NARRATIVE EXPLORATIONS OF THE MICRO-POLITICS OF STUDENTS' CITIZENSHIP, BELONGING AND ALIENATION AT SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

R. Carolissen (Guest editor)
Department of Educational Psychology
University of Stellenbosch
Stellenbosch, South Africa
email: rlc2@sun.ac.za

P. Kiguwa (Guest editor)
Department of Psychology
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg, South Africa
email: Peace.Kiguwa@wits.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Citizenship and social justice have been explored from ethical and theoretical perspectives in education. Furthermore, alienation or belonging in institutional cultures, often invoking social locations such as gender and race, were explored. Little research, especially empirical research, exists at the nexus of narrative, citizenship, belonging and subjectivities. In contexts of ongoing inequalities and associated student protests, legacies of unequal histories come into conflict in the crucible of higher education. Narrative as theory-method may usefully provide ways in which citizenship and identity may be connected to socio-historical processes and justice in higher education. Narratives of student experiences have the potential to provide insight into the nuances of subjectivities in personal and collective stories of belonging and alienation. They may also highlight how universities can be spaces where students may engage in non-normative negotiations and reconstructions of subjectivities to create different narratives about themselves and public spaces, thus signalling change.

Keywords: belonging, alienation, citizenship, narrative, higher education, students

This special issue draws together work focused on narratives of belonging and alienation among students in the context of higher education in South Africa. Storytelling or narrative is not simply a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge or information but is constitutive of individual and collective subjectivities. Narrative approaches offer us a framework for theorising how the much-talked-of "legacy of apartheid" surfaces in the "narrative

unconscious" (Freeman 2010) and how the past may be deployed in reactionary or progressive ways, often entangled, in the formation of contemporary South African subjectivities in higher education (Kiguwa 2014). It also allows us to access the complexity and authenticity of contemporary understandings and experiences of belonging that may include place and legacy (Di Masso 2015) or loss, loneliness and disconnection. Recollection, articulation and archiving of collective memory in the context of traumatic histories of higher education is therefore critically important, offering possibilities of restoring, erasing or re-imagining the past for joint productive futures (Bell 2010; Bradbury 2012). It is however equally imperative that we find ways to mobilise these histories as symbolic resources for understanding the articulation of present-day narratives and projected developmental storylines that may offer different future narratives (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou 2013). Higher Education is a particularly significant forum for the articulation of the past and future, for intergenerational learning. Innovative pedagogical practices also provide access to historical and global knowledges in ways that can be appropriated creatively for present and future contexts. These pedagogies may (in)form student citizenship and be reflexively (in)formed by new knowledges and modes of being of the next generation of emerging scholars. The temporal quality of the university space and shifting flows of tradition across generations, mean that narrative theory-method is exceptionally well suited for exploring this terrain.

Notions of citizenship, belonging and social justice remain contested at the levels of theory, definition and praxis in education and other social science disciplines (Keet and Carolissen 2010; Stevenson et al. 2015). Citizenship typically refers to legal status, membership of communities and relationships between members of those communities, but also to relationships between individuals, communities and nations. These definitions may also assume rights and obligations (Lister 1997; 2010). In the field of citizenship studies, it is clear that subjectivities consistently change in a complex and ever-shifting world. Static notions of citizenship themselves, change when considering how especially youth, remake identities and produce counter narratives in the making of the self.

Belonging, its affective relations and metaphors of "home" have similarly, evoked much debate in the literature (Weir 2008; hooks 2009; Young 1997; Yuval-Davis 2011; Vice 2015). Ideas of home and welcoming spaces assume a sense of comfort and often nostalgia (Medalie 2010) for all. Yet the idea of home itself, is critiqued. The notion of home as comforting and providing safety may be a sentimental and valorised construction of home because many do not experience the home as a safe place. Nevertheless, arguments about feeling at home suggest that subjectivities that attract heteronormative power that synergises with institutional power,

will always belong whereas those who do not hold heteronormative power, will be alienated in institutions. Dominant/normative subjectivities will therefore mostly experience institutions as enabling and productive environments. This view may sound logical and coherent, but is this how students experience university spaces? Young (1997) cautions against this binary view, arguing that the experiences of ambivalence *and* discomfort about "home" may themselves be useful experiences from which to construct opportunities for change. We would argue that because human subjectivity is not based on unidimensional social locations such as black or white, or women or man or disabled or able bodied, complex intersectionalities exist which are invoked in struggles for belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011; Carolissen 2012). Yuval-Davis (2011) suggests that a transversal politics of belonging, across borders of identity politics and spatial locations becomes a value that generates most potential for change. This of course takes place in the context of dialogue *and* material change.

In South African higher education, citizenship and social justice have importantly been explored at the levels of ethical dispositions and theorising (Waghid 2007; Bozalek and Carolissen 2012; Davids 2014) with some focus on cultivating citizenship through curriculum (Waghid 2010; Leibowitz et al. 2012; Constandius and Bitzer 2015) against a background of South African national higher education policies (DET 1997; 2001; 2008; DHET 2010) that encourage the cultivation of citizenship to effect social change and transformation in the higher education sector. Further debates that have invoked citizenship directly have focused on notions of "being at home" or alienated in institutional cultures, with specific foci on subjectivities in university cultures of patriarchy, whiteness and middleclass heteronormativity (Tabensky and Matthews 2015).

Although belonging and citizenship have clearly been the subject of research in South African higher education, ongoing student protests in higher education remind us that South African universities are crucibles in which the conflictual legacies of our unequal histories, continue to collide. Black South Africans' citizenship, in particular, (and the rights that come with citizenship) despite being constitutionally and politically certain, remains experienced by many as precarious. Black students, for example, despite legitimate student status, in many respects continue to experience their rights within universities as conditional, contingent, marginal and, circumscribed by the terms of the Other. They feel, at times, overshadowed by foreign products of knowledge and statues celebrating colonial conquests of their ancestors. These experiences are often coupled with their alienation by the languages of instruction, the languages of knowledge and power.

In this context, narrative as theory-method is of central significance and may provide a

mechanism to connect citizenship and identity formation to historical processes and questions of social justice in higher education. Innovative work on projects such as the Apartheid Archives project explores intersections between narrative, belonging and citizenship in intergenerational contexts (Stevens, Duncan and Hook 2013). This work has however, not explicitly focused on narratives of (non)belonging in education, and the ways in which intergenerational storytelling infuses learning-teaching processes in the present post-Apartheid context. While university study provides students with knowledge and thinking processes for their future work in the world, higher education is also simultaneously (in)forming citizen-subjects through both the transmission of ontological and epistemic histories and in creating the possibilities for new articulations of experience and novel solutions to the challenging problems of society.

It is in this context that narratives of student experiences in higher education contexts may provide us with insight into the complexities of subjectivities as they arise in personal and collective stories of belonging and alienation. Notions of DIY citizenship, for example, refer to non-normative ways in which people negotiate and reconstruct subjectivities to generate alternate narratives about themselves and public spaces, thus creating change (Harris and Roose 2013; Ratto and Boler 2014). Universities are nevertheless, also spaces where hopeful possibilities for future trajectories of knowledge-making and active socio-economic and psychosocial citizenship, may emerge.

Narrative, at a meta-theoretical level, enables us to reconceptualise human life by traversing disciplinary divides to articulate individual lived experience with the socio-political dimensions of material and/or discursive realities. We need to think outside of the reductionist confines of that which constitutes the psychological or linear conceptualisations of socio-political development that posit liberal democracies of the west predominantly, as the ultimate and inevitable destination. The "turn to language" has characterised the social sciences. This paradigm recognises the constitutive role of language and discourse in the formation of subjectivity and modes of social life to engage questions of how subjectivities are constituted, both retrospectively and prospectively, working simultaneously with the longitudinal trajectories of socio-historical time, symbols, institutions as well as the minutiae of quotidian, personal life. Significant experiences of belonging or alienation such as emotions (Ahmed 2004; 2012) and bodies in place or "out of place" (Puwar 2004) may also be explored through narratives of student life in HE institutions.

This special issue includes articles that reflect theoretical and empirical work that draws together concepts of narrative, citizenship, belonging and the psychosocial in constituting

existing and potential educational subjectivities that need consideration when transforming higher education. In this vein, the authors of this issue focus on:

a)   narrative theory and empirical work exploring the experiences of students in higher education particularly in relation to experiences of belonging

b)   the relation between learning-teaching and the narrative formation of subjectivities

c)   the theoretical frames of socially produced emotions and embodiment as reflected in narratives of the everyday among students in HE

d)   empirical work with students in higher education that explores the potential of narrative for transformation in HE contexts

e)   the dynamics and micropolitics of (non)belonging among students in HE as articulated in stories of everyday campus life

f)   the languages of expression in articulating (dis)continuities across generations in university life

g)   the ways in which narratives of our conflictual past surface and mutate in the processes of knowledge production

h)   possibilities for new versions of student-citizenship and intellectual identities to be articulated and narratively imagined

The articles engage on the issues raised above but also highlight – through marked absence – some of the challenges and difficulties of troubling notions of belonging within the academy. Indeed, this micropolitics of belonging remains an elusive one that the special issue aims to highlight as both pertinent to the current debate on decolonizing higher education as well as fraught with contradictions, tensions and ideological discord. The notion of belonging remains a contested political and social claim that attests to the ideological role and function of institutions of higher learning. The ongoing exercise of interrogating, developing and embarking on alternate modes of knowledge production and being in the academy thus continues to be fundamental to this project. This special issue joins this exercise in seeking to explore some of the nuances of belonging, exclusion and home in the academy. A number of authors have contributed to this endeavour in their own unique ways.

Sabrina Liccardo argues for the role of life histories of Black South African women scientists as a crucial site to tell stories of psychosocial (trans)formations. This is relative to this cohort's unique positionality as an outlier group that is paradoxically positioned within an interstitial space between their dual sense of belonging to and alienation from a marginal and

an elite group. The author proposes an infinity model to illustrate how these young women locate themselves through recognition from significant others, dislocate themselves through misrecogntion and academic failure and relocate other selves in everyday home spaces. The findings indicate the myriad processes of resistance within conditions of impossibility that attest to how science as a domain of knowledge production may be re-imagined.

Jill Bradbury and Thembelihle Mashigo discuss constructions of self in space and across time by black women student leaders in contemporary South Africa. The authors use data drawn from interviews with a cohort of black female student leaders within institutions of higher learning. These narratives of self reveal the precarious quality of identities as they negotiate shifting boundaries to find their place in relation to 1) their male counterparts in organisational structures; 2) fellow students both black and white; and 3) the wider civil society of the working class and unemployed poor. The intersections of race, gender and class are highlighted as troubling, immutable, shifting configurations in these young women's lives as they navigate struggles of institutional and student political culture in the academy.

Lynn Norton and Yvonne Sliep write about the utility and critical reflexive contribution of life stories as a methodology for working with relational reflexivity with tertiary education students in health promotion. Through this, they explore the possibilities for how teaching and learning may take place that encompasses a holistic approach. Such an approach must recognise the importance of context both in relation to students' current circumstances and socio-historical space and time, the authors argue. The methodology taps into students lived experience and acknowledges the links between the personal and the professional. The framework which facilitates this process involves four iterative loops: deconstructing power in the collective; determining values and identity; negotiating agency and responsibility; and accountable social performance.

Chipo Munyuki and Louise Vincent explore the strategies gender non-conforming and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) students describe as part of coping with, negotiating and resisting heteronormativity and homophobia, and in so doing laying claim to their right to be recognised as equal citizens. The micropolitics of student belonging is demonstrated in these different complex narratives of intersectional struggles and exclusions. Drawing attention to the micropolitics of segregated spaces of student residences on campus, the authors highlight the contradictions and politics of students' struggles for inclusion that fails to address the heterogeneity of the student struggle and micropolitics of belonging.

Floretta Boonzaier and Linda Mhkize similarly highlight the contradictions of notions of a heterogeneous student struggle in their exploration of notions and experiences of belonging

as narrated by black queer students at an historically white institution of higher learning. The authors draw our attention to the practices of resistance and re-claiming of spaces by these cohort of participants. Using the method of photovoice in which participants produce photo-narratives around their identities as black queer women, the analysis reveals not only the extent to which young women's experiences illustrate their struggles around belonging in a space not historically "theirs" but also the extent to which their narratives are potentially transformative and challenge current representations of them and their lives.

Shose Kessi similarly utilises photo-voice to explore the experiences of a group of students at the University of Cape Town. Through a participatory action research approach based on the collection of narrative data in the form of photographs and written testimonies, students were engaged in a process of "imagining" a transformed university. Findings demonstrate how the politics of participation and belonging in academia are fraught with outdated bureaucracies, complex racial, classed, and gendered relations, and competing claims to resources and recognition, all of which must be understood in a historical and ideological context of apartheid and colonialism.

Louise Vincent and Mlamuli Hlatshwayo examine the role that social capital plays in first generation black working class South African students' negotiation of entry into an elite higher education institutional environment. Using a combination of in-depth interviews, observation and the techniques of hierarchical mapping, the authors argue that the building of alternative social networks plays a significant role in enabling at least some first generation black working class students to successfully negotiate entry into university. The authors explore the degree to which students' exclusive trust in members of their own closed networks may be related to further exclusions from the possibility of gaining insight, skills and information from wider interactions. The authors argue that the presence of brokers – prominent trusted network members who are able to bridge the gaps between members – can play a significant role in ameliorating this problem.

Sisa Ngabaza, Tamara Shefer and Lindsay Clowes explore students' narratives of belonging on campus. Using photo-voice methodology, students were asked to photograph safe/unsafe spaces on campus and to write short narratives on these. The article reflects how gender intersects with sexuality and shapes student experiences of belonging on campus. Student narratives contribute towards challenging continuities of inequality with regard to gender and sexuality as they interrogate the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups on their campus. Such reflections on their experiences of spaces at particular times on campus arguably become a value engendering the potential for change. The authors present key

narratives emerging out of the study and reflect on the possibilities of such participatory research and the use of personal narratives, both visual and linguistic, in shaping both the development of a sense of agency as producer of knowledge and social change.

Oforiwaa Gifty Gyamera draws on a narrative research project with students in three public universities in Ghana to discuss their motivations, expectations and experiences in the universities. In exploring how students perceive and deal with the challenges that confront them, the author highlights students' critical need to be "somebody" in the future as well as foregrounding various privileges associated with attaining a university degree. The authors' specific focus portrays the pervasiveness of neoliberal influences in the universities and on students. Key to these motivations, which also underline students' expectations, is their instrumental perception of knowledge. Students' expectations of the role and function of the university in providing them with knowledge and skills to equip them for the job market is also problematized and critically interrogated.

Nirmala Gopal and Caitlin van Niekerk article discusses accommodation challenges experienced by students at institutions of higher learning. Arguing that student academic engagement is fundamentally tied to issues of well-being and security as provided by accommodation practices, the author utilises risk environment theory and enablement theory to discuss the possibilities and issues of accommodation to student well-being.

Daniela Gachago, Vivienne Bozalek and Dick Ng'ambi explore narratives of a cohort of pre-service student educators as part of interventions to engage students in difficult conversations to create more socially just classrooms. The constructed stories of difference, belonging and identity in a digital storytelling workshop highlight how students' stories also show the importance of destabilising dominant understandings of subjectivity, by allowing the emergence of fragmented narratives in difficult conversations. The authors demonstrate that as an intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality and class surfaced, connections between students were established that the dominant racial lens had previously blocked.

Willy Chinyamurindi's article explores how international students develop a sense of belonging as part of their enrolment at a rural university in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The author demonstrates that the formation of an in and out group mentality amongst international students may be functional to coping as an outsider. Furthermore, this cohort of students' narration of "suffering a sense of elsewhere" highlights the importance for re-imagining internationalisation in higher education institutions and that affect the work of lecturers, university administrators and also policy makers in thinking through issues of belonging for this unique cohort of students.

What does a project on narratives of belonging/citizenship among students in higher education imply?

There are a number of implications. Notions of homogeneity and singular meanings of identity are challenged. Homogeneity of identities are replaced by multiplicities of identities and subjectivities. This implies that policy in higher education transformation may have to adopt more nuanced meanings of groups homogenously defined as marginalised such as Black, women, disabled.

We may secondly, sometimes assume, and correctly so, that students refuse to assimilate into dominant cultures in universities. This may not always mean that students are oppositional but that they are finding different ways of carving out and legitimising alternate subjectivities not readily available to them in normative contexts such as higher education. It is important that we embrace complex identities instead of singular unitary notions of belonging and identification. There is no contradiction in multiplicities of attachments. For example, it is possible for students to be both proud *and* critical of their universities. If this reality is widely recognised, we create platforms for supporting identities that are flexible, and able to move between the local and global. The flexibility inherent in this movement is a significant attribute for all (young) people. It is thirdly evident that young people use citizenship status for economic and legal purposes and at times display varying emotional attachment. Students currently choose to study at higher education institutions based on what it can offer them. In other words, students reconfigure citizenship in terms of protection, rights and membership to facilitate social and economic mobility.

Redefining and understanding the nature of student subjectivity, assumes a re-engagement with re-imagining higher education cultures that create possibilities for the right to belong.

Overall, the contributions in this special issue provide critical thought for re-imagining belonging, citizenship and resistance within the spaces of the academy. In the midst of the tensions in the different accounts, the possibilities for re-configuring social relationships and relations of power exist. The narratives highlight myriad sites for such resistance but also draw attention to the often troubling meanings that different social bodies within institutional space attract and within which they construct their social lived realities. These contributions do not present neat solutions but offer a useful starting ground to begin to re-imagine, envision and disrupt spaces and sites of belonging.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, S. 2012. *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. London: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. 2004. *The cultural politics of emotion*. New York: Routledge.

Andrews, M., C. Squire and M. Tamboukou. 2013. *Doing narrative research*. London: Sage.

Bell, L. A. 2010. *Storytelling for social justice: Connecting narrative and the arts in anti-racist teaching*. New York: Routledge.

Bozalek, V. and R. Carolissen.2012. The potential of critical feminist citizenship frameworks for citizenship and social justice in higher education. *Perspectives in Education* 30(4): 9–18.

Bradbury, J. 2012. Narrative possibilities of the past for the future: Nostalgia and hope. *Journal of Peace Psychology* 18(3): 341–350.

Carolissen, R. 2012. "Belonging: As a theoretical framework for the study of psychology and globalisation. *Journal of Social Issues* 68: 630–642.

Constandius, E. and E. Bitzer 2015. *Engaging higher education curricula: A critical citizenship education perspective*. Stellenbosch: SUN Press.

Department of Education. 1997. *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the transformation of higher education*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Department of Education. 2001. *National plan for higher education.* Pretoria: Department of Education.

Department of Education. 2008. *Report of the Ministerial Committee on transformation and social cohesion and the elimination of discrimination in public higher education institutions*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of Higher Education and Training. 2010. *Stakeholder Summit on higher education transformation.* Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

DET *see* Department of Education.

DHET *see* Department of Higher Education and Training.

Di Masso, A. 2015. Micropolitics of public space: On the contested limits of citizenship as a locational practice. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 3(2): 63–83.

Freeman, M. 2010. *Hindsight: The promise and peril of looking backward.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harris, A. and J. Roose 2013. DIY citizenship among young Muslims: Experiences of the ordinary. *Journal of Youth Studies* 17(6): 794–813.

hooks, b. 2009. *Belonging: A culture of place*. New York: Routledge.

Keet, A. and R. Carolissen. 2010. Rethinking citizenship and social justice in higher education (editorial). *Perspectives in Education* 29(3): 147–149.

Kiguwa, P. 2014. Telling stories of race: A study of racialised subjectivity in the post-apartheid academy. PhD dissertation. University of the Witwatersrand.

Leibowitz, B., L. Swartz, V. Bozalek, R. Carolissen, L. Nicholls and P. Rohleder. 2012. *Community, self and identity: Educating South African university students for citizenship*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Lister, R. 1997. *Citizenship: Feminist perspectives*. London: MacMillan.

Lister, R. 2010. *Understanding theories and concepts in social policy.* Bristol: The Policy Press

Medalie, D. 2010. The uses of nostalgia. *English Studies in Africa* 52(2): 35–44.

Ratto, M. and M. Boler. 2014. *DIY citizenship: Critical making and social media.* Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Stevens, G., N. Duncan and D. Hook. 2013 *Race, memory and the apartheid archive: Towards a psychosocial practice.* Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Stevenson, C., J. Dixon, N. Hopkins and R. Luyt. 2015. The social psychology of citizenship, participation and social exclusion: Introduction to the special thematic section. *Journal of Political and Social Psychology* 3(2): online edition.

Tabensky, P. and S. Matthews. 2015. *Being at home: Race, institutional culture and transformation at South African higher education institutions*. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press.

Puwar, N. 2004. *Space invaders: Race, gender and bodies out of place*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

Vice, S. 2015. Feeling at home: Institutional culture and the idea of a university In *Being at home: Race, institutional culture and transformation at South African higher education institutions*, ed. P. Tabensky and S. Matthews, 45–71. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press.

Weir, A. 2008. Home and identity: In memory of Iris Marion Young. *Hypatia* 23(3): 4–21.

Young, I. M. 1997. House and home: Feminist variations on a theme. In *Intersecting voices: Dilemmas of gender, political philosophy and policy,* 134–164. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Yuval-Davis, N. 2011. *The politics of belonging*. London: SAGE.

Waghid, Y. 2007. Educating for democratic citizenship and cosmopolitanism. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 21(5): 584–595.

Waghid, Y. 2010. *Education, democracy and citizenship revisited: Pedagogical encounters.* Stellenbosch: SUN Media.