CHAPTER 2:

Praxis of humanising pedagogy to enhance the throughput of postgraduate students in South Africa: A caveat

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Abstract

South Africa requires black intellectual leaders who are skilled in objective critical enquiry and possess powerful knowledge that enables them to dare invent the future. However, postgraduate throughput in South African universities is low and slow, especially among black South Africans. Scholars have attributed this to epistemic othering tied to the legacy of colonialism and apartheid that have systematically erased and kept 'other knowledges' and forms of social life invisible. This chapter is a dialectical analysis of the praxis of humanising pedagogy, an epistemological approach employed in the Higher Education (HE) environment to bring the student at the centre of their learning. The analysis employs auto-reflexivity from a humanist philosophical approach to knowledge production. The objective is to highlight some shortcomings of the pedagogy, which largely consist in its conceptualisation whose associated praxis favours to project and position black pipeline students as objects of pity. From this approach, the praxis becomes sympathetic towards compassionate handholding models of teaching and learning, which paradoxically entrenches the superiority of the Oxbridge research supervision tradition whose ontological grounding consists in a structured exclusion, marginalisation, concealment, and production of other knowledges and social life as inferior or non-existent. A potent risk that

emerges is possible aggravation of existing abyssal exclusions through reproduction of conformity to the logics grounding these erasures. The greatest undoing of deficit positioning is its lack of regard to 'funds of knowledge' that the students can bring into their own learning. Conversely, anchoring humanising pedagogy on affordances that a student's background can yield (for example highlighting individual strengths and critical skills such as good work ethic, commitment, and resilience, which together are critical for postgraduate success) can be humanising, empowering and catalytic for black postgraduate throughput in South Africa.

Keywords: Abyssal line; academic resilience; affordances of the hash past; black South African postgraduate; humanising pedagogy.

Introduction

> *I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing*
> *– Socrates.*

The post-apartheid agenda for Higher Education (HE) in South Africa revolves around the need for an inclusive system. Central to this agenda are deliberate efforts to challenge the physical and epistemological obscurity of black students who, as with postcolonial societies (de Sousa Santos, 2028) remain excluded from spaces of knowledge production. The ultimate aim is thus to increase the country's research-based knowledge especially among black South Africans (Botha, 2010). Postgraduate studies capacitate men and women with high-level skills for the knowledge economy in order for them to participate meaningfully in efforts aimed at finding solutions to social, development and intellectual problems. According to Barnard et al. (2018), introducing more skilled employees into the economy is an important path to development for many middle-income countries. In any case, the essence of education lies in its dual function, that is to facilitate citizen conformity to dominant structure or to conscientise citizens to act for change. As Paulo Freire (1970) puts it, education functions on one hand as an instrument to

facilitate conformity into (or at most fight for change within) the logic of regulation of the dominant system. On the other hand, education can be the means by which people can deal critically with reality by enabling them to discover how to actively transform their world (Freire, 1970). Knowledge, as de Sousa Santos (2018:25) acknowledges, facilitates "the struggles against abyssal exclusions [that] entail a radical interruption of the logic of appropriation". de Sousa Santos further posits that knowledge, and being, operates together with colonialism and patriarchy "to produce certain groups of people and forms of social life as no-existent, invisible, and radically inferior" (de Sousa Santos, 2018:25). This, according to de Sousa Santos (2018) is called production of abyssal exclusions, or absences in society.

The epigraph above is a famous quote attributed to one of the Athenian philosophers, Socrates. Known also as the Socratic paradox, the epigraph conjures commitment to knowing, a distinct attribute of any researcher. Paradoxically, it may as well be a poignant epigram that captures the predicament that most South African postgraduate students find themselves, which according to Mouton and colleagues (2015) relates to their woeful under preparedness for postgraduate studies. Either way, the Socratic paradox constitutes a useful starting point for a discussion, as this chapter attempts to make, on critical challenges that accompany the praxis of humanisation pedagogy, an epistemological approach employed in the HE environment to enhance learning experience, retention and success of South African postgraduate students from marginalised backgrounds.

Why this discussion? Problem, aim and objectives

Humanising pedagogy has been normatively conceptualised as an educational approach whose organising principle and associated praxis of

'compassionate teaching' (Manathunga 2009) is grounded in the recognition of learner disadvantage to improve access, retention, throughput and learning experiences of students from (previously) marginalised backgrounds (Bitzer & Albertyn, 2011; Limbada & Kajee, 2021; Zembylas, 2018). This obviates teaching and learning environments and practices that are sympathetic towards handholding models, which paradoxically entrenches the superiority of Oxbridge research supervision traditions whose ontological grounding consists in abyssal exclusions (de Sousa Santos, 2018).

This chapter posits that such a deficit positioning of students unwittingly projects 'poor black students' as objects of pity. This conceivably risks the fostering of hegemonic assumptions that permanently cast black students within a deficiency syndrome socially, economically and even intellectually thereby facilitating conformity by "integrating the younger generation into the logic of the present system" rooted in historical and systematic marginalisation, concealment, and production of all knowledges (save for the Eurocentric) and social life as inferior or non-existent (Freire, 1970, 34). A key question that arises, which this chapter attempts to address, is how can the praxis of humanising pedagogy be implemented for the effective production of quality graduates among marginalised South African black students without entrenching the abyssal line?

To address this question, the chapter highlights conceivable risks that accompany this praxis, focusing specifically on black South African students in the postgraduate pipeline, hence its formulation as a caveat, a caution, or a warning. As a caveat, the chapter does not therefore seek to provide a prescriptive way to humanise postgraduate studies, not least because the praxis of education as a journey towards humanisation, as Freire (1970) contends, can neither be prescribed nor imposed. Rather, the intellectual contribution of this caveat consists in its potential to provoke a debate on

how postgraduate studies in South Africa can be humanised in ways that do not render the production of black postgraduates "an exercise in futility" (Waghid, 2015:3). Accordingly, the underpinning assumption here is that humanisation (Maluleka, 2020; Zembylas, 2018; Khene, 2014; Zinn & Rodgers 2012) should enable production of quality intellectuals and productive citizen South Africa requires.

The need for postgraduates in South Africa

South Africa continues to bear unsatisfactory postgraduate throughput rates, a situation that is increasingly troubling for both government and HEIs. Recent data from across the twenty-six (26) South African universities suggest that the country is unlikely to achieve the annual target of five-thousand doctoral graduates by 2030 (NPC, 2012; DHET, 2020). According to Mouton (2015) the target of 5000 PhDs by 2030 may not be met due to a leaky postgraduate pipeline[1]. Postgraduate throughput data presented in the Ministerial Statement on the Implementation of the University Capacity Development Programme 2021 – 2023 (Figure. 1) indicates that while there has been an overall increase in both the number and diversity of graduates produced in South African universities between 2000 and 2017, the number of South Africans graduating from doctoral programmes relative to 'foreign' candidates studying at the same institutions is underwhelming.

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1 Postgraduate pipeline is a term used to describe a pool of students enrolled, retained and progressing in a postgraduate programme.
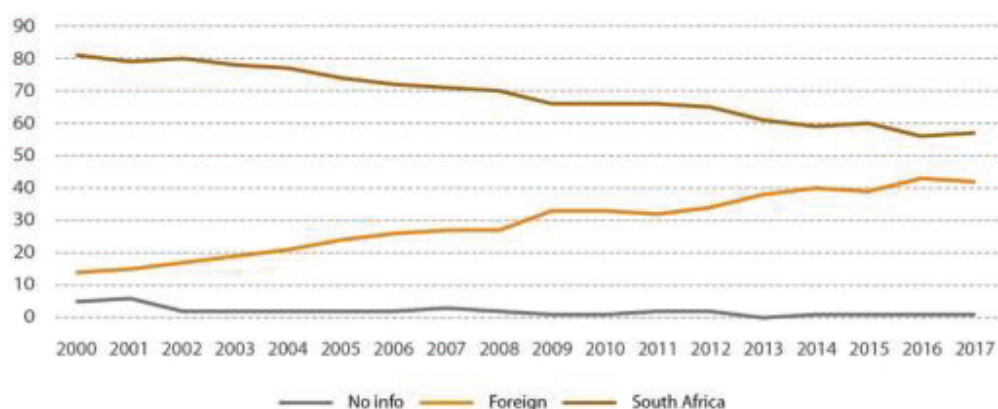
Figure 1: Nationality proportions of doctoral graduates from South African universities between 2000 and 2017 (DHET, 2020:9)

The proportion of non-South African doctoral candidates (marked in Fig. 1 as 'foreign') to that of South Africans graduating from the same institutions is diametrical. Various reasons have been cited for the slow and low throughput of black South African postgraduate students. In his characterisation of doctoral production in South Africa, Mouton (2015) lamented that the leaky pipeline of doctoral production owes to financial challenges, low progression and retention rates, and family constraints contribute. Other reasons include the schools' inability to produce sufficient numbers of matriculants; the university system's failure to recruit, retain and ensure effective progression; insufficient funding; (non) availability of, and where available third-rate supervision (Maistry, 2015; Mouton, et al., 2015). Also, poor student pre-research skills are known to have often resulted in attrition or more time being spent in the pipeline (DHET, 2020).

In light of the above factors, it is unarguable that ensuring wider physical access to postgraduate level can be sufficient to ensure increased throughput. However no positive co-relationship exists between wider physical access and progression at postgraduate (Guerin, Kerr & Green, 2015;

Wheelahan, 2012; Morrow, 2009). For this reason, any intervention that attributes the slow throughput of South African postgraduates to structural challenges only may not succeed in changing the above trajectory. This is especially so if the diametrical throughput ratios between South Africans and 'foreign students', some of whom share similar if not worst social and economic backgrounds is taken into consideration. A study reported in the University World News 2007 found that foreign students in South Africa comprised about 7% of enrolments at public universities (MacGregor, 2007). About two-thirds of these originated from the Southern African Development Community (SADC), with Zimbabwe being the major source country, followed by Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (also see Mouton, et al. 2015). All of these source countries bear relatively worse socio-economic conditions than South Africa.

De-colonial thinkers, however, attribute the slow and low postgraduate throughput mainly to dehumanising epistemologies that are tied to the legacies of colonial disempowerment (Delport, 2016; Salazar, 2013; Wheelahan, 2012; Morrow, 2009). Thinkers aligned to this view suggest as a way of improvement the need to ensure social justice in HEIs. Social justice in HE includes the disruption of the 'cognitive empire' dominated by Eurocentric approaches to knowledge construction, replacing them with decentred epistemologies of the South that are inclusive, socially just and humanising (Mamdani, 1996, 2016; Mbembe 2001, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Andreotti, 2011; de Sousa, Santos, 2018; Masinire & Ndofirepi, 2020). Together, these scholars isolate epistemic othering and inequalities that commonly mark social backgrounds of students as key drivers for this trajectory, hence the suggestion as a strategy for improvement to disrupt and replace such epistemic injustices with socially just epistemologies.

In addressing the central question in this chapter, consideration is given to vital skills that emerge from the bidirectional influences between an individual's agency and their environmental context as surmised by the bio-ecological theory of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). According to Mgqwashu et al. (2020), critical 'funds of knowledge' can be produced through such past. They doubt if postgraduate research teaching and learning based on deficit-positioning can be the best way to enhance throughput of postgraduates who are highly skilled in independent critical enquiry and dedicated to its importance.

From an auto-ethnographic perspective (see Mgqwashu, 2009), an incursion into my unenviable lived experience of 'disadvantage' in rural Zimbabwe maybe be useful to demonstrate why this chapter aligns with Mgqwashu and colleagues' radical doubt against deficit positioning of learners.

A long walk: My journey through basic and higher education

I hail from a remote and marginalised area where I was born and raised in a peasant family. The schools I attended for my basic education are seven kilometres (7 km) away from home. This means that I had to walk 14 km daily, for eleven consecutive years, (seven in primary and four in secondary) to and from school. The image in Figure 2[2] prefigures the harsh conditions that marked my experience in basic education. At all stages of my educational

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[2] The conditions under which I underwent basic education persist today in some parts of the country. This image was taken in 2021, at a different primary school in Mashonaland Central, in northern Zimbabwe.

career, the start and end of the journey was clearly defined, but the route unpaved, with no markings and signposts.

Figure 2: Physical, social, historical and material conditions underpinning my identity. (Picture courtesy of Lyndlin Masvaure, 2021)

As with the pupils seen in the image, I attended school barefooted. I started owning a pair of (second hand) shoes in my 9th grade. We had no classrooms. The few available had damaged roofs and floors, with no furniture. At home, I was expected to complete chores before and after school. For example, during the ploughing season (generally from late October to December every year, (the period that also coincided with end of year school examinations) we would wake up at around 0200Hrs and go to the fields, where we would be released for school just before dawn. After school, cattle needed to be

driven from the veld. Such is the life that I endured for the entire duration of my basic education.

At university, I also strived and coped within a very constrained resource setting. Access to computers, for example, was very limited and strenuous. One had to book a 45-minute slot at least a week ahead. Quite strangely, lectures were not compulsory so much so that one could bunk off as much as they like, and present only for examinations[3]. In this milieu, we had been made aware from the outset that marks ranged from 0 – 100. The irony here was that passing or failing the degree was a student's choice.

Interlocuters on social justice in education would, as they have mostly done, interpret the above auto-reflexive vignette from an abyssal thinking that associate's rurality with intellectual drought while urbanity (and proficiency in English language) is associated with intellectual ingenuity. However, post abyssal researchers such as de Sousa Santos (2018), Mgqwashu and colleagues (2020), Salazar (2013) among others have approached it differently. Mgqwashu and colleagues (2020) explored the generative effects of rurality on transitions in HE. Their study reveals how "the skills, experiences, and knowledges acquired in [low resource settings such as] rural communities and families might support higher education transitions and university learning" (Mgqwashu et al. 2020:946). Such background influences, for example, the development of student agency to overcome adversity, and ability to "improvise new ways of being [in their] epistemic becoming" (Mgqwashu et al. 2020:954). According to Salazar (2020), the

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[3] A certain group in my cohort spotted T-shirts inscribed "We DRINK daily and PASS annually". The group enjoyed independence through a free lifestyle mostly associated university sub-cultures.

hash past is a source of strength. It helps students' success in different ways. Fist it helps them with an internal drive (i-power) to find themselves or carve their identities from individual and community's strength and challenges. It also provides a 'culture of power' and 'power of culture', which means the dispositions, knowledge and skills students need to navigate unequal learning environments as well as cultural resources that impact student's ways of knowing respectively (Salazar, 2020).

With hindsight, I can attest that my present physical, emotional and intellectual dispositions owe to my experiences growing up. What sustained my educational journey is a combination of factors, which include determination to acquire an education that would transform my life. Growing up I had learnt that the unenviable conditions that marked our position in society owed to the lack of formal education by my parents. I grew up next to a family where my peers always changed shoes and uniforms every school term because their parents were teachers. That experienced sharpened my determination to obtain formal education.

The home chores, while encumbering my efforts to excel in school, were not entirely a disadvantage. They prepared me to persevere under difficult conditions, and also for what I later felt as a very soft landing at a South African university whose educational environment my colleagues found relatively unnavigable. My department used participatory methods of learning which involved body mapping and student led seminars. One would require self-disciple, focus and autonomy to succeed because the lecturers were almost always absent. When they were present, theirs was to facilitate student presentations, either individually or as groups. Through, my prior learning and the culture of power, I easily excelled in postgraduate studies. My Master's degree was obtained summa cum laude, and my PhD was

completed in record time, almost without correction. I had never obtained a first class in my previous learning in a rural and impoverished environment.

Mgqwashu et al. (2020) and Masaiti et al. (2020) posit that rurality can be a source of critical resources required for developing important dispositions and skills necessary for negotiating spaces at universities. These dispositions, which include agency, resilience, innovativeness among others were critical for my success at postgraduate. Background underpins identity formation, hence the need for its recognition, not erasure, through acknowledgement of the independence, agency and voice, which together constitute humanity of the student. Mis-recognition of that background, as Mgqwashu et al. (2020) contend, is tantamount to social injustice. It is from this perspective that this chapter is framed within a humanist understanding of postgraduate studies, which is located at the intersection of liberal humanism[4] and Ubuntu philosophy, and whose purpose is to reclaim the humanity of the student. To ground this understanding, it is perhaps pertinent to characterise what postgraduate study is, and should be.

What is a postgraduate study?

A postgraduate qualification is an advanced study or a mode of knowledge-production that gives students an opportunity to produce knowledge through independent research. According to the University of Tasmania

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[4] I am aware of the reprehensible racism of many founders of liberal humanism – John Locke (1632–1704), David Hume (1711–1776), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) - and how their work entrenched epistemic racism and seemingly lethally infected liberal theory. C.W Maris (2020) argues that liberalism appears to have since cleansed itself of the prejudices of its spiritual ancestors and cautions against an uncritical neglect of the distinction between genesis and justification.

(UTAS) website, candidates who elect to enrol in postgraduate programmes are ordinarily thought to be curious individuals who are driven by an inquiring mind, and have certain attributes that drive their passion to solve intellectual problems and advance humanity (UTAS, 2020). The first attribute is creative readiness or the desire to imagine the world differently (Wheelahan, 2012). For Thomas Sankara (2007) these are individuals who are daring to invent the future. Secondly, the student should be ready and able to be left alone to think (Mboti, 2018). This is the autonomy and independence that underpin andragogy, the philosophy of self-directed adult learning at postgraduate (Blaschke, 2019). Last but equally important is academic resilience, first propounded by Hall (1996), which enables a student to overcome complex realities that constitute adversities encountered in knowledge (re) searching journeys.

The aim of postgraduate studies is to cultivate a critical mind to enable a person to discover and carve an own personal individual identity and realisation of full humanity. While individuality is commonly associated with Western liberal thought, and inter-dependence with African sociability, carving identities through individual thinking is not foreign to Ubuntu. What Ubuntu - an African philosophy on the relational nature of persons (Lubombo, 2018) and the essence of what it really means to be human (Louw, 1998) - abhors is individualism not individuality (Sindima, 1995; Mboti, 2015; Maris, 2020). I-power (Salazar, 2020) and carving individual identities is not a liberal perspective as Maisty (2015) would suggest, but also an ideal which, from an Ubuntu perspective, can only be achieved through community both in harmony and through conflict (Mboti, 2015). Individuality and difference is inherent in Africans that are already multi-ethnic individuals who freely choose and shape their relationships in communities whose membership is marked by complex, messy and often undisciplined multi-ethnic interactions (Mboti, 2015). For Mboti, Ubuntu can thus be surmised simply as an ethics of

good African citizenship "based on independent thought and action, good sense, and informed choice in context" (Mboti, 2015:144).

A distinguishing feature between postgraduate and undergraduate study is that in the latter, success is measured by passing examinations. As Salazar (2013) puts it, learning at undergraduate results in pedagogical practices that not only favour high-stakes test-taking skills, foster memorisation and conformity, reinforce one-size-fits-all scripted practices, but also repress and silence students, leading to a decline in student efficacy in creating knowledge. Illustrating this point, Mboti (2018) likens examinations to an exalted form of a hide-and-seek children's game where lecturers hide bits of knowledge in select places expecting brightest students to find what was put there. For Mboti, "the person-who-puts-things-there wants, and expects, students to know precisely what he or she knows" (Mboti, 2018:67). This suggests little or no creativity and agency in knowledge creation. The critique against rote learning is taken further by Jan McArthur (2014) who posits that such forms of assessment are inimical to critical engagement with complex knowledge, and do not translate into the social justice aspirations of higher education to enhance the individual's ability to fulfil their potential within their social context. Such potential is possible through the following dispositions that measure success at postgraduate:

Independent thinking

Students who know only how to write exams make for 'disastrous' researchers (Tomaselli 2018:xx). This is not least because examinations, as with hide-and-seek, provide no room for independent thought and action (Mboti, 2018). Those with this experience (as with most black South Africans who attend schooling systems with increased class sizes and limited resources) suffer culture shock when they enrol in postgraduate studies

where pedagogy (which is traditionally associated with child learners) is replaced with andragogy (Blaschke, 2019). Instead of emphasising the presence of the teacher, andragogy advocates moral, emotional and intellectual autonomy as appropriate for postgraduate learning with mature adult learners. Here students are expected to engage independently in a real-knowledge production that goes beyond hide and seek to encompass that which is or was not meant to be known (Mboti, 2018). Independent thinking is seen here as both a method and goal of learning (Sinclair, 2004). The postgraduate world, as andragogy surmises, demands a state of creative readiness where the adaptive adult learner is left alone to think, reflect and solve problems. This is important as postgraduate researchers are not made to echo what was learnt as research apprentice but, as Botha (2010) argues, they are trained to become independent critical thinkers who can defend interpretive judgements.

Creative readiness

A creative mind is critical especially in doctoral studies where students are expected to make an original contribution to their subject area - often iteratively through trying out ideas, repeatedly, critiquing, getting lost, failing and correcting work along the way (McArthur, 2014; Mboti, 2018). A creative-ready mind is the one driven by curiosity, the desire to discover. Satisfying one's curiosity is the zeitgeist of research over the years, and an inherent quality for adult learners alongside a self-directing, self-concept, experience, and a performance-centred orientation to learning (Forrest III & Peterson, 2006). However, a recent study in South Africa revealed worrying cynicism amongst young scholars about the value of getting a PhD. A Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) study on building a cadre of emerging scholars for higher education in South Africa (Burton et al., 2018) found that younger scholars are mostly driven by the need for

increasing marketability on the job market and upward mobility at work. Only established researchers were slightly more driven by the need to satisfy their curiosity. An analysis of a compendium of literature by Guerin et al. (2015) provides insight on the motivations for the increasing numbers of students opting to undertake postgraduate studies. Most undertake doctoral studies to enhance workplace relevance (Guerin et al., 2015; Burton et al., 2018), and very few are driven by a desire to contribute to the worlds of the future (also see Wheelahan, 2012).

Kamler and Thomson (2008) acknowledge that the emerging researcher enters an already occupied territory where there are "imminent dangers such as possible ambushes, barbed wire fences and unknown academics who patrol these territories" (Kamler & Thomson, 2008:29). Here, survival and success in such environments is a call for the most resilient. As with excitement and gratification upon discovery of new ideas; dreadfulness, panic attacks, anxiety, nausea, and even some madness are common feelings that cannot be avoided in the world of discovering knowledge, which is often guarded.

Academic resilience

The above conditions within which postgraduate pedagogic encounters take place render a postgraduate study as a mode of life (Mboti 2018) or a journey, which as Turner (1998) surmises, has a known starting point and destination, but has an unknown route. Such a conceptualisation implies values identified by Wingate (2011) as challenge, exploration, and overcoming obstacles, which together constitute resilience. Academic resilience refers to the capacity of a student to achieve learning outcomes despite adversity (see Beale, 2020; Cassidy, 2015; Theron & Theron, 2010; Wang et al., 1994). Research as a knowledge production activity is a 'messy'

journey marked by a network of footpaths without clear markers on where to find knowledge. The researcher is vulnerable to mistakes, hard knocks, dead ends, disappointment, detours, frustration and failure. For McArthur (2014), in such moments of adversity, approaches to student learning that privilege greater individual agency should be encouraged. This is because such experiences are critical episodes that expose the researcher to independent thinking, problem solving, agency in shaping learning experience and liberation.

The decision to embark on postgraduate studies, as Hall (1996:163) puts it, "is accompanied by fears of intellectual incompetence, social isolation and difficulties in sustaining motivation". Academic resilience as an attribute, allows a student to sustain their agency and learning experiences in potentially threatening situations, and enables them to bounce back from frustration and disappointment (Hall, 1996; Theron & Theron, 2010). People who elect to undertake postgraduate studies should therefore have an ability for self-direction and capacity to cope with difficult and unfamiliar situations to arrive, on their own, at difficult questions about the task-at-hand (Mboti, 2018). Resilience thus involves readiness to take on challenges and willingness to do whatever is necessary to achieve a goal; ability to bounce back from frustrations and anxieties; recovering from a blockage or from being upset and maintaining a commitment to learning.

Academic resilience is a dynamic developmental process that is ordinarily nurtured through availing resources and enabling caring connections such as familial, institutional, or socio-environmental support (Theron & Theron, 2010). This is the main concern of a humanising pedagogy whose guiding principle is recognition of learner disadvantaged, including different forms of inequalities and harsh past (Limbada & Kajee, 2021; Therborn, 2014). This leads into what Manathunga (2009) calls compassionate teaching strategies

advocated through a humanising pedagogy (Vorster & Quinn, 2017; Delport, 2016; Fataar, 2016; Keet, 2014; Salazar, 2013; Wheelahan, 2012) to improve access, retention, throughput and learning experiences of students from marginalised backgrounds (Bitzer & Albertyn, 2011; Limbada & Kajee, 2021; Zembylas, 2018). As argued in the following pages, an uncritical projection of 'poor black students' as objects of pity who cannot function in a competitive environment aggravates abyssal exclusions of the black intellectuals by perpetuating hegemonic assumptions that permanently cast these students within a deficiency syndrome.

Praxis of humanising pedagogy

Humanising pedagogy is an education philosophy attributed to the work and thinking of the Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire (1970) who lamented the state of dehumanisation in education. It involves students in a dialogue with their teachers in the co-construction of knowledge and reveres a critical, dialogical and praxical process that challenges students to be critically engaged as active participants in the co-construction of knowledge (Salazar, 2013). Simply put, humanisation in education can be understood as a philosophy that privileges teaching practices that use histories, knowledges and realities of students as an integral part of educational practise (Kajee, 2020). This philosophy is opposed to mechanical pedagogical approaches such as Dennis Fox's (1983) transfer theory and shaping theory which are considered distractive to meaningful learning as they silence collective voices.

This chapter grounds effective humanisation in the sociology of absences, which according to de Sousa Santos (2018:25) is 'a cartography of the abyssal line' that seeks to respond to the erasure / concealment, irrelevance, inferiority of the knowledges, modes of social lives and humanity of the

marginalised produced by monocultures that mark Eurocentric knowledge as a form of colonial domination. The idea is to reclaim those social groups and modes of social live that have hitherto been labelled primitive, ignorant or inferior. As de Sousa Santos (2018) contends, this sociology cannot be generative if enacted through a mono culture of valid knowledge transmitted by an all knowing and ever-present master. Accordingly, in the process of humanisation, students should not be manipulated but allowed to express their voices and consciousness. Here, students are not vessels or innate materials, but rather coinvestigators- in dialogue with their supervisors. This dialogue is pursued with the goal of developing critical consciousness, which is an ability to critically engage with disciplinary conventions, identify and address intellectual problems or act against undesirable problems of reality. This aligns with Freire's (1970) view of education as a practise of freedom. According to Kajee (2020), humanising pedagogy values students' background knowledge, language, culture, and life experiences and promotes respect, trusting relationships between teachers and students, academic rigour and learning contexts where teachers and students share power.

In South Africa, humanising pedagogy in postgraduate studies is largely a pedagogy of love (Kajee, 2020), a relational process on student retention and success associated with caring in education (Thomas 2012; Salazar, 2013). It incorporates values that, in the (South) African context are relatable to Ubuntu. These include co-existence, social harmony, solidarity, democracy, consensus, plurality, diversity among others, all of which are deeply seated in the extended family structure inherent in many societies in Africa. While comparable to other philosophic traditions such as Confucianism in East Asia, Ubuntu's African pedigree has sociolinguistic support in Nguni languages of Southern Africa in which the term Ubuntu - meaning humanness – exists in

its different phonological variants[5]. One finds evidence of the cardinal principle of coexistence, expressed through an aphorism 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am' throughout all corners of Africa from Dakar to Addis Ababa, and from Cairo to Pretoria (Lubombo, 2018).

Although humanisation in education is not new, the formula and methodological examples of its application appear not to be clear (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010; Salazar, 2013). Indeed, as Freire (1970) notes, this pedagogy is not universally applicable. Be that as it may, the context in which humanising pedagogy can be applied for postgraduate supervision in South Africa becomes apparent. Advocates for the humanising pedagogy contend that supervision in this context must be conceived as a process of enabling epistemological access, which is inducting students into the new world of the knowledge community they are seeking to join. Here, student success relates both to the distinct qualities of the student and also to the extent to which the supervisor clearly reveals to, and collaboratively works with the student to discover ways of operating in the postgraduate life, that is for Hofstee (2006) knowledge of the process – what to do, how to do it, and when to do it.

In the context of the violent, exclusionary and unsustainable system within which the university is embedded that effectively dehumanised learners particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, reclaiming the humanity

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5 Ubuntu phonological variants exist in many languages in Southern Africa, including all indigenous languages in South Africa. It exists in the following languages across Southern Africa: Sotho (Botswana, Lesotho), Shona and Ndebele (Zimbabwe), Kisukuma and Kihayi (Tanzania), Bobangi (Democratic Republic of Congo), kiKongo and giKwese (Angola), Kikuyu (Kenya, chiChewa (Malawi), shiTsonga and shiTswa (Mozambique among others. For a detailed discussion on this, see Kamwangamalu (1999) and Lubombo (2018).

of the student through a total rejection of epistemic racism that structure the existing university becomes critical for student success (Andreotti et al., 2015; Bitzer & Albertyn, 2011). Listening to students and building on their knowledge and experiences enables not only contextualised, dynamic, and personalised pedagogic encounters that further the goals of humanisation and social transformation, but also enables students to push the boundaries of knowledge and move across conceptual thresholds.

To develop high level skills in objective critical enquiry as well as access to powerful knowledge that, in Sankara's (2007) words, enables people to dare to invent their future, students should be able to see the world differently from the way they were accustomed to, and from the way they were taught. Only once learners have crossed conceptual thresholds are they better located to direct their own learning (Delport, 2016).

It is critical to note that humanising pedagogy is anchored on compassionate approaches that emphasise values of respect, trust, reciprocity, active listening, mentoring, compassion, high expectations, and interest in the student's overall well-being. Supervision is here envisaged as developing the student rather than the dissertation report (Khene, 2014; Maisty, 2015). It revers a kind of supervision that, as Jansen et al. (2004:79) note, should cultivate both the knowledge to complete a research project "as well as the emotional, social, political and cognitive experiences that together constitute such learning".

It also reverses the idea that the pursuit of humanisation can never be an isolated or individualistic endeavour as "our being, is a being with" (Roberts, 2000:43). It emphasises caring connections in the production of knowledge where teachers and students recognise each other's existence, lived experiences and humanity while engaged in a collaborative effort to co-construct knowledge. This engenders mutual humanisation between a

student and supervisor, an educational practice that "requires the existence of 'subjects,' who while teaching, also learn, [unlearn and re-learn, and] who in learning also teach" (Freire, 2000:67).

The relational approach upon which the humanising pedagogy is rooted assumes that positive relationships with supervisors are social capital resources useful in the academic success. Applied from this perspective, humanising pedagogy orients towards an interventionist 'hands-on' type of supervision where the postgraduate student is hand-held to navigate the process. This approach is based on an assumption that the candidate does not possess all of the distinct qualities that predict success at postgraduate. A pertinent question that arises therefore relates to the effective praxis of this pedagogy in a way that does not compromise the andragogic practise and integrity of postgraduate studies.

Considering that some South African universities are already using humanising pedagogy as a philosophical underpinning to provide support for postgraduate students (Maistry, 2015; Gduld & Sathorar, 2016) to deliver on the mandate of the transformative agenda in South Africa higher education, critical self-awareness is needed. Three important issues emerge, which, if not mitigated, can pose what Waghid (2015) calls a serious epistemological threat to postgraduate scholarship, and possibly undermine the objective to produce quality highly skilled graduates South Africa requires. These include but not limited to the following three main risks upon which this caveat in premised.

Infantilisation of postgraduate students

Regardless of how much social capitation the positive student-supervisor relationship underpinning compassionate supervision may bring, pedagogic encounters in such environments tend to be marked by un-equal-power-

relationship that fosters continued obscurity of student agency while privileging superior knowledge of the supervisor. Such a pedagogic encounter countermands the nature and purpose of a postgraduate study to create independent thought among adults through encounters in environments where a teacher must be absent to avoid turning students into vessels (Fox, 1993; Mboti, 2018).

Caution must therefore be taken to ensure that the 'pedagogy' does not condemn the postgraduate student to perpetual infancy, conformity, uncritical mind, docility, acceptance and submissiveness to extant knowledge, a function of education set out early in this chapter. Depositing 'a new set of knowledge' into the student by the supervisor does not help the student to construct own pathways beyond the threshold they and their supervisor already have. At postgraduate, a student must not be afraid of loneliness, of getting lost, of making mistakes, and asking questions on their own because it is at these junctures that learning occurs. Such experiences and moments allow students to cross their conceptual thresholds, and it is only once one has crossed one's conceptual threshold that they begin re-imagining the world, to direct their own learning and re-invent the future (Delport, 2016; Wheelahan, 2012).

Compassionate approaches are here accompanied by a conceivable risk of encumbering the student's potential to discover real knowledge beyond that of the supervisor, and ultimately the creative potential to invent the future and re-shape the world. This, however, does not mean caring connections must be totally discarded. These networks of support must be used to optimise affordances of the past that helped these students to overcome adversity. Instead of projecting students as objects of pity, humanising pedagogy should project them as heroes who have capacity to, as they have already conquered adversity in the past. Such a projection has potential to

boost their confidence or what Salazar (2013) calls 'iPower', individual and community strengths and challenges that are an essential part of the student's humanity.

A positive positioning also un-brackets the black student from a deficiency syndrome that is automatically assigned by virtue of the 'disadvantaged' past. In fact, a student's past should never be projected as disadvantaged, as in some instances, it could be rich and self-enabling, especially in engendering academic resilience (Theron & Theron, 2010; Salazar, 2013). Understanding, engaging and leveraging affordances and strengths of the past, as with the deficit may help students establish mediating practices to mitigate adversity in HEIs. Optimising awareness that they have/can overcome adversity enables them to create own structures and communities of support. Even from a real Ubuntu perspective, individual (and communal) strengths and challenges are essential parts of the process of becoming more fully human. A meaningful humanising pedagogy should recognise the deleterious effects of unwittingly constructing students as deficit, especially on the self-efficacy and academic resilience. Moletsane (2012) decries that the deficit-based approach denies students agency.

Aggravating erasures, invisibility and inferiority

It should never be forgotten that ways of knowing, as Morrow (2009:78) posits, "cannot be supplied or 'delivered' or 'done' to the learner; nor can they be 'automatically' transmitted to those who pay their fees, or even to those who also collect the handouts and attend classes regularly". In any case, 'enabling epistemological access' and 'inducting the student' into normative ways of knowing leads away from agency and creativity. It implies that the knowledge already exists, and students just need to know how to join into the conventional process. Adult learners, as andragogy philosophy

surmises, learn better through self-direction (Blaschke, 2019). As Mboti (2018) posits, the work involved in the asking of difficult questions (knowledge discovery) must be confronted by the student with no option for delegation or outsourcing.

In fact, difficult questions - that a postgraduate student must ask - are the kind that a student arrives at on their own, and find answers to by themselves. This is not in the least because students must not be limited, as the hand-holding approach tends, to knowing what their supervisors know or allow to be known. While the role of the supervisor in self-directed learning should never be replaced (Dougherty et al., 2020), supervisors must as they walk along with those postgraduate students, still find ways to keep the student critically and actively engaged in the knowledge discovery process, and where possible even through radical ways that disrupt normative thinking transmitted through supervisors.

Some scholars have already urged for an exploration on how postgraduate supervisors can engage both in compassionate, teaching strategies that guide and support students' learning while at the same time engaging in rigorous and challenging debates with the student (see Manathunga, 2009). The fact that humanisation pedagogy surmises a supervisor as both a mentor and supporter on the one hand, and a gatekeeper of the discipline on the other, Manathunga (2009) urges for a discussion on both the cognitive and administrative aspects of supervision practise as well as its emotional and political dimensions. The outcome of this proposition is the humanist approach to philosophical inquiry that highlights the agency and value of human beings, both individually and collectively in the creation of knowledge. At postgraduate, this happens as pedagogical encounters underpinned by a sociology of absences, and in spaces where, as Mboti

(2018) argues, a teacher must be absent to avoid turning students into vessels waiting to be filled.

Meanwhile, a pedagogy of love advanced from an essentialist interpretation of Ubuntu emphasises as the essence of humanity interdependence at the expense of autonomy. I have argued elsewhere (see Lubombo 2018) that this is a simplistic and objectionable interpretation of Ubuntu that forgets that the subject of the aphorism "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" is the individual person (umuntu) whose aspiration is individuality. This individuality, however, can only be achieved through, and in collaboration with others. This view converges with an emphasis in the humanist approach to knowledge creation, that students should be allowed to carve own identities through independent research.

Compassionate handholding supervision approaches are deeply seated in apprenticeship models (Botha, 2010) inherited from the Oxford - Cambridge (Oxbridge) tradition. These approaches can easily lead into situations where supervisors work on students instead of working with them (Smyth, 1984), resulting not in the development of intellectual ingenuity of the student but in conformity whereby the student is taught to fight for change in terms of the logic of the imposed regulations. While students may want sympathy, support and guidance, they also need autonomy and respect as intellectuals. Obtaining these skills enables daring to invent the future through effective functioning in the knowledge economy. Failure to do this prefigures the dangers of compassionate teaching, especially when postgraduates who are not adequately prepared to work independently are involved.

Aggravating non-productivity among emerging academics

At postgraduate, greater individual agency is crucial. Here, commitment, interest and passion (Guerin, Kerr & Green, 2014:111) sustained through caring connections and affective emotional support (Theron & Theron, 2010) play an important role in helping students resist and reposition themselves within exclusionary structures (de Sousa Santos, 20218) persisting in a postcolonial university environment. Accordingly, those not optimally prepared for postgraduate studies struggle to participate independently in knowledge-production and can experience some creative slowdown. This often leads to spending more than the required time in the postgraduate pipeline. Here, the need for humanising pedagogy to provide some form of scaffolding to develop skills and competences, including academic resilience, required to reach the required exit outcomes becomes most crucial (Botha, 2010).

But what does the compassionate approach to supervision entail for students who may not be optimally prepared for the exigencies of academic rigour required at postgraduate studies? While there is a significant amount of evidence on the role of structural issues in slowing throughput, an analysis of throughput trends between the South African and non-South African students studying in same institutions could be instructive. It is conceivable that throughput rates might as well be influenced by factors internal to individual students. Such factors include motivation and determination.

According to Iwara et al., (2018), success characteristics inherent in postgraduate students who graduate on record time are grounded in three major contexts namely supervisory, institutional management, and personal standards. From this perspective, humanising pedagogy should consider students' individual attributes and agency as much as it does on structural

constraints. Ensuring wider physical access, epistemological access and material resources may not be sufficient to ensure progression without self-motivation, which, as noted by Burton et al., (2018) appears to be lacking amongst some emerging South African scholars (Burton et al., 2018).

According to Guerin et al. (2015:90) a mismatch between motivations for undertaking a postgraduate study and discovery of the actual experience and likely outcomes might contribute to incompletion rates. Postgraduate, as Mboti (2018) argues, is a mode of life where students genuinely want and work towards becoming analytical thinkers and leading intellectuals. This is the purpose for which South Africa should make of its postgraduate education, and the kind of researcher the country requires (see Guerin, Kerr & Green, 2015:115). A humanising pedagogy that fails to recognise this imperative might render the transformative agenda on higher education an exercise in futility. This not least because if overly idealised, humanising pedagogy can serve only to further entrench the docility, lack of curiosity non-productivity observed among emerging South African scholars (Burton et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion evinces that the praxis of a humanising pedagogy to enhance throughput is a delicate process that needs to be carefully managed to achieve the intended outcomes. It was not the intention of this chapter to discuss throughput or effectiveness of the pedagogy. My concentration was to highlight some important blind spots that need to be checked during the process. While there is an increased call for a pedagogy that favours the deployment of novel and relevant approaches that account for student's material conditions, there are many other factors that are critical for determining success at postgraduate. These include among others the nature

and purpose of the postgraduate degree as well as the kind of researcher that an institution aspires to produce. The praxis of a humanising pedagogy tends to foster otiose and discredited master-apprentice relationship between supervisors and students. This can perpetuate hegemonic assumptions that elevate the superiority of Western epistemologies while continuously casting black students within a deficiency syndrome. This would be an undesirable outcome that effectively undermines the objective to produce academics who are curious, highly skilled in independent critical enquiry and dedicated to its importance.

The chapter has also cautioned against a fallacious believe that transformative learning at a postgraduate level can be achieved through assumptions and philosophies of care meant for teaching children. Sometimes postgraduate learners need to be left alone to think, provided that adequate mechanisms for social, psychological and financial support and clarity on the process are sufficient. The overemphasis on compassionate supervision models may render the production of more postgraduates in South Africa an exercise in futility. Anchoring student support on their strengths rather than deficits associated with their past can actually provide critical affordances such as independence and resilience, which are critical enablers for success at postgraduate and productive citizenship. Be that as it may, academic resilience remains a communal responsibility and not entirely an individual effort. The importance of caring connections provided through humanising pedagogy therefore need not to be completely undermined. More reflection is however required on the challenges that may accompany such a pedagogy in the production of autonomous scholars required to address South Africa's social, development and intellectual problems.

Further questions need to be asked on whether enrolment into postgraduate programs on the basis that funding, support and caring connections are

available is enough to produce critical thinkers and intellectual leaders the current South African society requires. The purpose and nature of postgraduate studies, and what constitute success demands a student with certain type of qualities. Further insights can be gained through examination of what exactly propels black African students through the pipeline in which fellow black South Africans spend more time, or quickly leak from.

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