

Narratives of the transnational student: a complicated story of cultural identity, cultural exchange and homecoming

Nolwazi N Ncube
University of Cape Town

Abstract

This research study gives a glimpse into the ways in which transnational study complicates students' cultural identity, sense of belonging and homecoming; interweaving their experiences into a new transnational identity and a plural sense of belonging. The study examines a sub-group of elite, highly mobile people referred to as "transnational students" – who in a working definition are students who have travelled to; lived, studied and even sometimes worked in at least two countries during the course of their degree programmes. It draws on their autobiographical narratives in order to demonstrate the way in which they exist in a suspended state of 'temporary permanence' and with time, develop a 'contaminated' sense of cultural identity - one perceivably diluted by their 'foreign exchanges'. The study reveals the mercurial fluidity with which abstract and concrete constructions of 'home' are made by transnational students. It also portrays the ways in which these students navigate their multiple identities as a result of their cultural exchanges abroad. Finally, it tells a story of (dis)connects and (dis)connections to bring out the challenges faced by these students abroad and at home.

Keywords/phrases: **Keywords/phrases:** 'contaminated' cultural identity, cultural exchange, home(coming), multiple selves, multiple identities, third culture kid, transnational student, migration, temporary permanence