



Reimagining Space and Safety in the South African Writing Centre:

Keynote address from the 2022 CWCA/ACCR conference

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Volume 1, Number 1, 2023, pp. 1-22

Keywords: South Africa, ubuntu, CWCA/ACCR, linguistic injustice, writing centres, global village

South Africa: A Contested Space

South Africa (SA) has almost always been an exploited and contested space. Having been first colonised by the Dutch and then the British, the site of numerous territorial and tribal wars, home to Indian indentured labourers and the land of milk and honey (Bandeira, Higson-Smith, & Polatin, 2010, p. 92) to refugee and asylum seekers from across the African continent, her history to date can only be described as turbulent. As a country, she and her people have been scarred deeply by the ravages of a system and its policies marked by racial discrimination and segregation, culminating in the ultimate act of oppression through its system of Apartheid, which spanned the years from 1948 to the early 1990s (Repeal of Population Registration Act, 1991, June 17). So, while the country is now twenty-seven years or so into democracy, and still called the Rainbow Nation, there has, unfortunately been very little to celebrate. The ravages of Apartheid (1948 to 1994) still reverberate through every aspect of life, for especially the marginalised and especially within the educational sphere. The trauma of the Apartheid era brought with it unprecedented turbulence, and as the events of the past few years demonstrate, continued into even the rays of the rainbow nation.

There are, in the context of South Africa, five major historical events that have changed the face of the country—events that will help in a better understanding of space and safety in the SA context and its implications on the writing centre. The Group Areas Act of 1950 was one of the worst examples of spatial and social injustice aimed at extreme segregation, allowing government to establish particular neighbourhoods as ‘group areas,’ where only people of a particular race were

able to reside (South African Institute for Race Relations, 1952, p. 32). This saw the displacement and forced removal of people of colour from their homes, which was often accompanied by violence.

The Soweto Uprising of 1976 erupted as a result of the Bantu Education Act of 1953, instituted with the specific aim of providing an inferior quality education to black students, as well as promoting the use of Afrikaans as a language of teaching and learning (Moore, 2015). The uprising of 1976 was more than a protest against the privileging of Afrikaans, considered the language of the oppressor. It was the uprising of young people who were refusing to be marginalised, to be silenced, to be invisible, the uprising of young students who refused to bend to oppression and who made their voices heard because they understood that language is about identity, belonging, and ownership.

The *Fees Must Fall* Protests of 2015 and the *Afrikaans Must Fall* protests of 2016 were turning points for the new SA—the colours of the Rainbow Nation washed away by the tears of students. Reminiscent once again of the Soweto Uprising, these protests saw SA's public universities brought to its knees as students retaliated against hikes in student fees, student debt, lack of sufficient funding in higher education, and the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction (with English) at previously advantaged institutions.

Accompanying these protests, the country, seen as a land of opportunity across the African continent, was wracked by xenophobic violence. As poverty lines and unemployment increased and exacerbated by the lack of resources and competition for opportunities, SA nationals lashed out violently, killing, and displacing foreigners, straining SA's relations with her neighbours, and tarnishing her reputation on the international front.

COVID-19 brought with it additional challenges as our institutions migrated online making more apparent than ever the severity of SA's human condition. Students' home or living environments were not always conducive to learning, and this, coupled with (data) access and connectivity issues and student hunger, presented a dire picture for SA and the world at large. In my most recent research, which aimed to determine whether there is evidence of considerations of social justice (issues) during asynchronous consulting, consultant responses point to the contrary, with consultants making reference to its 'lack of humanness,' with the student being presented as a 'cold text' and 'not a holistic individual.'

So, what were the lessons students learned from these events? That the place called home is not theirs and is not safe. That they can be home but not belong? That their language is not valued? That their hunger is real? That poverty turns us against our own? That the right to education does not guarantee success or acceptance? That they can be present but invisible? That they can have a voice but be silenced? This is the backdrop necessary to understand the higher education climate in South Africa, one fraught with the unfair distribution of economic resources, misrecognition of language (Fraser, 1998; 2008), culture and identity, racial segregation, political and spatial injustice, rendering our students spaceless, voiceless, and powerless, even in a democracy that markets itself as having one of the most progressive constitutions the world over.

Space, social justice, and ubuntu

The implication, therefore, is that issues related to social injustices manifest in spatial injustices, too, a concept developed by Edward W. Soja (See Soja 2009, 2010). Soja defines *spatial justice* as the “fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and opportunities” (2010, n.p.). Accordingly, for Marcuse (2009, p. 4), spatial justice is derivative of broader social injustices that address the causes of spatial injustice. Spatial injustices always involve addressing the causes of social injustice that cannot be isolated from the historical, social and political economic context in which they exist. Thus, and in line with Marcuse’s contention, discussions pertaining to marginalisation, status subordination, inequality, domination, and oppression, cannot be separated from issues of space and spatial injustice. In fact, according to and in agreement with Soja (2008, p. 1), thinking spatially about justice not only enriches our theoretical understanding, spatial justice can also uncover significant new insights that extend our practical knowledge into more effective actions to achieve greater justice and democracy.

Unfortunately, the world over, there has been no such spatial justice, no fair and equitable distribution of space (Soja, 2009, p. 3). This is one of the main contributing factors in marginalising and oppressing Black people in South Africa. Space and safety, like language, are thus highly contentious issues in South Africa and each ‘social turn’ in SA’s history is marked by upheaval related to space, safety, access, or language, each inter-twined with the politics of race, racial conflict, and the inequitable distribution of resources.

In earlier research on social justice in the writing centre (Rambiritch, 2018), my appeal was to extend an understanding of the concept and principles of social justice, to move beyond Rawls (1971) notion of distributive justice by embracing Young’s notion of justice as enablement where institutional conditions in a society enable or constrain people to learn and use skills, to play and communicate with others, participate in running institutions, share in determining their own lives, and express their feelings, experiences, and perspectives (Young, 1990, p. 37, as quoted in Lötter, 1999, p. 95). In acceding to this request to extend the lens used to understand more clearly social justice, this paper embraces Fraser’s (2005) *multidimensional model for social justice* as well as the African philosophy of *ubuntu* (Ngubane & Makua, 2021). In so doing, two things will become clear: 1) the principles inherent in Fraser’s multidimensional framework cohere with the principles of *ubuntu*, an African philosophical perspective on social justice; 2) embracing philosophy’s from the Global South allow us to juxtapose indigenous and western knowledge systems—without privileging one while marginalising the other, thus putting an end to epistemic injustices that devalue indigenous knowledge systems such as *Ubuntu* (Ngubane & Makua, 2021).

Fraser’s (2005) reframed offering is relevant because it acknowledges the impact of globalisation and its expanding world have on issues of social justice. Fraser’s (2005) view of social justice is, first and foremost, interpreted as parity of participation, where justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life. Over-coming injustice means dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others as full partners in social interaction (Fraser, 2005, p. 5). Materialising democracy becomes possible under their multidimensional frame that encompasses distribution, recognition, and representation. This frame subsumes both Rawls (1971) distributive

justice and Young's justice as enablement without neglecting the political justice of representation understood as a matter of social belonging (Young, 1990, p. 37, as quoted in Lötter, 1999, p. 95), of being heard, and accorded a voice. In this way, the constitution of political space where all social actors are equitably represented (Keddie, 2012, p. 10) is a possibility. Such representation, however, is the ideal not the norm—realistically, there is a continuum (Israel, & Frenkel, 2017, p. 661) of social justice.

I am because we are.

Ubuntu, like the concept of social justice, is somewhat elusive (Rambiritch, 2018). The difficulty in grasping its full meaning in English is exacerbated by the fact that there is no equivalent meaning, as its true meaning is lost in translation (Le Grange, 2011; Letseka, 2014; Ngubane & Makua, 2021). *Ubuntu* is a Nguni Bantu term meaning “humanity,” sometimes translated as “I am because we are” (also, “I am because you are”) or “Humanity towards others” (in Zulu, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*) (Ramose, 2002; Le Grange, 2022; *The Guardian*, 2006; Tutu, 2004; Ngubane & Makua, 2021). It is a philosophy grounded in the principle of humanness and community: a multidimensional concept that represents the core value of African ontology's such as respect for human beings, for human dignity and human life, collective sharedness, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, inter-dependence, and communalism (Hailey, 2008, p. 5).

Theoretical ubuntu explains the moral condition of humanness and personhood through the promotion of moral values such as respect, duty, compassion, and care (Tshivhase, 2018, p. 199). As a social philosophy, it promotes cooperation among members of a community through negotiations, inclusiveness, transparency, and tolerance (Mkabela & Nyaumwe, 2007, p. 154). Criticism levelled at the concept suggests that the embracing of the spirit of ubuntu requires relinquishing freedom and autonomy. Proponents, however, argue that ubuntu cannot be related to communalism and the common good exclusively—an essentialist view—as if individual autonomy has no place in the cultivation of humanity (Waghid, 2020, p. 301). While ubuntu constitutes some aspect of togetherness, it is wrong to assume that it dismisses notions of individual autonomy (Waghid, 2020, p. 301). If the latter were the case, sharing would not have been considered an important aspect of ubuntu, as humans have to exhibit a willingness to do so—that is, they have to exercise their individual autonomy (Waghid, 2020, p. 301): I have, and I will share.

Concepts of ubuntu are also used to retain semblances of a guiding African moral value, often in direct contrast to its original meaning. Through this use, it is exploited for the enrichment of the political, connected as blind emotional endorsement of corrupt behaviour (Naudé, n.d.). It is used in this paper with respect for, and acknowledgement of, its roots in African culture. Ubuntu offers a form of decoloniality that undermines racism, exclusion, humiliation, and other forms of human injustice (Waghid, 2020, p. 307), and because, in addition to allowing us to foreground the value and importance of indigenous knowledge systems, ubuntu may be viewed as a transformative African philosophy and pedagogical frame to support African universities and higher education.

Ubuntu pedagogy

The principles of social justice in Fraser (2008) are key components of ubuntu, specifically social belonging, representation, the urgency for participation as peers in social life, and enfranchisement in principles of equality and equity and as full partners in social inter-action. Relatedly, ubuntu pedagogy draws from the ubuntu philosophical values of compassion, care, cooperation, respect, and dignity to provide a learning environment that, as a lens, brings together students from diverse cultural backgrounds to value cultures, opinions, ideas, and learn to cooperate and to co-exist (Ukpokodu, 2016). Taken together the guiding principles of ubuntu pedagogy include:

- Recognition of self and others.
- Building positive relationships.
- Working co-operatively.
- Nurturing minds.
- Working from a position of love and care.
- Utilising students' linguistic resources to promote meaningful learning or *ubuntu* translanguaging (Ngubane & Makua, 2021).

Ideally, these are guiding principles writing centre practitioners want to embrace in their writing centres, principles to frame the support offered and the training provided to consultants. The reality, however, is that writing centres are built on the scars of a history marked by social injustice, maldistribution, misrecognition, and misrepresentation (Fraser, 1998; 2005). Thus, the marginalisation of the writing centre was inevitable. Established as quick-fixes to the burgeoning intake of so called 'non-traditional' students entering higher education in post-democracy South Africa, universities were hard-pressed to support the range of students, as a result of a disparate education system. Academic development units and centres mushroomed; generic and faculty/discipline academic literacy courses were offered (Unit for Academic Literacy, 2007); and writing centres established. These operate on the fringes of their home institutions, largely marginalised, understaffed, and under-funded. In light of this periphery, it is crucial that writing centre practitioners work to create space that does not further marginalise students.

Called to action by Arao and Clemens (2013, p. 138), the time is ripe to work at transforming writing centres from a safe space to a brave—and braver space—and a first step in this regard is to foreground discussions and actions related to language, language injustice, and identity, and to, at least within the confines of the writing centre, fully embrace the principles of social justice and ubuntu by considering and resisting not only the extent to which writing centre policies and practices are influenced by deficit discourse but also how we may be complicit in the reproduction of deficit discourses (Cirillo-McCarthy, Del Russo, & Leahy, 2016). In previous research (Rambiritch, 2018), I attempted to justify the approach that should be resisted today. In attempting to justify and demonstrate evidence of an awareness and application of principles of social justice in our pre-dominantly monolingual writing centre, I asked how does this monolingual bias truly reflect social justice?

“English is the language of oppression,” I wrote. hooks (1994, p. 168) states that it is the language of conquest and domination, “the mask which hides the loss of so many tongues, all those sounds of diverse native communities we will never hear.” In South Africa, too, language has always been and continues to be a contentious issue. How do writing centres justify social justice while expecting students to read, write, and speak the very language that is most often the barrier to their academic success? I would like to think I can find an answer once again in hooks’ words:

Learning English, learning to speak the alien tongue, was one way enslaved Africans began to reclaim their personal power within a context of domination. Possessing a shared language, black folks could find a way to make community. (1994, p. 170)

Using English as the medium of communication in the writing centre allows for the possibility of empowering students to communicate in a language that may have, until now, silenced them. I refer students to Hoon and White (n.d.), as I do to many other ESL students who do not participate in classroom discussions because they do not see themselves as being adequately equipped with the necessary metalanguage. The academic institution can be a closed community, entry into which is often proficiency in English. Empowering students in English secures entry into this community. It also means that academic success, widening participation, and true access become possible. hooks’ (1994, p. 167) quoting of Adrienne Rich’s poem, *The Burning of Paper Instead of Children*, is relevant here: “This is the oppressor’s language yet I need it to talk to you.” The reality is that institutional requirements dictate that a student will be assessed on their ability to write—this too, in English. Encouraging dialogue in English could possibly instil in students a level of comfort with the language that they may not arrive here possessing. As comfort levels grow, so will confidence to use and write in the language. This may be one way of using the hegemonic language to give voice to our students—to ensure that they are neither dehumanizing nor silenced (Rambiritch, 2018).

My story as a reflection of linguistic injustice

This debate is closer to home than I would have imagined growing up. As a descendant of the indentured labourers brought to the African continent, specifically South Africa, 162 years ago, my foreparents laboured on sugar plantations as indentured immigrants under harsh and often dehumanising working conditions. Polak, in attesting to this, writes in 1909, “The Indian labourer is often regarded by his employer as of less account than a good beast, for the latter costs money to replace whereas the former is a cheap commodity.” In an attempt to build a life and a community outside of India, South African indentured labour-ers, on completing their agreement of bonded labour, chose not to return home and to stay behind with the hope of better opportunities. But, as with immigrants the world over, such dreams of prosperity often require equally large amounts of sacrifice and compromise, and the first thing that my ancestors were forced to sacrificed in their quest to survive, and then prosper, was their language. They built their own schools and community centres, employed their own teachers, and persevered by encouraging their children to master the English language—having been colonised by the British at home in India and here in South Africa, my ancestors realised the currency of English proficiency. And, because there was not time

or money enough for both, our vernacular language was the first to go. By 1969, less than ten percent of the Indian school population were receiving any kind of instruction in their home languages (Rambiritch, 1960).

Impacted, too, by language decisions at the time, such as a decision in 1927 to not offer vernacular languages in the education system for Indians, by the late 1950s, Indian children entered primary school with only a passive knowledge of their mother tongue (Mesthrie, 2007). Mesthrie (2007) states that this silent linguistic revolution was perhaps part of a larger, quiet social revolution; that Indian South African English became the covert badge of identity representing the new solidarity (p. 18). It signified that Indians were part of South Africa and not a transient, Asian population, who identified chiefly with India. Resultantly, there is virtually no South African Indian child attending primary school today with any knowledge of their mother tongue.

Beginning as indentured servants, South African Indians today contribute to every aspect of life here—politics, education, government, and healthcare. We are also, unfortunately, a community of people who cannot speak our mother tongue. As a naïve young academic many years ago, I celebrated the resourcefulness of my ancestors for my first language proficiency opened doors and elevated my status. Years later, on my first of many trips to my motherland, I was alien, alone, and voiceless, as I realised that I did not belong, neither here nor there; that the language that we had to sacrifice rendered me an interloper in the place I should have called home; and that the Westernised, English-monolingual, Indian South African does not easily fit into multilingual India (Mesthrie, 2007). As I age, and watch my son grow, the sad reality is that my mother tongue is everyday dying a slow and painful death, and I am powerless to intervene. I share my story, because, and here I quote Cirillo-McCarthy and Del Russo (2016) slightly out of context: such stories allow us to interrogate, disrupt, and complicate narratives, searching for untold stories or misrepresented voices buried in [our] writing centres—and because writing centre practitioners must uncover and examine the principles that have informed our stories and be able to articulate these principles if [we] want to change that story. I share this story, too, because the marginalization of language, and the hegemony of dominant form of language, this mono-lingual bias, does much harm, fracturing the identities and legacies of generations to come. I hope, too, to use this narrative to uncover the disruptive pedagogies inherent in the work I have engaged in in our writing centre.

Brave space

The question that remains, then, is how do we transform the space of the writing centre from one that was previously seen as a marginalised space, promoting a monolingual bias, and representing the ideology of our home institutions, to a brave and transformative space? Before furthering this part of the discussion, it is imperative to briefly trace the evolution of the writing centre, and its various attributing metaphors. The paper will then conclude with the offer to reimagine the present-day writing centre space.

The evolution of the writing centre space.

Writing centre practitioners have long theorised and metaphored the space of the writing centre. We see its evolution from labs and clinics to consulting rooms and fix-it shops, garrets, storehouses, and parlours, to contact zones, Parisian cafés, homes, and liminal and transformative spaces. I would like to move my discussion here beyond the writing centre as clinic (with its connotations of the student as ill, diseased, and in need of magic potions) and lab (with its connotations of the student as a scientific experiment), to more recent metaphors.

I will start with the most common, and the most problematic, at least for South African writing centres—the idea of the writing centre as home, as safe and as comfort-able. An image problematised by McKinney (2005), McNamee and Miley (2017) and perhaps most vehemently by Camarillo (2019) and García (2017). As writing centre practitioners, we understand the proliferation of such metaphors, which probably hark back to Brufee (1984, p. 637) or earlier, when he stated that what students needed was help that was not an extension of, but an alternative to, traditional classroom teaching. That alternative space became the writing centre, and in the quest to make it an alternative, it stood to represent the antithesis of the classroom, a space that was not homy, inviting, safe, friendly, familiar, or comfortable. But, from whose reading of this space is it homy? And why would we assume that any student walking into this space wants to be home? What does home represent to our students? McKinney (2005) notes that homes are culturally marked. If a writing centre is a home, whose home is it? Mine or yours? For whom is it comfortable? (2005, p. 25). García (2017) reminds us that the writing centre has been historically, culturally, and rhetorically marked by whiteness and white culture. For him, the writing centre is neither his safe space nor his home (2017, p. 48). Like García's, our campuses have become increasingly diverse both in terms of class, race, and ethnicity, thus relying on these “cultural markers may no longer be sufficient ways in which to welcome students” (Camarillo, 2019).

A large portion of students in SA HEI's have come from impoverished backgrounds, studied at under-privileged and under-resourced schools, and travelled far and wide with little but the clothes on their back to arrive at universities, seeking admission and accom-odation. The years they spend at university see them largely dependent on government funding. Student hunger is rife. Research conducted at one public university in 2019 showed that 48% of students had no food due to a lack of resources, 39.6% went to bed hungry, and 28% of them stayed hungry the entire day and night due to a lack of food” (Daily Maverick, 2021). Add to this the trauma of Apartheid, the high rate of crime, unfair language policies, child-headed households, the rising cost of living including the high rate of unem-ployment, and lack of digital access and connectivity, paints a bleak future. A warm and cosy space, carpeted floors, a coffee machine, and comfy couches are not the reality of the majority of our students—they would not find a recognizable home in the writing centre, not least because most people “cannot really feel comfortable or at home writing unless they are taught to write in their home voice, that is, in whatever language comes naturally to hand and mouth” (Elbow, 1999, p. 362). Thus, the idea of the writing-centre-as-home must be rejected because the two goals of the writing centre, to first welcome and then correct are, according to Camarillo (2019), incompatible and problematic to the “grand narrative of the cozy place” (p. 1). In dismantling the notion of the writing

centre as home, Camarillo (2019) proposes the imaginary burning down of the house, rebuilding it as a space that is “decolonised and more equitable” (p. 11).

Researchers have also rejected any feminisation (Miley, 2016) of the writing centre space with its domesticated narrative (McKinney, 2005) claiming that they only serve to devalue writing centres further. As an alternative O’Reilly (2007) offers the discourse of feminist mothering which acts as a negation of motherhood as institution, allowing women to be both feminists and mothers. In moving away from gendered metaphors of the writing centre space, and as writing centres attempted to transform themselves in line with the diversity of their student body, new metaphors took shape. Sunstein (1998) offers us the romantic image of the Parisian café, a temporary reflecting place, a movable spot (1998, p. 10), a liminal space, an in-between space, one marked by clashes, moments of communion, spontaneity, and insight” (Lavie, Narayan, & Rosaldo, p. 3 in Sunstein, 1998, p. 14), neither here nor there. For Sunstein (1998) it is this liminality that defines us, that provides the “greatest moments of teachability” (Myerhoff & Metzger, p. 106 in Sunstein, 1998, p. 23).

Later still, writing centre practitioners (Clarence, 2019) drew on Pratt’s (1999) notion of learning or working in “contact zones,” a “social” space in which “cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 584). This *contact zone*, according to Pratt (1999), was a space that saw students experience rage and pain, but also wonder and revelation. No one was excluded and no one was safe. It became a safe house, a place for healing and mutual recognition, a place in which to construct shared understandings, knowledges, and claims on the world. Watkins (n.d.) explains this contradiction stating that the contact zone can be a dangerous place, where people are easily misunderstood and hurt, but it can also be a place of mutual understanding, new wisdom, and the wonder that comes when people learn from each other (p. 5). Pratt’s (1999) contact zone is, according to Watkins (n.d.), thus ‘unpredictable’ (p. 5). The writing-centre-as-contact-zone saw the rapid transformation of the writing centre to welcoming diversity, as universities saw mass enrolments and grappled with changes such rapid transformation brings. The writing-centre-as-contact-zone saw the writing centre move closer to achieving its true vision and mission, prioritising the student over the institution.

Reimagined spaces

In the 31 years since Pratt (1999) wrote about the contact zone, and in the years following its application to the writing centre context, institutions of higher learning are still trans-forming in various and significant ways within a world equally in flux. Boundaries, both national and international, are crumbling and technology is cementing its presence in our lives, and more specifically in our teaching and learning, as has been demonstrated through the pandemic. Language barriers, too, are proving to be equally fluid, with the students today speaking a variety of languages, including Englishes, having crossed local and global borders to live, play, and learn collectively. This, together with the further massification of higher education, once the privilege of the elite (Philip, Reisberg, & de Wit, 2019), is now more accessible to an un-underprivileged and previously disadvantaged students, than in the past, further diversifying our student cohort. In the face of such transformation and evolution, the world still grapples with poverty and social inequality, xenophobia, food [in]security, a refugee crisis, religious

conflicts, and corruption on all levels. Such mobility, migration, massification, and social injustices impact directly on our work as writing centre practitioners and serve to further shape and mold present day writing centres.

Thus, today we can think of the writing centre as a *global village*, a term popularised by Canadian philosopher, Marshall McLuhan (1964), and adapted here to suit our context. McLuhan used the term to describe the phenomenon of the entire world becoming more interconnected as the result of the propagation of global media technologies. We use it here in closer alignment with Sue-Im Lee's description of the global village as "the dominant term for expressing a global coexistence altered by transnational commerce, migration, and culture" (as cited in Poll, 2012). The global village today represents the writing centre as mirror of the world. It is not, however, an analogy without conflict. Johnson (2007) states that the idea of the world's cultures drawn together in a global village raises questions about equal representation, reciprocal sharing, enriched diversity, and mutual understanding" (p. 192). Now while these are legitimate concerns, reflecting past history and related injustices, a global village operating within the African philosophy of ubuntu, will actively apply the principles of humanness and community to ensure an enhanced connectedness (Dixon, 2008, p. 4), cooperation, and respect, for collective unity but also for individuality.

The writing centre as global village, espousing an ubuntu philosophy and pedagogy, welcomes into its space a widely diverse and international student body, a colourful tapestry of tongues, histories, and nationalities. In this space, difference is seen, acknowledged, and celebrated. Writing centre consultations do not focus on 'writing only.' Students are encouraged to exploit their multilingual repertoire in multilingual writing centres like those envisioned by Lape (2020) and not simply monolingual writing centres serving multi-lingual students. In these instances, because of budgetary constraints or other administrative excuses, or personal choice, when we are forced to consult in a student's second, third or fourth language, we are already equipped with strategies from Raftery (2015) and Lape (2020) to fully support our students. In the writing-centre-as-global-village, students are not blindly indoctrinated into silent acceptance of dominant forms of knowledge. As consultants guide and support students in their writing journey, discussions detour, or in South African speak, take a '*sho't left*'—a slang taken from South African taxi lingo meaning, to take a short detour or just around the corner, into discussions pertaining to how and why academic discourses situate marginalised students within certain power relationships and require of them particular subject positions (Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999, p. 44).

In the writing-centre-as-global-village, consultants encourage students to reflect critically on the language choices they make and pave the way for discussions that acknowledge alternate and multiple forms of knowledge and knowledge production. It is a learning environment that supports participants in the challenging work of authentic engagement with issues of identity, oppression, power and privilege" (Arao & Clemens, 2013, p.138); where tutors are to "better identify and challenge the everyday, often subtle, language of oppression in their own discourse and in that of other tutors and writers in the writing center" (Suhr-Sytsma & Brown, 2011, p. 13); where we open up and engage in dialogue about whether spaces were being opened up to minoritized groups on the campus (Sharp & Rosenburg, 2018); where we acknowledge that gossip,

sexual tension, tearful arguments, seduction, anxiety attacks, and sexual harassment also make up the everyday practices of a centre that we not hide or tidy up these narratives but instead tell them, listen to them, and embrace them as a distinct part of our centre (Dixon, 2017); that we, like Herman (2017), focus on the LGBTQ+ students, an often “invisible minority” who may have specific concerns that must also be addressed to ensure a “productive and safe environment in which to work and learn; that we train “Woke” tutors, who according to Gross (2018), are “critically con-scious of social justice issues as they arise in the writing centre, tutors who have the kind of awareness of systemic oppression that impacts their way of being in the world” (pp. 11–12).

The writing-centre-as-global-village allows us to reimagine and reinvent the space and narrative of the writing centre into one that is not just a safe space, but one that is vibrant and brave. It may allow us the possibility of achieving the dream of Joan Mullin, who (in personal communication to Sustain) (1998, p. 8) wished for once and for all to erase the image of marginality that lurks in writing centers’ past, which still exists in some of our present centres. This because the idea of globalisation and internationalisation fore-grounds the melting away of borders, of walls, of separation. The writing-centre-as-global-village becomes part of the institution as a global university, one of the many villages within the international university. It may move us from margin to centre, as our name suggests. Our links with and across the institutions empowers us. The work we do, the issues we raise and the conversations we have with our colleagues, supporters, and adversaries, can reposition us. Moving from margin to centre, this new space we carve out for ourselves may allow us to progress even further in our mission to empower student writers, for it may allow us the opportunity to, through collaboration and dialogue shift the thinking of our colleagues, and maybe then our writing centre consultations with student writers may not always begin with the request for help with grammar.

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