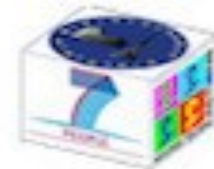




**European/International Joint PhD
in Social Representations and Communication
International Lab Meeting - Spring Session 2015**



**European Commission REA-Research Executive Agency
FP7 - PEOPLE Initial Training Networks
So.Re.Com. Joint-IDP
(PITN-GA-2013-607279)**



Funded by the European Union

The “Anthropological”, “Narrative”, “Dialogical” and “Subjective” paradigmatic approaches to Social Representations

**at the European/International Joint PhD in Social Representations & Communication
Research Center and Multimedia LAB**

26th - 29th April 2015



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

A contextual and subjective approach to Social Representations:

*Key epistemological and critical premises
for conducting empirical research in SRT
with examples from
Community Psychology and Intercultural relations*

Caroline Howarth (LSE)

Outline

1. Social representations, subjectivity, context and criticality
- reflections on theory

2. Community Psychology and Intercultural Relations
- empirical examples

3. Conclusions: conditions for political subjectivity
- continuing questions

Social representations are “ways of world making” (Moscovici, 1988)



- “A system of values, ideas and practices with a twofold function:
- first to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it;
 - and secondly to enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history.”

Moscovici (1976; 1961)

Representations:

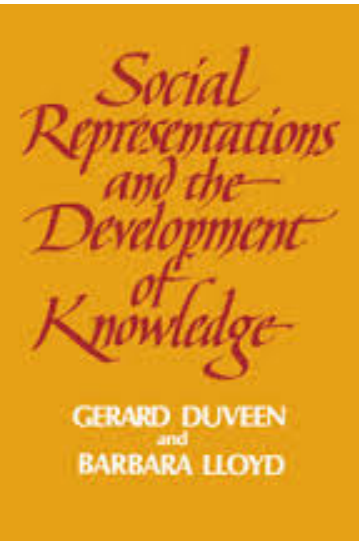
- help build communities (Jodelet, 1991; Jovchelovitch, 2007)
- inform systems of social categorisation and identification (Elcheroth, Doise and Reicher, 2011)
- sustain practices of social exclusion and prejudice (Howarth, 2004; Foster, 2003)
- provoke alternatives, critique and resistance (Philogene, 2001; Duveen, 2000).

1.a. The importance of context:

- Social context:
 - Much psychology has “tended to neglect the fact that human action has to be understood with reference to the meanings that the action has for actors and for its audience” (Nesbitt-Larking et al, 2014).
 - “how psychological processes are constituted through and operate in social context” (Subašić et al, 2012).
- Need to examine what we mean by context carefully (Howarth, Campbell et al, 2013). EG:
 - Culturally diverse cities of the world are simultaneously held up as symbols of massive (and often successful) societal change (Harris, 2013) and also as the sites of conflict, separate communities, failed multiculturalism (Cameron, 2011; Wierviorka, 2010) and so failed change projects.
 - Hence, the very same social context and the very same social phenomena can be read as (successful) societal change or a failed attempt at change, depending on political interests.
- Different levels of context (socio-genetic and micro-genetic, Duveen & de Rosa, 1992):
 - Macro: broad hegemonic representations; role of history
 - Meso: community interactions and systems of knowledge
 - Micro: interpersonal interactions and exchanges

Howarth and Andreouli (2014)

1. b. Social representations and subjectivity



- “Children are born into a particular culture and to become competent functioning members of their culture must re-construct for themselves the categories of that culture”

(Duveen and Lloyd, 1986).

- Social representations provide people with the means of making sense of their worlds, their experiences and themselves.

- Through using social representations individuals develop a sense of self and identity (Howarth, 2002; Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011).

- Hence the subjective is *framed* but not completely determined by the political, the historical and the material.

- The process of social re-presentation also creates a space for alternative identities, other possibilities.

- ***This allows not only subjectivity to develop, but also a political subjectivity.***

Howarth (2016)

1. c. Social representations and criticality

- Social representations operate as systems of power or as ideological or hegemonic representations (Howarth, 2011, 2014)
- EG: Racialising representations:
 - Societal systems through which people are divided into races, with power unevenly distributed (or produced) based on these racial classifications. Racialisation is embodied through attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, laws, norms, and practices that either reinforce or counteract power asymmetries. (Paradies, 2005).
 - While “racism cannot be wished away” (Dei, 1996), need to examine the opportunities for transgressing racialised networks of power.
- Highlight that representations can be contested, challenged and transformed – as emancipatory representations (Philogene, 2001).
 - “If categories relate to social forms, then taking categories for granted removes our choice over the type of world we live in. The reification of social categories is a raw road to tyranny. A healthy democracy depends on a continuous questioning of the terms of identity. (Reicher, 2004, p. 941). See also Elcheroth, Doise and Reicher (2011)
 - SRT explores “those social processes through which novelty and innovation become as much a part of social life as conservation and preservation” (Duveen, 2000).

Research agenda:

possibilities for political subjectivity and social change

- Bring to light the creative ways people use representations in order to challenge and resist racialising practices that invade subjectivity and our social relationships
- Research projects on:
 1. Belonging and community resilience in a marginalised community (Brixton)
 2. Tackling symbolic and actual exclusion at school
 3. Resisting hegemonic representations of whiteness in primary schools
 4. Developing assertive culturally-complex identities in community arts projects
 5. Multicultural practices in schools with different experiences of contact/cohesion
 6. Counter narratives to islamophobia and contested Britishness in schools & local politics
- These studies demand that our participants are seen as active agents in production, dissemination, resistance and transformation of representations.



Stories can “project futures and help to realise the hopes and expectations of the not-yet-become dimension of representations”.
Jovchelovitch

(2007)

Example 1: Racialised practices at school

- Social representations are sometimes *only* apparent in action.

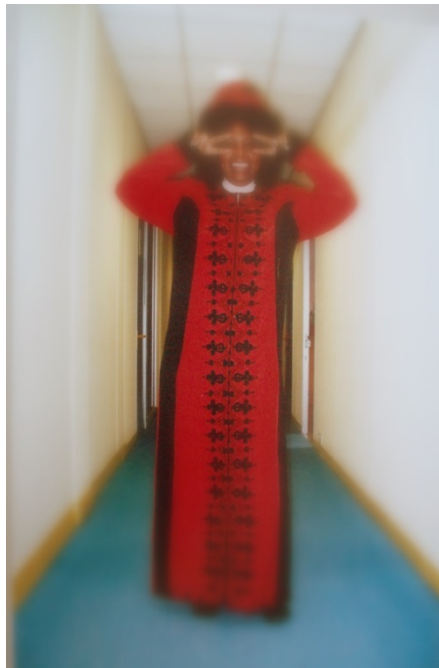
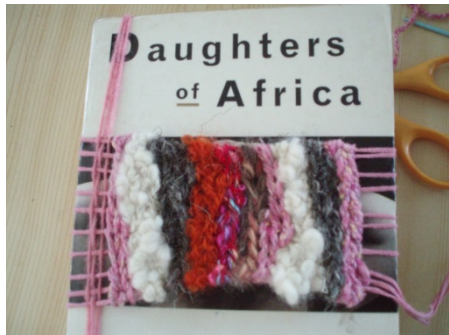
My teachers said that I cannot walk about the playground with my friends. They said we were a 'gang' that intimidated the other children. But it's okay for the white girls to hang out with their friends – even if there were 10 or 20 of them!! There's only 5 of us. ... But, you know, in the classroom, it was like the teachers could not even see us. When I put up my hand they would just look straight through me. As soon as there's some noise, yeah, *then* the teachers look at the black girls.
- Racialised representations permeate interactions between Chantelle and her teacher:
 - Visibility / Invisibility
 - Threat / belonging
 - Exclusion / agency
- The racialised representation exists as the institutionalised practice of looking / not looking
 - And informs the hegemonic construction of 'race' at school.
- Chantelle's insight emerges from a creative, critical and collaborative space – where excluded young black pupils share experiences and move forward in education.

Howarth (2004, 2006)

Mirza & Reay (2000)

Example 2: Political subjectivity and anti-racism

- Children, teenagers and parents with mixed-heritage participated in a community arts project that invited them to deliberate, construct and reconstruct their cultural identities and cultural relations.
 - The racialising gaze and photography
 - Inter-connected cultures and weaving
 - Performativity, agency and movement /dance



Caroline: (Your outfit) Looks great. So do you think that this says something about your self?
Thema: Err, Kind of. Cos the afro, cos I am African and when I was small I used to have afro hair, and most people – my mum has afro hair but she relaxed it, so that says something. The Egyptian because I like Arabic style things, I just love everything about Arabic style things. ... Um. But no one really knows that. No one really know that part of me, eve- everyone really thinks that because I am African I won't like something that is different to Africa

Photography workshop Aged 17, Kenyan

Example 3a. ‘Celebrating difference’

Lina: We’ve had a **cultural day** where like people wear their own clothes.

Eleni: Yeah, someone mentioned that to me already.

Lina: No one did it though.

Amneet: Because some people get **embarrassed**. I wouldn’t come into school with Asian clothes.

Eleni: Why not?

Amneet: Because that’s **embarrassing**. I don’t wear them that much anyway. I only wear them to temple and to a wedding. Otherwise **I just wear my English clothes**.

Eleni: Why do you think they want you to do come in your Asian clothes?

Amneet: But they know that I’m Asian because they can look at my skin and tell. So it’s like more **intimidating**.

Lina: I think it’s a bit scary that. Like when you’re picking on people, “Oh, **you have to come in your culture**”; some people don’t want to... **Nobody wants to be an outsider**.

(Yorkshire, Y10)

- How schools ‘manage’ diversity may end up presenting cultural communities as essentially different and separate.
- Importance of context: pupils at school may develop more connected identities and practices, which may be different to identities in other cultural and religious contexts.
- Obscures experiences of racism and power of privilege/whiteness

Ex 3b. Inviting criticality in the classroom

Head teacher: There was one activity that focused on Britishness and **what it means to be British**. It turned out to be an excellent activity because the girls were able to celebrate **what it means to be British**. For example in food technology they did British foods and where did it come from, this type of ingredient, **is it similar** to another ingredient that you may use in a dish from another country. And in music they looked at the national anthem and some of the girls reworded bits and pieces of it to put in certain words **that they think should encompass what it means to be British...** not just being born here but you know, coming in.

(London)

- Enabling a 'pluralistic re-construction' of knowledge and re-imagining identities as a collective practice (Andreouli, Howarth & Sonn, 2014)
- Highlights the agentic and collaborative aspect of identities in tackling representations that produce 'race' as limiting
- Creates a productive and political form of subjectivity – where pupils are positioned as active and agentic knowledge producers and citizens

Representations, ideology and change

- The reproduction of power relations depends on representations being institutionalised.
- Re-presentation carries the possibilities of the hybridity and polyphasia of meaning
 - and so provokes dialogue, debate and sometimes resistance in the ideological construction of race (Howarth, 2006)
 - and gives us the possibilities to become *agents not objects* of the stigma of race and so “counter the seduction of images that threaten to dehumanise” (hooks, 1992)
 - “Agency always operates within and through a social structure” (Ratner, 2000), and social context (Howarth & Andreouli, 2014).
 - Groups, communities and schools can become *agents of change* in taking on and challenging representations that *race* (Kowal, Franklin & Paradies, 2013).

Fostering political subjectivity

- “Individuals and groups, far from being passive receptors, think for themselves, produce and ceaselessly communicate their own specific representations and solutions to the questions they set themselves ... which have a decisive impact on their social relations, their choices”

(Moscovici, 1984).

- Need to examine the social, political and institutional constraints (and enabling mechanisms) for political subjectivity
- Schools as sites for political subjectivity:
 - **Recognising the power of hegemonic representations**
 - **The politics of engagement**
 - **Conditions for the social imaginary and criticality**
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5IV9o8QQmk>

Concluding thoughts



- What are the ways in which community psychology and intercultural relations research can harness the critical potential of SRT?
- What role can you play in this?

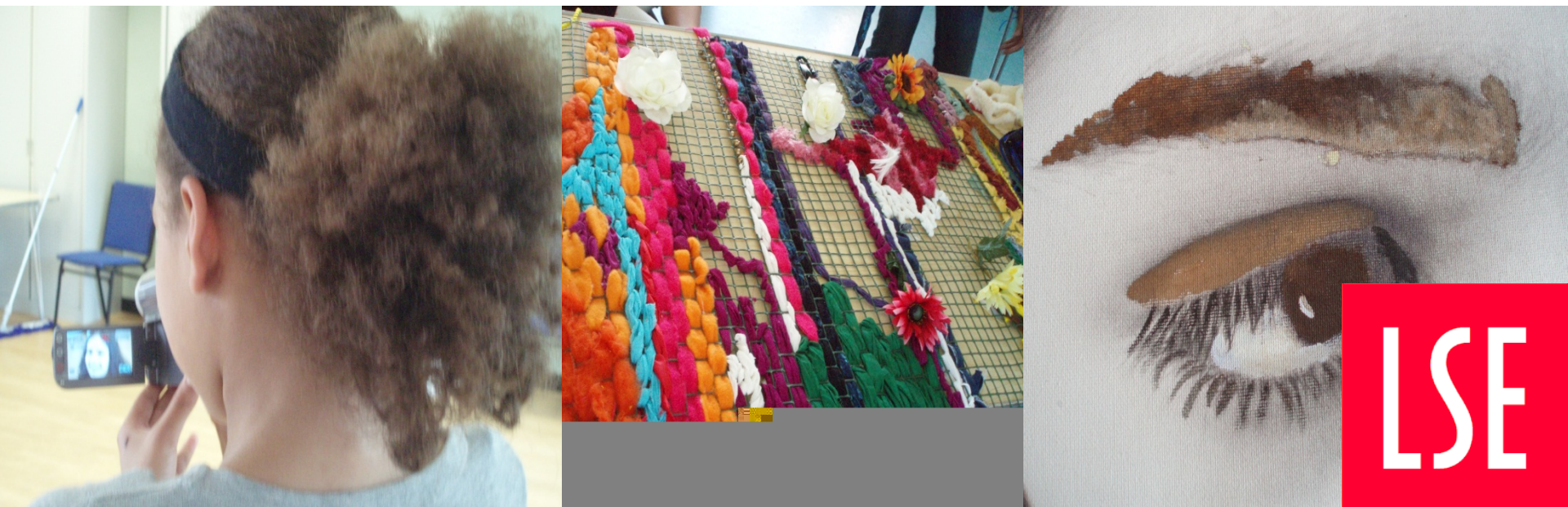
A battle of ideas?

- How are different meanings of 'race' asserted and contested?
- How do different versions co-exist? What does this mean for racialised identities?
- How are different meanings of 'race', identity, difference fought over?
- What resources do people bring to these battles?
- How free are we to navigate the symbolic landscape of our culture(s)?
- What hinders us from detaching from particular representations – such as racialising representations?
- How do alternative, resistant representations take hold and come to transform previously hegemonic representations of race?
- How can we reject the binaries of racism?

Adapted from Raudsepp (2005) and Howarth (2006)



Thank you





Tracey Rose's The Kiss

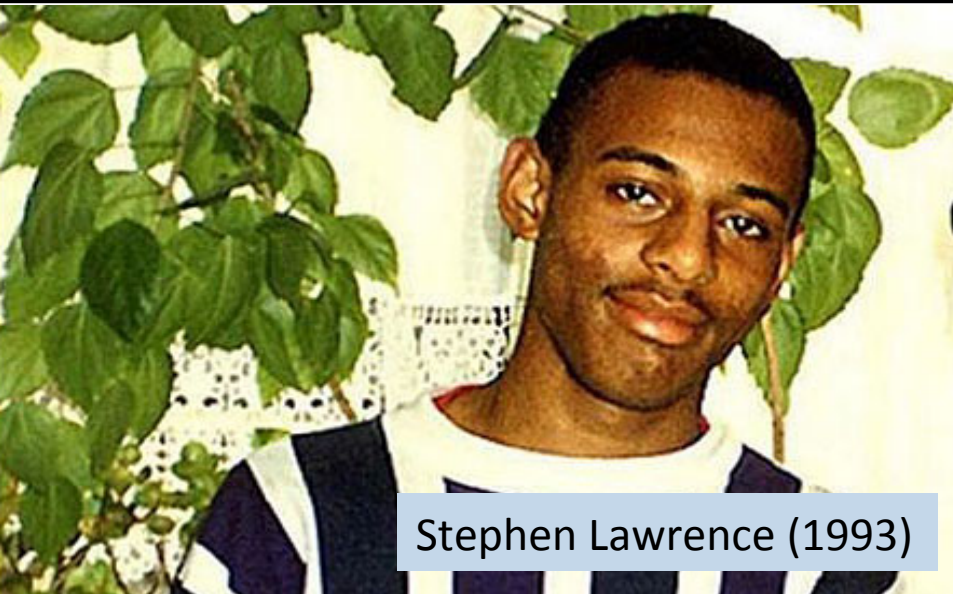
Rejecting binaries of race

The artist contests the racial logic of apartheid and turns the psychology of identity into a politics of representation.

...each and every attempt to pin something or someone down illuminates the shadow and the act of a radical human heterogeneity. The centre could never hold, the tidy polarities we set between black and white, man and woman, could never fix the flux....



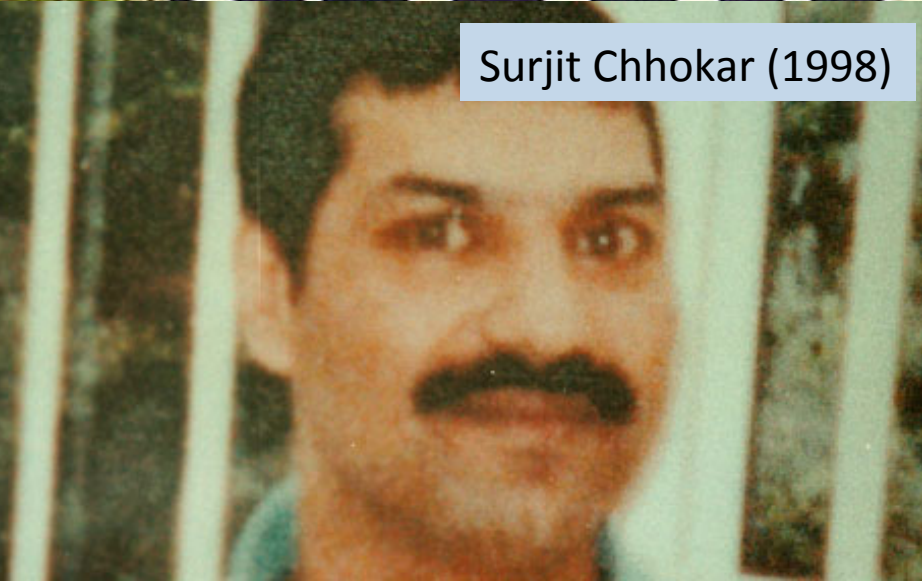
Conditional citizenship?



Stephen Lawrence (1993)



Jean Charles de Menezes (2005)



Surjit Chhokar (1998)



Mark Duggan (2011)

Innovation and collaboration

The transition from a tradition-dominated society (stable collective representations) to conditions of late modernity (dynamic social representations) calls for a new focus on:

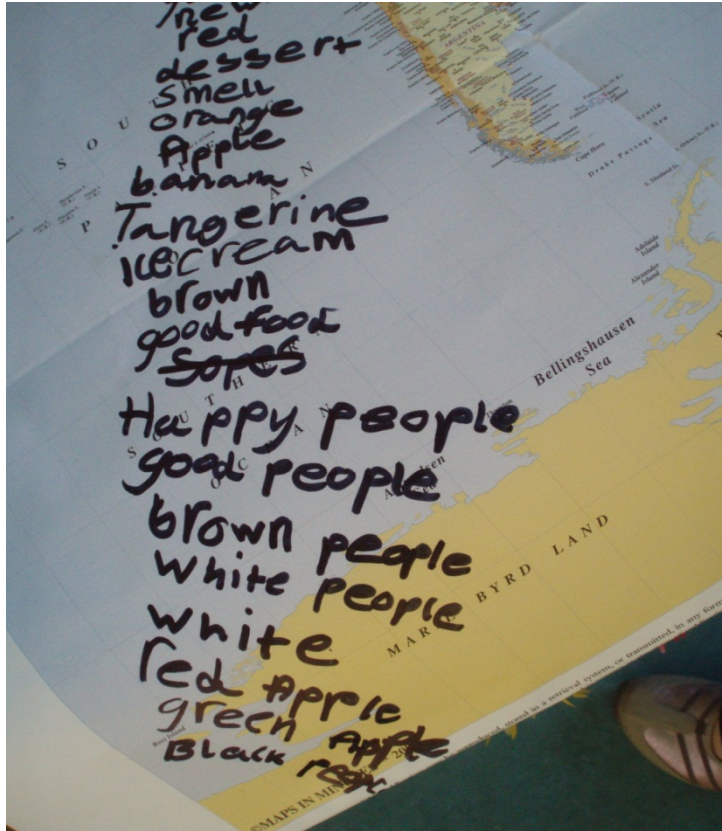
- ⇒ Creative and collaborative knowledge processes
- ⇒ Cognitive polyphasic nature of knowledge production

Representations today are always in the making, in the context of inter-relations and inter-actions that are themselves always in the making, particularly in:

- Globalised/localised interactions that characterise our age
- The globalisation of culture reshapes traditional values, traditional systems of symbolic thought and traditional knowledge.

See Jovchelovitch (2007) *Knowledge in Context*.

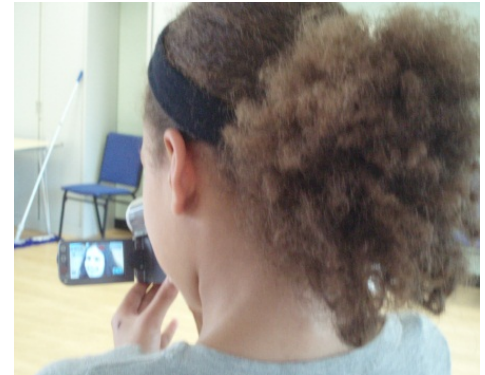
Creative methods (community arts)



- Participant observation over 24 days
 - 6 four-day workshops, ran by artists
 - 3 with younger group (7 – 10)
 - 3 with older group (11 – 19)

- Using different arts
 - Photography and painting
 - Weaving
 - Drama and dance

- 8 focus groups
 - Younger children
 - Teenagers
 - Parents



- Participants include 25 children and young people, 14 parents and 4 artists.
- Mixed identities, girls and boys.

Mixed, inbetween, hybrid, ... contemporary?

- Psychology conveys an image of identity problems and 'the tortured misfit' (Phoenix and Owens, 2000).
- Though always been a focus on the benefits of living 'inbetween' (Park, 1931).
- Need to recognise that all identities are hybrid, mixed, hyphenated – not a 'special' case of Others or racialised identities.
- Highlights the very dynamic ways in which all identities:
 - change as a function of their context and cultural-historical location
 - the shifting ways they are presented, defended and contested and
 - the role of power on identity-work (Howarth, 2002, 2006a)

Research interests

- The politics of (mis)recognition and identity
- The political psychology of racialisation:
 - Interpersonal encounters
 - Institutionalised dynamics
 - Political discourses
- The contested practices of citizenship
 - Critical dialogue
 - Democratic knowledge
 - Anti-racism and resistance

