PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SOCIAL AND ETHICS COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL WORKSHOP

THEME: *DIVERSITY IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR*

ETHICS AND DECOLONISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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- Chairperson of SECoC, Ms Therina Wentzel-DuToit

- Chairpersons of various committees of Council and other members of Council

- Members of the SECoC

- Members of our stakeholder groupings

To date the concept of ethics in higher education has been largely confined to research and more latterly, to institutional governance. Until recently, there has been relatively little impetus or emphasis on the *holistic* inculcation of ethics across the university (including in curricula) or on its inclusion in the mission of the university to produce a responsible and critical citizenry.

Similarly, the need for quality cultural and contextual relevance in our university has only recently gained momentum, and as the decolonial project gets fully underway, appropriate epistemic justification must be available to underpin and justify the significant transformation in our universities to that end.

Justification and the context for both may be found in an understanding of responsible *global* citizenship.

The concept of a responsible and critical citizenry is acknowledged globally as a fundamental responsibility of the university. But this kind of citizenship is not an automatic by-product of university education: it involves a process of 'socialisation' that assumes that graduates will have acquired in the course of their studies, the ability to think critically and analytically, that they will have a thorough understanding of their societies both nationally and internationally, as well as a

mature understanding and demonstration of critical, ethical and responsible citizenship, and that what they learn, will be relevant and find resonance with their cultures and contexts.

The *World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action* (1998) confirms that students should '(b) be able to speak out on ethical, cultural and social problems completely independently and in full awareness of their responsibilities, exercising a kind of intellectual authority that society needs to help it to reflect, understand and act' and that '(f) they must play a role in helping identify and address issues that affect the wellbeing of communities, nations and global society.'

So, higher education institutions need to ensure that they are producing graduates who are competent in their disciplines and fields of study, *as well as* well-rounded global citizens, cognizant of the changing international employment environment and employer expectations, while meeting the demands of the professional labour market.

These demands are not new. The idea of citizenship is often linked to the idea of transferable skills, aimed at equipping graduates to adapt to a dynamic work environment. However, the notion of *citizenship,* as such, has not enjoyed particular emphasis in higher education thus

far, as it is often seen as yet another responsibility in a growing list of demands placed on universities, especially in emerging economies. The emphasis on this particular concept, and the responsibility of higher education to inculcate citizenship, is however growing and is increasingly assuming prominence in the *corporate or corporatized* university.

Globally, universities are in fact charged to contribute to the production of responsible and **critical** citizens by virtue of education being 'a foundation for human fulfilment, peace, sustainable development, economic growth, decent work, gender equality and responsible *global* [my emphasis] citizenship', as well as 'a key contributor to the reduction of inequalities and poverty' by creating the conditions and generating the opportunities for better, sustainable societies (UNESCO Position Paper ED 2015.). In addition, the Sustainable Development Goals (2016: 4) assert the intention to "Ensure *inclusive* and *equitable quality* education and provide lifelong opportunities for *all*", and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1984) states: "*Everyone* has the right to education …. Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms."

One therefore notes that by marrying responsible *critical* citizenship and responsible *global* citizenship, quality, equality and inclusiveness are closely linked to education for discerning citizenship. But how such citizenship is to be inculcated in students, is unclear. Should it be via curricular content or pedagogical (andragogical) process, or both?

In 1997, South Africa's Department of Education (DoE 1997: 1.4) acknowledged the inadequacy of higher education in carrying out this particular mandate, when it asserted:

> Higher education has an unmatched obligation, which has not been adequately fulfilled, to help lay the foundations of a critical civil society, with a culture of public debate and tolerance which accommodates differences and competing interests ***[in other words, diversity – (my parentheses)]***. It has much more to do, both within its own institutions and in its influence on the broader community, to strengthen the democratic ethos, the sense of common citizenship and commitment to a *common good*.

The difficulty in nurturing *global* citizenship as part of 'graduateness' is a well-documented phenomenon, and although there is some *Northern* research that has shown that while university life in itself contributes to a sense of society and community among students, which is underpinned by values such as fairness, respect, responsibility

and altruism, such values do not constitute a holistic expression of a 'critical citizen' discussed above. Moreover, it does not indicate how this would be realised in an Open Distance Learning environment, or in the global South.

The conceptualisation of citizenship in this scholarship is also somewhat leaner than the overarching view of 'responsible *global* citizenship' referred to in the UNESCO position paper above. It is therefore possible that the *corporate* approach to global citizenship has contributed to the re-conceptualisation and understanding of citizenship in higher education especially in the era of 'new managerialism'.

When we turn to King III principles in the world of corporate governance to expand our view of global citizenship (King III, CH 2.1.4), they assert that: 'Good corporate citizenship is ***the establishment of an ethical relationship of responsibility between the company [university (my parenthesis)] and the society in which it operates***. As good corporate citizens of the societies in which they do business, companies [*universities*] have, apart from rights, also legal and moral obligations in respect of their social and natural environments. The company *[university]* as a good corporate citizen should protect, enhance and invest in the wellbeing of society and the natural ecology', and the draft King IV Report (King IV, 2016:4) states: … 'Ethics

considerations are part of the rationale for regarding the organization as an integral part of society, for corporate citizenship, sustainable development and stakeholder inclusivity.'

Responsible *global* citizenship enriched in the corporate environment can influence the conventional understanding of a responsible and critical citizenry advocated by universities and reflects a broad economic, social and environmental responsibility, (the *Profit-People-Planet* approach). This approach places a more deliberate focus on quality of life for all people and *the ethical stewardship of the environment in addition to, and as part of, the core function of scholarship and research.*

It is this emphasis on sustaining the environment, with its *concomitant moral and ethical underpinnings,* which we wish to instil in higher education's understanding of responsible, critical citizenship. Given our acknowledged 'ability to change and to induce change and progress in society' universities are in a position to sensitise students to our own triple bottom-line approach of **Pedagogy,** *People and Planet.* (So we replace or supplement the profit pillar, with pedagogy.) Leadership should, however, guard against simply transposing corporate governance principles on academia, practising the same *critical consciousness* (Freire, 2007) of responsible global citizenry by examining how tertiary education may benefit from a corporate

approach. Debate about this has been intense as academics have critiqued marketization and managerialism, so a thorough epistemological grounding is required, recognising the inherent diversity of higher education across the world.

It is therefore critical that universities advocate an understanding of *global* citizenship as consonant with, and complementary to (academic) citizenship, irrespective of its epistemic location.

There is, in addition, growing evidence from the internationalisation of higher education that the changing geopolitical landscape requires Northern scholarship to respond differently to challenges emerging from the Global South, which is producing new governance and curricular alignments, as well as a growing resistance to what is construed as knowledge (and technological) hegemony (Mbembe, 2016). Subaltern, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives are growing and asserting local knowledges in order to ensure relevance in developing societies, whose constructions of citizenship are contingent upon different social forces and conceptions of nation, identity and belonging (Giroux, 2016). The ethics of leadership and the role of higher education and technological innovation in such circumstances are also contested, and skills and characteristics associated with 'graduateness' tend to be ranked differently (*Horizon*

Report, 2016). In this context, ethical and responsible global citizenship becomes increasingly relevant as a characteristic of the successful 21st century graduate.

While higher education institutions are unambiguously tasked by global sentiment, policy and commitment to be [the] 'foundation for human fulfilment, peace, sustainable development, economic growth, decent work, gender equality and responsible global citizenship' and 'a key contributor to the reduction of inequalities and poverty by bequeathing the conditions and generating the opportunities for better, sustainable societies' (UNESCO 2015) these expectations present a number of complex challenges, given the cultural diversity that exists at national and global levels and the strategic, administrative, logistical and policy barriers that need to be navigated. The emphasis on ethical leadership in respect of global citizenship is not merely about imposing the concept through governance, imitation of business ethics, or superficial re-curriculation, but will require a far greater immersion in, and appreciation of, how the corporate notion of global citizenship and the academic notion of critical citizenship, may be harmonised to produce the best possible model for the university environment and the academic project.