CHAPTER ONE

Exploring the Postgraduate Education Space

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Abstract

This chapter sets the contextual, theoretical and philosophical background to the volume by gestating the idea of a postgraduate space. Recognising the interconnectedness of the global, continental and institutional forces acting upon postgraduate education, it examines how these often coalesce to lead to an exclusive focus on policy steering interests. The effects of an overemphasis on productivity and discourses which emphasize a deficit perspective on African higher education are illustrated by means of two case studies located in the professional contexts of the two authors. These serve to raise questions around the implicit assumptions underpinning the deficit framing of the African contexts. Alternatively, if postgraduate education is to be constructed as a public good to serve the wider community, deep systemic transformations must be activated through careful collaborative curriculum design and improving the quality of educational experiences for postgraduate students as indicated in the range of provisions and practices discussed by the contributors to this volume. The chapter concludes by raising the series of *questions* that recur across the anthology as it sets up the quest for a deep transformation of postgraduate education.

Keywords: postgraduate space, policy staging, doctoral education, transformation, curriculum design and provisions

> Decolonisation, and the Indigenous knowledges that sustain it, are diverse and, due to the embedded nature, unique to particular contexts and geographies. How do we negotiate these particularities in an increasingly globalised (and subsequently homogenised) and connected world, especially when there are increasingly fewer options to remain isolated in attempts to maintain particularity? (Sium, Desai & Ritskes 2012).

1 Introduction

1.1 Background: Beyond Policy Staging

This chapter serves to shift the discourse of underproductivity of postgraduate research within the African context. We already are confronted with a litany of explanations for the low levels of contribution of the African university systems to the international research corpus (Walshe 2008; McGregor 2008; Kotecha, Steyn & Vermeulen 2012; Scherer & Sooryamoorthy 2022). These studies have been useful in framing the problematic around matters related to the critical subject of building the capacity of the institutional systems, promoting leadership and political will to support postgraduate research, activating systemic institutional staff development initiatives, and funding opportunities to address the main challenges confronting higher education research in Africa. The extant emphasis has been on promoting a call for a policy staging of interventions to address a redirection of human, physical, and financial resources to activate change.

Fredua-Kwarteng (2023), a Canadian policy researcher, suggests that we need to be cautious about how we approach the staged reporting by global institutions such as the World Bank who argue that Africa (and the developing world context in general) lags behind the more economically advanced countries and that Africa needs to produce as many as 100,000 PhDs over a ten-year period. The construct of staging, drawn from the realm of theatrical drama performance, refers to the creation of a conscious platform in which the audience is invited into the world of the playwright. The creator of the imaging (the author/ the scriptwriter) has an underlying message to steer the audience in a pre-defined direction. When it comes to the realm of policy staging, it could also analogously refer to the diagnostic processes used by the medical profession to track the degree of spread of a particular pathology within the body. The status of a disease and its prognosis drives the agenda. In analogous ways,

creators and reviewers of policy (policymakers and analysts respectively), like playwrights and medical physicians usually have an *a priori* expectation of the choices of interventions to be implemented. Fredua-Kwarteng's critique does not deny the need for systemic policy initiatives that provide the necessary baseline funding framing interventions for change. The 'capacity development' discourse is built on the foundational evidence (the platform) that Africa has 198 researchers per million compared to 428 in Chile, 4,260 in Canada, 4,269 in the United Kingdom and 4,663 in the United States. Yet, the policy discourse is not sufficient and needs to embrace a more encompassing theoretical interpretation about whose interests are being served via the choices of postgraduate 'outside-in' interventions.

More importantly, at a theoretical rather than a pragmatic, operational level, Fredua-Kwarteng implies that the agenda of external deficit framings of the African context could be also understood as creating a marketplace of the spaces where the 'saviours' from the outside world might intervene to rescue the African context (the prefigured *a priori* solution). Advocates of this 'outside-in' discourse assist to reinforce rather than challenge the inequities that exist on the world stage, when they do not examine more critically the specific conditions under which African higher education are being undertaken. Many of the staged analytical positionings could be argued to reveal undertones of pleading deficit rather than asserting that developing countries are required to make strategic choices around how diminishing budgets are deployed to address competing social demands – many of which cannot be addressed by the 'Centre's' conception of useful research. A new form of 'knowledge colonialism' is promoted via the bartering and borrowing as exports and imports of curriculum, programmes, preferred policies and educational practices traverse between the centres and the peripheries (Ramtohul 2023). The *status quo* of inequities thus lingers albeit in the name of support and development.

Whilst the attempts to leverage change via the development of buy-in from the leadership and management structures of university executives and academic programme directors are relevant, most of their management leadership discourses (drawing from variations of the Human Capital Development theories-HCD) around postgraduate education usually point to the argument that an investment in the producing PhD graduates will ensure a sufficient skilled force to activate economic and social welfare development. The production of human capital to activate the economy is caste within circumscribed econometric understandings (See a critique of HCD by Brooks 2009). These

HCD discourses might have contributed to the marginal increases in the continental rate of PhD production over the last decade (UNESCO 2022), yet their enduring effect on the quality of development of the broader society is still questionable (Botha & Botha 2022). The concern is raised about whether the PhD graduates are indeed contributing to the quality of *public social life* or are their agendas primarily driven by individual private interests in what a PhD will benefit the graduate personally. This could be attested by the multitude of jobless PhD graduates (or graduates in peripheral jobs) (Sumanasiri, Yajid & Khatibi 2015) whose pursuit of private interests (certification) renders them vulnerable, as employers now value cheaper micro-credentials over more expensive, but less productive doctoral credentials (Ahmat, Bashir, Razali & Kasolang 2021).

The myth of a contribution to the public good by postgraduate graduates might not always be realised for several reasons (Leibowitz 2012; Williams 2016; Walker 2018). Firstly, there are many reasons why students enrol in PhD studies, not necessarily always driven by altruistic agendas or academic research interests. Additionally, the transition into the world of work post-PhD is fraught with nuanced challenges (Nerad, Bogle, Kohl, O'Caroll, Peters & Scholz 2022) (See also Chapter 11). Many do not exclusively embrace the targeted expectations that obtaining a postgraduate qualification is a stepping stone into the career as a researcher, or as a contributor to social growth and development (See Chapter 8). A much closer analysis is needed to track the processes of transitioning from the world of academia into post-qualification careers (Samuel 2014). Myths around this transition promote a misconception that all postgraduate students desire to be part of academia, find the trajectory into the job labour market a smooth or straightforward one, and are unfettered by social, familial and institutional political obstacles to achieve their aspirations (Nerad & Heggulund 2008).

Notably, the quest for a qualification could be driven by other expedient agenda to ascend promotion ladders within executive or managerial structures. There is a high status attached to obtaining a postgraduate credential and this sets the graduate apart from the majority in the population who do not reach this apex qualification. However, the scholarship of the discipline in which the postgraduate study was conducted is often jettisoned as new administrative, managerial and leadership responsibilities, and the status it accrues, takes preference. This could be one explanation for why the underproductivity of academic disciplinary research endures when new African graduates are absorbed

rapidly into managerial roles and out of academic laboratories and research fieldwork spaces.

Secondly, the lack of noticeable contribution to the public good by PhD graduates might be linked to the quality of African postgraduate education itself: its curriculum and research supervision might not adequately prepare PhD graduates at their exit graduation point to serve at a cutting edge of the disciplinary fields they have studied (See Chapters 4 and 6). Often times the agenda of their PhDs is driven by expedient imitation of the agendas borrowed from elsewhere: their host institutions, their supervisors, and not the specific contexts from which they originate. Indeed, the problematics they research might not even have emanated from within the local social context itself. Research supervisors are often obsessed with 'internationalization', where the notion of 'glocal' is romanticized at the expense of the local (See Robertson 1994; and Swyngedouw 2004 for foundational theoretical interpretations of the terms 'internationalization', 'glocalization' and 'globalisation').

Williams (2016) extends the argument that the notion of the public good value of universities has *morphed* over time. In the founding histories of universities as institutional structures, the role of the university was considered to be one which produced knowledge that held society to account for their choices. Nevertheless, the custodians of power over the knowledge production (largely embedded in religious conclaves) had a strong influence over what and whose knowledges came to be circulated in the public sphere. Later in the twentieth century, economists usually conceptualised the public good education as a means to drive technological processes. However, more recently, the public good of a university is understood in its ability to activate social justice through the social mobility of its participants. This shifting agenda of benefactors, agents and their roles, Williams (2016) argues alters the social contract of the relationship of the university and the state away from the university's prime role as a knowledge producer to that of an *inculcator of moral and social* responsibility.

Who defines the ingredients of these moral and social features has become a moot issue as increasingly the state seeks a return on investment of the resources they make towards the upkeep of the university system on behalf of the wider tax-paying public and the widening influence of private capital. Within evolving democracies, the expected role of the university system appears to be dominated by the goal to activate accountable research and knowledge that promotes the well-being of the wider society. This is not restricted

only to activating the development of civil rights such as participation in the political systems and institutions within a country, but also to the quality of human rights exercised, and the freedoms and responsibilities to define one's identities. Universities have arguably become more assertive spaces to define and refine self and society. The notions of access of previously marginalised groups into higher education and success therein are embedded in this developmental discourse (See Chapter 5). In addition, the infusion of this public good/social development agenda varies divergently according to the different professional and academic programmes on offer at universities. More instrumentalist curricula agenda are perhaps offered in the disciplines of the 'hard sciences' (e.g., the Natural Sciences) foregrounding scientific disciplinary knowledges, whilst the 'soft sciences' (e.g., Humanities and Social Sciences) take more overtly the social responsiveness responsibility. Arguably, both the hard and soft sciences could be understood as supporting either directly or indirectly the wider growth of the social system.

Concurrently, the agenda of the workplace (the market place) is imposing its critique of what is expected of higher education graduates. The under-preparedness of students to be 'work-ready' emphasises a mismatch between the idealism of university priorities, and the pragmatics of workplace expectations (McKenna 2019; Mesuwini & Bomani 2021). The employability of graduates from certain fields and disciplines of study, or from particular institutional typologies, is a concern (Adams & Yu 2022). For example, graduates from the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions (in the South African context), despite their work-orientated curricula and professed missions to support job preparation, are unable to secure productive employment for many of their graduates (Akojee 2016). This might point not necessarily only to the sending institution (the higher education system) but also to the receiving institutions (the labour market), each with its own exiting and recruiting practices, which are never neutral.

The competition of interests between the *state* (purporting to act in the interests of its electorate), the *marketplace* (with its profit-driven underpinnings) and the *university* (as an intermediary, or a servant to either of the above forces) are a feature of present-day priorities. This triumvirate is also affected by the rise of technological modalities which bolster each other's capacity to act (Hariri 2018). The interests of the higher education system to secure economic resources to keep afloat, might also prejudice institutions to choose particular expedient strategies. Moreover, the overarching discourse of seeking

to develop an interconnected globalised society which acknowledges the balance of people, profit and planetary perspectives in an era of the global climate change prevents any 'isolated choices' (Sium, Desai & Ritskes 2012). The competing, volatile and dynamic space requires fluid interpretation and responses (See closing sections 4 and 5 of this chapter). Postgraduate education ought, therefore, to be engaged in varying kinds of knowledges and knowledge-making processes. Underpinning this non-isolationist stance involves acknowledging the non-neutral nature of knowledge itself, and simultaneously drawing on the interflow of epistemologies of the past, the present, and the future. Time, space and purpose intersect, radiate and interflow in the act of knowledge-making, and doctoral education (policy and practice) could become a space for epistemic, lived and eternal temporal rhythms (Manathunga, Qi, Raciti, Gilbey, Stanton & Singh 2022; Manathunga 2019).

The conception of a postgraduate education space is thus considered as embedding simultaneously a personal, political and social value. This agenda operates within intersected layers: at individual, institutional, national, regional, continental and global levels. Epistemological disciplinary, ontological and axiological social interests overlap in a dialogical discursive interaction that span beyond just institutional programmatic boundaries (see Figure 1 below).

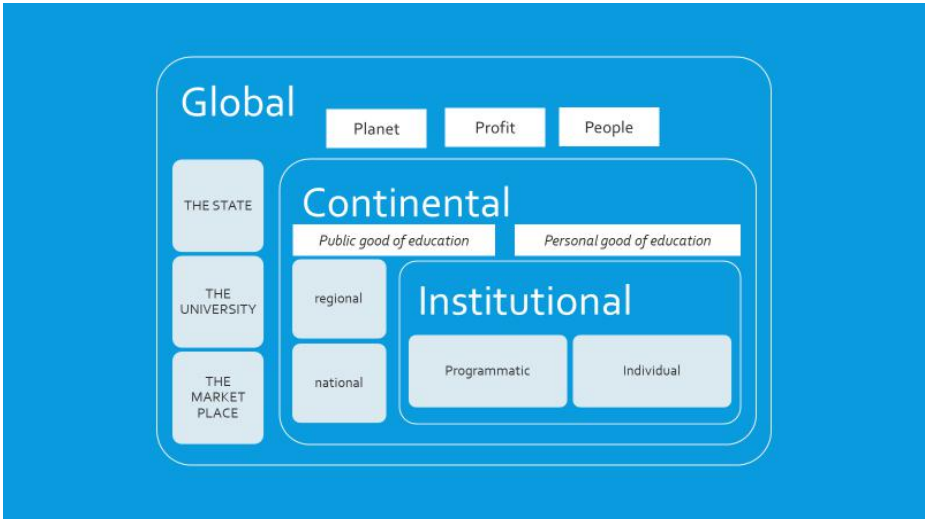

Figure 1: A Complex Network of the Postgraduate Education Space (authors' own)

1.2 The Structure of the Chapter

This chapter aims to recognise the complexity of the postgraduate education space within the African context (section 1). Next it will examine why the specific context of African postgraduate education should extend *beyond a focus exclusively on policy steering interests* (section 2). By looking at the specific contexts of the two authors, one from South Africa (Author A) and the other from Mauritius (Author B), we aim to explore how the *meso-contextual* space of postgraduate curriculum design matters. As an emblematic case study, we examine how the quality assurance agenda of the South African national reviews of doctoral programmes in the country were recently undertaken (2017-2022) by the Council on Higher Education (CHE). We focus on how, despite the interest in raising the quality of doctoral education provisioning, the CHE review re-emphasised and re-exposed the bifurcated system of inequities in curriculum design and development, management and administrative practices across a historically saturated system. Rather than serving a developmental purpose, it reinforces the gap between the advantaged and under-served higher educational contexts. The potential bureaucratisation of quality assurance is examined here. The Mauritian case study aims to examine the unintended effects of policy steering which gave rise to the burgeoning of private higher education provisioning. This has a knock-on effect on any quality postgraduate education programme design throughout the country.

In the next section (section 3) we make a case for shifting the discourse towards examining the nature of the *curriculum design* of doctoral education. We establish the *emergent lines of inquiry* required for this agenda. What factors indeed enable or constrain the development of African postgraduate graduates becomes the key question. Moreover, one needs to be examining how research capacity could be developed via the quality of postgraduate education and curriculum initiatives to activate transformation. Too often doctoral education is understood as the private privy of only the singularly-assigned supervisor and his/her apprenticed supervisees. The tensions in these student and supervisory roles are worth re-examining and are the subject of many of the chapters identified in this anthology (See particularly Chapters 3, 6, and 9). The section argues for the shift towards expanding the *relationship*s not just between supervisors and their students but also between wider partners across disciplines, across sites of learning/ researching or practising postgraduate studies, across institutions, and even across *national and international spaces* (see Chapters 8, 9 and 10).

The section also justifies elaborating *the discourse of transformation* beyond just superficial shifts in quantitative demographics of race, class and gender participation. The discourse is one not just of graduate production but also about how to examine the worthwhileness of a postgraduate qualification (see Chapter 11). The conceptions of a more elaborate deep transformation of postgraduate education are presented here. Some key constructs like dialogicality, collaborative competences, tackling uncertainty, complexity, and entanglements are explored here. The shift towards an 'anti-colonial hope' stance (Zemblyas 2023) is offered here.

The section concludes by justifying the architectural landscape and organisation of the anthology of chapters that follow in the book.

The chapter aims concludes to activate the series of *questions* that recur across the anthology as it sets up the quest for a deep transformation of postgraduate education (section 4).

2 Policy Resources or Restrictions: Case Studies from South Africa and Mauritius

In this section we explore two case studies from divergent African contexts: the one from South Africa (a large contributor to the share of postgraduate research on the continent) and the other from Mauritius (which has been successful in obtaining a far reach in higher education participation rates). The section suggests that the regulatory control of policy initiatives, whilst promulgated to uplift the quality of the education system, sometimes could have unintended consequences that mitigate against its original purposes. The first case study (South Africa) reveals quality assurance agencies' approach to problem-solving involves externalising the challenges of doctoral education rather than acknowledging the broader systemic dysfunction. Quality assurance (QA) agencies are argued to transfer responsibility to individuals and institutions rather than acknowledge systemic pathologies. The QA approach and its architectural mode of operation during the national quality review process of doctoral education reinforces the gap between advantaged and under-served higher education institutions. The second case study (Mauritius) comments on the self-congratulatory policy promulgation of rapidly expanding higher education provisioning through local and international collaborative online and residential efforts, without the deeper critical examination of the contextual, institutional, administrative, and intellectual academic resources to sustain

policy change in the higher education system. The knock-on effect of under-resourced poor quality of undergraduate expansion on the postgraduate research and curriculum is simply under-planned for in the quest for politically rhetorical social equity discourses. These findings are not confined to the two case study contexts and can be seen as placeholders for other contexts.

2.1 The Council on Higher Education (South Africa): Doctoral Standards Review (2017 - 2022)

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) derives its mandate from the Higher Education (Act 101 of 1997) to serve as a quality assurance body on higher education in South Africa. Themba Mosia (Council Chairperson) confirms that the CHE and its responsible sub-committees, such as the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), aim to 'promote, accredit and advance quality assurance mechanisms across the higher education system, and advise the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation on all higher education matters' (CHE 2022: vi). In concert with the interests of the National Research Foundation (NRF), which underpins several funding initiatives that support doctoral studies, the CHE undertook in 2017 to review the quality of doctoral education provisioning with the view towards making recommendations for higher education policy. Against a national set of established benchmarks (published in 2018), 23 of the 26 public higher education institutions (HEIs) and 5 private HEIs that offered doctoral education, were officially expected to evaluate their institutional quality assurance arrangements in a Self-Evaluation Report (SER). These institutions (28 in total) constituted varied typologies: those that had long histories of reputed research engagement, such as those advantaged institutions from the apartheid era, as well as those who had limited capacity and experience of postgraduate education. Some were classified as traditional universities (offering mainly degree programmes), and others as comprehensive universities (offering a range of degrees, diplomas and certificates). Another category was the universities of technology which recently were mandated to embrace postgraduate education programmes and research beyond their original vocational and technical foci.

Each SER (with its accompanying portfolios of evidence) was then evaluated by a peer review panel from outside the institution. The institutional SERs and the peer review panel reports were then synthesised comparatively by an expert team which then orchestrated the production of a *National Review*

of South African Doctoral Qualifications: Doctoral Degrees National Report (CHE 2022) (henceforth referred to as the Report) which was structured to look at areas related to the 16 national standards criteria such as the admission process, registration, supervision planning and execution, assessment, graduation rates, funding, institutional human and physical resources to support doctoral education. The transitioning of graduates into the world of work was also summarised.

This review period spanned approximately 5 years of engagement from the conception to the final synthetic report. It aimed through its review design to activate a shared synthesis about doctoral education within the institutions themselves and comparatively across the national system. The expectation was that direct policy recommendations to activate quality postgraduate education would evolve from this review.

However, key commendations and critiques are offered about such a quality review process. Notably, international commentators outside South Africa applauded the CHE for its rigorous and extensive process of casting the spotlight on the operational levels of varying institutions (Mohamedbhai 2022). The review process embedding *monitoring and evaluation as an extended mandate of HE policy* was considered relevant for similar doctoral education systems across the African continent. Many African institutions also have to balance the push for increased enrolment and maintaining the issue of quality doctoral education provisioning. These continental institutions are also varied in their historical trajectories: some of which have been long-established, those still in development stages, and those aspiring to be upgraded to university status. The importance of the development of supervisory capacity was highlighted as resonant with the African experience. In addition, the key issue of building *quality assurance capacity systems* was raised by Fredua-Kwarteng (2021). He argued that most African external quality assurance agencies are organisationally weak, poorly funded, and inadequately managed. He comments further that visionless leadership has not yet generated a robust set of monitoring and assessing of the quality of doctoral processes, outputs and outcomes. The South African example of quality assurance reviews was consequently seen as potentially a benchmark. Such a policy of quality assurance was interpreted as resourceful to promoting the standards of postgraduate education which look retrospectively at the masters' programme as a feeder into doctoral education, as well as prospectively cognisant of the financial resources needed when setting target enrolment and graduations outputs.

By contrast, some commentators from within the South African system were more circumspect about whether a *human capital orientation* in the review was driving the process (Harley 2020). The shadow of the gaze from the NRF which was involved in the setting up of the review was considered as infiltrating a 'return of investment' financial logic. The commentator critiqued the ambiguity of the CHE's defence of an independent choice of standards, whilst professsing its alignment with the NRF agenda. Further, the critique acknowledged that the process of self-evaluation could be uncomfortable for institutions, especially when the stakes were high. Institutional reputation across the national system was at stake, and report writers of the institutional SERs were pushed to present their institutions in a positive impressionistic light. The author cites the famously coined 'impression management' (Goffman 1959) which 'comes into play when people attempt to persuade others of their definition of the situation. The strategy is aimed at making impressions become the reality of the target audience' (Harley 2020). What counts as evidence presented in the SER is selective, and often not necessarily deeply critical enough of the realities on the ground. The audience writes the text.

McKenna (2019) is more blatant that 'quality assurance generally seems to encourage bureaucracy and compliance' and institutional actors are encouraged 'to be part of a rising managerialism in institutions'. She argued earlier (McKenna 2018) that universities are increasingly turning into business corporations, and the mantras of enhanced efficiencies from the business world chip away at the core purpose of higher education, namely the academic project. She cites Ginsberg (2011) who reflects that across the US, the number of academic staff employed to teach and guide research rose at a slower pace than increased student enrolment, yet the increase in executive positions, usually people with business rather than academic acumen increased.

Reflecting on the submitted SER for my institution (Author A), the quality assurance probing fostered a space for a questioning of the wide variance of doctoral curriculum designs. Different disciplinary fields of study interpreted the role of a postgraduate qualification in varied signatory ways (Matos 2014). The rituals and routines of disciplinary tribes (Becher & Trowler 2001) primarily drove the interest of academics' design and offering of doctoral programmes. The CHE doctoral standards were considered by these practitioners as a form of homogenising expectations of what constituted quality doctoral education. In the face of critique, the evidence that was shared for the institutional SER document tended to be largely descriptive rather than sufficiently

critical or theoretical. Internal curriculum designers of doctoral education chose to reference other more prestigious (national and international) institutions to establish their curriculum programme benchmarks. In certain professional programmes, the role of professional councils' steering the definitions of curriculum programme quality rather than the CHE came into contestation. Limited evidence was found of interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary collaboration since the individual academic units were being managed as separately-funded entities. While the report itself detailed this diversity, the CHE commentary on the institutional SER reflected that they expected that the institution had a common policy about the management and administration of the quality assurance across its diverse institutional settings. Interestingly, centralisation rather than decentralised variance was being suggested. This posed a challenge for a post-apartheid merged institution that had several campuses, spread over more than two cities, consisting of several disciplinary schools, and characterised by a complex governance structure of management. The institution valued its variations of doctoral designs and quality assurance systems; the CHE questioned the coherence based on other normative university structures nationally.

On reflecting more broadly about the SER review process nationally some institutional peers considered the procedures as somewhat of a bothersome exercise. The actual writing up of the SER was outsourced primarily to consultants who were retired individuals who had the luxury of time that permanent members of staff lacked to construct this extensive institutional overview. Their perspectives tended to emphasise the historical foundations of the institution in celebratory rather than critical tones, suggesting that their institutional reputation was already considered incontestable and that the CHE review process was largely an exercise in policy compliance. The site visit of the peer panel could be considered as a space where individuals at varied levels in the bureaucratic hierarchies seized an opportunity for a localised grinding of axes. The micro-institutional politics thus lay behind the critical commentary they offered, showing up fault-lines in the administrative and management systems. A preference for those being interviewed was to present a perspective of technical, operational and procedural levels of analysis. They usually steered away from any deeper critical socio-political analysis of their role in the broader community, across urban and rural contexts, and across neighbouring institutions with lesser resources. However, professional etiquette and deference to the SER panel visit were hospitable and avoided any controversial matters.

For academics intricately involved with the design and delivery of doc-

toral education, the final synthetic recommendations of the CHE in its final 2022 Review Report were somewhat insipid. The Report merely told us what was already known about the wider variation of doctoral education quality and practices that recur within the system. Whist individual institutions themselves were not named in the synthetic report, the overarching message was framed within a deficiency discourse.

More advantaged institutions were applauded for 'best practice', and other practices were considered as not exceeding baseline expected requirements and not necessarily commendable. The Report indirectly suggests that graduate research management tools, data management systems, and online digital platforms for higher degree management and oversight were considered as 'supporting efficiency but do not constitute above-threshold practice' (CHE 2022: 62). However, the use of international supervisors and the offering of co-badged qualifications (supported by the necessary oversight structures) were considered as representing above-threshold practice. The Report closes with this comment: 'It is recommended that institutions must clearly differentiate and separate achieving the threshold as per the Standard and exceeding it. In many cases, institutions tended to casually construe even those standard practices, conditions and national policy requirements as constituting above-threshold practice' (CHE 2022: 64)

Historically disadvantaged institutions were again set up as inadequate and in need of improvement. Whilst recognising the diverse *in situ* institutional challenges, the Report still reinforces the reality of a historically bifurcated higher education system without acknowledging adequately the complexity of the transitioning from the past and the difficult efforts undertaken toward reaching national benchmarks, especially when the starting platforms are highly unequal. The tone is judgemental rather than developmental. Moreover, the executive orientation to the Report emphasises the surveillance agenda that McKenna (2019) predicted: 'Based on the findings and recommendations from the national review, every institution that participated in the review was required to submit an Improvement Plan to the CHE. During the period of the implementtation of the Plan, institutions are expected to submit periodic progress reports and the CHE will monitor the implementation of the Improvement Plan to their successful conclusion' (CHE 2022: vii). This consolidates the 'overlording agendas' that Harley (2020) also predicted where institutions themselves are considered as the architects of their own surveillance mechanisms. The authoritarian gaze is deflected away from the CHE as a watchdog.

Important recommendations that the institutions' SERs suggested for new policy directives are glossed over and the responsibility for activation of the reform was again redirected to the institution to put in place its own Improvement Plans. The Report is detailed in identifying the range of issues confronting doctoral education from recruitment to entry into post-qualification employment. There is a set of listed recommendations accompanying each area of reflection. But, the onus is shifted towards institutions themselves to resolve their problematics, and it is likely that cash-strapped under-served institutions, or those with lesser experience or capacity resources, will unlikely be able to invest adequately to reverse their status.

For example, The Report acknowledges the Institutions' SERs recommended the need for student financial support to address the unrealistic terms of reference of current bursary or fee remission schemes that expected students to complete their doctoral students within three years (James 2022). The reality is that many doctoral students (especially in the professional programmes) were involved *de facto* as registered part-time students, holding day jobs to sustain their financial livelihood. The time-to-degree expectation was simply unrealistic, especially when many students do not have the autonomous research capacity at entry into the doctoral programmes. The registration time-lag between their masters and doctoral degree (different for varied disciplines) usually involves students grappling with updating their knowledge of the rapidly changing fields of research knowledge. Sometimes doctoral students are crossing over into new institutional cultures or disciplinary fields of study and their undergraduate or masters' degrees leave many students grappling with the transition to a doctoral study, and this delays their throughput and graduation rates. In listing these and other concerns, grounded from the institutions themselves, James (2022) notes that the Report acknowledges these challenges on the ground. But the Report typically responds perfunctorily as follows:

> Delays in completion can sometimes cause frustration on the part of the supervisor, who may lose interest in the student and subtly withdraw from providing appropriate guidance and supervision. Other consequences include 'hot' research topics dating and [that] may no longer be novel in the eyes of the supervisor or the examiner, to the potential detriment of the student (CHE 2022: 58).

There is a limited explicit declaration of what systemic policy intervention should be recommended at a macro-level to address these issues of delays.

Should there be a reconsideration of the policy of the time-to-degree span; should earmarked funding be directed to support specific higher education institutions or specific programmes to engage with appropriate transitioning support programmes to enable the cross-over into an autonomous doctoral study? Should pre-doctoral initiatives and staffing resources be subsidised and supported by national resources to address specific capacity issues in specific typologies of institutions? Who will establish the process of a new subsidisation scheme of promoting the throughput of doctoral education students if the time-to-degree completion is underproductive? What funding support is directed towards institutions for part-time students since most macro-funding support (and many bursary schemes) favour only full-time registered students? Why and how can students be encouraged and financially supported to undertake full-time studies that are feasible financially?

It seems as if the CHE absolves itself from making these overt policy recommendations at a national level and expects institutions to resolve these 'blockages' at a doctoral curriculum design level and internal institutional management level. Similarly, other areas within the Report about registration procedures and examination procedures, about ethical clearance management and administrative management, or the building of supervisory capacities are relegated as internal institutional accountabilities. Further, the Report advises that students personally need to choose doctoral studies with open eyes to its expectations. This recommendation does not acknowledge the range of motivations underpinning choice for doctoral studies, nor how graduates aim to utilise their credentials prospectively. (See section one above about choices for doctoral study.) No overt directives are offered about the rule of many universities to require that students submit a completed journal article manuscript for publication as part of the doctoral examination. Institutions' SERs reflected that this expectation, while promoting the dissemination of the research work, also contributes to delays in final graduation completion.

These deflections reinforce the misconception that poor quality is not a systemic issue, but a personal, or institutional lack of will or capacity. Additionally, the Report generally congratulates the institutions for the robust and well-documented set of regulatory policies, but chastises the institutions (or more specifically the academics on the ground) for the lack of shared knowledge about the terms of reference of the managerial policies. The managers of institutions are also hereby shielded in the Report's critique. Indirectly, the 'burden' of quality is being placed at the doorstep of individual supervisors

and their practices. Is this commentary indicative of the steering of the university system toward policy sycophants? Whose interests would such policy idealisation serve? Is this the most appropriate strategy by which the deep quality of doctoral education will be enhanced?

This above section points to the scepticism that there was missed opportunity in the Report, with its ambitious targets, to drive adequate policy steering directions. Instead, in support of its professed view not to encroach on institutional autonomy, it shifted the discourse towards internal institutional logics. The effect is to activate accountability from below, without a co-requisite responsibility of systemic support from above. It is not surprising, therefore, that many South African academics on the ground in this anthology, as perhaps a loss of faith in systemic reform from above, resort to how to change the system from the bottom-up.

2.2 A Graduate in Every Household: Un-intended Consequences of Mauritius Higher Education Policy

This sub-section foregrounds the policy directive to activate the growth of the higher education participation rates in the Mauritius context during the period 2011-2021. It highlights the rapid impact that this policy had on the burgeoning of a range of institutions that came to position themselves in the marketplace of the policy environment. The impact that a rise in private higher education institutions on the quality of postgraduate education provisioning within the small-island context which claimed to set itself up as a prospective 'knowledge hub' in the Indian Ocean is the focus of this reflection. This sub-section also reinforces the questioning of the potential resources and restrictive possibilities of policy as explored in the South Africa case study above.

Mauritius has one of the highest tertiary participation rates of the African continent currently at 47% (Higher Education Commission 2022). The policy change that ushered in this era of massification of higher education was adopted more than a decade ago and was framed around the political slogan of 'one graduate per family' which reflected the intention of the government of the time to transform Mauritius into a knowledge hub (Marshall 2010). Increasing participation in HE was not only a social justice issue but also closely connected with the economic ambitions of the island to generate in time revenue from foreign student recruitment. To this end, foreign universities were encouraged to set up their campuses either as satellite campuses or enter into collaborative

transnational partnerships through a series of fiscal reliefs (Mariaye & Samuel 2018).

The then Director of the Tertiary Education Commission, the apex regulatory institution entrusted to enact government higher education, writing in the context of the international Conference on the Internationalisation of Higher Education held in March 2011, argued '*Over the past decades, the number of globally mobile students has increased by 41%, according to UNESCO data. There are now more than 2.5 million students who are enrolled in higher education institutions outside of their home countries and it is estimated that the number will rise to 8 million in 2025. International education has resulted into a significant economical impact on countries hosting foreign students. As enrolments grow, so does the economic return. Mauritius should take advantage of the international market demand for tertiary education. The Mauritian tertiary education sector can become one of the pillars of the economy by attracting 100,000 foreign students by 2020*' (Higher Education Commission 2011). By the end of 2022, the Janus-headed policy of achieving social equity through massification and exporting Mauritian higher education primarily on the African continent produced mitigated quantitative results at best and at worst generated a range of practices which, in the long term would run counter to the very objectives of the policy. Student international recruitment stands as at date at 2,858 as compared to 635 in 2011, with the bulk of the recruitment being in private higher education institutions, a very far cry from the expected 100,000 (Higher Education Commission 2022).

Policymakers' miscalculation occurred on several levels. For one, their lack of knowledge of African realities and what prospective African students are expecting from an international programme; an overestimation of what Mauritius could offer as a higher education destination banking on the same assets as those that are foregrounded in advertising the island as a tourist instead and; lastly, a naïve understanding that local and international institutions already operate within comparable and compatible structures. Arguably, the social justice agenda was to be largely achieved by merging institutions or changing their statutes for them to assume an expanded portfolio. The Open University of Mauritius was to spearhead this transformation through its provision of distance education to a diversified profile of local and international students. Although its local student population is the fastest growing on the local campus, international student figures remain insignificant at 4 for 2021. The University of Technology was also set a target of 6,000 students with a campus,

which was already struggling to house 3,000 students Its current enrolment stands at 3,500 students (Higher Education Commission 2022).

Between 2011 and 2023, on average 15,000 new enrolments were registered at undergraduate levels and 5,000- 6,000 at postgraduate levels. Yet the number pursuing research degrees remain low at around 700 currently engaged in research degrees. The policy of one graduate per family has meant that a conservative estimate of 100,000 Mauritians completed an undergraduate degree between 2011-2021 in a country of 369,000 households with 36,500 families living below the poverty line (Statistics Mauritius 2022). Some may see in these figures an opportunity to celebrate but we argue here the costs of this quantitative track record will be onerous in the long term. Already, because of the inadequate attention paid to setting up the required regulatory, institutional and programmatic structures to guarantee quality outcomes, public and employer trust in the attributes of graduates has eroded resulting in a comparatively lower reserve salary for graduates.

Whilst the policy itself did improve accessibility to higher education and increase postgraduate uptake, its effects on research capacity remain negligible. In fact, relatively the proportion of successful postgraduate students taking research degrees has declined. We argue here this systemic inability to leverage the advantage created by a large undergraduate population to improve completions of postgraduate research degrees is created by the very 'one graduate per family policy'.

The policy was majorly founded on the premise that imported international education through brand-name universities be sufficient to raise the quality of provisions in Mauritius through the transposition of transnational practice in the Mauritian context. The unexpected legion risks to the quality of international universities provisions locally emanating from inadequate attention paid to the quality of teaching and assessment as well as issues related to language and curricular contextualisation (Pyvis 2013) resulted in graduates not having the level of criticality expected, poor study habits often symptomatic of a lack of understanding of the rigour, engagement and discipline required for success.

Local higher education institutions placed under the pressure of producing the required numbers to justify their demands for funding and be seen to contribute to the national agenda of improving access have used their position to increase enrolment even if that meant compromising the standards of achievement. Added to this, many recruited students may have school grades,

which are insufficient to see them successfully through an undergraduate programme. Yet, many of them aspirationally join a postgraduate programme lured by the career advantage this may offer.

The case of the policy of 'one graduate per family' stands as a poignant example of how the short-term quantitative achievements of policy run counter to its long-term qualitative objectives. The vision of Mauritian policymakers, though worth pursuing from an economic perspective, has been partial at best and at worst, set the Mauritian higher education system on the same trajectory as India fifty years ago. The ease and accessibility of earning a degree reduced its economic value on the labour market, led to a loss of public confidence in the value of a university education, and compromised the research capacities of universities.

However, the lessons learned from the implementation of this policy have resulted in the Higher Education Commission setting up a more robust system to monitor the quality of programmes offered but it will take time to repair the damage done to the cultural transformation it has brought in terms of shaping expectations of learning and quality of engagement in undergraduate education and how this transfers to postgraduate learning experiences. There is also a limited guarantee of how an externally imposed accountability system would be sufficient to counter 'beat the system strategies' which many higher education providers appear to have successfully activated over the 2010-2021 decade cushioned by the quantitative logic the policy legitimised.

3 Towards a Lens of Transforming Postgraduate Education in Africa

Many higher education institutions across the continent are confronted with a relatively small percentage of students interested in or capable of postgraduate education. Several contexts are constrained by the social, political, economic and historical realities that prioritise basic education (at primary and secondary school levels), given the low levels of gross enrolment and participation rates in formal education and schooling. Consequently, in this scenario, participation in undergraduate studies (access and success in bachelor's degrees and diploma studies) is already a selected achievement that aims to reverse the historical inequities of the past, and postgraduate education is often considered a luxury.

However, this anthology recognises these challenges of context, but aims to move beyond the repeated retellings of these harsh realities of under-

productivity. We believe that the refrains of underproductivity simultaneously fuel a deficit discourse of potentiality within the African context. These recurrent narratives offer a 'no-hope-prospect' which relegates Africa to sit as spectators to the field of research play that is being performed outside of their immediate environments as knowledge makers. It offers little insight into the spaces and processes where meaningful postgraduate higher educational provisioning is being transformed. We aim to show that not all African contexts capitulate.

There are cases of institutions and programmes where the rise of the research agenda and postgraduate education are being tackled head-on. Many creative strategies are being activated to develop locally relevant, indigenous ways of operating without simplistically borrowing models from the more affluent contexts. However, we recognise that the global stage of doctoral education requires a complex entanglement with the discourses that emanate from outside the immediate localised contexts. The process of postgraduate education is about negotiating our unique particularities without essentialising and commodifying romanticist conceptions of African identities disconnected from the rest of the globe. We believe that postgraduate education is a complex space with many intersecting networks across departmental structures, within programmes, within and between institutions, regionally, nationally, continentally, and transnationally.

This anthology aims to set the platform for sharing stories of how these obstacles of context, history and resources have been re-imagined and transformed to serve the local African contexts' ethical, worthwhile and productive interests. In particular, the focus will be on those exemplary spaces (programmes, people and perspectives) where postgraduate education studies are being activated in democratic and socially just iterations. This anthology aims to draw on stories of success about postgraduate education *in*, *by* and *for* the African continent. However, the book does not romanticise these alternate possibilities as a 'naïve hope' that optimistically expects things to change even if one puts forth no effort to make it happen. Neither does the unconventional possibilities suggest 'false hope' which celebrates that simplistic collaboration will alter patterns of power relations between contracting partners. Instead, the aim is to explore authentically how 'critical hope' has to be nurtured and co-produced in sustained and deliberative ways (Bozalek, Leibowtiz, Carolissen & Boler 2014).

The aim is to explore and report what it entails conceptually and prag-

matically to bring about a *deep transformation* of the postgraduate education sector within the African context. Complexities are acknowledged since Africa, and its multilingual and diverse histories and contexts each require unique responsiveness. Such theoretical explorations also include how the African continent and its higher education systems position themselves relationally to other global systems in the global North, as well as between intranational continental partners in South-South partnerships, and across different hierarchical positions and institutions within national systems (Maringe & de Wit 2016).

The role of funders, donors and designers of curriculum programmes for masters and doctoral education all exert powerful influences making the space of higher education systems and their knowledge-making activities replete with many linguistic, political, ideological and paradigmatic positionings, each vying for presence. De Sousa Santos (2014; 2018) refers to this stance of examining the interconnections between various systems and institutions as an 'ecologies of knowledges' approach which challenges the dominant gaze of global hegemonic forces. This examination is an exploration of both the developed and developing world partners implicated in marginalising and/or centring each other.

The anthology recognises that no one system has an embargo on the truth. All forms of knowledge systems should be respectfully recognised in a system of dialogicality and relationality (Schulze 2012). This includes forging relationships around who holds the epistemological knowledge required to activate postgraduate studies: between disciplines, between multiple partners within the institutional systems, and within the world of work. This suggests that both the African context (its current resources and expertise) and its interlocuting international and systemic partners (their worldviews and agendas of reading the African context) need to re-examine how they support co-designing and co-development of postgraduate research reporting and delivery. Each context has its heritage of lived values about what postgraduate education and supervision should entail and what constitutes the required interventions (Thambinathan & Kinsella 2021). These perspectives and programmes might both enable and constrain any innovation or transformation.

3.1 Emergent Lines of Inquiry in this Anthology

If one regards education as a dialogical democratic process of affirming indivi-

duals to re-read their world, then one needs to put under the microscope policymakers, funders, managers, administrators, support systems, supervisors and students, and their prospective employers in a transformed set of relationships (Nerad, Bogle, Kohl, O'Carroll, Peters & Scholz 2022). The anthology aims to scrutinise the multifaceted agendas driving the interest to develop postgraduate education studies within university systems in Africa. These agendas are not always driven by epistemological or transformative concerns to activate worthwhile scholarship linked to local African contexts. The transformation of postgraduate education in Africa is an ongoing contested conversation that involves the negotiation, and expected series of further re-negotiations, of varied vantages about the purposes, values, and operations of postgraduate education. (The framework presented in the opening section of this chapter in Figure 1 above refers.)

A concerted, collaborative multi-pronged approach is required to tackle the transformation of postgraduate education within the African continent. These changes include tackling,

- new initiatives within the overarching national systemic *policy landscape*;
- the shifting in *governance, management and administration* of postgraduate education;
- the reconceptualisation of the *design of curriculum* of postgraduate studies at masters' and doctoral levels; as well as
- the re-examination of the *pedagogical forms of supervisory models* that are being used to generate a more democratic transformative agenda in postgraduate studies; and
- the need to develop *collaborative relationships* across disciplines, institutions, regions and stakeholders within and outside the university systems.

3.2 The Organisational Architecture of the Anthology

We have organised the sections of this anthology into three broad yet overlapping sub-sections to reflect these above areas of focus:

- Transforming postgraduate education in Africa;

- Supervisors' and Students' Engagement with Postgraduate Education; and
- Inter-institutional, National and Transnational Discourses.

The **First Section** attempts to develop a broad overview of some key systemic issues characterising *the postgraduate education space*. The first chapter draws on specific case studies from the two African contexts where the editors have honed their interest in higher education policies and practices. It questions the limits and potential of a policy-driven activation of transforming postgraduate education (Chapter 1). The next chapter deploys a theoretical lens of 'critical hope' (Bozaleck *et al.* 2014) that recognises the ethical and political responsibility to counter despair and recover a lost sense of connectedness, relationality and solidarity with others. The supportive curriculum interventions related to this programme design are explored here (Chapter 3). This section also emphasises the political question about how one affirms the marginalised in a postgraduate curriculum programme. The statistical analysis of the enrolment, throughput and graduation rates of individuals by race and gender in particular fields of study, motivates the argument for a targeted intervention to address the challenges experienced by Black female doctoral students (Chapter 3).

The **Second Section** has been organised to reflect the interest of many of the authors in this anthology who have embraced a focus on what they can do at a localised curriculum design and pedagogical level of postgraduate education to enhance both students' and supervisors' engagement. In this section, the opening chapter evaluates options for designing online modalities in an honours degree (pre-masters') programme to activate student agency in their own postgraduate development (Chapter 4) The next chapter explores supervision models from the perspective of both students and their facilitator/supervisor in a collaborative cohort model (Chapter 5). The gaze in the next chapter turns towards an inward self-reflective critique using auto-ethnographic approaches to examine how to leverage change amongst diverse students in the supervisor-supervisee relationship (Chapter 6).

The next chapter focuses on assisting those postgraduate students who aim to join academia. The chapter shows how a scholarship of teaching and learning can be embedded alongside the research capacity development agenda for postgraduate education (Chapter 7).

The **Third Section** attempts to examine how inter-institutional collabo-

rations could de-territorialise the nature of postgraduate education. A more macro-systemic analysis is offered in the first chapter in this section which discusses how a national educational research association approaches the building of capacity for research participation and development of early career researchers, as a form of building of the next generation of scholars (Chapter 8).

The next chapter explores how the national Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa and a national educational learning and teaching research association collaborated to develop a model of postgraduate studies that activated scholarship about academic staff development framed by a social justice interest. The reflections by the facilitators of this project, from varied institutions nationally, argue that the emergent model constitutes an example of a decolonised supervision model (Chapter 9). Inter-institutional postgraduate programmes across national borders are explored in the next chapter. It explores comparatively the collaborative relationships in a North-South and a South-South transnational offering (Chapter 10).

The final chapter constitutes a reflective account offered by an established international researcher who has argued for moving away from the concept of a globally converging doctoral education model. She describes the process of assembling (in an international conference /workshop) early career researchers, their supervisors, university administrators and funders of doctoral education to share their vantages about building, renewing and reforming their local and national doctoral education systems. The chapter explores the seven key recommendations that stimulate not only doctoral education related to disciplinary expertise, but also is bolstered by a core set of values to underpin doctoral studies (Chapter 12).

Each of these chapters draws on diverse theoretical frameworks that locate their arguments in specific contextual spaces. It is not the intention of the editors to moderate these varied paradigmatic perspectives. Instead, their multiplicity enriches the anthology. A notable feature of many of the chapters is their collaborative developmental effort in co-writing between seasoned academics and novice less-experienced post-doctoral fellows, recently graduated postgraduate students, and some doctoral students too. This signals the collaborative shared effort that this anthology supports.

4 Concluding Thoughts

The anthology aims to explore the motivations for how and why African *higher education institutions*, their *supervisors and postgraduate students* engage in

postgraduate studies. We hope this anthology will provoke thinking about at least some of these questions:

- What drives the agenda of prospective students to undertake masters' and doctoral studies? And how are these agendas being thwarted and/or overcome in the course of their studies? What enables, constrains or challenges the students' expectations and agendas?
- Are the goals of worthwhile knowledge being pursued as a public good within postgraduate studies? How are social justice considerations embedded within the postgraduate curriculum?
- Whose definitions of worthwhile postgraduate education prevail in successful postgraduate programmes?
- How are agendas of performance, econometry and productivity discourses managed, understood and tackled?
- What kinds of governance, management or administrative structures/ systems are being designed to support the affirmation and capacity-building of postgraduate students, supervisors and their studies in the African continent?
- What examples of curriculum projects and programmes are establishing collaborative and productive partnerships toward the development of postgraduate education in Africa?
- What alternative typologies of masters'/ doctoral education curricula (like the professional masters/doctorate) are being developed on the African continent? What explains the support or resistance to alternative typologies of masters'/ doctoral curricula?
- How are interdisciplinary studies promoted within masters' and doctoral education within the African continent?
- How are alternative modes of delivery, like online postgraduate education, being harnessed within postgraduate education delivery for the African context?
- What alternative models of supervision are activated to develop democratic spaces to support postgraduate education in Africa?
- How are multiple stakeholders involved in shaping the nature of postgraduate education within and outside the university context in Africa?

In addition to, or within these questions, the contribution of this anthology might address themes/ issues such as:

- The re-imagination of institutional partnerships to support productive worthwhile, socially just and ethical postgraduate education in Africa
- Governance structures, policies and postgraduate education toward transformative education in Africa
- The programmes of capacity building to support successful post-graduate education in Africa
- The development of relevant African-led scholarship
- Postgraduate curriculum programme design, monitoring and evaluation
- Building supervisory capacities
- Shifting supervisor - supervisee relationships towards democratic engagement
- The postgraduate education journey: before, during and after the postgraduate qualification
- Entry criteria into postgraduate programmes
- Pedagogy and the postgraduate curriculum
- Exit-level postgraduate attributes
- Postgraduate education within the social community

Rather than advocate prescriptive solutions, we hope the anthology raises further dialogical questions for future research to transform postgraduate education in Africa.

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