
'In search of home' - practices of the self in selected teacher narratives

Daisy Pillay and Betty Govinden

Abstract

In this paper we offer glimpses of the way some teachers may work creatively within the constraints of our South African education system. There are many studies that focus on issues such as teacher attrition, low morale, work load, job security, and teacher migration, all suggesting something of the dire straits in which education is located in the post-apartheid era (Hall, Altman, Nkomo, Peltzer and Zuma, 2005; Ramrathan, 2002; Singh, 2001; Manik, 2005; Hayward, 2002). Against these negative impressions, we wish to present counter-narratives of teacher success, resistance and inventiveness, exploring teachers' lives and their narratives through the theme of *home*. The theme of home [and homelessness] has been an important one in post-colonial experience, and a variety of genre of writings have shown how dislocation and unhomeliness [*unheimlich*], and the attendant 'dis-ease' that results, are experienced, managed and contested. We begin the paper by providing a brief theoretical perspective on the theme of 'home' and 'homelessness' drawn from post-colonial literature. We then provide an analysis of the teachers' narratives, extracted from a larger research study, connecting this to the theme of 'home' and 'homelessness'. Finally, we show how teachers creatively resist the constraints of 'the school' to reconfigure what it means to 'be teacher'.

As Chandra Mohanty notes:

Home was not a comfortable, stable, inherited and familiar space, but instead an imaginative, politically charged space where familiarity and sense of affection and commitment lay in shared collective analysis of social justice, as well as a vision of radical transformation. Political solidarity and a sense of family could be welded together imaginatively to create a strategic place I could call 'home'.

Mohanty, 1993, p.352

Introduction

How might we enhance an understanding of teachers' lives and their narratives by deploying the theme of home? The theme of home and homelessness has been an important one in post-colonial experience, marked as it is by migration, exile, travel, border-crossing, dislocation, homelessness, dispossession, dispersion and diaspora. South Africa has also had its internal

politics of homelessness and exile through colonial and apartheid domination, forced removals and the Group Areas Act. A variety of genre of writings in this mode have shown how dislocation and unhomeliness [*unheimlich*], and the attendant dis-ease that results, are experienced, managed and/or contested.¹

The theme of home has been quite developed in English literature and post-colonial criticism. This is not surprising as the history of colonialism has been marked by travel and movement, by the settler or immigrant experience. Of course, dislocation takes on a peculiar meaning in apartheid South Africa, marked as it was by internal uprooting, dislocation and relocation.

The notion of home, generally linked to the domestic sphere of family and belonging and its attendant ideologies, is expanded and used metaphorically in English fiction and literary analysis. Such analysis draws attention to how the idea or memory of 'home' travels or is translated through artifacts, physical objects, or values and symbols as in cultural or religious traditions. It is not surprising that the theme of a 'politics of home' has emerged in such analysis.

One of the discursive features that emanates from reflection on the trope of home relates to setting up of the homes or dwellings and of dismantling them. The notion of the nomad or exile, exhibiting or embracing a state of homelessness is counterbalanced by a desire for rootedness, or the idea of 'feeling at home'.

A key theorist on the theme of home in post-colonial writing is Edward Said. Using his own personal experience of geographical dislocation, through exile and multiple journeyings and his acute political consciousness as a Palestinian intellectual living in the United States, Said has turned thinking on home and homelessness on its head. His memoir, *Out of Place* (2000) shows him viewing his own "ambivalent and contradictory location with an increasing sense of being an outsider" (Walia, 2001, p.4).

Said boldly suggests that the true intellectual should not give in to comfortable, static and sedimented ways of thinking, being and acting, nor should he/she engage in a 'rhetoric of blame'. Instead of adapting and reconciling to hegemonic systems, the intellectual should constantly develop a

¹ The second author has a literature background and has written on the theme of home in different critical essays (see e.g. Govinden, D. 2000).

resistant consciousness and engage in strategies of contestation. Citing Adorno, Said argues: “Dwelling, in the proper sense, is now impossible. . . It is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home” (Said, 1994, p.57).

Said (1994) suggests that the intellectual must travel, emigrate, move beyond confinements, and remain in a state of perpetual exile. The physical experience of homelessness is appropriated here and re-interpreted metaphorically, where the exile or exilic condition is embraced as a desirable state. The state of alienation is not seen negatively as loss, but as a condition that prevents stasis, sedimentation or conformity. Applied to the intellectual, it suggests a disposition and openness to change and newness, rather than to hidebound conservatism or tradition. It suggests the ability to transform the negative connotations of dislocatedness into a desirable state of being and thinking. It is in this sense that the notion of home and homelessness, developed in postcolonial criticism, is used in this article on teaching and education.

In our readings of the teacher narratives here, we show how teachers constantly seek out new understandings and insights and forge new ways of addressing problems and challenges that confront them in various educational situations. It is their feelings of constant ‘dis-ease’ that makes some teachers refuse to settle for mediocrity (Pillay, 2003; Nieto, 2003).

The study

The analyses of teachers’ narratives formed part of a larger doctoral study where new understandings of teacher success in South African schools were explored (Pillay, 2003). This study was pursued in the early 2000s, six years after the first democratic elections. It was period of change and challenge. The excerpts of the narratives give an impressionistic view of the lives of selected teachers from diverse educational sites in KwaZulu-Natal, and are representative of the South African race categories that were instituted during

the apartheid era. (All names in the narratives have been substituted with pseudonyms.)²

Preliminary sampling considered teachers across the educational spectrum from student teacher and novices to experienced and retired teachers. The final sample for the study comprised teachers who had been trained during the apartheid era for particular schooling contexts but who then proceeded to work in diverse teaching and learning sites both formal and non-formal. This dimension for the study in question reflects the diversity of educational opportunities that have ‘mushroomed’ since the democratisation of the country and the integration of education departments within the broader education and training sector.

Using life history research as the methodological tool, the first researcher accessed several nodes of experiences – the life history interviews were supplemented by photographs, poems, musical favourites, personal sketches/illustrations, and letters. This kind of memory work yielded rich and interesting data. Of the six teachers whose lives were composed and reconstructed in the study, excerpts of two teachers’ narratives are selected and presented here. Camilla is a Coloured female teaching in one of the schools in Durban. Growing up ‘coloured’ is never easy. She recalls very painful and poignant memories of a harsh and alienating city of Durban during the dark years of the apartheid. Her father dies under tragic circumstances when he tried to set up his panel beating business in spite of the difficulties that are placed in his path by the apartheid government. ‘Gogo’, her maternal grandmother lived in Swaziland and it is only through the random escapes to this ‘untouched’ part of the world that Camilla and her family spent many happy weekends and holidays. She remembers those happy days with mixed feelings:

On the farm in Swaziland is where I felt at home, where I experienced that spirit of freedom, the great outdoors and adventure. My cousins and I would race across to the kraals, where we could watch the slaughtering of the cows, sheep and pigs. The smell of the farm and the freshly slaughtered cattle always reminds me of my young days. Living on the farm gave me

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The first author had conducted member checks as she interviewed the six teachers. After a series of interviews, she would often ask the teachers what they thought about the interpretations she was making about their lives. Two-and-half years later, after she had the final version of the interpretation, she visited each one of the teachers and presented them with a copy together with the scanned photographs that were going to be included. Written letters of consent from each of the research participants were obtained for the publication of the study and the findings. Names and places have been changed to ensure the anonymity of the research participants.

the opportunity to see the dissection of the cattle in a biological way. I watched the farm boys pull the cow strap and skin the hide. The smell of animals and the bush is something I grew up with.

Becoming a biology teacher is not Camilla's first choice but is a personally fulfilling one. The teachers in her school are predominantly 'Coloured'. The principal is male and 'Indian'. Camilla's classroom once served as a dormitory for teacher trainees. Her narrative is about her struggles and her desires to continue to find new spaces, new homes, to be 'free' and to 'be teacher'. This is not easy.

The second teacher, Zandile, offers another interesting portrait. Her life is somewhat different from Camilla's but is still determined by the world of apartheid. As an African woman, she faces many struggles. She spends a major part of her young life in an economically impoverished semi-rural area outside Pietermaritzburg – a major city in KwaZulu-Natal. Her liberatory ideas and experiences are forged quite early in her life. Her father discriminates against her because she is a girl, treating her differently to her younger brother. At boarding school as well she and the rest of the girls are treated differently from the boys. She describes some of her experiences:

Our letters were opened and read while the letters of the males were not. We were abused. We carried sand from one point to another and repeated the process until they asked you to stop. We were asked to scrub floors and sweep the dusty, corrugated roads, as punishment for things they (the white nuns) regarded as 'wrong'. My experiences at home and at school created that pressure in me to prove myself as a woman, and actually engage in what we wanted and didn't want happening to us especially as African women.

These experiences serve to develop a sense of mission in Zandile's life and when she becomes a teacher she uses her position as a platform for change. She works as a teacher and member of the management team at the Alcatraz Prison School for Juveniles after serving three years of her teaching career in a small rural school on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg. As the only woman manager in a team of male managers, implementing her ideas and interests is never easy. Her principal is an African male. Her students are inmates serving long sentences for crimes including murder, hijackings, rape and robbery. Her office is a little room adjacent to the classrooms in which she teaches. An armed guard is posted outside her classroom while she teaches.

These descriptions, extracted from the larger life history narratives, offer glimpses of some of the challenges that beset teachers at both private and public levels.

'Homelessness': the constraints

Camilla

A glance at Camilla's experiences shows her enduring many inconveniences: under-resourced classrooms, bureaucratic pressures, and an unfriendly and uninviting school culture. She complains:

But I really found it difficult coping with fifty learners in the classroom and only forty minutes to teach. I hate the paperwork that I am also expected to do in set time. The volume of recording is unreal. The more I try to put my finger on the pulse, there is something else coming from the office.

She bemoans the constraining realities of formal lesson scheduling and the effect of large classes. She cannot put into practice a pedagogy that can allow learners to develop in leadership, strength and potential. "It does not allow me to see the learners differently and where they can get to see me differently" she argues.

In this educational context, there is an absence of alternative, vibrant and vigorous teacher cultures. The need for teachers to interact more flexibly, to discuss, reflect and explore new ideas and practices, and to learn and work collectively is sadly lacking in Camilla's school. "Oh! What are you doing this for?" is a refrain she hears, and is a constant reminder of the lack of desire among her colleagues to change and/or to support change. They acquiesce to routinised activities and actions and thereby threaten Camilla's need to be different. She says: "When I take my learners out into the school grounds for discussion teachers would comment, "You are not really teaching, are you?" The implication is that no serious teaching can happen outside the traditional classroom space.

Camilla thus positions herself and is positioned by others as disruptive of the norms usually controlling teachers. Camilla tries to construct her identity in opposition to her colleagues and they react with some suspicion and displeasure. Their comments range from, "Oh! What is she up to now?" or "There she goes again". Thus to be defined as a 'teacher' means to think, act and work in set and immovable ways or risk being labelled, alienated and belittled. Camilla summed up her feelings about being a teacher in this school:

Sometimes I feel like I'm pushing away or pulling a wagon of stones. I feel that I need to be continuously motivated because people who are not very motivated for change surround me. Whenever I approach management or the teachers with ideas, I am not given the support to

carry them through and ultimately the other teachers look at me and say, “who does she think she is”. So I take it upon myself to pursue these ideas with my own classes where I am my own manager, my own boss. The teachers look at me differently because I don’t belong to their clique. I don’t like the cliques among the staff. I hate it. I’m me, accept me for who I am. So I would say to them, “do not try and mould me into your kind of thinking”. People don’t like me voicing myself. . . I am different, and I am certainly not going to change for anyone. I enjoy who I am, what I do and how I do it. My children are the proof of the pudding.

Invoking the metaphor of home, we might observe that Camilla reveals dislocation and unhomeliness in the microcosm of the school setting. How does Camilla create alternative choices, alternative homes, we might ask? How does she overturn her unhomeliness? What risks is she prepared to take, given her negative experiences? How can she creatively deal with the uncertainty of taking risks for ‘being teacher’ differently? How does she refuse the predictable modes of thinking and working?

Zandile

Zandile’s experiences of teaching in the different schools (formal school and prison school) on the other hand, are about her struggle to be heard within a male-dominated arena. Her mission as a change agent reflects a constant struggle. She feels constrained because of her gender. The principal (of the prison school), through his position, authorises the male teachers and members of management to speak and, conversely, ‘silences’ Zandile. The following excerpt from an interview, conveys her frustration:

There is no open platform where you can really share what you feel, your vision, and your ideas. That flexibility of trying out new ideas and knowing what works has stopped. I find the atmosphere among the staff, especially the male staff who worked at the prison school for a longer period than I did but who have never been promoted, hostile. The principal is not giving me the space to do what I want to anymore . . . suddenly everything I do is questioned and looked at with suspicion. . . I do not feel appreciated as a valuable member of the team. Often the feedback that I have been getting is that I am too ambitious. . . that I think I am too clever. That has just killed that spirit of working as a team. That is really killing me.

We see here the way male teachers and managers create and naturalise systems of hegemonic power. Her experience at Dalesview Secondary, an ex-DET school for African learners located in an impoverished semi-rural area in KwaZulu-Natal, also confirms this. She says, “I would never have been able to get through to the staff who were predominantly male and who really didn’t understand who this Zandile was. They commented that I wanted to be too big

in a very small space”. How does Zandile resist the traditional cultural constructions of being an African woman? How does she refuse to be one who is suppliant? How does she refuse the easy and complacent ‘homes’ that her colleagues have created for themselves? What creative choices may be forged in what appears to be a hopeless situation? What alternative, life-enhancing ‘homes’ may be imagined?

These crossroads in teachers’ struggles are crucial. To refuse alterity, like many teachers do, is nearly to be interred. Yet many choose this line of least resistance. Every situation, according to Said (2004), is a contest between a powerful system of interests on the one hand and, on the other, less powerful interests threatened with frustration, silence, incorporation or extinction by the powerful. The challenge is to reverse this state of affairs.

In search of home

Faced with near despair it is encouraging to see in the narratives small but distinct attempts by these teachers to redefine themselves. These attempts, which may be seen as ‘practices on the self’, occur in small, elusive moments when teachers are able to forge alternative ways of being and acting. In these moments of creative agency, teachers are brave enough to give expression to their true selves, in spite of institutional demands that point them in another direction.

In the larger study, different metaphors were used to understand teachers’ patterns of agency. These metaphors show encouraging emergent practices of the self in learning situations. These practices were directly related to identities of race, gender, class and political activism. Against the common denominator of apartheid, different teachers displayed individualist responses to their experiential reality. There are different ways in which critique was articulated and change and transformation managed and accomplished. There are, in other words, different ways of dismantling and setting up ‘homes’. Of course this process is never complete, but is on-going. We see in the following narratives of Camilla and Zandile, the unique ways in which they engage in practices of the self to overturn the debilitating circumstances in which they find themselves.

Camilla: soul seeker/bush-baby

Camilla's lived experience, as a female Coloured teacher, offers us a window to particular moments of struggle and desire to be 'free' as teacher. She remembers:

I met with such negativity on the path of staff members, my colleagues, that it actually ended up to be a very confrontational level where you think to yourself, "Why am I doing this". Then you spring back and say well I'm doing this because the child enjoys it. For me everything that I do I thoroughly enjoy and I wanted my children to enjoy it. . . at the end of the day it is me and what is best for me and my learners. . .

This comment from Camilla focuses on the struggles and dilemmas of working in a schooling site in which asserting difference is seen as 'abnormal' and a threat to the institutional culture or collegial norm. Camilla becomes the stranger with strange habits. She is sandwiched between two poles – 'Who am I' and 'What do I want'. She realizes that feeling despondent and 'wanting to jump ship' is to refuse the possibility for change and innovation.

Camilla refuses to be a victim. Her movement out of a debilitating atmosphere to another place, another home, shows her ability to take risks. She abandons an institutional space that diminishes her, and escapes to a place that always gives her back her sanity – surprisingly, the 'bush', typifying in South Africa a place quite the opposite of the amenities-filled modern city. It is in the bush that she turns inwards. In moments of turbulence as she notes, she "goes back to nature, to the bush to find myself and get my sanity back":

Starting up the Enviro-club extended the boundaries for me. I do break boundaries in the classroom, but co-ordinating the club allows me to engage with something that I really enjoy doing outside of the school. I am a 'bush-baby'. It is a place where I see the child grow from a little seed in terms of leadership, strength and potential. The Enviro-club is my passion, it keeps me together. . . It keeps my sanity together.

Momentarily, she embraces this new found space with pleasure and pride:

Children need to see you differently, and I get to see the learners differently. The teachers need to accept that I am different and the Enviro-club gives me that space to be different, to be myself. This I believe will provide the learners with the confidence to develop and be proud of who they are. The song, 'I believe the children are the future' by Whitney Houston is the theme song for the Enviro-group. It captures what I believe, what I think about myself and my learners and what I want to do as a person and as a teacher.

Camilla's investments in social practices and the relationships she forges through these activities give her pleasure and restores her sanity. Working within the regulatory normative structures of educational practice, the Enviro-

club as a collective project becomes the key feature of how Camilla relates to each of the learners differently and provides the space within which to express her sense of ecological justice. In this private space, or alternative home, which nature offers her, away from the oppressive spaces of her school and work life, she is rejuvenated with fresh ideas about teaching and learning. The wide open space – the enticing African veld – becomes an embracing and hospitable home.

The sense of oneness she forges with nature and her family in this space, gives her a new understanding of the meaning of her life and her mission as a teacher. She is able to transgress the boundaries that usually separate a teacher's private life and a teacher's assumed, public or professional responsibility. She is aware of this intersection:

Mark, my husband is my strength for a lot of what I am doing now, in the way that I might approach things, or teach things. He is my soul mate. Taking the Enviro-group on an excursion, or going on a hiking trip has become a family thing. He has always been there to say, stop crying about it, deal with the problem and get on with it.

Camilla breaks free from the rigid separation of work and family, of private/public boundaries and tests out other ways of being and doing 'teacher'. Through her ecological activities she 'feels free' to recreate herself so that she is equipped with a disposition to love and hope. As pointed out already, she is able to draw strength from nature to resist oppressive practices and to strategise for alternative ways of being, both for herself and her learners. These *practices of the self* yield a rich harvest in different ways.

Zandile: the rehabilitator

Like Camilla, Zandile, in her own way, engages in practices of the self that are life-enhancing. The narrative of her family background, her life as a student, as a teacher/manager and later as a post-graduate student indicates her creative responses to different challenges. Her liberatory ideas and experiences are forged during her early years when she had to endure living with her abusive, alcoholic father. She tries to overturn the oppressive home family context in which she finds herself. As she recalls, "My experiences at home created that pressure in me to prove myself as a woman, and actually engage continually in what we want and don't want happening to us especially as African women". The place where she lived is not the safe, nurturing space that she would have liked; yet these very negative encounters of home were the means of making her resilient, of making her create alternative 'homes'.

Zandile had questioned the political system when she was a student and continues to this as a teacher. While Zandile's formal *teacher identity* legitimates her as a 'professional', her political consciousness, produced by her embeddedness in her apartheid reality, re-shapes her identity as a teacher and compels her to redefine what 'being professional' means. As Camilla does, Zandile also uses her teacher status, in spite of the negativity that permeates it through the legacy of apartheid, as a platform for change. Her ideas on collective engagement and transparency do not go well with the rest of the school community. The challenge to disrupt the oppressive practices that continue to dominate the educational experience of learners burdens her. She is intent on:

Instilling in the teacher's minds the fact that you just don't impose things on learners as we have been doing all along. I remember the school meetings where parents had to attend to discuss important school matters without the learners being present. I challenged that too. I wanted the teachers, management, parents and the learners to work together towards a common goal but the teachers took a lot of time to buy into it. Some people hated me for that, while others liked me. . . so I just looked ahead.

Zandile crosses the border between the classroom and the rest of the world by adapting her strategies of activism to suit each space. In the semi-rural school in Dalesview, where she started her career as a 'new' teacher, she recalls:

I remember that day when I walked into school and realised that all the chairs had been stolen from the school, stolen by a guy who started a beer hall in the area. After requesting permission from the principal, all the male students and I walked to the beer hall and returned with all the chairs. That day was an important day in my life as a teacher at Dalesview Secondary School because I succeeded in developing in learners a sense of ownership, a skill for life.

Although she may not articulate it in these words, her life is that of an 'organic intellectual', as she focuses mind and body creatively and constructively in the context in which she finds herself. What is noteworthy is that she creates critical spaces to express her political views. She reconstructs her experiences, imputing alternative meanings to them, so that her responses are not run-of-the-mill, predictable, conservative. When faced with barriers against meaningful engagement with her context, she continually reflects on the choices she should make to change this state of affairs:

Every day is a new day, learning about yourself and the kind of person you are in dealing with the learners, the subject and the colleagues you work with. . . I often question why all the learners need to specialise in Zulu, especially if they wanted to become engineers, I believed that they could spend the time improving their Math and Science results. What about learners who were wanting to pursue seven subjects? Why do we have to treat the boys at prison differently? I was called up to the office. . . to be reminded that I was not the principal of the school.

Zandile is not to be suppressed. This is the point in her life when the prison setting becomes her new home, and she recreates this repressive space into its opposite. Zandile finds strength to challenge and resist the effects of oppression and inequality from a strong moral sense. Through a deep understanding of the dominant and stifling discourses of being 'man/male' she seeks out creative and alternative ways of ensuring that the young juveniles in prison can reflect on their gender constructions and ways of thinking.

Dominique³ and I have become involved in numerous initiatives and projects at the prison to enable the students to participate in various activities like sport, dance and music. Dominique and I have set up links with the Natal Playhouse Company and we have started a project with the University of Natal where the students from the drama department come to the prison and train the boys. We now have boys who are writers and directors of plays. They write their own plays for Christmas or Human Rights Day and they even act it out.

Zandile's desire to develop as a critical reflective practitioner is also seen in her pursuit of a Masters Degree, and her choice of the Social Justice Education specialisation is no accident. She enlists the support of a like-minded male colleague and friend, Mike. The following excerpt reflects her taking her destiny into her own hands:

I had to do something. I spoke to Mike about studying. . . I spoke to the new teachers, many who were complaining that very often they sat around not knowing what to do. While Mike and I decided that we would register for our Masters degree, the others engaged in doing their degrees in varying specialisations (ABET, BA). We have managed to restore the culture of studying once again. I feel alive once again. Registering for a degree in Social Justice and Peace Education is just what I needed. For the first time this year I felt I reached out to most of the female teachers on the staff.

Zandile enrolls at the University of Durban-Westville, which was described for many years as a 'historically disadvantaged institution' and a site renowned for political activism. As a teacher, formal university study offers her yet another space or home. It is a space for the germination of new ideas, for intellectual activity, for collective, critical reflection and action.

Throughout her experiences we see Zandile claiming the right to question systems, structures and practices. She refuses the conventional, identities of being a Black woman, a student, a teacher, manager, and adopts a transformatory identity. The practices of self that she enacts show her refusing to be 'othered'; she claims selfhood and identity. She creates a new 'home'.

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Dominique is a male teacher who is a colleague of Zandile.

Resistant readings

Our firm conviction, reading these narratives, is that the educational terrain need not be soul-destroying and debilitating. The context can offer possibilities for thinking and acting differently as teacher. The emergent practices, ideas and values that we celebrate here are often not recognised. Highlighting these practices, which have been subsumed and muted in the homogenized category of 'being teacher', is a powerful means of understanding the slipperiness of identity and the caution necessary in fixing teachers' identities. Affirmed by their own histories – that nourish the cultural experiences that make up the texture of their daily lives – teachers may create and carve out spaces for their unique experiences. For these teachers the educational sites are interpreted as spaces for creative responses, unencumbered by staid and withering formulas.

Though the messages that the different teachers provide may be uneven, ambiguous and imperfect, we recognise the potential for change and transformation that the narratives signal. For us, the narratives highlight not the importance of technical expertise, of disciplinary or subject knowledge of narrow curriculum expertise, but they emphasise wider notions of truth, conscience and humanity – *of love*.

Instead of seeing alternative practices of the self as deviations from or variations on school policy, as being problematic and dangerous, we need to be sensitive to other understandings. We need to develop oppositional and resistant readings of teachers and their work. How can we open up spaces for teachers to be moved by ethical imperatives, and to experience 'being teacher' as a space for the continued formation of their political will?

As teacher-educators bent on developing teachers for new and different imaginings of curriculum, how do we reconstitute the teaching and learning world so that more opportunities emerge for hearing the voices of teachers? How do we deconstruct the taken-for granted categories, and read teachers' lives and their work differently?

The category 'teacher' is open to new meanings – meanings that may be strategically reworked, renamed and reconfigured. Instead of framing the fluid and multiple identities of teachers as a problem or an obstacle, we need to recognise powerful ways in which teachers can recreate themselves and become agents of change. Change and movement, both material and

metaphorical, may form the very basis for how these teachers move from 'what is' to 'what could be'.

When teachers see the possibilities of constantly rearranging and re-negotiating their identities, both personal and professional, as the teachers described here do, they will become freer agents. When there is a continual search for 'new homes' teachers may demonstrate surprising and remarkable tenacity. Refusing to withdraw, abdicate, or merely survive, some teachers may show an exilic, restless spirit. Ferreting out the stories that show teachers on a relentless quest for creative ways to deal with complex challenges of 'being teacher' in our present day South African context can become an exciting and hope-filled exercise.

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D Pillay and B Govinden
Faculty of Education
University of KwaZulu-Natal

pillaygv@ukzn.ac.za
govindend@ukzn.ac.za