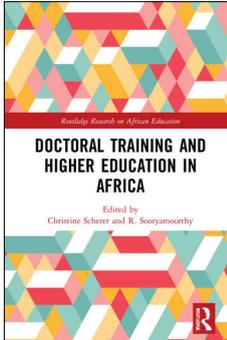


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Doctoral training and higher education in Africa

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# To 'train' or to 'educate' for doctoral work? – that is the question: A review of *Doctoral Training and Higher Education in Africa*

*Doctoral Training and Higher Education in Africa* is both timely and essential for a transforming and decolonising higher education. A combination of an ageing professoriate and a growing number of younger, newer and less experienced academics entering academia in Africa<sup>1</sup> make this book even more critical. Its deliberateness in offering varying insights on doctoral training from across Africa enables the reader access to unique discourses and practices that guide doctoral support in ways that other similar publications on the subject have not.

The timeliness of the book also lies in its contribution to the role higher education needs to play in economic development. Africa is a context in which, more than before, higher education can be said to be increasingly becoming one of the hopes for ensuring economic development, innovation and the necessary socio-political advancement for society at large.<sup>2</sup> Doctoral work is certainly critical in the context of such imperatives, for it is through it that an informed knowledge base equipped to tackle local and global challenges could be found.

The book is also critical as a political project. As some will rightly argue, disguised in neo-liberal discourses such as globalisation and/or internationalisation, former colonisers seem to have managed to control, and in some sense shape, higher education on the African continent.<sup>3</sup> Calls for Africans to take back knowledge domains, redefine and locate them within the local have been deafening.<sup>4</sup> In some respects, this book represents a response to such calls. Focusing on what it calls doctoral training, the book engages with the subject matter in ways that fit distinctly African needs and contexts, thereby revitalising African higher education.

One of the aspects that seems to have received cursory attention in the book, despite the attention it has attracted in the recent past, is the need to continue to deconstruct what it means to generate knowledge in a transforming and decolonising higher education context.<sup>5</sup> More specifically, given the subject of the book, it would have benefitted a reader to be exposed to an extended discussion on the possible implications for doctoral supervision of a candidate whose work needs to be locally responsive, while globally relevant. There is urgency for this as we are all grappling with ensuring that doctoral research begins from a decolonial lens, so that the knowledge generated leads to the democratisation of scholarship and learning.<sup>6</sup> This, I argue, is a niche that has not received the full attention it urgently requires in most publications. Given the transformation and decolonisation imperatives because of the massification of higher education, as well as concerns for epistemological access and recognition and incorporation of the knowledges of the South<sup>7</sup>, focused attention on this aspect would have added another layer of richness.

Doctoral candidates are arguably a cohort with potential to build a scholarly trajectory as future experts in higher education decolonial research practices – a concern raised by many scholars, among whom is Chilibisa<sup>8(p.1-2)</sup>:

*Northern research methodologies exclude from knowledge production the formerly colonised, historically marginalized and oppressed groups, which today are most often represented ... [by] broad categories of non-Western, third world, developing, underdeveloped, First Nations, indigenous peoples, third world women, African American women, and so on.*

What the book seems to be emphasising as key to success in Africa's doctoral journeys is the international collaboration with scholars from the North and/or Westernised contexts, and thus underplays the urgency to focus on introducing future scholars in Africa to decolonising research techniques such as indigenous research methodologies, with the intention to reduce the influence and current flow of research from domination by the North, as well as what Radcliffe<sup>8(p.330)</sup> refers to as the influence of the 'white and neoliberal universities' on the 'prevailing political economy of knowledge production'. What seems to be emphasised in the book, in other words, is the need for 'training' future African scholars through (among other things) sending them overseas to universities that have had a long history of 'success' in doctoral education, thereby ignoring the extent to which such contexts have been for centuries dominated by what Radcliffe<sup>8</sup> sees as 'white and neoliberal' worldviews. While the book rightly sees room for such 'training', I argue that there is an even more urgent need for 'educating' first.

A distinction between 'training' and 'educating', particularly in the context of doctoral work within the context of a transforming and decolonising higher education sector, could have received some extended attention in the book. A tendency to 'train' before we 'educate' is one of the underlying reasons rightly identified in the book as contributing to the doctoral throughput conundrums in most universities in Africa. By implication, the book distinguishes wisely and carefully between the two, with *training* as having to do with the act of imparting a special skill or behaviour commonly offered to individuals to perform at operational level, and *educating* as having to do with a process of systematic learning that develops a sense of judgement and reasoning. While the former involves learning something with a goal of performing a specific skill or behaviour, the latter is a systematic process of learning something with a goal of acquiring knowledge necessary to make informed, critically reflective and reflexive decisions. As eloquently argued, and effectively illustrated in the book, exposing doctoral candidates to disciplinary conceptual, theoretical and knowledge foundations, as well as relevant research traditions and paradigms prior to embarking on a doctoral research journey, continues to evidence the value of *educating* for doctoral research, before *training*.

To conclude, despite the aspects I consider to have needed some attention in the book that are either underrepresented or not covered at all, I am persuaded that, by not shying away from such issues as access to education, proactive recruitment, funding, practitioner expertise, enrolment and drop-out, this book is a great resource for higher education administrators and policymakers, as well as researchers and academics.

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