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Identities, Youth and Belonging

International Perspectives

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Foreword

In the intellectual frameworks that guide academic and social policy understandings about young people, it is taken for granted that youth is fundamentally about time. Indeed, in many ways, the historical development of the notion of youth mirrors shifts in the imagining of time in a social and historical context. For example, as Nancy Lesko (2001) has shown, early modern discourses of youth and adolescence constructed the development of children and young people as rehearsals of evolutionary history and aligned youth with colonial depictions of racialised Others as developmentally delayed. Contemporary developmental psychology constructs adolescence as a period of linear development marked by physical and cognitive milestones (such as the capacity for rational self-governance) that themselves reflect normative assumptions about the nature of contemporary youth and adulthood. Finally, the concept of youth 'transitions'—perhaps the dominant concept currently shaping social policy interventions into youth—understands youth in terms of the timing of movements into work, family formation, and other normative signifiers of adulthood (Wyn & White, 1997). The development of youth is then assessed in terms of normative milestones—either of individual development or social transition—and compared to a developmental end point that is idealised by those who put these frameworks to work in understanding and shaping the world.

As youth has become intertwined with notions of developmental time, young people have become critical targets for institutional interventions into the social, economic and political fabric of a changing world—changes that are themselves conceived in terms of development. 'Developing' counties are encouraged to develop their young people in order that they may support their home country's position in a competitive global economy. A global institutional framework of citizenship education aligns the social and cognitive development of young people with the political sensibilities suited towards navigating a post-national political landscape. This post-national citizenship discourse encourages young people to relinquish ties to particular localities, and understands this as the logical end point of healthy political development. In both instances, successful development is understood as the accumulation of capitals and dispositions that are suited to the needs of the contemporary economy, and to the national and supra-national institutions that act within this global scene. It is in this way that young people become critical to the governmentality of globalisation. Moreover, it is in this way that a developmental temporality is installed as a way of governing the changing and increasingly complex spaces of the contemporary world (Farrugia, 2018).

This book is published amidst global social changes that are unravelling this taken for granted temporality, and that are raising the problem of place in youth studies. Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) have suggested that youth labour markets in the global North increasingly resemble those to be found in 'developing' countries, dissolving any clear developmental distinction between the two and installing elevated levels of youth unemployment as a structural feature of contemporary global capitalism. Amidst incitements to 'global citizenship', young people's day to day practices of citizenship are positioned at the forefront of what Anita Harris (2014) has described as conviviality amidst difference, or new strategies for negotiating belonging within the complex social relations of the hyper-diverse local. Finally, youth cultures encompass unpredictable trans-local flows of cultural symbols that are articulated in unique local practices that produce strong attachments to the specificity of a local scene or place (Condry, 2006). Place—and the mutable spatiality of the contemporary global scene—is being reasserted both in young people's practices, posing a challenge to the intellectual frameworks currently deployed to understand their lives.

Identities, Youth and Belonging: International Perspectives is therefore an important and timely resource for those aiming to understand the meaning of youth in a changing world, and to challenge the intellectual orthodoxies currently shaping youth studies. Through a focus on practices of belonging, this book shows how young people are producing and reproducing the places that make up the daily fabric of their lives. In this, the editors and authors demonstrate the critical political significance that place occupies for young people and for theoretical development in this field of research. The relationship between belonging and place provides a new insight into how youth identities are imbricated within educational institutions, religious communities, virtual networks, music scenes, and trans-national mobilities including experiences of migration and displacement. Through a focus on place and belonging, the multiple contributions of this volume amount suggest new, interdisciplinary frameworks for understanding youth. In this way, this book suggests a new epistemology of youth that visible forms of situated relational practice that have remained marginal to theoretical development in the field thus far. The book therefore offers a new insight into the creation of youth subjectivities and to the position of young people within the contemporary politics of place.

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Contents

1 Youth Negotiating Belonging in a Global World 1
Sadia Habib and Michael R. M. Ward

2 Growing Up in 'The Ends': Identity, Place and Belonging in an Urban East London Neighbourhood 17
Joy White

3 Young Indonesian Musicians, Upward Career Mobility and Feeling at Home 35
Oki Rahadianto Sutopo

4 Religion and (Re)negotiation of Belonging among Zimbabwean Migrant Youths in South Africa 51
Charles Dube

5 Being Kurdish at a Turkish University Campus: A Spatial Approach to Belonging 69
Baris Isci Pembeci

6 **Transit and Transition: Student Identity and the Contested Landscape of Higher Education** 87
Vicki Trowler

7 **Using Bourdieu to Understand the Pathways to Belonging That Are Forged by Young Students of Refugee Experience in an Australian Mainstream School** 105
Fiona Picton and Grant Banfield

8 **Virtual Communities as Safe Spaces Created by Young Feminists: Identity, Mobility and Sense of Belonging** 123
Raquel Miño-Puigcercós, Pablo Rivera-Vargas, and Cristóbal Cobo Romaní

9 **Exploring the Potential for Community Where Diverse Individuals Belong** 141
Kate J. Cassidy

10 **(Un)Belonging in Higher Education: Negotiating Working-Class Masculinities Within and Beyond the University Campus** 159
Michael R. M. Ward

11 **Portraits of Place: Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom** 177
Sadia Habib

12 **Conclusion: Young People Negotiating Belonging in Changing Times** 195
Sadia Habib and Michael R. M. Ward

Index 213

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