate women from the newly created public-sphere' (Tamale, 2020: 6).

others; and voting for the right leaders.

Engagement as meaningful dialogue

Linked to the capability of integrity and reputation but also framed in terms of effectiveness, seminars on civic education I observed as well as the accounts of participants in the interviews emphasised the need for an engagement that is done through recognised constitutional processes — such as attending public participation forums or writing petitions — and is well argued and supported by facts. The constitution and the mechanisms it provides are seen — and encouraged during civic education trainings — as the basis for this effective engagement: “The reason why we educate them about the constitution is so that they don’t cry. Our constitution is not meant for people who cry. It’s meant for people who demand for their rights” (Interview P25). Participants who had attended these trainings also argued that this approach was more effective in youth being taken seriously:

you know, people here they have been so reluctant with these issues and most of the time we’ve been singing the song of corruption, corruption, corruption... and we don’t, we don’t know the fact about the corruption, what’s the source of the corruption. But from these [referring to civic education] I [have] come to realise (...) I can come up with a framework to realise there is some mismanagement of funds somewhere. So, from there, it can help me to stand it upon using the constitution of Kenya to petition, asking the question, for the county government or the government to elaborate or briefly explain how did they spend this amount or how this project (Interview P16)

Another participant talked about getting “down with the real thing (...) getting involved practically” (Fieldwork diary) to refer to this need for more meaningful engagement.

Engagement as power to decide

Like information, engagement was also valued as a way to bring the power back to young people so they can “make decisions for themselves in the community (Interview P19)” and contribute to change: “now we can write memorandums, we can petition the government about what we need at ground level in our wards, village units and all that *maendeleo mashinani* [local development]” (Interview P15). Engagement as using citizen power was also referred to in the WhatsApp focus group: “I also tend to agree with my colleague here who is of the view that it because our leaders have failed to take up their responsibilities thus the urge by the youths to want to exercise their powers directly through civic engagement” (WhatsApp FGD). Engagement is therefore not only a valued capability in itself but also a conversion factor for other capabilities, as will be covered in the next chapter in section 6.2.

Engagement as accountability

Engaging was also framed as a way to follow up with representatives: “we have elected leaders, leaders who have gone to parliament, and they are not performing here so we remind them what they are supposed to do” (Interview P4). This discourse also framed the citizen as the taxpayer: “It is very important because I am a taxpayer. And, when you are a taxpayer, whatever little you buy, however, maybe let’s say a sweet of 5 shillings, you are paying taxes. Whether you buy a book, whether you buy a cloth, you are still paying tax. So it’s your money going in circulation, so if you don’t follow it up, so your money is going to waste. And you are working for it” (Interview P22). Although the capability to engage was central for participants, they also expressed barriers from the side of their political representatives. As mentioned earlier, there was fear of retaliation: “they really don’t like getting to know that people have the right information about them or what they are doing. Because, it will be a threat to their survival to some extent, it will be against their interests to some extent” (Interview P21). Various participants expressed the risk of being seen as too active: “There’ll be that extended pressure of ‘you are too active in your ward so what will I do to slow you down” (Interview P22). A few participants gave specific examples of retaliation after following up with their representatives on pending projects, such as a participant

who reported being denied materials that were being distributed in the community. Resistance was also manifested through the withholding of information, as mentioned under the capability of information, and through avoidance: “they are not easily found” (Interview P12).

Participants also made references to what can be interpreted as a mismatch between the content of legal frameworks and the readiness of political representatives to enact it: “They are not ready. The political class is not ready to empower the community with civic education. They want the community just at the lower level so that, on daily basis, they are just dependent on them” (Interview P13).

Engaging on behalf of others

Many also expressed the need to engage so that they could speak for others in the community, as a participant in the WhatsApp focus group mentioned: “On my side I participated 4 those [who] don't [so that] they [don't] Miss to give out [the] issue [that] affects them” (WhatsApp FGD).

Some of the participants had been elected to take part in civic engagement as representatives of their communities and there was therefore a sense of responsibility and leadership to represent their peers. This was also emphasised during the trainings they received: “You are representing the people from your constituency” (Observation—December 2018). Inequalities and class differences also constituted discourses in relation to engagement in decision-making processes. When talking to me, some participants positioned themselves differently from other members of the community with less access to information, resources and education and framed their participation as needing to engage on behalf of the “poor” or the “grassroots”:

*You see people at grassroot level, these are the people that we call the poor people, these people are not even involved much in some agendas, in some, some of the activities that they are done by the government of Kenya. They are just left out. Now, we are the voice of the grassroots people. Yeah (...)
You get a person, an old folk from the village who doesn't know where to start from, and, now, she is not going to choose on the right politician or*

the leader that she wanted to. Just because she'd never go to that civic education. Also I do that. We do civic education to our grassroots people.
(Interview P9)

The need to engage on behalf of others, then, is indicative of unequal access to capabilities and of the importance that civic education had for many participants as a way to 'activate' citizenship among those who did not have access to resources, such as information and spaces of discussion, that many participants had. The process of accessing or supporting capabilities will be discussed in the next chapter.

Voting for the right leaders

Engagement in reference to elections was often framed as a responsibility and as a need to elect the right leaders for structural change, despite a context described by participants in which the electoral process lacked integrity: "Em, at the moment, our, voting... [the] Kenyan voting pattern it is discouraging but it is necessary [to vote]" (Interview P22). Participants talked about leaders only being present in communities before elections in order to buy votes. They also talked about historical patterns of disenfranchisement as well as confrontational politics that have led people to vote based on regional allegiances. Despite these practices, discourses on voting for the right leaders emphasised the potential that an informed youth had for effecting change in the country. There was hope placed in young people voting for the 'right' representatives and for this to signify the start of a new phase in the country's development: "me being a youth, if I want to decide (...) I have to involve myself in participating in elections, so that I choose the better leader" (Interview P17).

5.2. Conclusions

The capabilities discussed above have been identified in the analysis of participants' accounts shared during interviews, during conversations observed in seminars on civic education and public participation events, in a WhatsApp focus group discussion, as well as in conversations held in WhatsApp groups that participants were members of as part of their activism. They have been interpreted in the specific political and

historical context of Kenya's devolution and as part of the digital ethnography I conducted at the time Siasa Place was implementing a civic education programme. The process and interpretation have also been influenced by my own positioning as a researcher. To balance this, I have relied on the frequent use of quotes to support the interpretation process and to show the different meanings behind these capabilities for people differently situated.

The chapter has identified the following capabilities: (1) mattering, voice and belonging; (2) aspiration and purpose; (3) respect and integrity; (4) information; (5) affiliation and social interaction; (6) fair access to basic services and resources; (7) driving change to improve people's lives; (8) exercise sovereignty and democratic rights; and (9) meaningful engagement in decision-making.

Applying an intersectional analytical lens in both the instrument design and the analysis has helped to pay attention to: (i) sites of difference, contestation of power or oppression including, for example, class, gender and age; as well as (ii) situating citizenship as a 'multi-layered construct' (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 4). This multi-layered aspect covers both time and space. Across time, discourses refer to the context of the 2010 constitution and the devolution as a historical juncture that offers tools to change the future, or to seeing the democratic culture of both leaders and citizens as an ongoing process of learning or compromise. Across space, the discourses show interactions across the private sphere, the community, the county governance system, and the state level.

The way or reasons why the various capabilities were valued was constituted by positionings mainly related to age, gender and class. Paying attention to sites of exclusion showed the importance of psychological and cultural perspectives when considering citizenship capabilities for young people and women, such as the need for mattering, voice and belonging, or for integrity and respect. This resonates with King's (King, 2018) research on young people's aspirations in Nairobi. In addition, there is in the discourses of participants an overarching need for personal and collective wellbeing often framed in a context of injustice, especially in terms of (a) communities not having adequate access to basic services and resources such as water, health care,

roads, education or finances; and (b) citizens largely not having a say in decisions that affect them, with some groups feeling particularly dismissed, like youth, women and poor rural communities, especially when these categories intersect. Social interaction and affiliation through groups is particularly valued as a resource to support collective wellbeing, rooted in values of cooperation and reciprocity as well as historical approaches to rural local economic development. Information is also an important capability and participants complained of access to information and spaces of discussion being difficult or intentionally hindered. In this context, civic engagement through civic education and collective organising becomes an important turning point, described by those receiving this information and spaces of engagement as enlightening. It becomes a resource to access other capabilities.

The next chapter explores the ways in which these civic engagement processes can improve the conversion factors to achieve the valued capabilities. To do this, it situates the discursive patterns identified in this chapter in two broader thematic realms: performing citizenship and activating citizenship. This will form the basis for then exploring how WhatsApp affordances mediates this process of conversion or citizenship enactment.

Chapter 6. Activating and Performing Citizenship

We have to tell youth: ok, so now you have been activated, you know that this is the club that you should belong to; but now, this is what the club does. And so we really push for youth finding out what's your issue in your community and actually confronting your leaders about your issue. Because, also culturally, we are sort of... yeah you are not supposed to speak when elders are speaking, so you find that you are changing narratives of how you are supposed to, you know, manoeuvre. (Interview P23)

This excerpt from an interview with one of the participants in the study illustrates the two theoretical realms used in this chapter to explore the conversion processes that can enable people to achieve the capabilities they value and turn them into doing or beings (functionings): firstly, activating citizenship and, secondly, performing citizenship. In the first sentence, the participant uses the verb 'to activate' which implies a need for a catalyst that can enable young people to access or enact the citizenship capabilities they value. Activating citizenship is understood in this chapter as the process by which young people are supported with the resources or conversion factors that can enable them to turn capabilities into a doing or being (functioning). This process may include changing discourses or providing narratives that can help to mobilise or tap into resources like confidence, motivation or the belief that change is possible; or may include providing access to resources themselves like information, skills or spaces and opportunities for interaction with other peers or with decision-makers. This is explored below in section 6.1.

In the second sentence the participant refers to a process of being and doing whereby the young person performs some of the citizenship capabilities, such as holding political representatives to account and having a say in decision-making processes. As also described in Chapter 2, critical citizenship theories emphasise citizenship as praxis where political subjects can follow, challenge or transform rules, either claiming rights or exercising them (Isin, 2017). As such, section 6.2 of this chapter explores how

participants enacted their citizenship by exercising or performing some of the capabilities they value and how the performance of citizenship capabilities becomes a conversion process in itself.

These are processes that act as catalysts or enablers for change and which can improve what in the capability approach are theorised as conversion factors. I therefore refer to these processes as conversion processes. Conversion factors influence the extent to which a person can transform resources into capabilities and are often categorised into personal factors (i.e. skills, mental or physical conditions), social factors (i.e. social norms, institutions, power relations, legal framework) and environmental factors (i.e. geography, infrastructure, public goods) (Robeyns, 2016). The intersectional lens in this study helps to highlight how the range of conversion processes that can help people transform resources into capabilities is not the same for everyone and that they can have an impact on people and groups to a different extent or in different ways. These intersectional differences have implications for processes designed to support, empower or activate citizenship in others and will be included in the discussion of relevant conversion factors below.

The chapter therefore proceeds in section 6.1 by discussing a set of conversion processes under the realm of 'activating citizenship'. Specifically, these conversion processes identified in the analysis are: amplifying the discourse of unjust governance in relation to the demographic dividend (meaning that it is particularly unfair that youth and women are marginalised when they are a majority); helping others believe that change is possible (also in relation to the demographic dividend, meaning that change is possible because young people and women are a part of the population large enough to effect change); enabling a space of belonging and collective action; enabling a space for deliberation; and, finally, providing information. This set of conversion processes highlights the importance of social factors, in particular narratives and discourse as resources for change, which I discuss later in the chapter.

The chapter follows in section 6.2 with a discussion on a set of conversion processes that relate to 'performing citizenship'. These are: collective organising; enacting leadership; referencing the constitution; and enacting participation and accountability.

These show that the visibilising of beings and doings can be in itself a way to catalyse citizenship capabilities. The chapter ends by providing a concluding synthesis of these empirical findings and what they mean for processes of civic education and engagement and facilitating access to citizenship capabilities.

6.1. Activating citizenship: enabling capabilities

This section outlines the ways in which young people can be supported to activate their citizenship. Activating citizenship is often understood in the context of civic education as processes that aim to catalyse citizen participation or engagement, both because of normative value and because of its impact on democracy and development (Gaventa and Barrett, 2012). The Citizen Handbook (Uraia Trust, 2012) by Kenya’s civil society organisation Uraia Trust, which was used by facilitators in the trainings I observed, includes a chapter outlining the steps to activating citizenship (‘activate citizen power’), which is described as catalysing citizen participation. The handbook defines citizen participation as ‘an action or series of actions a citizen takes to participate in the affairs of his or her own government and/or community’ (p. 77).

I theorise activating citizenship as a process to catalyse change but within the theoretical framework of the capabilities approach and based on the citizenship capabilities identified in analysis and outlined in the previous chapter. Therefore, activating citizenship here involves enabling access to resources or facilitating conversion factors that can help young people enjoy the capabilities they value or provide them with the opportunity to turn them into functionings.

Table 2: Conversion processes for activating citizenship

Conversion processes to activate citizenship	Potential relevant capabilities
Amplifying the discourse of unjust governance in relation to the demographic dividend (youth and women as a majority yet underrepresented)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mattering, voice and belonging • To drive change/improve people’s lives • Fair access to basic services and resources

Amplifying the discourse that change is possible – the demographic dividend (youth and women as a majority)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspiration and purpose • To drive change/improve people’s lives • Fair access to basic services and resources
Enabling a space of belonging and collective action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mattering, voice and belonging • Affiliation and social interaction • Aspiration and purpose • To drive change/improve people’s lives
Enabling a space for collective deliberation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mattering, voice and belonging • Affiliation and social interaction • Meaningful engagement in decision-making processes • Drive change/improve people’s lives • Fair access to basic services and resources
Providing information on citizen’s rights and how to claim them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information • Mattering, voice and belonging • Respect and integrity • Meaningful engagement in decision-making processes

Unjust governance – the demographic dividend (youth and women as a majority)

The concept of the ‘demographic dividend’ is often used in relation to the proportion of young people in Kenya and the African continent in general, especially in terms of the economic potential (Kimenyi et al., 2016). During the data collection period, the discourse that young people and women form the majority of the population yet their voices are not heard or their needs are not being met was present in participants’

accounts of the need for more active engagement as citizens with processes of public participation and accountability. This underrepresentation was referred to as an injustice both in relation to democratic principles and for development. As an injustice in relation to democracy, for example, a participant said: "We lack clear policies on how the voice of the youth as the majority should count in governance" (Observation—March 2019). As an injustice in terms of being an obstacle for development, another participant said: "having it in mind that currently in Kenya women and youth constitute around over 70%. So this is a big constituency that if you don't have special interest for them, then any country won't say that they are doing any form of development" (Interview P25). Framed as an injustice that hinders development, this discourse tapped into participants' agency and self-worth, which I relate to the capabilities of 'mattering, voice and belonging', the capability to 'drive change and improve people's lives' and the capability to a 'fair access to basic services and resources'.

This discourse was not only used by the young activists but also by decision-makers when speaking in front of citizens, which is an indication that this is an argument perceived as appealing to young people and women as underrepresented citizens. For example, during a public participation meeting I observed a Member of the County Assembly (MCA) saying: "I will not be sleeping there [county assembly] (...) I'm going there to legislate and represent many people (...) my voters are 3/4 women and youth (...) and I love them" (Observation—March 2019).

In one of the WhatsApp groups I was observing, a forward message was shared that was titled "A WARNING MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH OPPRESSORS"²³ which also referred to this discourse of unjust governance where the silent majority are oppressed as a way to hinder any catalyst for change: "we have the silent majority who are Willing to do what it takes to make the society a better place" (Observation—WhatsApp Group 2).

²³ Capitals were used in the original message.

Believing change is possible – the demographic dividend (youth and women as a majority)

Believing change is possible as a conversion process or catalyst for change relates to Evans' (2018) argument that 'building confidence in the possibility of social change' is an element to consider in thinking what enables progress towards tackling inequalities (p. 369). Evans also refers to the need to challenge narratives on entitlements, which this and the previous discursive resources relate to, and which is also relevant when considering the importance of information as a resource. The need to believe that change is possible was a discourse used by participants as a way to activate others in civic and political engagement. Some participants shared in discussions their concerns about the apathy felt by peers and the challenge to engage them: "They don't even believe. It takes time to convince somebody that the change begins with you, begins with me and you, and we can impact and be some source of change in our society" (Interview P21). In this context, the demographic dividend that young people and women represent as a majority was often mentioned to help others believe that change was possible: "Like even currently as we speak they are really the majority. There are so many [laughs]. But they fail to realise what it means by their numbers. What... what impact they can cause to happen by virtue of being just many" (Interview P24).

Enabling a space of belonging and collective action

Enabling a space for young people to come together with a purpose appears to be important in activating citizenship according to participants' accounts. This space of belonging is often referred to in the data alongside the opportunity to pursue a mission, such as defending youth's right to political engagement and to services, holding government to account, and educating others about their rights and the mechanisms available for public participation. As such, I interpret providing a space of belonging and collective action to be a conversion process for capabilities such as mattering, voice and belonging; affiliation and social interaction; aspiration and purpose; and the capability to drive change.

The importance of having a space of belonging and collective action as a catalyst to activate citizenship can be seen in the way some participants talked about the civic education programme they were part of, which they described as having provided

them with the “avenue” (interview P21), “platform” (Interview P22) or “entry point” (Interview P12) to getting involved in political discussions or mobilising others. Participants often referred to the value of creating a space that is for young people: “We felt that young people... a bit disconnected, so we were like... how can we get to youth and youth only and make it feel like it’s an exclusive club. Coz, everywhere else you are sort of on the periphery” (Interview P23). Another participant also referred to the importance of having a space where one is welcome: “civic engagement and training others it’s very important. Especially showing the youths the space that is available. And telling them where they should now come in” (Interview P13). This resonates with other studies on processes of citizens empowerment, such as a Making All Voices Count study in Kenya and South Africa which argued that “‘Power with’ [through peer solidarity] is activated and converted into ‘power to’ through collective spaces for action’ (Feruglio, 2017: 36).

The core group of young activists directly involved with the civic engagement activities enabled by Siasa Place not only had access to a regular space of discussion and learning through the seminars and stakeholder meetings but were also tasked with a leadership role as representatives of their sub-counties. They were asked to organise peer training in their own communities, tasked to do a social audit in their county, encouraged to attend public participation meetings and to write petitions or memorandums on issues that were important to them. As a facilitator said during a training with the core group of activists: “we should be able to mobilise your fellow youth to have meetings to deliberate about the issues”. The use of ‘we’ suggests the emphasis on a collective mission, which was also used in the WhatsApp groups shared by participants: “In places or wards where access to information is a challenge and people don’t seek for information due to lack of public participation forum are still laying in offices so guys lets embrace civil education as a tool to our people to change attitudes of our community and put duty bearers to task” (WhatsApp FGD).²⁴ As mentioned earlier, many saw the training programme on civic engagement as an

²⁴ As mentioned in Chapter 4, the language and grammar of quotes from the WhatsApp discussion is not altered—other than typos to help with legibility. WhatsApp texts are included as they were typed directly by participants to protect their authenticity and reflect the characteristics of instant messaging communication.

avenue to access tools to pursue change in their communities and change in service delivery from governments. As such, a space for collective action is not only relevant to the capability of aspiration and purpose but also to other capabilities, like the capability of driving change in their communities.

The shape that this space of belonging took varied for participants. Those who were part of the core group of activists met regularly in a physical space and received training from facilitators but also had ongoing discussions in a WhatsApp group they shared. Others received the information indirectly through peers from the core group and had discussions in their own in-person local youth group meetings and WhatsApp groups. A participant involved in training others referred to the value of the peer trainings as spaces for young people in their community: "Because we usually target 30 youths per meeting. But now they are coming more than 30. Just because they are now hearing that we are highlighting, we are giving them voice. We are making them speak out. Yes" (Interview P13). However, another participant made a reference to the issue of confidence or experience of dismissal felt by youth and how this made mobilising peers difficult: "I find it difficult because bringing their minds to get solutions is also a problem. You find that sometimes when you try to encourage them others think that maybe, maybe you just want to know their problems, that you can, you can laugh at them, others take it negative, maybe you have other intentions, you see... Yeah..." (Interview P5). This suggests the importance of trust and relevant entry points in creating these spaces for mattering, belonging and voice. For example, another participant explained how he engages young people in his community through football and basketball: "Before training I talk to them, after training I talk to them, encourage them, empower them" (Interview P21).

In addition to trust and confidence, other factors related to class can act as a barrier to young people attending and making use of spaces created for them, such as the cost of transport and spending time in meetings that young people needed to spend earning a living. The core group of participants engaged with Siasa Place received financial compensation for the work undertaken (training others, undertaking a social audit) and some of the expenses incurred (for example for transport or for the use of mobile

data) but lack of finances was still a barrier for some of them to continue with the work beyond the specific activities and duration of the programme: “sometimes you need transportation for some areas. These are all the obstacles” (Interview P12). The lack of funds was also a problem when trying to mobilise others through peer training: “Mobilising my community, the challenges that are there, just people come there, ask you, how much are you going to pay us, we have left our jobs, our businesses, we have closed our businesses and now we are here, how much are we going to be paid. Sitting allowance, transportation. You see, those are the challenges” (Interview P15).

This issue was raised not only in the one-to-one interviews but also during training sessions and in WhatsApp conversations: “Kuna allowance 🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄 for those that will participate? [is there an allowance for those that will participate?]” (Observation—WhatsApp group 3). Attendance to the peer to peer trainings was presented as voluntary to ensure people came driven by the willingness to learn and engage in civic participation rather than by financial incentives but the socio-economic factors meant a compensation was needed regardless: “Ok, what we do, we tell them it is voluntary. People willing, they should come. (...) because we want to capture their mind, but at the end of the day we give them at least let’s say a back home. We can’t leave them there because there are some people who are coming very far end, eh?” (Interview P17). When mobilisers did not have such financial support, other strategies were mentioned to sustain their civic engagement and mobilisation, such as using existing spaces of dialogue in the community: “Yeah! We can make it because we can use those barazas, there are those community barazas [village meetings] of the chief, assistant chief, there are those chamas [informal cooperatives], those women groups, youth groups, we can just go there. Ask for only 15 minutes, and you do that civic education in those 15 minutes. So there is nobody that will come up raising a question of how much are you going to pay and what transport, or what, you see?” (Interview P15). This issue illustrates barriers related to class but also alludes to the balancing act faced by civil society organisations when working with communities. In their study on civil society legitimacy in Kenya, Matelski, Zijlstra and van Kempen (2021) find that organisations involved in civic education were particularly concerned with a culture of patronage promoted by politicians and NGOs providing allowances for people to

attend meetings. At the same time, the authors also find that the issue is indicative of the need for 'daily survival' (p. 11).

Some participants made reference to the sustainability of their civic education and engagement work: "They [Siasa Place] are saying that there'll be working with us or supporting us for one year. But I believe we have now to capitalise on this one year" (Interview P21). Another participant felt optimistic about the change continuing after the year of support: "I think the change will continue because the people have seen the importance of the change" (Interview P19). Similar comments were made by some participants in the conversations they had in a WhatsApp group: "Civic education has become part of me. anywhere, anytime we just have to continue educating our people. Siasa Place ilitujenga lazima pia tuwajenge [Siasa Place built us and we must build them]. information is power" (Observation—WhatsApp group 1).

In addition to class, differences in gender or language played a role in how young people experienced the spaces of belonging. For example, a participant in one of the offline meetings facilitated by civic educators had to leave the room several times during the group discussions because of childcare, but she was nevertheless tasked with taking notes during the training. Gender also conditioned the extent to which some women could attend meetings, especially when called at short notice, as they often had to juggle not only work but also supporting family: "I might say that I have some disadvantages. Because right now, I don't have... Ok, I have kids who come back for lunch today. I don't know how they have eaten. But at least I know they have eaten. And I need to be here. I need to be a woman at home preparing food, to be at school also, and then to be at this place. So, I feel like I am sometimes mixed up" (Interview P12). I also observed that another participant was holding back from speaking up during a training to the point that the facilitator made a reference to her quietness. I noted in my observations that language was a barrier as she switched from English to Kiswahili several times to communicate her points to the group more confidently (Observation—March 2019).

WhatsApp appeared to have specific affordances that enabled this space of belonging, as will be explored in the next chapter. For example, participants felt that in WhatsApp

they could share their views more freely and be part of a discussion unlike in public offline forums where youth felt it easier to be dismissed. The disembodied experience also has the potential to remove barriers based on gender or class, as will also be explored in more detail in the next chapter. However, not everyone had access to WhatsApp, or access was intermittent and occasional due to the cost of data bundles, network access or smartphone ownership and control in the household, which is why many participants emphasised the importance of existing offline spaces of discussion, such as youth groups, women's groups, community *baraza* or *chamas*. Some participants were put on the spot by the facilitator during one of the offline trainings for not submitting their reports on the peer training on time but these were participants who did not have access to WhatsApp or to a laptop. One was able to go to a cyber-cafe but said to do so they had to spend 400 KES,²⁵ an amount inaccessible for many. This is another example of the different positioning from which people experience spaces. Although providing these spaces for belonging and collective action can be a conversion process for young people to access valued capabilities as citizens, other conversion factors intersect in the extent and ways in which some can make the most of these spaces or the extent to which these spaces can be sustained. Those creating programmes to support civic engagement need to consider this range of intersecting factors when designing this support. These differences speak to a core tenet of the Capability Approach about the importance of understanding conversion factors (Robeyns, 2016) and the different ways and extent to which people can transform resources into functionings.

Enabling a space for deliberation

These spaces of belonging and collective action also provided a space for discussion in which the activists could find common ground, articulate the issues they wanted to be involved in resolving and the ways to do it, and build their arguments and claims. In their study of online groups, Black et al. (2011) define deliberative discussions as 'decision-oriented conversations in which a group weighs pros and cons of different options, articulates core values, and makes choices in a way that is respectful,

²⁵ Approximately 2.6 GBP or 3 USD depending on the exchange rate.

egalitarian, and open' (p. 597). Deliberation is not only important for decision-making but can have formative and empowering potential for groups. Grönlund et al. (2021) refer to how it can enable members to position themselves in relation to some issues and enhance mobilisation. This is particularly relevant for participants in this study, as they were part of a process of learning so the trainings and meetings they attended, and the discussions enabled in these meetings through a civic educator as facilitator, helped them to make sense of their demands and mission.

Curato et al. (2017) also refer to how the deliberative process can be a source of 'clarity' for participants and add that this 'is especially important for oppressed groups struggling to find a voice. Talk with like-minded others can give people, individually and collectively, the confidence subsequently to enter the larger public sphere' (p. 33). This use of the internal discussions as preparation for the larger public sphere was present in the sessions I observed and can be seen as a conversion process for the capabilities of affiliation and of meaningful engagement in decision-making processes. For example, the core group of activists attended a session facilitated by a Kenyan media specialist to learn about how to use radio to enable wider discussions on topics such as devolution and citizen participation. During the session, participants had to agree on the name for a hypothetical radio show and the topics that would be covered. They also had to put together their claims and arguments as discussion points for the potential show. After various proposals for a radio show name, the group reached an agreement to be called "Sauti Yetu" [Our Voice] with the tagline "kipindi kinachoangazia jinsi vijana wanafaa kujihusishwa katika ujatuzi na viongozi [the programme highlighting how young people should be involved in engaging with leaders]" (Observation—July 2019). In the discussions during training, the young activists also shared with each other their understanding of what devolution is, what they see their role being in its implementation and, through mock radio interviews, they were able to articulate arguments to mobilise others on the importance of and mechanisms for civic engagement.

The core group of activists that was also involved in mobilising others within each sub-county shared a WhatsApp group where the discussions were able to continue outside

of formal trainings. These discussions were not structured or facilitated as offline seminars but enabled the quick sharing of information, including documents and photos, in an ongoing and ubiquitous way. As such, participants had a space to share their thoughts, ask questions, share the work they were doing in their communities or reinforce their collective purpose. Whether and how WhatsApp can work as a resource for deliberation and for whom will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

As seen in the previous chapter, it was common among participants to say they feared retaliation from government officials or elected representatives because accountability threatened their privileges and because of a lack of information and democratic readiness among “duty-bearers”. In this context, Siasa Place also facilitated the organisation of events as spaces for collective deliberation between the activists and political representatives. During one of these events, which brought youth, civil society organisations and elected representatives together, an attendee who had been involved in organising public participation meetings referred to the lack of democratic culture: “The culture of our previous leadership also matters a lot (...) there was no culture of people being told the truth” (Observation—February 2019). A participant referred also to this need for a process of change suggesting that civic education was not only needed for citizens but also for political representatives: “we also encourage them to read more of the laws, like getting access on information is a legal right for any Kenyan. So, with time, they’ll have to... to understand” (Interview P20).

In a training of the young activists attended by a Member of the County Assembly (MCA) in which young attendees were told about the existence of open meetings with the committees of the County Assembly, participants expressed fear of the meetings being “politicised” to which the MCA answered by reassuring the participant: “let me remove the fear (...) what is discussed is like a procedure, it is like a meeting (...) it is only nine members or so, not the whole assembly” (Observation—February 2019).

Other interactions took place in county-led public participation forums where deliberation resulted from participants enacting participation and accountability as citizens, which is covered later on under the performative conversion processes.

Providing information on citizen's rights and how to claim them

As discussed in the previous chapter, I considered access to information as a capability in itself because of the importance it had for participants to function as citizens in interaction with others and with the state. However, its central role as a resource for other capabilities deserves more attention here to understand how, in what forms and for whom it can activate citizenship. As Robeyns (2003) writes, 'as long as a capability is important in its own right, it does not matter if it is also simultaneously a resource for other capabilities' (p. 76).

One of the discursive patterns under the capability of access to information described in the previous chapter was 'information as a catalyst for civic engagement'. As a participant said, without the knowledge of their entitlements as citizens, some young people do not see the point in engaging (Interview P13). Another participant said during the focus group discussion in WhatsApp: "Minus civic knowledge there can't be civic engagement, so most youth need to be empowered with civic knowledge for them to understand their rights so that they can engage effectively" (WhatsApp FGD). As a resource, then, information can activate citizenship by enabling capabilities such as meaningful engagement in decision-making processes, as this participant's statement also suggests: "There will be very many changes in the community. Because now, most of the offices there [have] come to realise that (...) people started knowing their rights, people are civilised, I think it is going to change, and it has started because, before, people used to be very few in public participation but nowadays I see most of the youth are the majority [in these meetings]" (Interview P17). This participant also explained the value of the information received in reference to being able to quote their rights as included in the constitution: "we've been taught on our rights and where to quote our rights through the constitutions of Kenya. I can say maybe in the constitution of Kenya maybe in chapter 35 maybe it favours you. I have to understand the meaning of the chapter, of our constitution, maybe chapter 35, and see how it considers me as a youth. I think it has really helped me". Another participant explained how they were able to write memorandums and the outcome that resulted from it: "I have written one memorandum by myself and the other three we have written as part of the community (...) We were allowed to have a roundtable discussion" (Interview P20).

Making other youth realise that they matter was a driver for many participants engaging in civic education and mobilising peers. Therefore, educating peers by providing information can be considered a conversion process for the capability of mattering, voice and belonging too. A participant mentioned that youth “feel they are not part and parcel within society” and that the civic engagement “will make them realise that they have a role to play” (Interview P11). Participants often expressed how the information received during civic education trainings made them realise not only that, as citizens, they have the power to have a say and influence policy-making in Kenya, but also it helped them to learn the ways in which they could engage: “some of the problems we encounter in our areas of stay... like the water problems, the health problems, the road problems, problems of electricity... So we initially have been seeing these problems but I don’t [didn’t] know how to tackle [them], to whom do I channel these problems. And, for now, I know the person whom I can channel to and get assistance from that person” (Interview P12).

When asked what she was most proud of after almost a year of activism, a participant said the process “enlightened me and it made me also enlighten other people” but also that she had seen a change in how young people were engaged in discussions with leaders in her community: “in the past youth were afraid of interacting with the leaders (...) but now they can interact [with them]” (Interview P19). Other studies have also referred to the empowerment resulting from education that helps citizens understand the political and legal frameworks because they provide ‘a language and a platform to engage with the state: “power within” is the prerequisite to “power to”’ (Feruglio, 2017: 35). Information can also serve as a resource for capabilities like ‘respect and integrity’ especially when this information can be used as a performative resource by, for example, quoting articles of the constitution when interacting with decision-makers, which will be covered in the next section below.

However, approaches to sharing information need to consider the various realities of people for information to be a valuable resource. In their discussions as well as in interviews, participants often referred to the need to ensure that information reaches the “local mwananchi [local citizen]”, or those from “the village”. When mobilising

peers in their communities, some of the activists mentioned the difficulties in people attending dissemination sessions initially either due to time and the need for economic compensation or due to not seeing the value. In this context, some participants mentioned the need to use existing structures to share information, as mentioned earlier when discussing the enabling of spaces of belonging: “As much as we are trying. But people are not informed. We just need to get many copies of the constitution as possible, so we reach out through the groups, women groups, we go youth groups, so that when we use those entities, CBOs [community-based organisations]... when we use those entities is when we’ll get people get information” (Interview P14). Another participant said: “The community I just mobilise them through groups. Then we talk with them, I tell them why we want this, that’s why they also help me maybe by giving their signatures and also those who have education, they also push me as we go to maybe to ask for something to an MCA, because of the benefit of their community” (Interview P18).

When considering information as a resource, language was also important. Participants often mentioned the need to speak in the local languages other than English or even Kiswahili, such as Kiteso or the various dialects within the Luhya language: “if they are to be called probably to a gathering, you will always see a public address assistant, and somebody speaking in the native language for them to understand what is happening. Even English and Kiswahili might not help...” (Interview P7). Another participant said: “when they come to those meetings, I don’t restrict myself to English. Or Kiswahili. I mostly speak in our local dialect, the Teso language” (Interview P21).

This section has discussed the processes identified in the analysis that relate to resources which can catalyse citizenship capabilities. Whereas information has been discussed in ‘Chapter 5: Citizenship Capabilities in Western Kenya’ as a capability in itself, it has been addressed here as a resource for other capabilities too. In addition, the other conversion processes discussed in this section highlight the important of social and discursive practices, such as amplifying narratives that can inspire change and providing spaces of belonging and deliberation. Providing information is already a common resource used by civic education programmes in Kenya and elsewhere but

the analysis shows the value of discussion and narratives to catalyse agency and individual or collective action.

6.2. Turning citizenship capabilities into functionings: performing citizenship

This section covers the set of conversion processes that are based on the performance or enactment of capabilities. This means in some cases participants claimed their citizenship, conceptualised here as the citizenship capabilities they valued, by turning these capabilities into functionings and thus performing in front of peers or decision-makers their claims as citizens. This enactment seems particularly relevant in a context where there is a supportive legal framework (such as a constitution that explicitly states the rights of citizens and mechanisms of engagement and accountability) but a lack of awareness or implementation of this framework because of low knowledge of rights and mechanisms for participation and rooted social norms, practices and impunity that precede this legal framework. Enactment, then, can work as a way to visibilise the rights and engagement mechanisms available and normalise “new” practices. Enactment is therefore also relevant in the context of contingency that comes with a relatively recent constitution and the recent colonial and postcolonial history of citizenship in Kenya, because of the clash between historically rooted practices and more recent legal frameworks or emerging expectations related to state-society relations. As an example of this contingency, a participant said in a meeting: “we are still using the old ways” (Observation—February 2019). So, the enactment of citizenship as a process of claims-making and changing or challenging power is relevant in the socio-historical context of this study.

The quote below by a participant during the focus group on WhatsApp (expanded version of an excerpt included in Chapter 5) makes a reference to the argument that conversion processes that can support citizenship involve not only the provision of resources, such as information, but also involve tackling discourses, social norms and providing alternative narratives. The quote also illustrates how the enactment of citizenship (“exercise their powers directly”) is a process that can improve social conversion factors by amplifying

these narratives or changing expectations of one’s place in society or of what is possible.

“I also tend to agree with my colleague here who is of the view that it [is] because our leaders have failed to take up their responsibilities, thus the urge by the youths to want to exercise their powers directly through civic engagement. They understand by coming together they amalgamate and ameliorate their views and ideas. Their involvement also acts as what I may call ‘a microphone’ in disseminating what is expected to the society.”

(WhatsApp FGD)

Table 3 outlines the performative conversion processes identified and the citizenship capabilities they can relate to.

Table 3: Performing citizenship as a conversion process

Performative conversion processes	Potential relevant capabilities
Collective organising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect and integrity • To drive change/ improve people’s lives • Exercising sovereignty and democratic rights • Meaningful engagement in decision-making processes
Enacting leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspiration and purpose • Respect and integrity • Affiliation and social interaction
Referencing the constitutional legal framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect and integrity • Affiliation and social interaction • Exercising sovereignty and democratic rights • Meaningful engagement in decision-making processes

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair access to basic services and resources
Enacting participation and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercising sovereignty and democratic rights • Meaningful engagement to decision-making processes • Fair access to basic services and resources

Collective organising

A theme I identified in participants' accounts referred to the view that the government would listen if young people got together, thus suggesting that collective organising is not only a capability in itself (captured under the capability of 'affiliation and social interaction' in Chapter 5) but also a resource for other capabilities like those related to being taken seriously (mattering and respect), being able to engage in decision-making processes or exercising sovereignty and rights.

This was a discourse also present as part of the strategy of the organisation running the civic education programme, Siasa Place: "I've come to realise that youth groups work in silos and I really believe, a part of me really believes it is intentional and systematic because as long as youths are working separately it makes them weaker. But as long as they come together then it'll be strength" (Interview P23). Another participant also referred to the importance of coming together to be listened to by government: "I went out and realised that actually when people are organised, government listened to them. So I said ok the best thing is to organise people" (Interview P25).

As discussed in 'Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework', critical citizenship studies have argued for the importance of collective agency and social movements as a way to visibilise sites of exclusion and understand citizenship practices in contexts where the meanings of citizenship are contested. These collective struggles help individuals to regain agency (Kabeer, 2002). Moreover, visibilising this collective organising can work as a way to prefigure new models or arrangements for state-society relations, which, in the process of collective enactment, are both

'envisioned and mirrored' (Milan, 2017: 1359). During the period of data collection, young people made themselves visible as an organised collective by sending petitions collectively and raising issues from various parts of the county. For example, a participant commented during one of the meetings with other activists that one of the desks of a government department was noticing the mobilisation of the group to demand fixing issues related to water delivery. The participant paraphrased the words of the relevant county office when she delivered a petition: "You people are giving everyone a headache. You are everywhere!" (Observation—March 2019). The importance of collective organising as a way to enact power and exercise sovereignty is also reflected in the words of a participant in one of the WhatsApp groups used by the activists: "let's ensure we mobilize community members in large numbers for duty bearers to fill [feel] citizens power" (Observation—WhatsApp Group 1).

Enacting leadership

It was common in the WhatsApp groups I was observing to see participants enacting their activism and leadership by, for example, sharing photos and descriptions of actions they had taken in relation to their civic engagement. This often resulted in validation from the rest of the members. Some of the interactions showed that enacting this leadership related to the capability of respect and integrity, as well as the capability of aspiration and purpose. Others also explained in interviews how the visibilising of their involvement and leadership helped them access new spaces and groups, thus showing the relationship between this conversion process and the capability of affiliation and social interaction.

For example, a participant shared a photo of herself delivering a memo to a county desk and encouraged others by saying "Let's share more memos", to which another participant replied: "Very serious indeed. I like it for it's only such seriousness that one's efforts can bear fruits..." (Observation—WhatsApp Group 3). Another participant also shared photos of the training delivered in his community and added a description, to which some responded by saying "great" or using a thumbs-up emoji: "Training bamboo women group in [location anonymised], in Busia County. I covered two topics (1) public participation (2) the constitution of Kenya 2010. Concern: Discrimination

during bursary forms distribution. We agreed that they meet with ward administrator (...) I will write to her requesting for that meeting. They also request for at least 10 copies of the constitution” (Observation—WhatsApp Group 1). When asked what she had learnt about herself by engaging in public participation meetings, one of the participants referred to the importance of speaking up and the benefits it brings: “I have learnt that... courage. You have courage to speak to in front of people. I have learnt that, if you move, you can also learn more. Yeah... That’s what I have learnt. And you can go very far if you engage to many activities” (Interview P18).

Enacting leadership, however, also had negative consequences for some participants, especially women who talked about the backlash received as their visible leadership threatened gender-related social norms and power dynamics. For example, whereas a participant spoke to me about the opportunities that her leadership in public had given her (such as recognition from others and being elected in local committees), she also explained to me that this more prominent role had resulted into violence by her husband at home. This was also seen in the previous chapter in relation to the capability of affiliation and social interaction. Gender norms can lower the conversion factors of women because, for example, some might feel restricted by threats or violence and therefore not find it possible to enact their leadership and achieve their aspirations for purpose, respect, affiliation, or other capabilities like engaging in decision-making processes. At the same time, though, the enactment and performance of leadership by women can be an enabling conversion process if it helps to change these very same barriers by normalising leadership roles of women in society or amplifying discourses that are supportive of women taking on leadership positions.

Referencing the constitutional legal framework

Participants often referred to the content of the 2010 Constitution to make claims such as defending their right as young people to participate or justifying their demands for answers when questioning political representatives. In a context where participants felt they were dismissed as citizens and their rights not respected, the existence of a legal framework under the 2010 Constitution was a key resource for them to perform their

citizenship. The importance of this legal framework was also covered in the previous chapter when describing what ‘meaningful engagement’ meant to participants.

Articles of the constitution were often mentioned by participants in public forums. For example, during a public participation forum to discuss the County’s Fiscal Strategy Paper (CFSP) and in the context of discontent among the public due to the delay in the start, a participant raised his hand and stood up to state that article one of the Constitution says sovereignty resides with the people. The facilitator of the meeting replied in a tone that I interpreted as defensive and that suggested he was taken aback by the assertiveness of the young participant: “This is an honest opinion (...) We are aware of article one my friend” (Observation—March 2019).

The referencing of constitutional articles was not only done publicly in front of government representatives but also internally among the activists, which reinforced the group’s purpose. For example, in one of the WhatsApp groups, a participant shared a photo of a petition delivered to the county government to demand a public participation meeting on the allocation of bursaries, to which others replied as a way of congratulating or celebrating the action by referencing the articles in the constitution relevant to the rights they were exercising:

04/02/2019, 09:53: Exercising Chapter 1, Article 1 and Article 35 of our Constitutional right. 😊

04/02/2019, 09:59: 👍

04/02/2019, 10:45: Good work [NAME HIDDEN] lets keep on keeping on since together we shall transform busia county. Put in mind that a journey of 1000 miles starts with one step. (Observation—WhatsApp group 1)

Referencing this legal framework therefore helped to legitimise activists’ purpose and actions, helping them to access capabilities such as respect or meaningful engagement. This meaningful engagement understood as based on the Constitution and argued on facts also helped the young activists feel safer. Many spoke about fear of retaliation as a result of their engagement but also mentioned that having the tools to do it helped

them feel more confident: “But if you are, for example, we are giving the Constitution, you can quote eh?” (Interview P18).

Enacting participation and accountability

In addition to referencing the law, participants spoke up in public forums, questioned officials and followed up on policy implementation, or reminded both political representatives and other citizens that the governments’ role is to represent and serve citizens as taxpayers. Therefore, by participating and holding officials to account, participants were performing their citizenship capabilities, including exercising sovereignty and democratic rights as well as engaging in meaningful decision-making.

For example, a participant stood up during another public participation forum to complain about the delay in the start of the meeting and asked the political representatives to apologise to citizens and to give “genuine participation”. Some of the political representatives reacted with a defensive tone. In this case, one of them asked the participant who he was, which I perceived to be said in a dismissive way, but the participant responded saying; “I am a Kenyan citizen” (Observation—March 2019). The same participant proceeded during the public participation session to ask specific questions about the allocation of budget lines to different services as per the County’s Fiscal Strategy Paper (CFSP) that was being presented. This action, which I perceived as an assertive enactment of sovereignty and participation, resulted in the facilitator of the public event apologising for the delay and explaining that those who would like to have more time to have a say on the CFSP could write a memorandum. In the end, the participant was thanked by a political representative for “being very much involved” and the civil servant said “I have seen you are a very brilliant guy”. This example illustrates how enacting participation and performing accountability can relate to a meaningful engagement in decision-making as well as the exercise of sovereignty and democratic rights.

The same participant then held the microphone for a visually impaired elder who asked the panel of political representatives what they were doing for those living with disabilities and what budget was allocated in the CFSP for them. In the response, one of the political representatives referred to having been challenged by the question to do

better for "women, youth and disabled". Another woman participant in the study, also stood up to complain about lack of budget to pay community health workers. Four months later, the same participant told me during an interview that the question had resulted in a local chief mobilising an NGO and successfully lobbying for the payment of health workers. This example illustrates not only the enactment of citizen sovereignty and democratic rights and meaningful engagement but also how participating and performing accountability can also relate to the capability of fair access to resources.

Participants also used WhatsApp to share photos of themselves holding a microphone and asking questions to Members of the County Assembly. This helped to visibilise the performing of citizenship and, as mentioned earlier under the enactment of leadership, helped to amplify the discursive resources that may also help to activate citizenship by showing others that they have a right to engage and speak up and that there are mechanisms for them to do so. However, inequalities in access to WhatsApp or social media meant some were not able to amplify their leadership or participation in the same way, as seen with other conversion processes discussed in this chapter. This is covered in the next chapter.

6.3. Conclusions

Despite a potentially favourable legal framework enabled by the 2010 Constitution, and as the set of capabilities discussed in the previous chapter reflects, participants in this study talked about their place and aspirations as citizens in a context of struggle and unmet expectations. These include communities not being informed about their rights; political representatives not performing their roles in service delivery; elections not working due to corruption, divisive politics, and voting patterns based on historical grievances; citizens being excluded from decision-making processes due to their age, class, gender, or cultural identity; or women dealing with oppressive dynamics both in the private and public sphere. As a contested, situated, and dynamic concept, citizenship is not given but transformed and claimed through enactment and performative practice and especially so in a context of

struggle or unmet capabilities. For this reason, this chapter has explored how citizenship can be supported and catalysed through processes that enable the conversion factors that can help individuals and groups turn the capabilities they value into functionings. I have grouped these processes into two broad theoretical realms: (i) activating citizenship, which refers to the provision of resources or supporting of conversion factors through, in this case, civic education programmes, to turn relevant capabilities into functionings; and (ii) performing citizenship, which refers to the process led by individuals, activists, or social movements of claiming citizenship capabilities by enacting these capabilities themselves (or turning them into functionings).

In exploring these conversion processes, this chapter has made the following key arguments. Firstly, the chapter discussed the strategies for supporting civic engagement identified in the analysis and aligns them with the citizenship capabilities that participants value. This helps to explore how participants can benefit from these strategies as conversion processes. It also shows the potential value of processes of civic engagement as a way of “activating citizen power”²⁶ that pay attention to and use discourses and narratives and involve spaces for deliberation. This dialogical and more participatory approach is in contrast with processes catalysed by organisations or institutions that assume what citizenship means or that work with one-size-fits-all step-by-step guides to enhance civic engagement and participation, especially if these organisations are not embedded in the local context.

Secondly, the intersectional lens in this study emphasises the point made by scholars of CA that not everyone is equally placed to turn capabilities into functionings. An intersectional lens helps to explore the different ways in which people can benefit from resources and how conversion factors might need to be addressed differently for participants even when they share common experiences of oppression such as those based on age. These findings show that young activists experienced the support provided in different ways based on class, gender, language or location. Therefore,

²⁶ As referred to by Uraia Trust in the Citizen’s Handbook.

organisations or movements working to activate citizenship need to take into account the different conversion factors that influence how people can enjoy capabilities and functionings. The next chapter provides a more detailed account of this by focusing on the use of WhatsApp as a resource for participants' citizenship capabilities.

Thirdly, the chapter highlights the importance of conversion processes to support citizenship capabilities that are performative to the extent that they can model capabilities by enacting them as functionings. By doing 'acts of citizenship' (Isin, 2017), like attending and speaking in a public participation event, participants were challenging the barriers that hindered others from accessing these capabilities, such as social norms that exclude certain groups from participating. These discursive and social resources also helped to show others that new arrangements based on these claims are possible and how they can look like.

The next chapter focuses on the use of WhatsApp as a resource for participants to access and enact their citizenship capabilities. Based on the intersectional lens applied in the design and analysis of the research, the chapter will also discuss the different conversion factors that mediate the ways or extent to which participants can make use of WhatsApp and how this influences the sets of citizenship capabilities they can access or enact.

Chapter 7. WhatsApp Affordances and Citizenship Capabilities

As discussed in the introductory chapter, one of the objectives of this doctoral research was to understand the role of mobile digital technologies in mediating citizenship capabilities and the ways in which this mediation process differently affects people experiencing intersecting oppressions. WhatsApp was the most accessed and used online platform by the research participants in their daily lives. It was also the main tool used by the organisation Siasa Place and the group of activists to communicate. As the most relevant digital technology in the context of this study, then, this chapter focuses on the affordances of WhatsApp and how they mediate citizenship capabilities. However, not everyone had access to WhatsApp, or for some access was poor and intermittent due to, for example, affordability of smartphones or data, poor access to networks or gender dynamics. Therefore, an intersectional lens can help to highlight how barriers in access to WhatsApp mediate citizenship capabilities in different ways.

The chapter will start by discussing the presence of WhatsApp in participants' daily lives, including the barriers to access and use identified in participants' accounts. It will then identify and explore the affordances, including how these affordances relate to the conversion processes and citizenship capabilities already discussed in 'Chapter 5: Citizenship Capabilities in Western Kenya' and 'Chapter 6: Activating and Performing Citizenship'. This discussion includes an analysis of whether and how those without access to WhatsApp are left disadvantaged or their capabilities limited, as well as which alternative or complementary ways of communication can support citizenship capabilities in this context.

7.1. WhatsApp access and use

According to the Global Web Index 2020 report, internet penetration in Kenya was forecasted to be at 40% in 2020 (Global Web Index, 2020: 29). Similarly, the Digital 2020 report estimated an internet penetration of 43% (compared to a world average of 59% or an average for Europe of 84%) and a social media penetration of 17% (Hootsuite and We Are Social, 2020). But these average statistics are lower when looking at rural

populations and women: according to the 2019 Kenya census, 45.3% of the male urban population accessed the Internet in the last three months but only 11.3% of the female rural population did (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019c: 432). Busia is a largely rural county²⁷ and, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, 32% of those aged 25 to 34 reported having accessed the Internet in the last 3 months. Although no sex disaggregation is provided in the census within age groups at county level, one can assume this 32% to be lower for women in Busia too judging from the national differences by sex.

Despite these inequalities in access and use, WhatsApp is ubiquitous among Internet users in Kenya. As became apparent during the digital ethnography, WhatsApp is used not only to communicate with friends or family but as a communication channel for associational life, business, and political engagement. It is a space not only to informally chat or keep in touch but also where meetings and transactions take place and where job vacancies are shared. Almost all (97%) of internet users in Kenya use WhatsApp monthly, which makes Kenya the country with the highest monthly usage of WhatsApp in the world (Bayhack, 2021; Rollason, 2021). WhatsApp is the favourite platform in Kenya, over others like Facebook, according to the Global Web Index (Global Web Index, 2020).

WhatsApp is also a channel for government communication and political campaigning (Tactical Tech, 2018). For example, in the WhatsApp groups I was observing various messages circulated containing official information and government logos, such as statements announcing the start or finalisation of the citizen biometric registration process, Huduma Namba, government press statements or various political announcements, such as the tabling of bills in the County Assembly. In September 2019, for example, a message explaining the tabling of a bill was shared in one of the WhatsApp groups: “Busia Assembly today tabled the Third Way Alliance’s Punguza Mizigo²⁸ Bill, 2019 that proposes to amend the constitution of Kenya 2010, a day before the sponsor Dr Ekuru Aukot’s visit to Busia to address the Assembly on Wednesday”

²⁷ According to the 2019 Kenya census, 87% of the population lives in a rural area.

²⁸ This translates as ‘reducing the burden’.

(Observation—WhatsApp Group 1). As Omanga (2018) points out, WhatsApp groups are an important space of participation in Kenyan political discussions: ‘WhatsApp and WhatsApp groups in Kenya have lately become important loci of sociality and political “talk”, from mundane, routine messaging to more organized, structured groups with a more or less formal agenda’ (p. 2).

WhatsApp appears then to be both omnipresent as well as out of reach for many. This apparent contradiction was reflected in research participants’ accounts of their use of WhatsApp. Descriptions of use often started by explaining the many ways in which WhatsApp was part of the participant’s communicative habits both personally and as an activism and organising tool but were often followed by the recognition that many young people are still not able to access it: “We’ve got a WhatsApp group. We are 23 members, but only six are in WhatsApp. Only six can access WhatsApp. The other lot cannot access WhatsApp” (Interview P21). A similar comment was made by a participant who led a women’s group: “Yeah also I have used it [WhatsApp] but also with ... eeee.... In our group here, most of them have an analogue [phone]. They cannot afford smartphone. It is three/four people who have a smartphone. Me, secretary... (...) but most of them, analogue” (Interview P2). The quote below follows a similar pattern with a “but” in the middle of the paragraph indicating this duality between WhatsApp’s perceived omnipresence yet unequal reach:

You come up with a WhatsApp group, you open the name of a WhatsApp group, like we have... child protection unit group. (...) Updating, writing stories, consulting each other, it’s very useful to me. I see it’s very useful and it reaches a big number of people but still at grassroots level, with media like WhatsApp, not, it’s not very much effective to those people, yeah. They still use the chiefs baraza [village public meetings], they still use the radio, the radio, but not all have the radios. But at the age of youth group, it’s very effective. (Interview P9)

In this quote, the participant goes from stating that WhatsApp has a wide reach to clarifying that this is not the case at the “grassroots level” to then adding the nuance

that it is effective for the young age group. This is also indicative of a narrative that assumes a majority of young people have access to the Internet and social media.

This is also a view that some government officials expressed to me informally during events I was observing. For example, at the end of a public participation meeting, a government official told me about being puzzled that people complained about lack of information about jobs yet there is a government website with job vacancies and most young people had smartphones to access it. The government official implied that young people were to blame for spending time on Facebook yet not knowing about this website to access job vacancy listings (Observation – July 2019). Yet both the official statistics presented above as well as young people’s own accounts suggest the reality is more nuanced. Among participants themselves, ownership of smartphones and access to the Internet cannot be framed in binary terms (have or have not) (Roberts and Hernandez, 2019). Some did not have a smartphone; others owned one but the phone had cracked or stopped working and they could not afford to repair it: “I have a smartphone. It just cracked down. Some few months ago. But the problem is I didn’t have finances to repair it because it’s expensive even to repair. That one has been really a great challenge in reporting” (Interview P14). Another participant who used to be on WhatsApp was offline for seven months: “my phone fell down and crushed that’s why I’m offline” (Fieldwork Diary). Others did not have a smartphone. One participant eventually got one after saving up over the course of the data collection period. Others used their husbands’ smartphones occasionally to catch up on what had been said in the WhatsApp groups or to send reports and photos. Even for those who had a working smartphone though, access was often intermittent due to the limited affordability of data bundles or difficulties in accessing networks: “sometimes you find that you don’t have money and if you’ve not paid for Wi-Fi, you’ve not visited [venue with free Wi-Fi²⁹], I can even go a month without it, and the other month I can go throughout online. So, it varies” (Interview P19). Therefore, engagement strategies that

²⁹ Seminars and trainings often took place in hotels in Busia, where participants could access free Wi-Fi.

use online spaces need to assess the levels of “meaningful connectivity”³⁰ for them to be inclusive.

An intersectional lens can help to understand these nuances in access and use and what strategies to adopt to account for the different realities of young people. The following are the main axes identified in the analysis that mediated access and use of WhatsApp:

- **Class or socio-economic background.** Participants referred to “poverty level” (Interview P9), “family background” (Interview P10) or having parents who are “capable [or] enlightened” (Interview P18) as a reason that determined whether a young person would have a smartphone:

You know, it depends on how, it depends on the capability of your parents... you know for me I am not employed, like most of us when you go to college you have been given fees to pay, (...) ok, maybe, most of the youths their parents are able to buy for them those phones, for others, their parents are, they can only afford to pay fees. (Interview P8)

- **Affordability.** Participants referred to the cost of smartphones, repairs, or data bundles as a main reason for having intermittent or no access to the Internet: “due to maybe lack of finances that affects most of the youth that are locally based” (Interview P11). Participants often described what they spent “a lot” (Interview P18) on data bundles. Some spent 100³¹ shillings a day (Interview P6) or 600³² per week for data only: “by the way, just like data bundles only. But not phone calls” (Interview P17). In a context of precarious informal work and where the lack of jobs was a key issue for participants, these are significant costs for many: “Poverty... just financial... job opportunities they are not there... So somebody who wishes just to get at least a phone for communicating but not a

³⁰ According to the Alliance for Affordable Internet ‘[w]e have meaningful connectivity when we can use the Internet every day using an appropriate device with enough data and a fast connection’ (Alliance for Affordable Internet, 2021)

³¹ Equivalent to approximately 0.7 GBP or 0.8 USD depending on the exchange rate.

³² Approximately 4 GBP or 5 USD.

smart [phone]...[some people may get a phone for at least communicating but not a smartphone]" (Interview P12).

- **Location.** In the first quote mentioned in the point above, the participant related struggles of affordability to young people that are "locally based". Another participant (quoted earlier) referred to something similar using the word "grassroots". Being located in a rural area or village was seen as associated with limited access and use of Internet or smartphones: "People in the villages, in the remote areas, they don't even know how... they just know use the small phone, just receiving and taking calls, or calling (Interview P14)". Location is both a proxy for social class and affordability as well as an axis that mediates access and use of Internet because of reasons such as digital literacy or infrastructure like network: "In some rural areas there's no network, completely, so... that would be hard for them" (Interview P19).
- **Gender.** The Kenya census data on internet access presented earlier reflects the gender digital divide (as well as urban-rural divide). Some participants did not think that young women were less likely to have access to the Internet compared to young men, but others did and their views unearthed deeper issues related to oppressive social norms about girls and women's role in society and the household.

P19: You know, in Africa there is just that difference in gender. Majority of the girls would lack smartphones. You know the guys will work hard and then buy smartphones. But, for the girls, these ones mostly they don't have WhatsApp, so the number of people having that Facebook and WhatsApp majority are boys.

(...)

A: (...) but I am sure women also work very hard?

P19: Yes, women work very hard but, ok, around my place... you find... ok, I don't know how to put it but, around my place, majority of these people... who... the women.... they drop out of school in reality and they are still very

young due to early pregnancies and... pressure [emphasis on the word 'pressure'] from the society. So, when they go to their home, yes they work, but they are working to feed their children.

A. *Yeah.*

P19. *Yeah. But, the men, they can even work for pleasure. (Interview)*

Another participant said she did not have a smartphone because of priorities regarding how she spends her income rather than financial means per se: "I may say that the...my income surpasses my... ok, my responsibilities is more than what I earn. I have... I stay with orphans, I pay them fees, I do what... a, b, c, d... So I feel like taking 3000 [KHS] or 4000 buying a phone and my niece or my daughter is here , I have an orphan, so I say let me pay fees and then I'll consider the phone" (Interview P12).

- **Education.** Education as a barrier is closely related to and intersects with both socio-economic background and affordability. Participants mostly referred to affordability and financial issues but some were also more explicit about education: "a big number use WhatsApp and that small number that don't use WhatsApp it's most of them are illiterate. Yeah... they never went to school, yeah..." (Interview P9). There was also a view that those online are more confident and conversant: "I do see that the youth who I say are online, who have access to Internet, smartphones, they are the ones who are a little bit more aggressive [confident], they are the ones who are a little bit more confident compared to others who maybe rely mainly on radio" (Interview P23).
- **Infrastructure.** Infrastructure includes public Wi-Fi, mobile data network coverage, computers with enough broadband access or even access to electricity. The lack of Wi-Fi is a barrier to internet especially when access to data is not an alternative due to data costs: "the Wi-Fi connectivity is not there. It's not there. There's no Wi-Fi connectivity, so you have to, one, to get money, buy airtime bundles for yourself, then you can access" (Interview P22). Even when some can afford data bundles, some rural areas have weak network

coverage as this participant explains: “disadvantage maybe, I can say, network problems, like in our communities we don’t have boosters like in this town Busia, so we go somewhere, you want to download something, you want to send something, you find that the network is low. So we just walk around searching for network. That’s the disadvantage” (Interview P15). This participant also gave the example of the challenge posed by the lack of electricity in what was meant to be an ICT centre for the community: “in our ward, our previous MCA had something like building an ICT what equipment, what and what... But the problem we have there... electricity. (...) So you’ll find youths are just hanging around.” Another participant tried to use a cybercafé when her smartphone broke but said that the network was just too slow: “it takes so much time of you” (Interview P17).

- **(Digital) literacy.** Literacy and digital literacy were also referred to by participants when discussing barriers to internet access: “some don’t even know how to use a phone. They have a smartphone, yes, but they don’t know how to use it” (Interview P19). Another participant made a similar point suggesting that access is not only about financial means: “There are people I’ve seen they have money, they have such phones, but they can’t... they don’t know how to operate them...” (Interview P7). A participant who acquired a smartphone during the course of the research explained to me how she sought help when she did not know how to use certain features: “when I was opening WhatsApp and Facebook I was assisted by my brother... yeah, they opened [it] for me. Then I started from there, nobody has... maybe if I have difficulties I go to a friend. Or I go to the cyber, somebody so they can help me...” (Interview P18). Others, however, held a view that some people do not see the need for owning a smartphone because, “they are not computer literate. So, they don’t see the need of having one because they don’t know how to use it” (Interview P14).
- **Language.** Closely related with literacy and education, the dominance of English in most apps and mobile phone interfaces can be a barrier for some. As

a participant said: "there is very little that it is in our language" (Interview P18). This was not however an issue that was mentioned recurrently or consistently by participants.

- **Disabilities.** Young people with disabilities face systematic marginalisation as pointed out by Gathoni (2019) in the context of Kenya. The Constitution makes explicit reference to the responsibility of the State to promote 'communication formats and technologies accessible to persons with disabilities' (Uraia Trust, 2010: 26) and participants made some references to supporting people with disabilities during a stakeholders event and a public participation forum I observed. For example, a participant asked about access for visually impaired persons to an MCA who led a motion to install screens across the country to provide public information (Observation – February 2019). Yet, as with language, this was not an issue mentioned as much when discussing reasons for limited access to smartphones, the Internet or WhatsApp, possibly because people with the lived experience of a disability were underrepresented in the spaces in which this research took place.

The barriers above are axes that intersect. For example, those with less financial means may have fewer opportunities to continue with education or move out of a rural location. In addition, affordability or gender intersect with location and infrastructure, because some participants could afford to travel to an urban area or access a hotel with free Wi-Fi, thus overcoming lack of network or electricity in a rural area, but others with less financial means or gendered care responsibilities could not. It is therefore important when including the use of WhatsApp and online platforms as a strategy for civic education and civic engagement to consider use and access to the Internet in nuanced non-binary ways and devise complementary strategies.

7.1.1. Hybrid and offline communication strategies

(...) the use of social media will only help those who own the handsets that access the social media and know how to reach and write. But indeed if we really need to create an impact, because there are these people who do not have

all these opportunities, but they have an ID... [a] voting card, they vote, they can play a role, they are mature people, they have families, that's why we are trained as natives. When we go to these communities, villages and organise these meetings, we don't narrow or say that the qualification for you to be one of us in this meeting or to be thought about is should knowing how to read or write or own this type of handset. All of them come. We teach them in our local language and they also communicate the same local language. (Interview P21)

The quote above illustrates the hybrid approach navigated by Siasa Place and the core team of activists that delivered peer civic education in their communities. WhatsApp played a key role in the communicative habits of many and there was also a view that it was a marker of progress and the way forward for young people. However, traditional face-to-face spaces of communication, texts and calls were still essential. Communication and mobilisation within sub-counties relied on calls, texts, organising offline meetings, or using existing structures such as *baraza* [traditional town-hall type meetings], youth groups, women's groups or traditional media like radio. Participants often referred to needing to call or text as a complement to WhatsApp:

P17. Mostly, I use my WhatsApp to mobilise my youth groups, my members my friends, if there is any public participation. Or if there is any information I have to pass through, I use my WhatsApp for communication.

A. Does everyone has...?

P17. Not everyone. But for the rest who doesn't have I decide to call them, to give them a call. Because not everybody has a smartphone... (Interview)

There were some instances in the WhatsApp groups I was observing in which its members reminded others about needing to text or reach those not in the group. For example, a participant in a group sent the time and date of a meeting on WhatsApp and another responded: "Watu wote wanajua? Tell sec asend text [Does everyone know? Tell the secretary to send text messages] (Observation—WhatsApp group 2)". A similar situation happened in a different WhatsApp group:

20:14 -: 👍👍👍👍🍌🍌🍌 Good job chair

20:15 -: 👍👍👍 kindly madam chair text, there are some members who have gone analog.. (Observation—WhatsApp Group 1)

As discussed in the previous chapter under strategies for enabling spaces of belonging and providing information, participants also referred to using “actual [offline] community engagements” (Interview P23) to find people where they already are. This was also mentioned in the focus group discussion held on WhatsApp: “We should urge and encourage youth on WhatsApp to share what they have with others. Also we need to make use of existing structure in the community like Chiefs in baraza, Church leader to reach youth without WhatsApp to have information” (WhatsApp FGD). As for radio, it was also mentioned as a way to reach “the local mwananchi [citizen] who cannot access the social media” (Observation – July 2019). As mentioned in a WhatsApp group, there was a view that mobilising others requires deeper engagement that cannot be done in WhatsApp alone: “sasa niya what sup tuu si kuingia mashinani keulimisha vijana [now using WhatsApp only isn’t getting into the grassroots to educate young people]” (Observation—WhatsApp Group 2).

On the other hand, WhatsApp was viewed as playing a central role as a communication and mobilisation tool. The reasons for this are discussed in the next section below on affordances. In addition, there was a view that using technologies is a marker of progress and sends a signal to those offline on what is the way forward: “Yeah, social media is a good strategy, it’s a good platform because...ok, the world is changing, and people are embracing technology. So, with time, I am sure even those who don’t have phones or anything will just be interested at them” (Interview P19). Similarly, another participant made a reference to keeping up with the times: “it’s something that we feel it should be a space that young people completely capitalise on. Because organising is changing” (Interview P23). As a perceived marker of progress, it was also seen as conferring status: “If you don’t have a smartphone [laughter] like me, I had the small one, and people said, that is not your standard. Now, I was wondering, what standard do these people want me to... but I knew, at long last, [getting a smartphone] it has made me also to prosper. Yeah” (Interview P18).

The next section therefore outlines the key affordances identified during the analysis process. In this section below I also discuss the relationship of these affordances with the citizenship capabilities and relevant conversion processes covered in previous chapters.

7.2. WhatsApp affordances

As discussed earlier in this thesis, affordances are the action possibilities that are offered by the materiality of a technological artefact in a given context. As such, affordances include both functional and relational aspects (Hutchby, 2001). Lists of affordances for different technologies have been categorised differently in the literature depending on the extent to which they relate more directly to the functionalities of the technology or affordances that are more related to the actions they have the potential to afford in practice (Roberts, 2017; Zheng and Yu, 2016). In this chapter I suggest a set of affordances in table 4, which can then be grouped into the following categories or relational affordances based on the type of action possibilities they offer: communicative, organisational, social, discursive and agentic.

Communicative affordances are affordances that can change the ways people communicate and communicative habits (Schrock, 2015). For example, WhatsApp's use of mobile technology as well as some features that indicate when a message has been delivered and read allows for communication to be potentially instant (affordance of immediacy). The possibility to send messages in writing or audio, to include visual cues such as emoji or gifs, or to share a range of files in various formats, such as photos or long documents as .pdf can also change communicative habits (affordance of multimodality). These are the type of affordances that are often mentioned in the literature when discussing WhatsApp: 'Its communicative affordances (speed, reliability, mobility, multimediality) in conjunction with the omnipresent smartphone are often emphasized' (Treré, 2020: 1).

Organisational affordances relate to how groups organise work or activities and are therefore 'collectively determined' (Ellison et al., 2015: 105). The option in WhatsApp for communication to take place between a group of people (scale) alongside other affordances such as immediacy or the way hierarchies can become diffused in

WhatsApp groups can change how groups question, determine or deliberate on arrangements for collective planning and action. Treré (2020), who has studied the use of WhatsApp by social movements in Mexico and Spain, also emphasises that WhatsApp has become a 'robust organisational device' for organizations and movements (p. 1).

Social affordances are those 'identified as having meaningful implications for human interaction' (Fox and McEwan, 2017: 300). For example, the mobility of WhatsApp, its perceived privacy, or its affordance to access relevant groups enable ways for affiliation and interaction that are different from other online spaces.

Discursive affordances are those that enable the creation or amplification of discourse or narrative. For example, the possibility to share information in multiple modes (such as photos) at scale to people or groups that are relevant to a person's or group's interests or objectives can enable what Sebø, Federici and Braccini (2020) refer to as 'framing', a social media affordance, which they define as the 'construction of shared meanings and building of a collective understanding' (p. 704). This can also be related to the concept of 'dramaturgical action' that Van Osch and Coursaris (2017) refer to in their study of social media affordances in relation to social action and which entails the projection or performance of an identity.

Finally, agentic affordances are affordances that relate to voice and the agency of the individual or group. Affordances like perceived privacy or group relevance can facilitate 'situated agency' understood as people being actively involved and pursuing their aspirations and needs in the context in which people are located and in which these needs are given meaning (Jiménez, 2018; Jiménez and Zheng, 2017). Abubakar and Dasuki (2018), for example, have argued in the context of their study of WhatsApp in Nigeria that WhatsApp has helped women act 'as agents of their own lives' (p. 179).

The potential of affordances as communicative, organisational, social, discursive or agentic, as well as their mediation potential for conversion processes of citizenship capabilities, results from a combination of individual affordances. Other research on the potential of social media affordances for organising collective action also found that affordances alone could not explain how social media enabled specific collective action

processes as some groups of affordances were only actualised when combined (Sæbø et al., 2020). For this reason, each affordance in the table below may be associated with multiple categories, conversion processes and capabilities.

Table 4 is not an exhaustive list of affordances. It results from my analysis and interpretation of the data in the context of this research. Similarly, the association of each affordance with affordance categories, conversion processes and capabilities is based on the empirical analysis but is not exhaustive or exclusionary of other potential associations and interactions. Affordances may be actualised in diverse ways and different combinations depending on the context in which WhatsApp is used. Implicit in these affordances is the ubiquitous nature of WhatsApp as an instant messaging app used on mobile phones. As a mobile communication technology which moves with the user it offers the potential for enhanced proximity to the user's life (Campbell, 2013). Gómez-Cruz and Harindranath (2020) also refer to this weaving into the quotidian and argue that WhatsApp is a clear example of what they call 'technologies of life' because of the way it mediates a wide range of everyday activities, not only personal but also political and economic.

The column under the heading 'Conversion processes' refers to the processes that can improve conversion factors by enabling citizenship capabilities as identified and discussed in 'Chapter 6: Activating and Performing Citizenship', either through enabling resources, such as providing information, or through enacting or performing the capabilities themselves, such as enacting participation and accountability. The link between these processes of change with the functional affordance (first column) and its relational category (second column) shows how social change transforms affordances into affordances in practice as argued by Zheng and Yu (2016). The third column in table 4, then, illustrates the link between the affordances of the technology and the social processes that work as conversion factors in the path from the materiality of the technology to citizenship capabilities.

Table 4: WhatsApp affordances and citizenship capabilities

Functional affordance	Affordance category based on type of action possibility	Conversion processes (affordances in practice)	Capabilities
Immediacy	Communicative affordance Organisational affordance Social affordance	Providing information Collective organising	Information Affiliation and social interaction
Scale	Communicative affordance Organisational affordance Social affordance	Providing information Collective organising Creating and amplifying discourse	Information Affiliation and social interaction Aspiration and purpose Respect and integrity
Multimodality	Communicative affordance Discursive affordance	Providing information Enactment (of leadership, of participation and accountability, referencing of the constitutional legal framework)	Information Mattering, voice, belonging Respect and integrity
Information visibility	Communicative affordance Discursive affordance	Providing information Collective organising Creating and amplifying discourse Enactment (of leadership, of participation and	Mattering, voice, belonging Affiliation and social interaction Aspiration and purpose Respect and integrity

		accountability, referencing of the constitutional legal framework)	Exercising sovereignty and democratic rights Meaningful engagement to decision-making processes
Group relevance	Communicative affordance Organisational affordance Discursive affordance Social affordance	Enabling a collective space of belonging Enabling a space for collective deliberation	Mattering, voice, belonging Affiliation and social interaction
Perceived privacy	Agentic affordance Social affordance Discursive affordance	Enabling a collective space of belonging Enabling a space for collective deliberation Providing information	Mattering, voice, belonging Affiliation and social interaction
Perceived freedom	Discursive affordance Social affordance Agentic affordance	Creating and amplifying discourse Enabling a collective space of belonging	Mattering, voice, belonging Affiliation and social interaction
Diffuse hierarchies	Discursive affordance Social affordance Organisational affordance Agentic affordance	Collective organising Creating and amplifying discourse	Mattering, voice, belonging Affiliation and social interaction Aspiration and purpose

Deliberation	Discursive affordance Social affordance Communicative affordance	Creating and amplifying discourse Enabling a collective space of belonging Collective organising	Mattering, voice, belonging Affiliation and social interaction Meaningful engagement in decision-making processes
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Immediacy

This is an affordance conveyed in the naming of applications like WhatsApp as *instant messaging* apps. Participants referred to this instantaneity or immediacy as a reason they liked using WhatsApp: “it’s easier to convey information within a very short time” (Interview P24). A participant explained this affordance when compared to communication in offline spaces: “You know, like church meeting, we’ll have to tell people, maybe before or after (...)... you tell them before, even 2 days or one week... But if you use WhatsApp, a person will get information immediately” (Interview P6). Similarly, another participant said: “Yeah, someone can send the budget, instead of youths again going there, check, download it, someone sends it and then it’s there easy, you pick it from there. Even if a meeting is supposed to be somewhere, maybe you didn’t know. It’s easier. You can get the information” (Interview P19).

The features that allow users to see if someone has received and read the message or to know when someone was last online also contribute to this sense of immediacy according to participants’ accounts: “sending information is very easy. Getting feedback is very easy and it’s easy to know when somebody is online or not online. You can just get ‘somebody is active’, ‘when was just [last active]’... yeah” (Interview P14).

Another participant who did not have WhatsApp referred to the cost of calling or texting as a challenge: “(...) if somebody can tell you a little bit, now, maybe you use the credit. Now, 20 bob, you cannot talk a lot. It’s just like some minutes” (Interview P18). The cost barrier makes the WhatsApp affordance of immediacy more relevant, not only compared to offline communication but also to other mobile communication

as more information through the app can be sent at once and to more than one person when compared to text messaging or calls. The advantage of overcoming cost barriers, then, is especially relevant when combined with other affordances like scale and multi-modality: “it is easy, you can even share a document instantly” (Interview P20).

As reflected in participants’ accounts, this affordance then can be a resource for the capabilities of ‘information’ or ‘affiliation and social interaction’ or can facilitate conversion processes related to these capabilities such as providing information or collective organising. For example, a participant who had lost access to WhatsApp talked about the impact this had in her social interactions:

You just follow up what’s going on every per sub-county but now even I can’t even know what’s going on because I am not in access of WhatsApp. Even like somebody is telling me, he can say, tomorrow I am going to somewhere, if you are willing you come and join me, you are going to visit a certain place, but it is on WhatsApp so, now, we add on (...) when we go.
(Interview P17)

Another participant also reflected on the impact that not having direct access to WhatsApp had on her ability to report back to a facilitator from Siasa Place. An action that would have been immediate for someone with meaningful access to WhatsApp became a more complex process mediated by the participant’s husband: “like yesterday [the facilitator] was asking me to deliver the information [of an activity done in a church] but because I don’t have that WhatsApp I couldn’t. I went to my husband, then buy 20 [MB of data] bundles, then use this and we [add the] pictures and then we sent to him. If [my husband was] not be at home, I could run [emphasis on ‘run’] from here to [there]” (Interview P18).

This affordance was also mentioned not only in relation to information relevant for civic engagement and civic education but also in relation to accessing jobs or health information. It also became apparent during my observations in the three WhatsApp groups that it was very common for participants to post adverts for jobs, internships or grant applications for community-based organisations. In between specific interactions

related to the group's work in civic engagement, the WhatsApp threads were often filled with information on vacancies or opportunities for grants.

P19. Yeah, it's very helpful actually. For someone who is looking for a job is very helpful.

A. Where would you access this information otherwise? Like, for jobs and internships.

P19. For jobs...? It's very hard sometimes because maybe it's on a poster somewhere. Maybe it's in a poster in Busia and you stay in [location in a different sub-county], so for me to see it it's very hard but if someone takes a picture and then sends it it's really easy. (Interview)

The quote above also refers to the affordance to overcome distance and therefore introduces the next affordance in this section ('scale').

However, immediacy is an affordance that only applied to those who had constant access to the Internet. It was common for participants to connect online only after buying data bundles, which sometimes allowed them access for up to 35MB or 65MB maximum and which they could only afford from time to time. Others would also be offline often due to network coverage in their area:

The only disadvantage is that sometimes... because youth sometimes lack money maybe to purchase airtime, (...), so sometimes you may send and they don't really get to read the information. Because they are lacking. That is the challenge that is there. And also network. (Interview P24)

Scale

Participants referred to the possibility of sharing information quickly and easily to more than one person at the same time and overcoming distance and cost issues. The affordance of scale is relevant both in terms of the number of people one can reach as well as the geographical distance one can overcome. Participants talked about the advantage of being able to communicate with people and groups from their local area or anywhere in the world: "with the WhatsApp, you communicate with a wide

number of people from different corners” (Interview P9). Another participant referred to the importance of this scale for access to information and one’s development: “Yeah, the people who don’t have a smartphone they are left behind because they don’t have information. They don’t know what is happening in the... in fact even in the entire world. There is some things happening outside there and we are just blank, we don’t know. But in WhatsApp, Facebook, you can know! Maybe even if you know later, three days, four days, but you have got information. But for those who don’t have they cannot get” (Interview P18). Another participant also referred to the ability to reach many people at the same time with immediacy and lower cost when compared to SMS or calls through which the interaction can only happen one on one and one after the other: “The most helpful part of being... actually, it’s been easier to communicate than when you communicate manually, or, rather when you just use calls and SMS. It has been easy because we are together and everyone can speak... is a free space in that, anyone, you can type at the same time, you can deliver messages, a message, as the other person delivers. But, for SMS, the message will go from one person to the next and then, sometimes you can feel that maybe, if they send you the message, you don’t have maybe credit to reply, so it’s easier. (...) And it’s faster” (Interview P19).

Scale, then, can be a communicative, organisational and social affordance related to the capabilities of ‘information’ and ‘affiliation and social interaction’ as it changes the way and with whom one can relay information, have conversations with, and plan. In addition, scale can also act as a discursive affordance and can relate to capabilities such as ‘respect and integrity’ or ‘aspiration and purpose’, especially if combined with affordances like group relevance, multimodality and information visibility, because it allows the visibilising and sharing of narratives, framings and representations, individual or collective, to reach large and diverse groups. For example, a participant referred to using social media, including WhatsApp, as a way to project their brand. This was done not only in groups but more frequently in the participant’s WhatsApp status updates, with the potential to reach all contacts no matter where they are: “it’s part of building, do I call myself like a small brand? It’s a way of building my... every activity I get involved... I always put it on social media. (...) Everyone will want to associate with something that adds value. No one will want negative energy. So I

always bring, I always make sure that my Facebook is about positive energy. In a way that you can be able to comfortably associate with. So, yes, I use social media. The WhatsApp, the Facebook, the Instagram” (Interview P22).

This discursive potential in WhatsApp is perhaps less obvious than in open social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook because the scale takes place with or via smaller relevant groups of people in what are seen as more intimate interactions. In the book ‘Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics’, Nyabola (2018a), political analyst and researcher based in Kenya, discusses the role of the open and networked characteristics of social media like Twitter in allowing the creation of alternative counter-narratives that would otherwise have not had opportunity to exist in the traditional public sphere. Similarly, there was a view among some of the participants from Siasa Place that Twitter was the only space for youth to influence the public as their access there does not depend on the gatekeeping that makes it difficult for youth in Kenya to access traditional media: “And so already as a young person we are already ostracised from that [the media] so [the] Internet is the one space where young people own. And, and it’s very difficult to buy the Internet, and that’s what I think it’s extremely powerful. (...) So we are able to even push for hashtags and issues and make them national news media items” (Interview P23). In contrast to more public platforms like Twitter, the discursive potential in WhatsApp is closely related to its organisational and social affordances as it can help build individual or collective identities and a sense of purpose. As the same participant added: “But, also, WhatsApp, it’s used to organise us a lot. We’ve managed to even organise a demonstration on WhatsApp (...) So that’s how I see technology changing how we are organised, and even for me, it’s much easier for me to keep tabs of what’s happening in the country, I would say, without having to delay in terms of communication and its immediate effect.”

Multimodality

Multimodality or multimediality is an affordance often mentioned in the literature on WhatsApp (Baxter, 2018; Treré, 2020) and refers to the possibility for sharing and receiving information in multiple types of formats, which participants referred to on various occasions: “through whatsapp, its easier to give information plus its pictorials

attached to it" (WhatsApp FGD). Another participant in the focus group also referred to this multimodality: "Its even easier to give evidence using Action photos, videos and statistical data from genuine source even if its a heavy document it can be uploaded easily as opposed to carry bags of papers to the meeting where you may not get a chance to contribute. so a person who is not in WhatsApp misses a lot".

Multimodality can relate not only to the capabilities of 'information' but also to the capability of 'mattering, voice and belonging' because it can help people express themselves in alternative ways to voice or text and because of its discursive potential. For example, participants can share pictures of themselves speaking in public, which, combined with the affordance of information visibility covered below can also mediate capabilities of 'respect and integrity' by, for example, helping to enact leadership: "Yeah, it's made a difference because you call people very fast. They know also very fast. For example when we were in Busia at [event venue] after doing that then I post. People, many people knew very fast! Hey, they said, wow, you have done a good job" (Interview P18). This quote also refers to the affordances of scale ("many people") and immediacy ("very fast") which illustrates how the potential of WhatsApp as a resource for conversion processes or capabilities becomes actualised when combined with other affordances.

However, this affordance could not be actioned equally by all participants who used WhatsApp or was not a substitute for offline sharing of information. For example, some participants said that there was a need for them to have hard copies of the Constitution in Kiswahili to share with people in their communities. Others complained that some reports or documents cannot be shared via WhatsApp and have to be emailed (Observation—July 2019). In addition, some files like photos or videos require greater data use, which was less affordable for some participants. Yet, these are not issues that the facilitators would always consider during the civic engagement programme. For example, during a training I observed, a participant asked for a template for petitions as well as for copies of the constitution and the facilitator said he would send soft copies via WhatsApp. He added: "Technology makes things easier, doesn't it?" However, this participant did not own a functioning smartphone,

something the participant did not mention then but which I knew as I had just had an interview with them on the same day (Observation—February 2019). A mobilisation or civic education strategy that relied on this affordance without taking into account these barriers would leave those without reliable and unlimited access to Internet and data at a disadvantage in accessing the capabilities.

Information visibility

Unless deleted by the sender, messages remain in the threads of WhatsApp chats,³³ which, combined with affordances such as scale and multimodality, can change the extent to and ways in which opinions, behaviours and narratives are visible. This relates to conversion processes discussed in the previous chapter such as the amplification of the discourse that change is possible or enacting leadership or participation (also referred to previously under the affordance of multimodality). It then also relates to capabilities such as ‘mattering, voice, belonging’; ‘affiliation and social interaction’; ‘aspiration and purpose’; and ‘respect and integrity’.

For example, on ‘mattering, voice and belonging’ as well as ‘affiliation and social interaction’, some participants talked about the value of sharing views in WhatsApp to mobilise others: “You know, if we use WhatsApp, I have learnt that many people they have seen our views and they’ve known their rights and some they have been coming in our group asking questions, getting them I can see it is helping others” (Interview P6). In relation to ‘aspiration and purpose’ or ‘respect and integrity’, members of the WhatsApp groups I observed often shared pictures of themselves and peers speaking up in public participation meetings or delivering petitions. These instances would often result in appreciative comments from peers. For example, in one of the groups a member shared this about another member taking part in a public participation meeting: “[participant] contributing on Construction and equipping of Youth Empowerment Centres, Theatres at Subcounty hospitals and recruitment of more staff in the health sector”, which was preceded and followed by photos of the participant at

³³ WhatsApp has a feature that allows users to set the messages in a chat to disappear after 24 hours, 7 days or 90 days. However, this function was rolled out from November 2020 and was not yet available at the time this research was conducted.

the public participation meeting. During a training event, a facilitator said to a participant “I saw you in WhatsApp” and to another one: “I saw you standing” (Observation—March 2019). Similarly, I observed in the WhatsApp groups conversations like the one below. In this example, the interaction takes place after a participant shared a number of photos of a petition with a list of signatures being delivered to the administrator of a local ward:

01/03/2019, 13:21: *Great work (...)*

01/03/2019, 14:02: 🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌🍌

Leading from the Front 🍌 (...) Chairman

01/03/2019, 15:00 : *Good work (...)*

01/03/2019, 15:07: *Hapo ni sawa bro! [This is good bro!]* (Observation—WhatsApp group 1)

Information visibility, especially when combined with scale, is then not only a communicative but also a discursive affordance as it can help to build and amplify narratives and discourses, such as amplifying the belief that change is possible, a conversion process discussed in the previous chapter. As mentioned under the affordance of scale, though, this affordance plays a role within more intimate groups of people when compared to more open social media platforms, like Twitter or Facebook. By visibilising the enactment of leadership, participation and accountability, this affordance relates to capabilities such as 'exercising sovereignty and rights' or 'meaningful engagement in decision-making processes' to the extent that it models them inwards within trusted groups.

Group relevance

Group relevance refers to the affordance to create different groups for interaction that are relevant to the personal and social spheres of the participant, especially when compared to other social media applications which participants found less intimate or open to an unknown or less relevant group of people:

The difference is that... with the... with WhatsApp the group is of likeminded people. Yeah... those people who think the same idea, those people who welcome that idea that you have brought up, and we know each other, you just group them, maybe human activities (...). But with the Facebook, you can just have a friend from America, you have a friend in Somali and, but WhatsApp, no, especially it is a group of the people that feels to do something of the same. (Interview P9)

Participants referred to the targeted nature of communication (“the intended information only goes to the target group and not anybody elsewhere” [WhatsApp FGD]) as well as the intimacy of interactions. The quote below is an example of the many diverse groups some people belonged to depending on interests or circles of interaction:

P10. I'm in a number of groups. One, we have a... the professional WhatsApp group that was called, we have a WhatsApp group for the teachers, we also have a WhatsApp group for a... the... the heads of department. We also have a WhatsApp group for, for the sub-county...

A. *Ok*

P10. For the sub-county... engineering fair, we do... we have a common WhatsApp group. And then I have a WhatsApp group for the family, from my family, and then now we have a WhatsApp group for the alumni of our university, ok I also get in touch with them, and then we have the one for, for our high school. (Interview)

Milan and Barbosa (2020) argue that WhatsApp has a specific discursive potential because of the mix between the intimacy of exchanges and the public nature of group interactions, which brings activism closer to people's lives and experiences. By enabling a more familiar interaction with diverse relevant groups, this affordance then relates to conversion processes such as enabling a collective space of belonging or a space for collective deliberation. It therefore can mediate the capabilities of 'mattering, voice and belonging' as well as 'affiliation and social interaction'. This resonates with other empirical evidence which suggests that 'WhatsApp "private groups" are

associated with a stronger sense of belonging rather than network-based Facebook' (Milan and Barbosa, 2020: 8).

As seen in 'Chapter 5: Citizenship Capabilities in Western Kenya', the capability of affiliation and social interaction included interacting in groups for mutual help and development, finding spaces for healing and care amongst women or as a resource in itself to access information. Participants also referred to these valued capabilities in relation to WhatsApp. For example, with regards to self-help groups, some used WhatsApp groups for financial contributions: "It's like a table banking but done on WhatsApp" (Interview P1). With regards to social interaction as a resource for information, a participant who had lost access to a smartphone in the last 12 months would enquire in face-to-face gatherings but regretted missing a lot of information by not being in WhatsApp: "If you don't interact with others, you won't get the information. That's why I miss a lot of things" (Interview P3). This is another example of how WhatsApp mediates capabilities and access to resources and illustrates the importance of understanding the invisibilities that digital inequalities can entail, resulting in some people not being able to benefit from conversion processes and access citizenship capabilities.

Perceived privacy

Closely related to the intimacy that they described, participants also referred to the privacy of interactions on WhatsApp and explained feeling less exposed than when using social media apps like Facebook. For example, a participant said: "I just love it because at least it is when you are sharing your issues it is not exposed... yeah..." (Interview P5). Another one shared a similar experience and mentioned it in contrast with Facebook: "But, through WhatsApp, you just share with the people that you want but with Facebook everyone will just see it on their wall" (Interview P17). Others mentioned words like privacy ("I cannot say that there isn't anything I don't like in WhatsApp because I feel it has a little bit of privacy" [Interview P14]) or safety: "WhatsApp is also a bit safe in terms of... it's not... you can't track it so easily" (Interview P25). Perceived privacy as an affordance can be (i) agentic as participants felt freer to express themselves in what they saw as more private and relevant groups;

(ii) social, because it can open up possibilities to interactions that participants would not have in a more open social media platform; and (iii) discursive, because of the implications this sense of agency and freedom have on what and how participants communicate. As an affordance, then, it is connected to the affordance of perceived freedom, covered next.

As discussed earlier in the thesis, some of the literature on social media has argued that end-to-end encryption may afford political counter-publics and acts of resistance (Johns, 2020). However, participants did not refer to encryption explicitly. Their statements suggest a perceived sense of privacy related to the design of the app to interact one-to-one or with groups of people of one's choice. No references, however, were made either to WhatsApp's messaging being encrypted or to the controversial capture of metadata connected to the user by Facebook (re-branded as Meta since October 2021), proprietor of WhatsApp. The sense of privacy is, therefore, relative when considered from other points of view. As another example, during a break in one of the events I was observing, some participants gathered to watch on a phone a video of a Citizen TV news piece that circulated on their WhatsApp groups. In this news report, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) of Kenya warned group administrators of their responsibilities against abusive speech and warned of arrests (Fieldwork diary – February 2019). Another participant also mentioned having stopped using Facebook and WhatsApp in the past because he was being harassed by politicians (Fieldwork diary – February 2019), which indicates this sense of privacy and safety was also perceived as relative by some participants.

Some women also referred to privacy as important for their social interactions and found the threats to this privacy much closer, within the household itself: "Now maybe you leave your phone there, one [he] comes through it, scrolls it, finds information on it, even now there has been a lot of stress in the house, maybe you want to find some friends outside to chat with, now he thinks as if you are moving out of the marriage. Ah it makes us really beaten there at night because of the phones". Although not specific to WhatsApp, this participant also referred to the affordance of password-protecting the screen which she got in her smartphone when she had it but was not

able to access when she was using a basic phone: “with a smartphone at least you have a password (...). But now, this one, he just opens and looks everything” (Interview P3). When considering affordances like privacy, then, it is important to take into account what privacy means for people differently situated and how gender and affordability intersect with experiences of oppression and privacy and the ability to access capabilities such as ‘mattering, voice and belonging’ or ‘affiliation and social interaction’.

Perceived freedom

Participants referred to WhatsApp as a free space where they could share their views without fear of being dismissed or threatened. For example, in reference to the value of WhatsApp in civic engagement a participant of the WhatsApp focus group said: “Everyone has the liberty to air their views and thoughts with no fear resulting from a one on one engagement.” In the same context, another one said: “In WhatsApp, once you have a view it can be removed in any way you have presented it without fear or anybody intimidating you as opposed to open meetings where old people tend to dilute the efforts of the youth contributing.” This may be enabled in combination with the affordances of group relevance or diffuse hierarchies which can make WhatsApp an intimate space that is part of users’ daily communicative habits. Treré (2015) refers to WhatsApp interactions as ‘digital comfort spaces’ where participants could express themselves without feeling exposed like on Facebook walls (p. 911). A systematic review of the use of WhatsApp for political and civic engagement found people not only drew on organisational affordances but also on affordances for ‘informal and “de-politicised” conversations’ (Pang and Woo, 2020: 1). Other research has also found that online spaces of interaction more widely can offer a disembodied experience that can encourage participation through this sense of freedom (Ndlela and Mulwo, 2017). This can be considered a social affordance because of the more intimate and spontaneous way in which participants might interact; agentic because this perceived freedom may allow each participant more room for self-expression and less prescriptive protocols when compared, for example, to a group face-to-face meeting; and discursive because this room for self-expression can enable the building and amplification of narratives

and discourses that may not have place in spaces where people feel more constrained, like in formal meetings or on more public social media platforms.

However, this perceived freedom can also blur the lines of what is considered appropriate in the group. Participants would sometimes share or forward messages that were considered by others outside of the purpose of the group, which created some moments of tension. For example, a participant was asked to remove a forwarded long post titled “Ladies Dress Recently” to which they replied: “If I post what I do i.e civic education no one comments but if I go out of topic mncatch ma feelings mbaya [you get bad feelings]” (Observation—WhatsApp Group 1). Without clear rules or hierarchies (see next affordance), this perceived freedom can make group conversations fuzzy but also subject to power dynamics as it is not always clear what falls within what is considered appropriate in the group and who decides this.

Diffuse hierarchies

The perceived freedom is closely related to a sense of diffuse leadership. WhatsApp as a familiar space of belonging and interaction, combined with other affordances like immediacy, is related also to the perceived flat power dynamics that were reported by some participants: “with WhatsApp someone can ask me a question in a WhatsApp group, and I must answer you, I must, because it’s in an open forum. And so it allows for people to... to feel that they have the same voice. On WhatsApp... it’s a flat....it’s a flat playing field” (Interview P23). Milan and Barbosa (2020) also refer to the ‘equal footing’ in which people can take part in instant messaging apps and argue that the affordances of WhatsApp allow for a type of interaction that enables a structure based on ‘diffuse leadership and experimental pluralism’ (p. 9). Similarly, Bowes-Catton et al (2020), also refer to the flat structure of their WhatsApp activist group where voices were treated equally. This affordance can be agentic, as power is perceived to be more equally distributed, and discursive, as the equal footing can enable more diverse narrative and discourses to be visible and develop. It is also organisational and social as it enables different ways of mobilising and deciding and different types of interactions. It can therefore relate to capabilities such as ‘mattering, voice and belonging’, ‘affiliation and social interaction’, or ‘aspiration and purpose’.

Deliberation

This affordance is a potential result of more functional possibilities, such as being able to both immediately and asynchronously see and respond to messages in a group setting with a shared purpose. It refers to the provision of a space that can help a group discuss issues, make different points of view visible, agree or conclude on actions to take, and form an identity through discursive practice. As a participant said: “We share some issues, maybe we see the problems that people come up with... we try to get people ask maybe questions concerning what happens them so we decide to discuss there in the group, then try to make (...) to see maybe if we can make solutions” (Interview P5).

WhatsApp allowed participants to reply at their own time, asynchronously, but participants said sometimes they would agree a specific time and date for a synchronous discussion on WhatsApp: “Sometimes we do meetings, on WhatsApp. WhatsApping, we conduct meetings because engagement sometimes is distant, we call each other and say when it reaches at nine we can have a meeting, everybody will need to be on” (Interview P11). Another participant also referred to this practice: “I’ve had people who... who use WhatsApp completely. They don’t even have staff meetings” (Interview P23).

In the WhatsApp groups observed, participants would have brief deliberative discussions, often about mobilising (such as agreeing time, date and a venue) but also related to strategy and action plans, such as steps to set up as a community-based organisation. This relates to the organisational affordances of WhatsApp and to conversion processes such as collective organising or enabling a collective space of belonging, elements of what Treré (2020) refers to as ‘backstage activism’. Participants also referred to the option for discussion in comparison to Facebook, which they saw more as a space for broadcast and keeping up to date rather than in-depth discussion: “WhatsApp is where you go to an in-depth discussion of a given issue. But, Facebook, if you need information, you go to the Facebook page of this (...) communication network like Citizen TV, Nation Media group, Standard Media Group, you get it updates on what’s transpiring and what have you” (Interview P21).

Although I observed examples of deliberation, interactions were often based on exchanges of information that served other functions, such as sharing information on jobs and grants, or performative functions such as sharing photos of petitions being delivered or of participants asking questions in public forums. On some occasions, seven months into my observations in one of the WhatsApp groups, two participants raised the lack of discussion and leadership (“Chairman u r so quiet plz say something is everything alright??🙏σ” or “We started well, we had a good progress but now.....?”). By contrast, I found that the focus group discussion I facilitated in WhatsApp showed the potential of WhatsApp as a deliberative space where participants could find common ground, exchange different views and agree on potential ways forward (Colom, 2021). I reflected in my fieldwork diary on the potential importance of leadership, facilitation, or structures in enabling deliberative practices in WhatsApp groups. While the diffuse leadership and the informal interactions in WhatsApp can afford building a space of belonging and purpose, they can also possibly make productive deliberation more difficult.

In his study of the *Nakuru Analysts* WhatsApp group in Kenya, Omanga (2018) finds that the group worked as a deliberative digital public but also concludes that a person played a central role in convening it: ‘digital publics like Nakuru Analysts are also not just brought into being through texts, but also through specific persons who summon these publics into being. (...) Digital publics do not simply emerge, but are a complex product of specific agencies, cumulative social capital and voice within a digital space’ (p. 13). With the caveat that deliberation can be hindered by lack of structure and diffuse leadership, this affordance can be associated to the capability of ‘meaningful engagement in decision-making processes’. An example of this was given by a participant from Siasa Place who mentioned the case of a group of young people from another county who formed a WhatsApp group with political representatives to continue the engagements initiated offline: “our engagement helped them to identify the key youth groups, we helped them identify the issues that they needed to handle. And we told them now (...) you have to stop confrontation, you need to view these people as your partners, so they started a WhatsApp group. The WhatsApp group they also included some of these leaders. They... they’ve started a meeting (...) they have

identified the need to come up with the youth inclusion policy” (Interview P25). Similarly, a political representative in Busia mentioned during an event with young people and other stakeholders that they had a WhatsApp group to engage with young people on issues related to youth policies (Observation—February 2019). The suitability of this type of engagement with political representatives can be questioned for its lack of transparency and inclusion depending on who is made aware of these groups and given access, but it was seen by some as an option for the type of meaningful (non-confrontational) engagement with decision-makers covered as a capability in ‘Chapter 5: Citizenship Capabilities in Western Kenya’.

Reliance on WhatsApp groups for deliberation risks excluding those without access to smartphones or consistent access to data. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, participants used a hybrid of online and offline communication, or online communication combined with calls or SMS, to have discussions and make decisions with peers in their communities: “But we cannot exclude them from making decisions with us. They are part of us and they are directly affected by these challenges. So we tend to have them one on one [meaning in-person]. So, the original source of our discussion, is one on one. Then after having that one on one is where we put the social media: these are our initiatives, form the sitting” (Interview P20). Those with intermittent access to WhatsApp lost the affordance for immediacy and the possibility to take part in certain discussions that might have become irrelevant by the time they were able to read them or that they might not see in long threads of messages accumulated over days.

7.3. Conclusions

This chapter has discussed the presence and relevance of WhatsApp in the context of the case study and its role in mediating conversion processes and citizenship capabilities through its affordances. Firstly, it addresses the apparently contradictory realities of WhatsApp’s use in Kenya. On the one hand, it is the most used social media platform in the country and ubiquitous in private, social, work and political life. On the other hand, many cannot meaningfully access it due to barriers such as smartphone and data costs or network infrastructure. These difficulties in access include users who

might be counted as being online in official statistics but who can only connect intermittently, which renders ineffective some of the affordances or combinations of affordances, such as those including immediacy. I discuss how these barriers to access and use intersect, leaving some people in greater disadvantage than others in the ways in which they can benefit from WhatsApp's affordances to access the capabilities they value.

Secondly, I discuss how this duality translates into the way participants engage in civic education, peer mobilisation and public participation. WhatsApp played a central role in participants' communication and organising. Using it was also strategically seen by Siasa Place as a way to show young people that online spaces are tools they can capitalise on. At the same time, it was part of a hybrid approach to communication and engagement which included face-to-face meetings and participation in offline public forums.

Finally, I discuss the WhatsApp affordances identified from participants' accounts in relation to the citizenship capabilities they value and the conversion processes discussed in previous chapters. In addition to more obvious communicative and organisational affordances, I discuss the role of social, discursive and agentic affordances and how these relate to conversion processes such as the enabling of a collective space of belonging, the creation and amplification of discourse and the sharing of performative practices. Whereas more open platforms like Twitter have enabled alternative narratives to be more visible in Kenya's public sphere, such as those from feminist activists (Nyabola, 2018a), instant messaging apps like WhatsApp act as the 'backstage' (Treré, 2020) where citizenship is activated, constructed, rehearsed and performed inwards by enabling spaces of belonging, respect, discussion, discourse formation and mobilising (Colom, 2022).

I also argue that affordances often work in combination, as others have also identified (Sæbø et al., 2020). For example, the potential of WhatsApp to create and amplify discourse relates to its affordance for scale (reaching many from different places at the same time), multimodality (being able to send photos and other modes of communication in addition to text), group relevance (being part of groups of interest

and intimate networks), perceived freedom (feeling one can more freely express their views in their own terms) and potential deliberation.

An intersectional lens helps to shed light on points of invisibility that emanate from existing oppressive dynamics and inequalities. These invisibilities mediate access to resources and capabilities and can result, for example, in people being left out of meaningful conversations and spaces of belonging, being made aware of important events when it is too late or being unable to access information that might be increasingly shared only on WhatsApp. These invisibilities also include those who suffer from gender-based violence resulting from the changes in power dynamics brought by the new spaces and forms of interaction that smartphones and online spaces like WhatsApp afford. WhatsApp has offered new avenues for young people and women to activate and perform citizenship in spaces that are perceived as intimate, safe and embedded in everyday life interactions. However, engagement strategies that rely on the affordances of internet-based technologies without incorporating approaches inclusive of those without meaningful access or facing other types of discrimination risk reinforcing intersectional axes of oppression and disadvantage.

Chapter 8. Conclusions

My doctoral research project sought to theoretically and empirically contribute to understanding the role of digital technologies in citizenship processes, with a focus on intersecting inequalities. It is situated in what have been identified as research gaps in the field of Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) characterised by a recognition that the field needed more evidence on the transformational role that digital technologies can play in development, especially for marginalised groups, as well as a recognition that research in ICT4D was undertheorised (Sein et al., 2019; Walsham, 2017; Zheng et al., 2018). The research took place in the Western region of Kenya and followed a digital ethnography approach with young people and women involved in civic engagement processes in Busia County, located by the border with Uganda. At the core of the study were young people directly engaged in a civic education and engagement programme facilitated by Kenyan civil society organisation, Siasa Place.

Whereas the role of social media in enabling oppressed groups to voice and visibilise alternative narratives in the public sphere is now well documented (Bosch, 2017; Nyabola, 2018a), the role of instant messaging has received less attention, especially because it is a more private space compared to platforms like Twitter, and can be more difficult to access for researchers. Yet, instant messaging, and WhatsApp in particular, is the social media platform most used in Kenya (Global Web Index, 2020) and the main online mode of communication used by participants in the study as part of their activism. Centering the research questions on WhatsApp enabled this doctoral research to make a significant contribution to the body of theoretical and empirical literature exploring the role of digital technologies in citizenship and social change.

The field of ICT4D has been dominated by Western scholars doing research in non-Western countries (Bai, 2018; Mawere and van Stam, 2019). The 'white gaze' of development and its colonial underpinnings (Pailey, 2019a) inflict epistemic injustice. In addition, Eurocentric research is also empirically flawed if it fails to recognise the diversity of realities and ways of knowing. To account for this injustice and empirical flaws, I followed an epistemic approach based on situated knowledges and a

theoretical framework that decentres definitions of citizenship from mainstream Western political theory.

The three research questions this study set to answer were:

- What are the citizenship capabilities that young people and women in Western Kenya value?
- How does WhatsApp mediate these citizenship capabilities?
- How does the role of WhatsApp in mediating the valued capabilities vary across to the various axes of discrimination that young people and women are experiencing?

The next section summaries the research findings for each of the research questions. It then explores the theoretical and empirical contributions of this research, and its potential to inform activism and approaches to citizen engagement. It ends with suggestions regarding areas for future research.

8.1. Understanding how instant messaging mediates citizenship capabilities

This section discusses the responses to each of the research questions, which have been covered in detail in the analysis in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Whilst the intersectional lens has been integrated throughout the chapters rather than being extracted into a chapter on its own, this section includes a space to specifically reflect on intersectionality as a way of addressing the third research question.

8.1.1. What are the citizenship capabilities that young people and women in Western Kenya value?

To identify the citizenship capabilities that participants had a reason to value, I followed an analysis approach that paid attention to discursive patterns in relation to how or why participants engaged or hoped to engage in the community, at the county level and at national level. Accounting for these multiple spaces was aligned to approaches to citizenship in postcolonial contexts that are inclusive, multi-layered, and dynamic (Kabeer, 2002; Pailey, 2019b; Yuval-Davis, 1997). I identified a total of nine

valued citizenship capabilities: (1) mattering, voice and belonging; (2) aspiration and purpose; (3) respect and integrity; (4) information; (5) affiliation and social interaction; (6) fair access to basic services and resources; (7) drive change to improve people's lives; (8) exercise sovereignty and democratic rights; and (9) meaningful engagement in decision-making.

The first finding resulting from this list is the importance it had for participants to feel that their needs and contributions mattered and that they were respected. The capabilities to 'drive social change', to 'exercise sovereignty and democratic rights', and to 'meaningfully engage in decision-making processes' may be more expected and can be more directly aligned with notions of citizenship valued in the republican and liberal branches of citizenship in Western political theory (active participation of citizens and citizenship as rights respectively). However, other capabilities in the list offer insight into the importance of access to spaces of belonging and voice, where discriminated against groups, such as young people and women are valued and respected as citizens. In addition, these capabilities, and the discourses that informed them, also show the importance that contributing to the community had for participants and the relationship this had with their status and integrity.

A second finding is the importance of justice when engaging with and making claims on the state. Participants related justice to issues that affect both individual and collective self-worth and wellbeing, such as individuals being able to aspire to jobs and opportunities as 'fully-fledged citizens' (Honwana, 2014: 29), or communities being able to access services such as water, well-equipped schools and health facilities, roads and transportation, and infrastructure like electricity and ICT. Justice was also a discursive resource used by participants to help others see a need for civic engagement in order to claim the rights of what were referred to as marginalised majorities (young people and women).

A third finding is the importance of 'information' and 'affiliation and social interaction' as two capabilities that also play a central role as resources for the other capabilities and which reflect the specific context in which the study took place. Both capabilities are also strongly related to the role of digital technologies in mediating citizenship as

addressed in the next section 8.1.2. With regards to ‘information’, participants referred to learning about their rights and mechanisms for engagement as enlightening. In addition, the responsibility to inform others was a dominant discourse when justifying their involvement as activists and in doing peer-to-peer civic education. In this sense, information was seen as power and important for the capabilities of driving social change and improving the wellbeing of their communities as well as the country. Access to information was also talked about as being hindered by political representatives to uphold their power, which participants felt was a barrier to citizens’ sovereignty and access to rights.

Based on participants’ references to “old ways” of doing things, I also argue that this struggle needs to be interpreted in the context of a postcolonial country whose constitutional framework, in which citizens are recognised as sovereign and which acknowledges the importance of public participation, is not well known or implemented. Its implementation clashes with governance practices rooted in colonialism and the transition to independence which perpetuated amongst the Kenyan elite the view of citizens as subjects (Ndegwa, 1998). With regards to ‘affiliation and social interaction’, this was a recurrent theme and practice amongst participants. The importance of being part of *chamas* (wide-spread informal cooperatives), women’s groups or youth groups was related to forms of financial and emotional solidarity and wellbeing and also rooted in value-systems that characterise many African societies based on mutual reciprocity and solidarity (Njeri Kinyanjui, 2019; Tamale, 2020). In the context of the study, these spaces were a sign of both the presence and absence of the state. On the one hand, these groups helped individuals and communities to access resources for wellbeing that the state was not providing and, on the other hand, many of these groups were incentivised by the need to access the state’s Uwezo fund, which require groups to have a formal structure and a specific number of members in order to apply.

A fourth concluding aspect in relation to citizenship capabilities is the ways in which participants can access resources to transform them into functionings by activating and performing citizenship. Activating and performing citizenship were discussed in

Chapter 6 as two broad categories of conversion processes. Participants received support from the organisation Siasa Place through access to information as well as access to spaces of belonging in which they could engage, organise, and deliberate about their role as activists in the community. Borrowing the term used by Siasa Place, I group these resources under the category of 'activating citizenship'. It is important here to note the significance of narratives and discourses, like the discourse that change is possible because young people and women represent a majority, as part of this set of processes that can help to 'activate' citizenship. In addition, participants performed the citizenship capabilities they valued, which I interpreted as a process of making claims about these capabilities by enacting them. For example, participants would submit petitions to government offices and attend and speak up in public participation meetings despite the feeling of dismissal faced as youth and women in these public spaces. They would quote articles of the constitution to state their rights, and engage by discussing details in governments' plans, such as the County's Fiscal Strategy Paper (CFSP), and what budget allocations (or the lack of) meant for their communities. By visibilising their collective organising, and by enacting their leadership, participation and accountability, participants were performing their citizenship to make claims. As such, their 'acts of citizenship' worked as processes that improved the conversion factors to access capabilities they valued.

The extent to, or ways in which these capabilities mattered for participants varied across intersecting oppressions, such as gender, age, class, or location and so did the extent to or ways in which they could access or make use of these spaces of learning, deliberation and visibilising, which I discuss by way of conclusion further down in section 8.1.3.

8.1.2. How does WhatsApp mediate these citizenship capabilities?

The second research question sought to understand the role of instant messaging, specifically WhatsApp, in mediating the citizenship capabilities identified. To do this, Chapter 7 draws on affordances theory, which recognises that the materiality of technological artefacts matters but also that the action possibilities that these material

characteristics offer depend on the context of those who interpret and make use of these technologies.

In the context of this study, a total of nine affordances were identified: immediacy, scale, multimodality, information visibility, group relevance, perceived privacy, perceived freedom, diffuse hierarchies, and deliberation. These affordances act in combination in the ways they mediate citizenship capabilities. For example, different affordances in combination interacted with the capability of 'voice, mattering and belonging': the affordance for group relevance meant that participants found in the WhatsApp groups intimate, safe spaces of belonging in relation to their interests where they felt more comfortable speaking up; the affordance of perceived freedom let participants express their views without fear of being dismissed unlike in formal public spaces of participation; and the affordance of diffuse hierarchies meant that the discussions in WhatsApp were not led or structured around a leader or authority and that different views could be more easily expressed. Similarly, the affordances of immediacy, scale and multimodality mediated the capability of 'information' because they enabled new ways of sharing information in a decentralised way, much faster and to many people or groups at the same time.

Across all affordances, an overarching characteristic of WhatsApp is its ubiquity and integration into everyday life due to being a mobile technology that mediates daily interactions not only related to family and friends but also to economic and political activities. I have grouped the affordances into five categories based on their relational potential or the practices they serve: communicative, organisational, social, discursive, and agentic. This relational aspect helps to associate the affordances with the citizenship capabilities and the conversion processes that these affordances mediate, such as the provision of information or the enabling of a collective space of belonging. Communicative and organisational affordances may be more obvious when considering the role of instant messaging in citizen engagement processes. However, WhatsApp also mediated citizenship capabilities through its social, agentic, and discursive affordances by enabling different voices to have a space for visibility and deliberation. For example, the combination of affordances such as information

visibility, multimodality and scale helped participants to construct and amplify their own narratives, including the enactment of leadership, participation and accountability and therefore mediated capabilities such as 'respect and integrity' or 'mattering, voice and belonging'. These affordances also helped to model capabilities such as 'exercising sovereignty and rights' or 'meaningful engagement in decision-making processes' by mediating conversion processes such as the enactment of leadership and participation.

Whereas open social media platforms, like Twitter, help to do this in the public sphere (Bosch, 2017; Nyabola, 2018a), WhatsApp enables this modelling within closer trusted relevant groups. I therefore argue that WhatsApp was a space for participants to construct and rehearse claims on citizenship capabilities that could solidify the participants' purpose and agency as well as inspire others. This resonates with what Treré (2020) called, in their research on WhatsApp in Mexico and Spain, the 'backstage' of activism.

8.1.3. How does the role of WhatsApp in mediating the valued capabilities vary across the various axes of discrimination that young people and women are experiencing?

The intersectional lens in this study has been integrated in the instrument design as well as the interpretation of analysis both in relation to exploring citizenship capabilities and the processes related to relevant conversion factors, and in exploring the role of WhatsApp in mediating these capabilities. In this section I discuss the empirical findings that relate to applying an intersectional lens to this study.

8.1.3.1. Capabilities and intersectionality

Firstly, and with regards to citizenship capabilities, the discursive patterns reflected oppressions related mostly to age, gender, class and location. Age was a widely uncontested site of oppression, with discourses of young people as dismissed being predominant. Being a woman intersected with age as a site of oppression and accounts of discrimination against women appeared especially in interviews with young women but were also mentioned by facilitators and by political representatives during public events. For example, there were accounts of women feeling dismissed during peer civic

engagement processes in ways that their male peers were not or accounts of women facing more struggles and resistance if they wanted to actively take part in politics, a well-documented issue (Nyabola and Pommerolle, 2018). In addition, women's interaction outside the household intersected with dynamics in the private sphere, which mediated capabilities that mattered to them. The capability of 'affiliation and social interaction' clashed with power dynamics in the household and sometimes resulted in violence by male partners as described by some participants. At the same time, social interaction outside the household was an important capability for women as a space for emotional healing as well as access to financial resources. It was also associated with other capabilities such as 'aspiration and purpose', or 'respect and integrity'. This example shows that capabilities had different dimensions and needed different processes to serve as conversion factors for differently situated participants.

In relation to class, it was mentioned in participants' accounts as related to entitlement to engage in politics as well as to an injustice perpetrated by the political elite on citizens who struggled to access jobs and basic services despite paying taxes. Class was also found in the language used by participants themselves in relation to peers from their communities, often related to their location. Words such as "grassroots", "fieldwork", people "from the village" or "lay people, down there" were used by participants who situated themselves differently in terms of their knowledge and resources. There were occasional references to cultural identity (referred to as ethnicity) or people with disabilities. Both are mentioned in Kenya's constitution in relation to the representation of marginalised groups, but ethnicity remains a very sensitive issue. It is historically rooted in politics of colonialism, division, control, and electoral violence, dynamics which participants challenged in their discourses for constructive engagement, democracy and social change. References to people with disabilities were made by some participants in public events but it was less predominant in the context of the study compared to age, gender or class, possibly because people living with disabilities were less represented in the spaces in which this study took place. Experiences related to disability may have been predominant if the case study had included participants living with disabilities or had focused on activism in relation to the rights of people with disabilities specifically.

8.1.3.2. Conversion factors and intersectionality

These axes of oppression interacted with the conversion processes identified in the study that were grouped according to whether citizenship was being activated (through the creation and provision of spaces of belonging, civic education, deliberation) or performed (through collective organising, enacting participation, and referencing the constitutional framework).

Positionings related to class, gender, location, or language meant that participants experienced the resources in different ways even when participants shared age as an axis of oppression. These intersecting positionings affected their conversion factors, or ability to transform these resources into functionings. For example, I have argued that the civic education and engagement activities in the case study enabled a space of belonging and collective action as well as deliberation where participants could learn, organise, and build their own narratives. However, class and location affected the extent to which some young people in the communities could attend the peer civic education sessions without financial compensation. Gender compounded this as some young women could not attend meetings even when there was financial compensation because of care and work responsibilities. Class and gender also related to confidence in speaking up even when the space was for youth only. There were instances observed, as well as referred to by participants themselves, that demonstrated the extent to which language was a barrier for those with less command of English, which was sometimes the language used by facilitators.

The intersectionality lens highlights the nuance needed in the design of spaces and activities for civic education and engagement. It is not enough that these spaces are designed for young people; they need to account for the different ways in which young people are situated. Not accounting for this intersectionality of experiences can exclude persons already in positions of disadvantage from being able to transform resources into functionings.

8.1.3.3. WhatsApp affordances and intersectionality

‘Chapter 7: WhatsApp Affordances and Citizenship Capabilities’ discussed the different ways in which participants differently situated across axes like class, gender

or location could make use of WhatsApp affordances. Intersectionality helped to explore this mediation in relation to online exclusion and what this exclusion meant for participants' conversion factors as well as in relation to how online access interacts with existing inequalities.

In relation to online exclusion, WhatsApp's ubiquity and its perceived omnipresence obscure a pervasive digital divide and, particularly, a divide that is not based on a binary understanding of access (for example having access to smartphone or not) but on the quality of access. Even though some participants had a smartphone and were members of WhatsApp groups, their online presence and use was intermittent and this intermittence could not be solved by allowances for the cost of data provided by Siasa Place. That is because, in addition to affordability, other factors related to gender, class or location would mediate access and use. These included issues accessing electricity or network in some rural locations, or prioritising paying for school fees and supporting other community members over spending on buying or repairing a smartphone. These factors intersected. For example, a young woman based in a rural area with care responsibilities would have more difficulty in accessing alternatives to online access (such as Wi-Fi connection) compared to a young woman based in a city and with fewer care responsibilities. This means that some participants could not benefit from the WhatsApp relational affordances (communicative, organisational, social, agentic, and discursive) as others did and this had an impact on their access to resources and capabilities such as 'information', 'affiliation and social interaction', or 'aspiration and purpose'. WhatsApp's functional affordances made it more convenient to share information, organise and deliberate online, but relying on this convenience risked further amplifying inequalities and there were instances in the WhatsApp groups of members reminding others to share the information with those who had "gone analogue", meaning they could not access the Internet. Language and disability were mentioned as obstacles to online access to a lesser extent but, as argued before, research with participants living with disabilities or no command of English could have identified more detail on these barriers.

In addition to online exclusion, online access interacted with other axes of oppression. For example, some women shared experiences which showed that the added social interaction afforded by the phone worsened violence from their male partners because it challenged power and gender norms. Intersectionality, then, helps to shed light not only on inequalities related to digital exclusion but also in relation to how online access and use interacts with existing power relations that keep people in structural disadvantage (Zheng and Walsham, 2021).

This analysis suggests that policies or organisations that include digital technologies as part of their civic education and engagement strategies need to account for the different needs and positionings of people even when they come from the same county or community. A nuanced understanding of internet access and use and of how digital technologies interact with structural inequalities may avoid further amplifying these inequalities.

8.2. Contributions of this research

8.2.1 Theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions

Following from the reflections above, this section argues that this study has made the following four contributions. Firstly, in the context of the ICT4D field and the need identified in the literature for better theorising, it provides an empirical case study resulting from the application of a holistic approach to theorising ICT4D, as suggested by Sein et al. (2019), that addresses the three pillars of ICT4D, the technology (ICT), the development outcome (D) and the process of transformational change that links the two (4). This empirical case study has helped to address insufficient evidence on how citizen engagement can be better supported and the potential and risks of using digital technologies, and specifically instant messaging, in the process.

Secondly, the theoretical framework is highly interdisciplinary and this has provided specific theories and approaches with mechanisms to complement or operationalise them, resulting in both theoretical and empirical contributions. My doctoral research draws from the fields of ICT4D (in itself interdisciplinary), citizenship studies, politics, discursive psychology, and feminist and postcolonial studies. In doing so, it

demonstrates the overlap across disciplines and the advantages of bringing them together to enable empirical evidence that is relevant to a range of fields. Theorising citizen engagement both as capabilities as well as through the lens of critical citizenship studies is an example and a specific contribution of this interdisciplinary application. Although the Capability Approach has been consistently used in ICT4D research, its application in the study of citizenship is less common.

On the one hand, using the Capability Approach can support critical citizenship studies in operationalising research on processes of citizenship, such as activism, social movements, or political participation (or lack of). Whilst critical citizenship studies have emphasised the importance of reconceptualising what citizenship means in different contexts and how it is claimed and enacted, the capability approach and concepts like resources and conversion factors complements this reconceptualisation of citizenship with mechanisms to understand how citizenship can be supported or catalysed. The process of claiming and enacting citizenship can be enabled by policies or civil society organisations through provision of resources such as information, or safe spaces of belonging, organising and deliberation. The evaluative nature of the capabilities approach, then, helps to understand how these resources and transformational processes may be best supported. For this reason, I use the concept of 'conversion process' as it helps to understand how more dynamic aspects and processes of change relate to mechanisms in the CA, like conversion factors and resources. The CA helped me to explore citizenship as values and aspirations of participants as they engage in processes of civic education. In addition, this allowed me to prioritise participants' accounts and meanings over pre-existing notions of citizenship.

On the other hand, complementing the CA with critical citizenship studies helps to design studies that take into account the relational and contextual aspects of capabilities within state-society dynamics that encompass multiple layers of engagement and belonging/exclusion and that are also situated in historical processes. In addition, critical approaches to citizenship, such as performative citizenship, help development studies and the capabilities approach to consider performative aspects as

conversion processes in themselves. The performative aspect puts the emphasis on the agency of people, collective action, and on processes of struggle involved in making claims.

Using this approach means that the citizenship capabilities and the processes of change identified may be different not only in different countries but also within Kenya itself. For example, studies with populations facing legal disfranchisement within Kenya, like the Nubians (Balaton-Chrimes, 2015) or Kenyan Somalis (Scharrer, 2018) may have resulted in a very different list of capabilities, relevant to their specific historical, social and political context. This contextual approach also means that the capabilities in the same location (Busia County) may change or have been different at another point in time. The digital ethnography took place from 2018 to 2019 and the civic education activities were framed in the context of the devolution and constitutional mechanisms of the 2010 Constitution. At the time I was writing this chapter, Kenya was approaching its 2022 elections when the discourses from participants and in observed events may have been different.

Thirdly, applying affordances theory to this theorising of citizenship has shown how affordances of instant messaging relate not only to the activation, or lack thereof, of citizenship (through, for example, information and mobilizing) but also to the performative aspects of citizenship. Beyond the better documented communicative and organisational affordances of instant messaging, this study illustrates the role of the agentic and discursive affordances of WhatsApp and how they relate to an inwards performative process that helps to construct and rehearse citizenship in a more intimate and safe space before enacting it in the public sphere. This study therefore contributes empirically and theoretically to building an understanding of the use of WhatsApp in processes of citizen engagement and social change.

Finally, this doctoral project makes a methodological contribution as an example of a digital ethnography applied to WhatsApp. This multi-method approach helped to explore both online and offline spaces and the interactions between the two (Hine, 2017), particularly relevant considering the embeddedness of instant messaging in the personal, social and political life of participants. This digital ethnography was guided

by feminist postcolonial methodologies. More specifically, I followed a situated knowledges approach, which recognises my power and positionality in the research process and my account as partial. In addition to a multiplicity of methods as part of the digital ethnography, this situated knowledges approach entailed: a focus on language and discourse in analysis; a process of reflexivity; and following an ethics of relationships and care. This was aligned to an interpretivist ontology that understands reality as socially constructed through power and discourse. This research, then, contributes by providing a case study on conducting digital ethnographies that involve instant messaging specifically and using a postcolonial and feminist approach.

8.2.2. Contributions to activism and practice

This research is relevant to strategic discussions, designs of activities and programmes in civil society organisations, and activists involved in processes of citizen engagement and struggles for justice and rights. I suggest the following contributions.

First, the theoretical framework used to study citizenship has helped to explore aspirations and struggles for citizenship in ways that are situated historically, socially and as a dynamic process of change. In the case of Busia, and at the time the research was done, aspects like mattering, belonging and aspiration were a central aspect of what being a citizen meant for young people and women, in addition to what might be more expected aspects like the exercise of sovereignty and democratic rights or engagement in decision-making processes. Organisations or policies supporting citizen engagement and civic education processes, then, need to go beyond sharing information or skills and understand what matters to groups and individuals discriminated against and who are differently positioned, and provide spaces of belonging where they can articulate and enact their needs.

Secondly, in the context of the study, WhatsApp afforded the enactment of citizenship but, unlike public platforms like Twitter, WhatsApp did so inwardly, among more private and intimate groups. It can be argued, then, that the affordances of instant messaging helped users in the process of constructing citizenship because it worked as a space of belonging in which to build a sense of agency and purpose internally. This internal process interacted with more outward acts of citizenship, such as taking part

in public participation meetings or signing petitions. Organisations supporting activists or civic engagement processes can think about the use of instant messaging platforms more strategically to support this behind-the-scenes processes and the construction of narratives, identity, and purpose.

Another contribution is the ways in which the ubiquity of WhatsApp in the social, work, and political life of Kenyan internet users can overlook realities of digital and social exclusion and therefore sites of oppression and disadvantage. WhatsApp's affordances hide, exacerbate, or interact with, often invisible, oppressive dynamics related to lack of or intermittent access as well as to how online access interacts with existing structural inequalities. Initiatives supporting processes of civic engagement or citizen activism considering the use of online spaces for interaction should take a digital rights and justice approach, mindful of intersecting sites of marginalisation and oppression. This means designing civic engagement or education activities so that they have spaces and strategies that listen to the needs of more oppressed groups, like, in the case of this study, young women with low financial resources and low levels of formal education living in remote areas.

8.2.3. Areas for further research

There are two main areas for further research that I have identified during this project. The first one relates to exploring privacy as a potential citizenship capability. In my doctoral study, privacy was identified as valuable in reference to the affordance of perceived privacy that WhatsApp offered to participants when compared to more open social networks, such as Facebook or Twitter. Participants also placed value on the relevance and intimacy offered by the ways in which one could affiliate in small groups in WhatsApp. Yet, no references were made during the research to the ways data is collected by Big Tech companies like WhatsApp's owner, Meta. Similarly, the data collection period coincided with the deployment of the country-wide registration of citizens for the Huduma Namba, a controversial and contested centralised ID system based on the collection of biometric information. Participants shared information about the process in the WhatsApp groups I observed but as an opportunity for jobs rather than as reflections on what the process meant for their rights. This suggested to me a

lack of information on the relationship between digital technologies and governance processes that include surveillance and the use of Big Data for micro-profiling or to feed into algorithms. It could also be that participants did not relate the type of privacy that mattered to them to these macro processes. Perhaps because of this lack of information, I did not identify privacy to be a capability during analysis. I suggest that there is scope for further research to explore privacy as a citizenship capability in the context of the use of Big Data and surveillance in governance processes.

The second area for further research relates to the relationship between misinformation and WhatsApp. This is a question that I have been asked about whilst I have shared this research in different forums. This was not a topic that the research questions explicitly sought to address, and it was not an issue found in the accounts and discourses across interviews, WhatsApp groups or events observed. Access to information was, however, an important capability and the responsibility to share information with others was one of the discursive patterns within it. Perhaps the issue of misinformation may have been more salient at another point in time during events that tend to heighten the uncertainty and tension in public discourse, such as closer to elections or during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, understanding the role of instant messaging and misinformation in processes of citizen engagement is a potential area of further research, especially considering the importance of information as a citizenship capability. As with the topic on privacy, policies and programmes on civic education might need to include more discussions on misinformation and fact-checking in a context of digital citizenship or when digital technologies such as WhatsApp are used as a key communication tool for activists.

8.3. Conclusions

This doctoral research project makes an empirical and theoretical contribution to better understand the role of digital technologies in mediating citizenship processes with a focus on intersecting inequalities. In particular, the findings presented in this thesis make a contribution to the research on instant messaging. The literature in this area is limited when compared to research on more public social media platforms whereas instant messaging, and specifically WhatsApp, is the most used social media platform

in many locations and specifically in Kenya where my empirical work was conducted. Due to its interdisciplinary approach, this thesis also makes a contribution to research in an array of academic fields, including ICT4D, Citizenship Studies, the Human Development and Capability areas, as described in this chapter. It also makes an important contribution to the methodological literature by pioneering a form of digital ethnography that uses instant messaging (WhatsApp) as a platform for research alongside in-person methods of data collection.

The findings presented in this thesis could make a valuable contribution to policy and practice. They make the case for an understanding of citizenship as contextual, multi-layered, and dynamic, grounded on the capabilities people have a reason to value. In addition, the findings of this research project highlight the importance of understanding the power relations and inequalities that can otherwise be made invisible when groups share a common space of belonging and purpose. Policies and initiatives supporting citizen engagement processes and using digital technologies to do so need to take into account these different positionalities for these initiatives to respond to people's needs without amplifying inequalities.

Our lives increasingly happen across online and offline spaces, which has implications for how we communicate, relate, belong, shape and are shaped by societies and how they are governed. This thesis is a contribution to understanding these technology-mediated citizenship processes by focussing on the use of WhatsApp by young people and women in Busia County, in the Western region of Kenya, and exploring how these processes interact with structural inequalities.

Appendices

A. Ethics approval

Figure 2: Appendix A—Ethics approval by The Open University

From: Research-REC-Review
Sent: 19 November 2018 11:05
To: Anna.Colom; Research-REC-Review
Cc: Rose.Capdevila
Subject: HREC/2925/Colom: HREC favourable opinion

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear Anna

This message confirms that the research protocol for the following research project, as submitted for ethics review, has been given a favourable opinion on behalf of The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Project title: The role of ICTs in influencing the citizenship capabilities of women in Kenya: an intersectional approach

HREC approval date: 16/11/2018

As part of your favourable opinion, it is essential that you are aware of and comply with the following:

1. You are responsible for notifying the HREC immediately of any information received by you, or of which you become aware which would cast doubt on, or alter, information in your original application, in order to ensure your continued safety and the good conduct of the research.
2. It is essential that you contact the HREC with any proposed amendments to your research, for example - a change in location or participants. HREC agreement needs to be in place before any changes are implemented, except only in cases of emergency when the welfare of the participant or researcher is or may be affected.
3. Your HREC reference number has to be included in any publicity or correspondence related to your research, e.g. when seeking participants or advertising your research, so it is clear that it has been agreed by the HREC and adheres to OU ethics review processes.
4. Researchers should have discussed any project-related risks with their Line Manager and/or Supervisor, to ensure that all the relevant checks have been made and permissions are in place, prior to a project commencing, for example compliance with IT security and Data protection regulations.
5. Researchers need to have read and adhere to relevant OU policies and guidance, in particular the Ethics Principles for Research Involving Human Participants and the Code of Practice for Research - <http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/>
6. The Open University's research ethics review procedures are fully compliant with the majority of research council, professional organisations and grant awarding bodies research ethics guidelines. Where required, this message is evidence of OU HREC support and can be included in an external research ethics review application. The HREC should be sent a copy of any external applications, and their outcome, so we have a full ethics review record.
7. At the end of your project you are required to assess your research for ethics related issues and/or any major changes. Where these have occurred you will need to provide the Committee with a HREC final report to reflect how these were dealt with using the template on the research ethics website - <http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/human-research/full-review-process> (HREC Final Report form)

Sent on behalf of the Human Research Ethics Committee

Professor Louise Westmarland Dr Duncan Banks Dr Claire Hewson
Chair Deputy Chair Deputy Chair

B. Permit to conduct research in Kenya (NACOSTI)

Figure 3: Appendix B—Research permit issued by the National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation (NACOSTI)



C. Information sheet for participants

Figure 4: Appendix C—Information sheet about the research for participants



INFORMATION SHEET

The role of ICTs in influencing the citizenship capabilities of women in Kenya: an intersectional approach

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research study. This form describes, briefly, the purpose of the study and your activity and rights should you chose to be a participant. |

1. What is the aim of this research?

- This research aims to explore your views on the meaning of citizenship, on the aims of the civic engagement activities you are involved with, and on the role that online technologies play in supporting these activities.
- The justification for this research lies in the fact that digital technologies are disrupting traditional spaces and forms of civic engagement and that more organisations are investing on them and, yet, not much is known on the different ways in which these technologies work for people with diverse backgrounds and identities.
- The research is part of a PhD project.

2. My responsibilities to you:

- **I protect your privacy:** your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Kenya 2012 Data Protection Bill, the European General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), and the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (United Kingdom). Your contribution will be used for research purposes only. Your name will not appear on the transcripts and nobody will be individually identified in the final report.
- **I respect your wishes:** participation in the study is voluntary and you are not obliged to answer any questions you do not wish to. If you change your mind at any stage before analysis starts, including during the interview, you may withdraw from the research.
- **I answer your questions:** I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.

3. What is involved?

- You will be taking part in an interview. It will be open, like a conversation. It should take between 45 minutes to an hour.
- At the end of the interview you will be given the opportunity to ask any questions around the research.
- The interview will be audio recorded, transcribed and analysed to explore the meanings of citizenship and how the different roles of digital technologies in supporting citizenship capabilities across people with diverse backgrounds and identities. You will have the opportunity to see the typed transcript and amend your contributions should you wish.

4. Do you have to take part?

- No. I am relying on your voluntary co-operation. No one is taking part in this study who does not want to. Even if you say yes to begin with, you are free to withdraw at any time up to a specified date, just before analysis starts.

5. Is it confidential?

- Yes. Everything that you tell me will be in confidence. No personal information will be passed to anyone outside the research team. This includes staff from The Open University (& any other relevant association). I will write a thesis and accompanying dissemination papers and articles based on the [data](#) but no individual will be identifiable from the published results of the research.

6. What happens now?

- Having read this, if you would like to help with this research, I will appreciate if you could please reply to this email or send me a message on the number below so that I can arrange an interview time and location with you.

7. What if you have other questions?

- If you have any other questions, I would be happy to answer them. Please contact me (details below). Alternatively, you can also contact my supervisor.

Many thanks,
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D. Interview consent form

Figure 5: Appendix D—Consent form



CONSENT FORM

The role of ICTs in influencing the citizenship capabilities of women in Kenya: an intersectional approach

Please do not sign this consent form until you have read the Information Sheet and you have been given satisfactory answers to any questions that you may have about this research. Please circle your answer to the following questions before signing this form:

- | | |
|---|--------|
| Have you read the information about this study? | YES/NO |
| Have you had an opportunity to ask questions about this study? | YES/NO |
| Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? | YES/NO |
| Have you received enough information about this study? | YES/NO |
| Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time (before analysis starts) and without giving a reason for withdrawing? | YES/NO |
| Do you understand that short anonymous extracts from the interview may be used in educational or research contexts (e.g. publications)? | YES/NO |
| Do you agree to take part in this study? | YES/NO |

Participant

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Printed name: _____

Researcher

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Printed name: _____

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E. Participant details form

Figure 6: Appendix E—Participant details form



|

PARTICIPANT DETAILS FORM
The role of ICTs in influencing the citizenship capabilities of women in Kenya: an
intersectional approach

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What language do you feel most comfortable speaking in?
4. Are you currently studying?
If so, what are you studying?
5. Are you currently working?
If so, what is your occupation?
What kind of work is this?
Is this full or part-time?
6. Some people have a sense of what social class they belong to e.g. very poor, working class, middle class, elite. Do you, and, if so, how would you describe your social class?
7. What is the highest level of qualification that you have?
 - Primary not completed
 - Primary completed
 - Secondary not completed
 - Secondary completed
 - College/university
 - Postgraduate
8. How much do you spend on airtime each month?

9. How much of an economic effort is this amount spent on airtime for you? (Or what proportion of you monthly earnings it is?)

- Very small
- Small
- Medium
- Big
- Very big

10. What do you consider your national identity to be?

11. Which ethnic group would you consider yourself to belong to?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add about yourself? Please continue at the back if needed.

Thank you

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F. Interview guide

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the interview was open and conducted as a friendly and informal conversation. This document served only as a guide for me as the researcher. The headings were not read and only present in this document for the researcher, as a way to signpost the different topic areas.

Figure 7: Appendix F—Interview guide

Interview guide – young people

[Participant will have read the information sheet and given informed consent before the interview]

About yourself

How did you get involved with these activities [organised by NAME ORGANISATION]?

Potential follow up question:

How do you think it will help you/benefit you to take part in these activities?

You and your environment

Do you think these activities will benefit anyone else?

Potential follow up questions if needed:

- Why is this important?

Are you involved with any other groups, **organisations** or community events?

Potential follow up questions if needed:

- Could you tell me a bit more about why you are involved with these activities?

How important is it to you to get involved in decisions that affect the country, such as by voting or interacting with your government officials?

Do you consider yourself a Kenyan citizen?

Potential follow up question:

- Why?
- Were you always of this opinion or did your views changed at some point in your life?

The role of technology

Could you tell me what social media or social messaging app do you use the most and why?

Potential follow up questions if needed:

- Are you using these as part of these activities with [NAME ORGANISATION FACILITATING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES]?
- Why are you using them/not using them?

Before closing

Is there anything else you wanted to say that you didn't get a chance to say or that you wanted to add more detail on?

Do you have any questions for me?

G. Invitation message for the Focus Group Discussion

Message for the WhatsApp groups I was observing inviting members to a future focus group.

“Hi, hope you are all well. Thank you for allowing me to be a member of this group as an observer. As part of my research methodology I would like to organise a focus group discussion in a separate WhatsApp group for those aged 18 to 35. If you are interested to know more, please send me a one-to-one message or a missed call (kufiash), so I can send more information.”

H. Information sheet for the Focus Group Discussion

This below is the text from the information sheet typed in one-to-one WhatsApp messages for those who had expressed interest to take part in the focus group. The text is followed by a screenshot of one of the communications as an example.

“Thank you for your interest.

During my observations so far in the WhatsApp group and interviews I have noted relevant discussion points that I would like to further explore with you all.

As a reminder, my name is Anna Colom, and I am doing research for the Open University in the UK as part of my PhD studies. This research study aims to explore people’s views on the meaning of citizenship and on the role that online technologies play in supporting these civic engagement activities.

How it works:

I will set up a WhatsApp group on Tuesday 26 March from 9am. From that time, I will pose questions in the group, and I will hope to get your views on the questions. I will export the conversation for the purpose of analysis and I will close the group after 24 hours.

I can support you with airtime but can only do it via MPESA. If you have MPESA I will transfer 100 Ksh for airtime on Monday and 100 Ksh after the focus group has finished.

My responsibilities to you:

- I protect your privacy: your participation will be treated in strict confidence. This discussion will be used for research purposes only. No names will appear on the transcripts and nobody will be individually identified in the final report.
- I respect your wishes: participation in the study is voluntary and you are not obliged to accept this invitation. If you change your mind after giving consent, you may inform me so that I can withdraw you from the group.
- I answer your questions: I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.

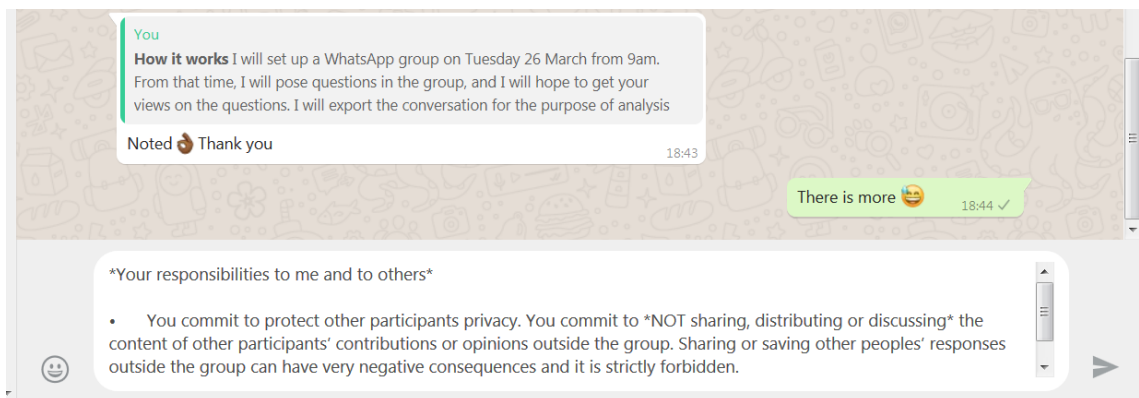
Your responsibilities to me and to others

- You commit to protect other participants privacy. You commit to NOT sharing, distributing or discussing the content of other participants' contributions or opinions outside the group. Sharing or saving other peoples' responses outside the group can have very negative consequences and it is strictly forbidden.
- You are respectful. You are not allowed to use of threats, offensive or harmful language e

Risks

- If you consent, you assume the risks that might come with others being irresponsible and leaking information. I hope everyone will follow the rules and act in good faith but I can't control information leakage.
- Remember that you are using your phone number to engage in this focus group and therefore you are identifiable by others.

Figure 8: Appendix H— Screenshot that shows how the information for obtaining consent for the focus group was done on WhatsApp



I. Information sheet for online observation

Figure 9: Appendix I—Information sheet for online observation



INFORMATION SHEET

The role of ICTs in influencing the citizenship capabilities of women in Kenya: an intersectional approach

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research study. This form describes, briefly, the purpose of the study and your activity and rights should you chose to be a participant.

1. What is the aim of this research?

- This research aims to find out about people's views on the meaning of citizenship, on the meaning of the civic engagement activities you are involved with, and on the role that online technologies play in supporting these activities.
- The justification for this research lies in the fact that digital technologies are disrupting traditional spaces and forms of civic engagement and that more organisations are investing on them and, yet, not much is known on the different ways in which these technologies work for people with diverse backgrounds and identities.
- The research is part of a PhD project.

2. My responsibilities to you:

- **I guard your privacy:** your participation will be treated in strict confidence in accordance with the Kenya 2012 Data Protection Bill, the European General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), and the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (United Kingdom). My notes on the observation of this event will be used for research purposes only. No names will appear on the transcripts and nobody will be individually identified in the final report.
- **I respect your wishes:** participation in the study is voluntary and you are not obliged to accept my presence as a researcher observant in this online group. If you change your mind at any stage before analysis starts, you may inform me so that I can withdraw from the event.
- **I answer your questions:** I will be happy to answer any questions you may have about the research.

3. What is involved?

- I will join your group/page and taking notes on actions or conversations that I may think relevant for the research.
- At the end of the event you will be given the opportunity to ask any questions around the research.
- In the case of a WhatsApp group, the data file will exported, anonymised (to remove any identifiable phone number or name) and analysed to find what kinds of views are there on the meanings of citizenship and how the different roles of digital technologies in supporting citizenship capabilities across people with diverse backgrounds and identities.

4. Do you have to take part?

- No. I am relying on your voluntary co-operation. No one is taking part in this study who does not want to. Even if you say yes to begin with, you are free to inform me that you don't wish me to use my observations and data exported, until analysis starts.

5. Is it confidential?

- Yes. No personal information will be passed to anyone outside the research team. This includes staff from The Open University (& any other relevant association). I will write a thesis and accompanying dissemination papers and articles based on the [data](#) but no individual will be identifiable from the published results of the research.

6. What happens now?

- Having read this, if you would like to help with this research, I will appreciate if you could please reply to this email or send me a message so that we can arrange the steps for me joining the group and obtaining consent from the group/page members.

7. What if you have other questions?

- If you have any other questions, I would be happy to answer them. Please contact me (details below).

Many thanks,

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J. Thanking group administrator for permission to observe

Figure 10: Appendix J— Screenshot of WhatsApp Group 1 transcript where I acknowledge permission obtained from the group administrator and invite further questions

29/01/2019, 13:15 - N: Hello everyone. Asante sana [xxx] for adding me. Mimi ni Anna, mnakumbuka?

29/01/2019, 13:15 - N: If you allow me, I will take part in this WhatsApp group as an observer.

29/01/2019, 13:16 - N: I will analyse the conversations. Any data I use from the discussions in the group will be anonymised: your name and phone number will not appear in the data files I use for analysis

29/01/2019, 13:18 - N: I thank you in advance for welcoming me into the group. Please feel free to message me to ask any question you may have on this process if not clear.

29/01/2019, 13:35 - xxx: Welcome on board Ann.we really missed madam .hope you are fine enough to meet us face to face again.

Figure 11: Appendix J— Screenshot of WhatsApp Group 2 transcript where I acknowledge permission obtained from the group administrator and invite further questions

09/02/2019, 16:55 - N : Hello everyone. Asante sana [xxx] for adding me. Jina langu ni Anna na ninafanya utafiti kwa chuo kikuu Open University nchini Uingereza kama sehemu ya masomo yangu ya PhD.

09/02/2019, 16:55 - N : Utafiti huu unalenga kuchunguza maoni ya watu juu ya maana ya uraia na juu ya jukumu la teknolojia za mtandaoni zinazolingana katika kusaidia shughuli hizi za ushirikiano wa kiraia.

09/02/2019, 16:55 - [xxx]: OK thanks welcome

09/02/2019, 16:56 - N : Ukiniruhusu nitashiriki katika kundi hili la Whatsapp kama mwangalizi. Nitachambua mazungumzo. Mazungumzo yote tutakayo yaongelea katika hii kikundi yatakuwa ya siri: Kama Jina lako na nambari yako ya simu hazitatumika katika uchambuzi. Nitalinda maelezo yako ya kibinafsi

09/02/2019, 16:56 - [xxx]: <https://goo.gl/forms/xxx>

09/02/2019, 16:56 - [xxx]: Welcome

09/02/2019, 16:56 - N : Nakushkuru kwa kunikaribisha kwa hili kundi. Tafadhali jiskie huru kunitumia ujumbe ukiuliza swali kuhusu hii kazi.

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