The ambivalence of comradeship in the appointment of principals: A threat to the provision of quality education

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In this article, we problematise the practice of appointing principals on the basis of comradeship instead of excellence, qualifications and competency. The appointment of principals in South Africa has, over the years, become politicised and unionised to the extent that it is contextualised within comradeship narratives, thereby negating the competency and qualifications that are required to champion quality education – education that is essential to empower people. To cement its arguments, the article is couched in decoloniality, a framework that evokes the need to challenge coloniality, which has displaced professionalism and competency as criteria for appointing principals. The data for the study were generated through questionnaires completed by, and interviews with, 19 participants in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province. The article reports that most schools with comrade principals face challenges related to competency, learner performance and indiscipline. The article recommends that the Department of Basic Education revisit its appointment policy for principals to ensure that competent principals are appointed, regardless of whether they are comrades or not.

Keywords: comradeship; politics of belonging and othering; principalship; unionism

Introduction

South Africa's education system has been undergoing a fundamental transformation towards emancipation and democratisation. One of the ways of transforming is by including teacher unions in the recruitment of principals. During the country's transition to democracy in 1994, teacher unions played an important role in advocating for positive transformation and democracy in education (Wills, 2016). As a result, democratisation and the decentralisation of power were formalised, and power redistributed and extended "to local school governing bodies (SGB) through the removal of centralised control over certain aspects of educational decision-making" (Oosthuizen & Rossouw, 2003:195). Part of the decentralisation and, perhaps, democratisation of schools should be evident in the appointment of principals. However, the appointment of principals in South African schools presents new trajectories that threaten to derail efforts to achieve competency and quality education. One of the causes of challenges facing schools is the influence of unionism on the appointment of principals, which is referred to as comradeship.

In this article, comradeship is defined as "the act of offering jobs, contracts and resources to members of one's own social group in preference to others, who are outside the group" (Bramoullé & Goyal, 2016:16). Furthermore, the term comradeship refers to a certain group of teachers, principals and departmental officials who refer to themselves as "comrades", because they tend to share the same political and ideological stance in their union and political party. While teachers and principals have the right to be comrades, it becomes undesirable if comradeship is used as a yardstick for the appointment of principals. Informed by this definition and the preceding argument, we argue that there is a need for education stakeholders to re-examine and rethink the processes that underlie and hinder development in the education sector (Gonzales & Husain, 2016:269). Thus, readers of this article should not conclude that we are against comradeship; we only zero in on comradeship that undermines excellence and productivity. We want readers to understand our use of the word comradeship in its negative sense; we are not referring to its positive aspects, which are not the focus of the article. In the same breath, we do not imply that if one is or is not a comrade, he or she is competent. Thus, part of our argument is that, whether comrade or not, competency, hard work and dedication should be the hallmark of school principals.

There are various aspects to school quality that can be compromised by a lack of good school leadership. One of them is planning. Planning helps education managers to anticipate problems and opportunities, to think ahead and to contribute to the efficacy of other managerial functions (Farah, 2013). This planning can encompass many goals, such planning to improve or maintain a certain pass rate, dealing with disciplinary issues, effective use of finances, and managing teachers and assistants. This implies that when incompetent people are deployed to schools, such schools could become dysfunctional due to a lack of planning by the school principal. Another aspect that can be affected by compromised school leadership is teacher quality. Teachers become competent based on the leadership and guidance they get from principals. Failure by the principal to demonstrate competency means that teachers are likely to underperform, consequently affecting the quality of students coming from that school (Emese, 2010). In essence, achieving good quality students begins with the type of principal appointed at the school. It then cascades to the teachers who in turn make meaningful contributions to the quality of the learners. Once the appointment of principals is compromised in favour of incompetent principals, the quality of both teachers and learners is compromised, which in turn affects the

teaching and learning process (Krasnoff, 2015; Mathibe, 2007). The goal of a competent principal is among others to ensure that the teaching and learning process is managed effectively (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008). Failure to do so results in school performance being affected, teachers compromising on their work, learners performing below expectation and the school's instructional quality becoming dysfunctional, thus necessitating the need to challenge the appointment of principals based on comradeship, especially when competency is sacrificed on the altar of comradeship.

The article unfolds as follows: first, we locate the trajectories, then we investigate the appointment of principals in an international context, provide a theoretical framing, explain the methodology, and lastly, present and discuss findings.

Locating the Trajectories in the Appointment of Principals in South Africa

Decentralisation, it is claimed, is accompanied by an increase in democratic participation by parents and unions in the governance of schools (Beckmann & Prinsloo, 2009). This it is not necessarily true, especially in relation to the appointment of principals. When a principal must be appointed, the SGB meets to declare that, due to the nature of the business, there is a need to co-opt knowledgeable people with expertise onto the interview committee. The SGB recommends various people who can serve on the interview committee. Generally, the committee comprises two SGB members, three principals, a circuit manager, and union representatives from the National Teachers' Union (NATU) and the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) (appointed as observers). The challenge is deciding who to co-opt and why. Informed by this problem, we argue that this is the point where manipulation starts and, consequently, opens the door to comradeship, which is contrary to the mandate of some co-opted members, who are limited to being observers. To be more precise, as explained by Education Labour Relations Council, Limpopo Chamber (2008:1), unions have the following roles in relation to appointing principals:

- "Union representatives must be observers of the process mentioned above.
- Observers may not be directly involved in the process of shortlisting and interviewing, but will ensure that approved procedures and practices are adhered to in a fair, consistent and uniform manner.
- An observer has the right to intervene in the procedure if he/she deems that agreed-upon procedures are being infringed upon.
- If this happens, an observer must indicate to the chairperson that he/she wishes to intervene. It is expected that the observer shall observe the following:

    a) Avoid discussing any question(s) in the presence of the interviewee.
    b) Discussions concerning the interview must take place after the interviewee has left the room.
- Observers must sign the declaration of confidentiality and uphold the code of secrecy.
- An observer must, first, attempt to resolve any concern with the Interview Committee (IC). Should they fail to reach consensus, the observer must inform the IC that he/she is lodging a grievance."

While unions are represented on the IC as observers, this study found that their role involves much more than mere observation. In the following section, we map the problem addressed by this article.

Appointing of Principals in International Contexts

In this section, we discuss how principals are selected in contexts other than South Africa and the challenges faced during the principal selection process. Despite this section referring to international contexts, it is not a comparative study. In the case of Turkey, a principal is appointed after seven processes, starting with a school preparing a report covering the need of the school and setting out a declaration explaining the head teacher position, taking the needs of the school into consideration. Then, the deselection team identifies suitable candidates and makes a preassessment by consulting applicants' National Professional Qualification for Headship certificate, academic competency, essays on school administration and the situation in their previous schools (Sağlam, Geçer & Bağ, 2017:1483). In the case of the United States, aspiring principals have to complete a 30-credit course (Hale & Moorman, 2003) and can then be appointed as vice or deputy principals to gain experience (Jackson & Davis, 2000). In Kenya, the Teaching Service Commission has a full mandate to employ and manage the entire teaching fraternity in Kenyan public schools, including promoting them to professional and administrative positions (Republic of Kenya, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2005). In Zimbabwe, school heads are centrally appointed; aspirants list their preferred schools and can be appointed at any of the schools. In this approach, whether it is considered democratic or not, SGBs and unions are not involved in the process. Although mission schools can recommend whom to appoint, the eventual appointment will depend on the public service and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Magudu, 2014).

We believe that, regardless of the approach used by a country, the assumed intention is to provide equal opportunities and the best outcomes for education systems and to promote improvements with a view to increasing standards (Sağlam et al., 2017). From the discussion in this section, it is evident that all the countries discussed here have centralised, regulated systems for

appointing principals, through which they limit the negative influences of stakeholders, such as unions, especially if the unions' agenda is deploying cadres through a process characterised by the politics of belonging, which disqualifies competent candidates and practises the politics of othering.

In the following section, we will discuss the South African approach to appointing principals in order to locate the need and purpose of the article.

From Democratisation in Principalship to Comradeship in South Africa

Decentralising the appointment of principals can be described as an effort to democratise schools, which is intended to ensure a more consultative and engaging approach to making decisions about school leadership. Decentralising power to SGBs was also part of the democratisation process, which afforded SGBs meaningful power over schools (Beckmann & Prinsloo, 2009:171). While this delegation of power is appreciated, the decentralisation is accompanied by trajectories that were not necessarily anticipated but which emerged as a result of cracks or loopholes in the process of selecting principals, thereby threatening the provision of quality education to achieve people's power. The reality is cemented by Smit (2008:75), who argues "that the decentralisation of school governance, particularly the appointment of principals in South Africa since 1996, has seen a number of bureaucratic actions and incorrect administrative decisions being taken and, as a result, cliques are benefitting." This creates the politics of othering and belonging in South African principalship narratives.

Politics of othering is a term that not only encompasses the many expressions of prejudice based on group identities, but also propagates group-based inequality and marginality (Powell & Menendian, 2016:17). In the same vein, Baumann (2004:18–19) views "othering as a way in which collective or individual identities are defined through the assertion of another's difference or alterity." The politics of othering refers to the idea that people belonging to groups other than the dominant one are not supposed to attain principal posts. Shedding light on the foregoing argument, Powell and Menendian (2016:14) claim that the problem of 21st century schooling is othering, which presents intractable and overwhelming challenges and involves school processes being organised around one or more dimensions of group-based difference. In essence, we agree with the assertion of Staszak (2009:43) that othering is the result of the difference of the other, rather than of points of view and discourses.

In addition to the politics of othering, comradeship, or the politics of belonging, creates exclusion and inclusion criteria for the appointment of principals. According to Powell and Menendian (2016:18), the politics of "belonging connotes something fundamental about how groups are positioned within society, and about how they are perceived and regarded." Identity is infused in the politics of belonging, which raises "questions about the boundaries of difference, the differences that count, their normative and political evaluation, the boundaries of collectivities and social bonds, and how they are struggled over" (Anthias, 2013:3).

In light of the politics of othering and belonging, teacher unions in South Africa have created new trends, characterised by promotion being framed within these politics. Informed by ongoing discussions, we submit that it is the politics of belonging that creates comradeship: a perceived easy route to principalship, as opposed to a long route to competency. It is within this milieu that we argue that while comradeship is a constitutional right and every teacher has the right to belong to a teacher union, constitutional rights must not be used as processes of othering for the appointment of principals, since doing so negates democracy, equal opportunities and inclusion, which are some of the pillars of democracy. In arguing this way, we couch this article in decoloniality.

Theoretical Framing: Decoloniality

Decoloniality "is not a singular theoretical school of thought (though it is grounded in the earlier works of Enrique Dussel and Anibal Quijano), but a family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as being the fundamental problem of the modern age" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:15). Decoloniality refers to a commitment to challenging and reformulating the communicational, scientific, native, cultural paradigm (Huérfano Herrera, Sierra Caballero & Del Valle Rojas, 2016). The theory rejects modernity, which is located in the oppressed and exploited side of the colonial difference in favour of a decolonial liberation struggle for a world beyond Eurocentric modernity (Grosfoguel, 2011). The theory is suitable for this article since we aim to problematise the new form of coloniality demonstrated by trade unionism, which has caused competent people to lose their posts simply because they cannot be located in the comradeship space.

Decoloniality should not be mistaken for decolonisation. The latter refers to political liberation from colonisers, whereas the former deals with the aftermath of colonisation, where the thrust is to challenge colonial systems that have remained in place long after the apartheid or colonial rulership has been displaced (Muchie, Gumede, Oloruntoba & Check, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). These colonial systems manifest through and by monopolising and contextualising appointments within the perimeters of comradeship. In more precise terms, the struggle

for decoloniality is coloniality, which entails invisible structures enacted by colonisation that continue to haunt postcolonial states like South Africa. Grosfoguel (2007:213) explains coloniality as the "long-standing patterns of power that emerged because of colonialism, but define culture, labour, intersubjective relations and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations." Hence, the thrust is to challenge coloniality, which, in this case, manifests itself as comradeship, for which the politics of belonging matter the most. By doing so, coloniality "creates an invisible power structure, an epochal condition and epistemological design" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:31). In short, we frame this article in decoloniality because the article supports the need for continuing the search for a new and democratised way of implementing the appointment of principals, so that those who are excluded because they are not comrades, and who are subjected to "subordinated subjectivities, can launch themselves into a new world order that is humane and inclusive" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:22) and, thereby, improve school administration. Informed by this theory, the quest is to appoint principals in South African schools according to a process that is devoid of coloniality and its invisible structures, which seem to have been accepted for the appointment of principals, despite them being undemocratic. Thus, Wills (2016:7) reports, the excessive control exerted by teacher unions on education in South Africa has been heavily criticised, especially for its reference to comradeship as the point of entry to principalship.

Methodology and Data Analysis

This qualitative article responds to two questions: What are the effects of comradeship on the appointment of principals; and how can the process of appointing principals be implemented effectively to cater for the values of inclusion, equality and competency? Data were generated in KZN in rural schools by means of a combination of research methods, namely, interviews and questionnaires. We interviewed 19 participants, which included principals who shared their journeys towards principalship, aspiring principals, and SGB and union members. We used the snowball approach to select participants. The rationale for using this approach is that it takes advantage of the social networks of identified respondents to provide researchers with an ever-expanding set of potential contacts (Thomson, 1997), especially regarding sensitive issues like comradeship, which some might not want to discuss because of fear of victimisation. In the interviews, we met individually with principals and aspiring principals, some comrades and others not. The interviews centred around the appointment of principals in the context of comradeship and its effects on attaining

quality education and education for people's power. In recognising the weaknesses of, and to mitigate the challenges posed by, interviews, we also applied questionnaires. The data derived from the interviews and questionnaires were recorded and the data provided in the interviews were transcribed. In compliance with ethics requirements, we assured the respondents that their identities would remain concealed through the use of pseudonyms.

The data generated through interviews and questionnaires were analysed through the lens suggested by Laws, Harper and Marcus (2003:395), which comprises the following steps:
Step 1: "Reading and rereading all the collected data: The data from the interviews and the questionnaires was read and reread, until we heard the views of the participants.
Step 2: Drawing up a preliminary list of themes arising from the data: Major issues and themes were picked up and arranged according to the two main research questions of the study.
Step 3: Rereading the data: In this step we checked if the themes we had identified are in line with what the participants said, and that the themes corresponded with the research questions.
Step 4: Linking the themes to quotations and notes: The themes that emerged from the data were linked to various scholarly views.
Step 5: Perusing the categories of themes to interpret them: In the interpretation of data, we remained cognisant of the research questions.
Step 6: Designing a tool to assist in discerning patterns in the data, in order to triangulate and determine the patterns during data analysis.
Step 7: Interpreting the data and deriving meaning: This step related mainly to highlighting the research findings and arranging material according to categories, which are premised or guided by the research questions."
The data were coded independently by the two authors. After the data had been coded, we met the principals and aspiring principals again, this time in a group. In compliance with the member checking, we had a meeting to discuss the findings and the themes that had emerged from the findings related to the data they had provided (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016:1802; Bygstad & Munkvold, 2007:243b; Gunawan, 2015:10). Doing so enabled us to verify the trustworthiness of the findings and ensured the transferability of findings to other contexts facing the same vulnerabilities. The trustworthiness of the data that had been collected was also ensured by contrasting and comparing the experiences of the different participants (Muijs, Ainscow, Dyson, Raffo, Goldrick, Kerr, Lennie & Miles, 2010:145).

The following section will present the findings and discuss the research according to the themes.

Findings and Discussion

The findings are arranged in two major categories, each responding to one of the research questions. In the first section, we will report the findings and discuss them in response to the question relating to the effects of appointing principals on the basis of comradeship.

Compromises the Quality of Education

Often, when incompetent people are appointed to be at the helm of school leadership, school performance fails in many aspects including learner performance, financial integrity and discipline. Therefore, it is important that the SGB and co-opted members of the IC ensure that the "best qualified, motivated, committed and competent educators [are appointed] to vacant posts, in order to ensure effective and quality teaching and learning for the learners" (Beckmann & Prinsloo, 2009:181). While the idea is noble, doable and desirable, the appointment of principals is often compromised. The research revealed that the reality on the ground is that performance and competency are no longer prerequisites for appointment, which has negative consequences for ensuring quality education, since incompetent people cannot deliver school leadership and manage schools effectively. During the interview, one of the participants in an interview said that, "*in comradeship competency is not prioritised, rather, commitment to the agenda and mandate of the union, thereby appointing people who cannot deliver in management of the schools.*" Sharing the same sentiment, another respondent said that "*here, in KZN, if you are not a comrade, getting a school is a nightmare. So, we know the new route to principalship despite competency and qualification.*" These responses suggest that competency is not the prime criterion for the appointment of principals. What matters is where one is within the comrade space, which, of course, compromises the provision of quality education.

In support of the foregoing argument, Madikida (2016) avers that the underperformance of many schools in KZN province can be attributed to factors such as the quality of teachers, their lack of professionalism, inadequate learner resource materials, teacher and learner absenteeism, poor leadership and management, poor school governance, lack of parental involvement, and school management staff being appointed on the basis of comradeship. In support of this observation, one respondent in an interview said that "*most of underperforming schools are managed by comrade principals. They fail to meet the ever-changing demands of leadership and are, in most cases, inefficient, mostly because some get promoted into principalship positions having little or no management experience. They run around with union activities and, most often than not, are*

rarely found in their schools." Note that, while the observation by the respondent may be true, it does not represent all comrade principals; nevertheless, the claim that comradeship is affecting the schooling system in South Africa remains a topical issue.

In addition to appointing comrades, the teacher unions also play a role in protecting non-performing though committed union members, some of whom are principals. Commenting on the union SADTU, Davis (2017) reports that the organisation is being blamed for blocking measures that would hold educators accountable for poor performance. A participant said that "*implementation of policies is greatly compromised, because they regard policies as belonging to the employer and as a means to oppress their members.*" In support of this observation, De Clercq (2013:35) says that, "beyond advocating for improved pay, benefits and conditions of work, teachers' unions remain strongly opposed to national policies that imply forms of monitoring or control of teachers' work, even where accountability systems are disconnected from punitive measures." Thus, the deployment of comradeship as an indication of loyalty to the politics of belonging has a negative impact on education, as long as comradeship supersedes competency.

Undermines Democracy

A democratic society implies equal opportunities, access and equity, despite race, gender, religion and other factors. However, regarding the appointment of principals, this equality has not been apparent in recent times. One participant in an interview noted that, "*if you are not a comrade, just forget the post. Here in KZN, most schools belong to the comrades.*" In a response given in a questionnaire, another respondent said that, "*you see, as a principal, when I am opted to the IC, I am reminded that I came through comradeship; hence, I must not close doors for the other comrade, despite knowing fully well that one is not competent.*" Teacher unions have created coloniality in a new guise; according to decoloniality, there is a need to challenge segregation based on comradeship. If the practice of appointing principals based on comradeship is not challenged, it will, according to Shields (2009:3), "create sites of cultural politics that serve to reproduce and perpetuate some inequities, and to confirm and legitimate some cultures, while other cultures are marginalised." In this regard, various distressing incidents have been reported in KZN:

- Disagreement about principalship positions has resulted in a number of murders (the latest happened in March in Pietermaritzburg, and in June 2017 in Nkandla).
- Principalship posts are put up for sale.

- At schools where the majority of educators are comrades, principals who are not comrades are displaced or moved to remote schools.
- Comrade educators refuse to cooperate when the principal is not a comrade (Masondo, 2015).

Büte (2011) remarks that in organisations characterised by intense preferential treatment, human resources departments fail to carry out their activities independently. Under such conditions, appointments based on competence and knowledge accumulated seem impossible. This is because, in some contexts, the appointment of principals under undemocratic pretexts becomes militarised (Christie, 2010:703), thus affecting competent candidates who do not wish to engage in fighting or corruption to secure principal posts.

Promotes Corruption and Othering

According to the findings, appointing principals according to comradeship promotes corruption and creates politics of othering and belonging. One respondent commented as follows in the questionnaire, "*posts are sold, this has become an open secret, union members bid for post, and thus, the highest bidder is the one that is appointed.*" Another respondent explained, "*sometimes the comrades demand sex from the aspiring principals as a gateway. So here its either money or sex, besides that, forget an appointment.*" This was confirmed by one of the comrade principals who said, "*here in KZN the mandate is made known. In fact, by the time the IC meets, teacher unions are well aware of the comrade they want to appoint to the post. They have the opportunity to caucus with the IC on how points should be allocated during the interview to ensure that their comrade is appointed, thus more than 90% of principals in this district came through unions.*" Given these responses, we agree with Joubert and Van Rooyen (2008:2) that "too many schools in South Africa are faced with significant problems relating to corruption, mismanagement, managerial incompetence, lack of leadership, limited capacity and a lack of courage and willpower to change." Hence, a "crucial social menace, which has been acknowledged as a serious threat and danger to democracy and good governance, is corruption" (Agyeman, 2015:1). In this context, Livingston (2012) argues that opponents of teacher unions see the unions as greedy and self-serving, while teacher unions see themselves as embattled protectors of the very people who are most committed to serving learners.

Meier (2016:2) argues that corruption threatens equality of access, and the quantity and quality of education. It leads to misallocation and loss of talent, since people are promoted on the basis of bribes rather than merit, and deprives a country of competent leaders. Hence, our argument is that appointing principals on the basis of comradeship should be problematised, especially if comradeship supersedes competency and creates a philosophy of othering as a means for getting posts, as it is tantamount to corruption. Our observation is cemented by Meier (2016:3), who avers that "corrupt practices in education include bribes and pay-offs, embezzlement, bypassing criteria, academic fraud, favouritism, nepotism and trafficking of influence, which constitute abuse of power for private gain." In addition, union control over new management positions in education has several consequences. It encourages administrators to be loyal to the union rather than to the improvement of the education system (Murillo, 1999).

Rethinking Practices of Appointment of Principals: Towards Competency and the Democratic Appointment of Principals in South Africa

This section responds to the second research question on how the appointment of principals can be democratised to promote competency and quality education. We believe that this is a struggle that South Africa has to confront if it wishes to improve the education system. Research reveals that one of the ways to mitigate the challenge is to appoint an independent body that oversees the selection process, since the current process has loopholes.

Appointment of an independent body for principal selection

The respondents indicated that appointing an independent body to oversee the appointment of principals would go a long way to mitigating comradeship. The aim of appointing an independent body is not to undermine democracy and the decentralisation of power to the SGBs; on the contrary, the aim is to enhance SGB roles. A democratic society is one that is committed to change, growth and the improvement of its institutions and systems – this is a key defining characteristic of democracies, in contradistinction to totalitarian regimes, which invariably seek to prevent change and development (West-Burnham, 2011:2). While SGBs remain part of the selection process, there is a need to involve an independent body, unknown to the SGB and union members. This will reduce canvassing to influence the outcome of the selection process. The independent body can assist in the appointment process by setting criteria for selection, developing the interview process and questions, shortlisting, being involved in interview tasks and assisting with debriefing unsuccessful candidates (Gloucestershire County Council, 2016).

Training in management and leadership

Managing the curriculum in South Africa today requires school principals who are prepared to transform schools and improve academic standards (Kyahurwa, 2013:3). Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and

Van Rooyen (2010:162) say that the core purpose of principalship is to provide leadership and management in all areas of the school, to enable the creation and support of conditions under which high quality teaching and learning can take place and which promote the highest possible standards of learner achievement. There is a need to raise the bar higher for educational achievement by aspiring principals. The respondents argued that a diploma is no longer enough to equip a principal to meet the demands of managing contemporary schools. For example, in Britain, to be a headteacher the candidates must participate in a training programme, called the National Professional Qualification for Headship or Principalship, which consists of theory and practice that improves candidates' administration skills (Sağlam et al., 2017). In essence, further education, as a requirement for an inspiring principal, can be one of the ways to combat comradeship-oriented appointments.

Negotiations between unions and the Department regarding power

The respondents agreed that negotiations about power are critical for shaping relationships in the education sector. These relationships are premised on championing quality education in South Africa, which also implies appointing competent people to posts (whether comrades or not). This will be impossible unless our minds are decolonised of unionism as the politics of belonging and othering. Decoloniality is desirable for framing relationships in a quest to promote the appointment of deserving and qualified educators to principalship. The respondents to the questionnaire were in agreement that the Department has been captured by the unions. As a result, for fear of the unions the Department is cautious even about ensuring that policies are implemented. This is true, because, as explained by Murray (2016:3), unions are able to forge an often-militant on-site presence in almost every lower quintile school in South Africa.

While power is everywhere and humans cannot escape the complex relations of power that make up society (Daldal, 2014:160), it can be negotiated to improve the efficiency of South African schools. We believe this, because power that dominates faces resistance (Karlberg, 2005:4). The power of the unions and the Department of Basic Education must be "constantly negotiated through day-to-day interactions immersed in local contexts" (Kannabiran & Petersen, 2010:698). Through this, the agenda for decoloniality can be achieved. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:13), at the centre of decoloniality lies the idea of remaking the world such that enslaved, colonised and exploited peoples can regain their ontological density, voice, land, history, knowledge and power. In other words, decoloniality is not in favour of the politics of othering and belonging as a means of allocating principal posts.

Recommendations

While the study was conducted in KZN, it does not mean that the trajectories discussed are prevalent only in that province. In fact, according to Masondo, reporting in *City Press* (2015:para. 3), a commission to investigate abuse and comradeship in relation to appointing principals, headed by Professor John Volmink, "found that not only is education in KZN being run by rogue union members, but Sadtu members have been found to have violated the system in the provincial education departments of Gauteng, North West, the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Limpopo." Based on the findings of this study, we argue that the findings are applicable to various contexts facing similar challenges and, thus, we make the following recommendations:

- Unprofessional interference by higher authorities in matters concerning schools should be banned and discouraged (Suleman, 2015).
- Universities should design modules or degrees specifically for those who intend to be principals.
- Unions should exercise their democratic rights without compromising the quality of school leadership on the basis of reciprocal friendship and the politics of belonging.
- The Department of Basic Education should appoint an independent body to regulate and adhere to the benchmarking set for principalship posts.
- The minimum qualification requirement for principalship should be reconsidered by moving it from a diploma in teacher education to a bachelor's degree, at the very least.

Conclusion

We conclude this article by noting that, while comradeship is a form of identity, it should not be used as an exclusion criterion, and that one of the purposes of teacher unions should be to promote social justice, inclusion and equal opportunities for all. Politics of othering and belonging creates coloniality, which presents new trajectories that derail democratisation efforts and the quest for quality education. We would not, however, want this article to be seen as undermining the role of unions in the teaching profession; in fact, unions also work to democratise the profession and improve working conditions. The only challenge is that unionism can be used to promote the politics of othering and belonging when decisions have to be made regarding principalship, thereby negating competency and qualifications.

We conclude this article by taking the advice given by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:10) that

> Africans must be vigilant against the trap of ending up normalising a universalising coloniality (as can happen with comradeship) as a natural state of the world; instead, comradeship must be unmasked, resisted and destroyed, because it produces a world

order that can only be sustained through a combination of violence, deceit, hypocrisy and lies. Cognisant of the above discussion, we conclude by arguing that South African education would be better if this advice were followed.

Authors' Contributions

BD conceptualised the article, wrote the literature review and collected the data, while CT wrote the methodology and analysis. Both authors reviewed the final manuscript.

Notes

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