Review of "Transforming Postgraduate Education in Africa", edited by Michael Anthony Samuel and Hyleen Mariaye

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ABSTRACT

This review examines the book *Transforming Postgraduate Education in Africa (*2023), edited by Michael Anthony Samuel and Hyleen Mariaye. The book presents a collection of case studies that illustrate how doctoral supervisors and researchers have adapted and challenged the traditional hierarchical apprentice model of doctoral education, with a primary focus on cases from South Africa and Mauritius. Through collaborative projects and theoretical reflections, the authors advocate for transformative practices that empower both supervisors and doctoral candidates, offering valuable insights for reimagining doctoral education in contexts shaped by structural and systemic inequalities.

"Transforming Postgraduate Education in Africa" (2023), edited by professors Michael Anthony Samuel and Hyleen Mariaye, invites any academic teaching at the doctoral level to interrogate the underpinning values that inform their pedagogical decisions and the imaginaries about the purposes of doctoral education. Indeed, nine of the 11 chapters included in the book demonstrate how doctoral supervisors and researchers have adapted and challenged the traditional hierarchical apprentice model of doctorate education, mainly considering cases in the context of South Africa.

But before I proceed with this review, allow me a disclosure. I know and work with three of the co-authors who contributed to this collected volume, and with whom I have discussed in depth the processes of educating a new generation of doctoral holders in contexts of profound class, racial, and gender inequalities. Thus, my opinion about the book is somewhat biased because I share the concerns that inspired this book. Being a doctoral supervisor and researcher of doctoral education working in Chile and South Africa, I often grapple with the question of the relevant pedagogies and support structures needed to interrupt inequalities that are reproduced in the doctoral education space, including the formative process as well as the process of knowledge production.

This book does not provide definitive answers to this inquiry. Instead, through the exploration of concrete projects involving alternative models and pedagogies in doctoral education, it invites us - academics - to reflect on our own pedagogical decisions and relationships with our doctoral students. The first section of the book includes institutional efforts that propose alternative structures and supervisory models of doctoral programmes; the second section discusses different types of pedagogies to facilitate doctoral students' participation in the academic community; whereas the last section describes inter-institutional and national projects to strengthen doctoral education capacity through partnerships that involve universities, professional organisations of researchers, and national government agencies. The final chapter of the book, written by Professor Maresi Nerad, argues for doctoral programmes and institutions adopting a framework of seven core values, which emerged from an international conference that gathered doctoral education researchers in different stages of their careers from the five continents. Two of these values highlight the importance of acknowledging and respecting different types of knowledge and defending the role that doctoral education has in educating ethical, independent researchers.

In its entirety, the book can be seen as a collection of endeavours written by academics who want to transform the doctoral programmes in which they serve as supervisors. In most cases, these efforts respond to national government policies that have focused on increasing the number of graduates in

a short period of time without paying enough attention to the entire research ecosystem required to educate doctoral fellows. Samuel and Mariaye eloquently address this matter when they explain how short-sighted policies focused on increasing numbers of researchers and scientific productivity frequently compromise the academic quality of the doctorate and overlook the question of what doctoral education is for. This was the case in South Africa, which in 2012 set the goal of achieving 100 PhD holders per million inhabitants, implying an increase to 5000 doctoral graduates per year; around 3000 more doctoral graduates than at the time. Diverse studies show that the South African higher education (HE) system did not have sufficient doctoral supervisory and institutional capacity to fully address this increase of doctoral students enrolment in a short period of time (Cloete & Mouton, 2016). On the island of Mauritius, the other national case addressed in the book, the government set the plan of transforming the island into an international hub of HE and pushed an agenda that promoted international universities to establish branches in the country, but the plan did not bring the expected results.

In the same introductory chapter, the editors argue that innovative projects of doctoral education cannot be detached from theories and invite the readers to appreciate the multiple theoretical frameworks that inspire different models of doctorate education in the African context. Thus, the readers will find cases that describe doctoral programmes that embrace a pedagogy of critical hope (Wilmot & McKenna,); intersectionality as a lens to make visible the entanglement of gender and racial inequality that affects black women PhD fellows and academics (Msimango & Motala,); Critical Pedagogy (Mendelowitz, Fouche, Reed, Andrews & Vally Essa,); and theory of habits of mind (Govender), amongst others. Readers will notice that each of the chapters engages to a different extent with a theory of change that aspires to interrogate or disrupt with different intensities the difficulties and injustices that appear in doctoral education.

One of the cases that particularly captured my attention involves a collaborative effort led by the HE Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA), a professional organisation of academic developers, and the South African governmental agency, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). This initiative aims to establish a framework for decolonised doctoral supervision, scrutinising every aspect of the relationship between doctoral fellows and supervisors. To achieve this goal, HELTASA and the DHET have launched an inter-institutional doctoral programme that employs a cohort supervision model and a hybrid format combining online classes with face-to-face summer and winter schools. The program is coordinated by an advisory committee

linked to HELTASA, whose members are senior and reputed academic researchers in the field. They have overseen developing the curriculum of the summer/winter schools and short courses.

The authors of this chapter – Samuel, Behari-Leak, Maringe, Ramrathan, and Keane – who are also members of the advisory committee of the doctoral programme, recognise that they do not share a common understanding of what decoloniality looks like in the supervision space. Yet, they agree on a temporal definition of decoloniality that seeks to generate an "empowering (not overpowering) process, which enables continuous and persistent intellectual conversations between the researcher, the researched, and significant others…" with the final goal of generating conditions that allow "equal partnerships in the re-creation of the conditions which support sustainable survival, progress, and development" (p. 234).

Their reflection echoes what several decolonial scholars argue regarding the ongoing, complex, and contradictory nature of projects that seek to undo colonial legacies in HE (Menezes du Sousa, 2019; Machado de Oliveira, 2021). Rather than proposing a pure decolonised model of doctoral supervision, Samuel and his colleagues are exploring how to challenge the power asymmetries between doctoral candidates and supervisors as well as questioning the assumed legitimacy of Western-European knowledges and ways of being. Central to their initiative is a decolonial supervisory course designed for both supervisors and PhD candidates enrolled in their programme.

This project, alongside others featured in the book, illustrates the potential for transformative change in doctoral education. It emphasises the absence of a universal solution, advocating instead for a sustained commitment to critically examining entrenched practices within doctoral programmes that perpetuate inequalities. This book promises to inspire doctoral academics and postgraduate administrators interested in reimagining doctoral education pedagogies, particularly in societies marked by significant social and income disparities.

References

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