Working with and through Neoliberalism: Envisioning Research Supervision as a Pedagogy of Care in a Context of "Privileged Irresponsibility"

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Abstract

The report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion revealed that exclusionary practices are commonplace in South African universities. They remain a compelling factor that contributes to student attrition in Master's and doctoral programmes, and they were a trigger to the #RhodesMustFall movement. Universities, oblivious to their doublespeak, have institutionalised curriculum decolonisation and delivery, yet simultaneously enforce neoliberal performative principles (fast-tracking increased numbers despite different levels of student readiness). The extent to which traditional, hierarchical research supervision models (with their genesis in an asymmetrical master-apprentice power dynamic) have responded to the needs of the euphemistically coined "non-traditional" student is moot. In a context of unprecedented increase in research supervision workloads and pressure to decolonise, there is limited research-informed knowledge as to how research supervisors navigate these contradictory conditions. This article reports on a study informed by a Freirean "pedagogy of care" as it attempts to address this lacuna by exploring the research supervision experiences and practice of a sample of 18 research-active professors in a College of Humanities at a research-led university in South Africa. Data was generated through in-depth interviews and subjected to reflexive thematic analysis. The findings indicate that a deep sense of care exists among the sampled supervisors and it manifests in various ways as supervisors actively work with and through neoliberal protocols.

Keywords: neoliberalism; research supervision; care; privileged irresponsibility

Introduction

> Neoliberal policies around the globe have made caring more difficult. Yet, many scholars seem to have accepted neoliberalism as an inescapable reality. Instead, … care stands as a major alternative way to the neoliberal paradigm, both conceptually and historically … a democratic form of care—which makes the reallocation of care responsibilities its central concern—can provide the basis for a theoretical challenge to neoliberalism. (Tronto 2017, 27)

Tronto's observation of how neoliberalism has altered the nature of care and caring has salience. Of significance though is her explicit assertion that while neoliberalism might prevail, it should not be constructed as insurmountable—that subjects can access affective (theoretical) resources, such as care, to challenge neoliberalism's contouring of economic and social life.

It is beyond the scope of this article to engage in any in-depth fashion the construct "neoliberalism". Extant literature is, however, replete with this conceptual explication (see for example Harvey 2007; Maistry 2015; Maistry and Africa 2020; Shore 2010). Similarly, there has in recent times been a proliferation of scholarship on decolonisation (see Le Grange 2016; Maistry 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Tuck and Yang 2012; Zembylas 2018).

In this article, I take my cue from leading scholars who have theorised care in the South African higher education context (see Bozalek 1999; Bozalek and Zembylas 2020; Zembylas, Bozalek, and Shefer 2014). I also recognise that increased (neocolonial) bureaucratisation and entrepreneurialism appear to reinforce mainly Anglo-Saxon scholarly publication benchmarks (Le Grange 2019; Maistry 2019).

I attempt to lead two distinct but related arguments as they relate to the issue of care givers and care receivers in a neoliberal university environment, by invoking Tronto's (2013) notion of "privileged irresponsibility" and her imploration for locating care at the centre of the politico-academic project, especially as it relates to the work of research supervision.

I argue, firstly, for an unapologetic and overtly conspicuous construction of university managers as oblivious *receivers and unashamed solicitors of care* from those they task to deliver on performances that help such managers achieve their key performance targets. I draw attention to how research supervisors in particular are summoned to deliver individual performances/research outputs that collectively contribute to managers' aspirations. Secondly, I argue that despite neoliberal constrictions and prescriptions as they relate to advanced research students' (doctoral level) throughput and time-to-completion, research supervisors find ways to work with and through such constraints through multiple means of attentive care. A compelling issue with regard to doctoral supervision in the South African context is that it continues to be weighed down

by residual effects of the apartheid legacy, especially as it relates to the quantum of doctoral graduations and the need for fast-tracking.

Key aspects of the state of doctoral education in South Africa reviewed by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf 2010) included the predominance of white male graduates at this level, high differentiation in the quality of programmes across the country, low throughput rates, high dropout rates, and time-to-completion well beyond "regulation" time frames. What was clear was that the capacities for effective delivery of doctoral programmes were quite uneven, especially as they relate to both the qualifications and experience of doctoral supervisors. In 2011, only 34% of all academics in South Africa held a PhD degree, a disturbing indication of the country's lack of capacity to rapidly increase the number of doctoral students (RSA 2012, 69). The National Planning Commission (through the National Development Plan [RSA 2012]) appears to have remained convinced that one of the levers for economic growth is increased doctoral graduates—individuals assumed to be eventual high-level experts that would innovate and fuel the desired economic growth that the country is desperate to achieve.

In their review of higher education in South Africa after two decades of democracy, the Council on Higher Education (CHE 2016) reflected on what they considered to be a tenuous assumption, that increasing the number of doctoral graduates will lead to improved economic growth and prosperity, arguing that the relationship between the per capita doctoral graduates and economic growth is inconclusive (CHE 2016). It is not unreasonable to infer that such instrumentalist persuasions as they relate to the purpose of education have their genesis in neoliberal ideology that now saturates both education policy and higher education governance (Maistry 2015). South African public universities take their cue from the state (the Department of Higher Education and Training), they buy into neoliberal knowledge economy discourses, and they acquiesce to centrally determined enrolment targets that they are expected to meet. While anecdotal information suggests that the ripple effect of the national drivers for increasing PhD production is likely to impact the work of those subjects (PhD supervisors) tasked with giving effect to quantum performance benchmarks, there is a dearth of understanding of how such subjects navigate what might well be considered unprecedented doctoral research supervision workloads (of 12 students and above for most of the sample in this study), and the research supervision practices they employ in what has become a performance-mediated higher education system. To their credit, McKenna and colleagues edited an insightful collection of personal reflections on attempts at inclusive supervisory practices by mainly novice supervisors (McKenna et al. 2017). While Bitzer and Albertyn's (2011) insights into "alternative" models of supervision and Mckenna's penetrative analysis of learning that might occur in doctoral programmes (Mckenna 2017) are notable instances of empirical work in the specific area of advanced research degree programmes, there remains a dearth of empirical research on the nature of supervisory practices in the fraught South African higher education context. This field remains under-theorised and has not developed a

sufficiently nuanced language of description beyond metaphorical constructions of the supervision enterprise, a problem not unique to the South African context (Lee and Green 2009).

I focus on the experiences of a sample of humanities professors as they work with (care for and with) advanced research students in an entrepreneurial university context—one that has "unremorsefully" embraced a "for profit" logic and that encourages/coerces university academics to function as individualistic entrepreneurial agents. Contradictions in the higher education space are an endemic feature of universities across the world; such contradictions, however, take on a particular complexity in South Africa where transformation and decoloniality have become institutionalised as key performance indicators within the contours of neoliberal accountability, surveillance and performance regimes (Maistry 2015). Almost two decades ago, in a fascinating article titled "The New Prudentialism in Education: Actuarial Rationality and the Entrepreneurial Self" (2005), Michael Peters invoked Foucauldian theorisation to warn of a disturbing proclivity that has infiltrated conceptions of the self as it relates to accountability and responsibility for personal well-being. What is clear is that

> this ideal type neoliberal subject … is constituted through multiple micro-practices of bureaucratisation and professionalisation … [that attempt] to produce a culture of hierarchy, competition and individualism through the eradication of cultures of solidarity, care and collectivity. Some subjects and forms of behaving and embodying space are empowered and legitimised, whilst others are delimited, disciplined and subjected to the dominant logics, allowing some to judge and others to be judged. Imposed standards of excellence and quality manifested in audit culture are those to which the ideal subject is produced against and through. (Motta and Bennett 2018, 634)

In the section that follows, I draw attention to the tensions that present in South African higher education as it relates to "new" imperatives to transform (and decolonise) both curriculum and pedagogy (including research supervision) with particular reference to the issue of a humanising pedagogy of care.

Care in the Context of Contradiction: The Case of the University's Espoused Vision

While it is beyond the scope of this article to apply strict critical discourse analysis techniques to the sampled university's espoused value aspirations as contained in its *Reach Principles* (University of KwaZulu-Natal [UKZN] n.d.), they do warrant some discussion as they set the scene/stage on which a performance culture is expected to play out. Embedded in the institution's mission statement is the expression that it "aims to establish a value-driven organisational culture that empowers the Institution and its people to achieve institutional goals. The guiding values are Respect, Excellence, Accountability, Client Orientation, Honesty, and Trust" (UKZN n.d.). On the surface these values appear laudable.

The notion of student as client though and a thick regime (policy) of human resource performance management protocols, including neoliberal academic performance assessment as it relates to research production, prescriptive teaching and supervision workloads (Maistry 2015), suggest that the affect "care", while implicit in the university's aspirations, is likely to remain constructed within the parameters of a client-service provider dyad, despite recent rhetoric around decolonisation. As such, the decontextualised (student) client (Boughey and McKenna 2016), namely, the Cartesian subject, is reduced to a unit (of output/production) as opposed to a subject with peculiar experiences and unique consciousness as described by Motta and Bennet above. In their distinct feminised theorisation of "pedagogies of care and careful epistemologies", they foreground "pedagogical relationships and affective power dynamics as opposed to the careless hegemonic masculinities … and accompanying affectivities" that they argue "imbricate smoothly with neoliberalism and increasingly dominate the higher education landscape" (Motta and Bennett 2018, 635). They contend that "subjects perform the dispositions and behaviours of hegemonic and 'other' subjectivities in complex ways (and often inadvertently), regardless of how they are positioned in the (hegemonic) sex-gender binary" (Motta and Bennett 2018, 631). For them, mapping males with masculinity or females with the feminised has no currency. This is a particularly salient point as it is useful in understanding how both male and female higher education leadership (policymakers) and academics (un)wittingly perpetuate hegemonic notions of care. Reflecting on access and participation programmes in an Australian higher education institution, they caution that narrow neoliberal constructions of access and participation are likely to ignore "ethico-political social justice commitments [that] reproduce damaging dualisms of academic subjectivity, premised … on reified, essentialist oppositions between: body/mind and emotion/intellect, with the former often represented as the feminised irrational and private, and the latter assumed to be the masculinised rational and public" (Motta and Bennett 2018, 632).

These insights have particular resonance for conceptualising the notion of pedagogies of care in a South African higher education context grappling with reconciling decolonial (human-oriented) initiatives as they relate to teaching and research supervision with traditional hard science models that resonate with a neoliberal agenda.

Zembylas's (2018, 1) insights as they relate to his examination of "the links between humanisation and the decolonisation of higher education and … [its implications] for pedagogical praxis" have salience. He describes a humanising pedagogy "as a form of pedagogy that has its roots in Freire's notion of humanisation and focuses on the pursuit of one's full humanity" (Zembylas 2018, 1). He cautions though "that even 'noble' ideas such as Freirean-based humanising pedagogies need to be constantly scrutinised to avoid becoming complicit with the rhetoric of the status quo" (Zembylas 2018, 1). This is an important line of flight, especially as it relates to the non-neutral (innocent or free) notion of "care" in higher education.

In earlier work, Zembylas, Bozalek and Shefer (2014) put forth the notion of "privileged irresponsibility", reflecting on the affective domain of care and what this might mean for "critical pedagogies of emotion in the context of higher education" (Zembylas, Bozalek, and Shefer 2014, 201). They draw attention to how a historical gendered construction of care locates this affective disposition and responsibility as being the exclusive domain of women—an erroneous presupposition that needs to be challenged, especially given its often expedient application to further marginalise women in particular in the higher education space. It raises questions concerning whether university mission statements embrace the full ambit of care and the extent to which university managers and university academics are aware of their (un)witting complicity in privileged irresponsibility. The argument here is that rank-and-file academics are forced to care for the welfare of powerful neoliberal university managers, who exact from these subjects they control the kind performances that contribute to the achievement of performance targets or benchmarks by which institutions and such managers are themselves judged. Of course, privileged irresponsibility works in such a way that this hegemonic relationship is seldom understood or conversed about in any critical, open fashion, nor is there much tolerance for such discourse within university structures (department, board or senate meetings— fora usually commandeered by subjects not fully conscious of their own subjectification by the "invisible" neoliberal grandmaster).

Towards Reframing Humanising Pedagogies in the Arena of Research Supervision

In their analysis of the state of the "conceptual-discursive field of supervision", Lee and Green argue that this knowledge field remains largely under-theorised (Lee and Green 2009, 621). They lament the predisposition to view research supervision as "research" and the emphasis on disciplinarity as opposed to research supervision as teaching. They observe that ephemeral archetypal metaphors (master-apprentice, maternal and gestatory, for example) have "congealed" and have achieved a reified canonical status. They do, however, also draw attention to the three archetypal metaphors that predominate, namely, authorship, discipleship and apprenticeship (see Lee and Green 2009). They posit that each metaphorical appropriation constructs the supervisory enterprise in a particular way. As such, each implicitly alludes to particular pedagogical orientations. A particularly intriguing analysis and conceptualisation is the "ocular" metaphor of supervision, that is, the act of constantly "seeing" and being seen. They also draw attention to how the word "supervision" itself has assumed a normalcy in contemporary research learning discourse, arguing that its "metaphoricity is concealed and its symbolic force covert and subliminal" (Lee and Green 2009, 624). This is a telling observation as it alerts academics to the neoliberal surveillance, observation and performance machinery that researchers have so easily been lured into (Maistry 2015) and the supervisory practices that might follow from this kind of orientation. Of importance is that it signals the benignity of liberal approaches to research supervision to offer any kind of counter-narrative.

In recent years, there has been an emerging body of post-liberal scholarship that argues for the reconceptualisation of research supervision—away from the traditional liberal (technicist) approach, which Lee describes as the functional approach with its emphasis on "directing" and resultant student "obedience" (Lee 2008, 691). Research supervision as pedagogy, on the other hand, endeavours "to problematise language, subjectivity, power and identity in ways that emphasise the fragmented, partial and multiple nature of the self" (Manathunga 2009, 344). This pedagogical reorientation is steadily gaining currency internationally (Clegg 2014), resulting in calls for more nuanced approaches to supervision that go beyond the traditional Oxford Model (Burford 2014; Grant 2008; Wisker, Robinson, and Schacham 2007) still prevalent in many South African universities. Supervision as pedagogy necessarily implies a refocusing of supervision on the development of the research candidate with high-level conceptual skills, as thinker, writer and creator of knowledge. It necessarily demands a re-imagining in which learning as process is salient.

In extending this concept, Khene (2014) posits a humanising pedagogy, one which draws attention to the particular issues that may confront students in developing contexts such as South Africa. She invokes Freirean pedagogical principles that recentre the student in the teaching and learning enterprise—in this instance, the supervision enterprise, suggesting supervisor dispositions that respond and are sensitive to especially social and cultural barriers that students in developing contexts such as South Africa are likely to encounter. A humanising pedagogy recognises "othering" that comes with prejudice that relates to "race", class, gender, and sexuality, and how this is implicated in the supervision encounter, and how oblivion to these social issues might lead to unwitting social exclusion in the higher education academic space. Supervision as pedagogy requires the creation of situation-specific enabling conditions that respond to the peculiar needs that students present. Manathunga and Goozée state that it may be naïve to assume, even in developed contexts, that advanced research students enter research programmes with sophisticated levels of readiness to proceed with independent study (Manathunga and Goozée 2007). Supervision as pedagogy in a developing context such as South Africa might also entail supervisor self-constructions as both learner and "teacher".

Research supervision as pedagogy might take on an even more sophisticated understanding in the decolonisation-of-pedagogies debate as it welcomes an openness to ontological, epistemological and methodological permissiveness, necessarily transcending traditional Euro-American approaches to research education to transcultural approaches in the research space (Singh et al. 2016). The latter approach denounces "epistemological arrogance" in favour of "epistemological openness and curiosity about indigenous and non-Western modes of theorising and critique …, cultural inclusion and knowledge co-construction" (Singh et al. 2016, 63).

Zembylas contends that there is much potential for humanising pedagogies to be reconceptualised in line with decolonial thinking. What is required is a conscious and

explicit teaching (and learning) intent directed at rupture and deconstruction of normalised colonial pedagogic practices. This would entail invoking theory that is premised on an agenda that contests modernity and coloniality—that give due consideration to the "geopolitics of knowledge production" (Zembylas 2018, 6). Zembylas is convinced that while Freirean inspiration is a useful point of departure, it has to be supplemented by contemporary decolonial theorisation and activism in former colonised contexts—powerful "nurseries" where "counter-narratives" to the colonial canon can be nurtured and developed.

A Brief Methodological Note

Data for this article was drawn from a larger project on research supervision practices in the College of Humanities at a South African university that declared itself to be a research-led institution. For this article, data from 12 experienced research supervisors at associate professor and full professor levels was extracted for analysis. All participants had successfully graduated more than five doctoral students and significant numbers of Master's students. This qualitative study drew on the tenets of phenomenological research (Van Manen 2016) as it focused on the experience and practice of participants as supervisors of advanced research degree students. The "phenomenology of practice" is *for* and *of* practice (Van Manen 2016, 1). An attempt is made at understanding the social world of the academic research supervisor by probing her subjective experiences of her practice as supervisor. This approach allows the key point of reference to be that of the research participant, by delving into the individual consciousness and lived experience of the phenomenon under study. The assumption is that research supervision practice is a socially constructed phenomenon, the essence of which might be apprehended by describing the thoughts and actions of the research participants as they carry out their work as research supervisors.

Data was generated using a semi-structured interview schedule. Thirty-minute in-depth interviews were planned for each participant. While one would expect busy university professors to be prudent with their time, the selected professoriate was particularly generous with their responses, with some interviews going beyond 60 minutes. What became evident was that participants were keen to have the details of experiences documented—to tell their stories was a first-time opportunity for many participants.

Drawing on the tenets offered by phenomenological data analysis, the concepts epoché (bracketing) and reduction (see Van Manen 2016) were used to guide the analysis. A systematic process of inductive, open-coding thematic analysis was employed. The thematic analysis involved six steps: familiarising oneself with the data, followed by coding, searching for themes, reviewing of tentative themes, naming/conceptualising themes as findings and eventually writing up the findings (Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield 2015). All ethical protocols as stipulated by my institution's ethics policy were duly followed.

In the section that follows, key findings are presented, which are supported by selected verbatim utterances from the large corpus of qualitative interview data that was generated.

Some Key Findings

Disillusionment with the Institution's Performance Demands: Exacting Its Pound of Flesh and More

It has been more than a decade since the sampled university formally implemented a performance management system—"sophisticated" human resource protocols designed to quantify and measure the qualitative work of university academics, including the complex work of research supervision. While there was some resistance to this neoliberal-informed accountability regime, this system has firmly embedded itself as monitoring and surveillance machinery, so much so that it has become normalised and "accepted" by rank-and-file academics. All participants appeared to have acquiesced to this human resource utilisation model, with responses that ranged from constructions of self as compliant subject of the institution to open dissatisfaction with the institution's unrelenting inflexibility. The data extracts below reflect this disillusionment:

> On a yearly basis, you have to quantify what you did in terms of the number of PhDs you produced, the number of master's you produced, the number of articles you have written …

> … the formula used by the University in terms of supervision, the number of hours you spend supervising students falls far short from what you actually do.

> You have to adapt your life in a particular way to get in those hours for each student. … Well, I don't know whether I'm doing something right … but what I do is I think I'm doing my work so to speak.

> You have to play with hours. I have to create hours in the morning, before anything else. I have to get up, start working at 4am, so I can read, so I can do other things. So, it's in the weekends, it's just all the time.

> Often, it's a 14-hour day … working day … and even on weekends, … so it is quite draining and taxing, to keep your game as a supervisor.

While it might be harsh to infer that it appears as if the participants have internalised the institution's demands for performance or that this might be unquestioning compliance, there does appear to be some level of angst among participants that if they do not comply, they may face sanctions, and when they do comply, they unwittingly endorse the system. What is clear is that "to keep your game" as a supervisor of doctoral students demands of these senior colleagues what might well be regarded as exploitative work hours. While the work hours mentioned may seem an exaggeration, it is not unrealistic given that all participating professors in this study were supervising in excess

of 10 doctoral and Master's students, with some having 15 or more students at some point (well beyond the official minimum six advanced research students per annum). The pile-up effect as it relates to the "lagging" students—those who do not complete doctoral studies in the minimum four (full-time) or five years (part-time)—is certainly a contributory factor to the exorbitant number of work hours that many research supervisors have become subjected to, and for which there is no official recognition—an issue that is taken up below.

Care for and of the Lagging Doctoral Student (Unit of Output)

In many cases, the research supervision workloads of many of the sampled academics comprised students who had advanced in their studies, but at a rate that did not meet the requirements (time-to-completion time frame) of the university. These would be students whose personal contexts might have prevented them from completing their studies "timeously". The research supervisor (participants) would have built long-term relations, invested time and effort in guiding such students through project conception and through subsequent stages of the research project. Of concern is that supervision (hours) of students who have exceeded the university norms for study completion, but are granted permission to register as official students of the university, is *not* recognised by the institution, yet, when such students do in fact complete their studies, the university receives the due research output grant from the state. While the participants in this study felt that this was punitive as it implied that supervisors might be the only cause for non-completion (and especially since a multitude of factors could be cited for why students fall behind with their studies), all participants continued to indicate their deep commitment to their (lagging) students. Participants were adamant that they and their students were victims of a rigid system, fixated on quantification and essentialising doctoral work at the cost of creative processes of learning, scholarly identity formation and knowledge creation. Participants share the following:

> I want to make certain it's [the PhD] a contribution to knowledge, and therefore my students take a little longer. … I have a student graduating in April this year, a PhD student. It took me six years to go through this but there was pressure all the time from the discipline—how many are you turning out … at each meeting you are asked how many you are turning out and we do this quantitative analysis at every discipline meeting. So, it's only about the numbers. … It's not about what knowledge you are producing. So, I've been resisting it but increasingly the pressure of the numbers game is getting to you. So, look let's face it, this discourse is openly managerial. … It's quite a powerful discourse.

> I haven't bought into that yet, for the sake of points or time. [My student] needs to finish the study; that's some struggle that I've had with students of mine, where I want to take them to that scholarly space, and that identity that is developed purely by them.

What is becoming increasingly evident is that the performance discourse has become incessant and permeates all levels—that spaces (such as discipline/department meetings) that were once custodians of the university's academic agenda have

degenerated into repressive accountability and surveillance machinery where even the established professoriate feels the burden of a master who demands performance. For professors to achieve a maximum score in any year on a scale of one to four, they must have graduated a minimum of two doctoral students within regulation time plus one year. Graduating only a single student in any calendar year earns a score of one. These performance expectations (numbers per annum) are likely to boggle the mind—they demand doctoral production in every calendar year. Not meeting such performance expectations is deemed under-performance in a key performance area (research supervision). Productivity and research output league tables are circulated for public scrutiny annually; they are often flaunted especially when departments, schools and colleges outperform their counterparts and are (un)wittingly used to name and shame under-performers. What is clear is that no-one can escape the system. The proverbial doctoral-production treadmill is set at a predetermined speed, and at a predetermined inclination, irrespective of the health and fitness levels of research supervisors and their doctoral students. It is not unreasonable to expect that even the "fittest" research students and supervisors are likely to take strain or feel the pressure, as indicated by one of the participants above.

Participants lament the rigidity of the system as it relates to doctoral work and the time and expectations of the competence set for doctoral students, arguing that it contradicts international best practice. A participant voices the following:

> When I compare students at McGill University in Canada who take six years and more to do a PhD, and here we are saying, our students need to be fast-tracked.

This participant had particular issues with fellow colleagues who subscribe to the idea that it is tolerable and even defensible to employ a functional approach (Lee 2008) to research supervision by emphasising completion of the doctoral thesis as a product or artefact and that scholarly depth and development usually take place after graduation. She explains:

> I have arguments with one or two of my colleagues who say, the PhD is one thing, and it's after the PhD that the scholar really develops. But for me, when I go to AERA [the American Educational Research Association], I see PhD candidates engaging with top scholars in the field.

Implicit in this participant's utterance is her belief that doctoral students at her institution may not be operating at the same level of scholarship and may struggle to share academic platforms with leaders in the field. She attributes this to the university's high output and rapid throughput policy as it compromises scholarly identity formation. What can be discerned from the data is that research supervisors in this sample, while not having explicitly used the word "care", do in fact reveal a deep care for the academic project that they engage in. They are wary of the risks associated with flouting neoliberal prescriptions as to how to conduct their work as research supervisors, yet deliberately work against such neoliberal persuasions, valuing highly the development of the

doctoral candidate as scholar and understanding that learning and scholarliness cannot and should not be fast-tracked.

"Dissolving" (In)Soluble Hierarchies—Towards Reciprocal Recognition and Learning as Elements of Care

Research supervisors in the sample were acutely aware of the inherent power dynamic in the supervisor-supervisee relationship, a remnant of inherited colonial models of research supervision. They reflected on the discipleship pedagogic genre that they were subjected to as students and appeared to be keen not to perpetuate such hierarchical relationships. There was also an awareness that some supervisors relish the power traditionally accorded to research supervisors. As such, achieving autonomy is likely to be difficult for students struggling to find their voice. Participants in this study who had such experiences were particularly apperceptive of this and wanted to be different, as reflected in the utterances below:

> I know, in my own supervision, I was like scared …

> But I must say, for a long time, in that struggle to develop that identity as a doctorate student and as an emerging scholar, it wasn't easy because XXX was my supervisor. And at times, I think I struggled with the position he was taking in terms of where I should be, what I should be doing. … So, in my relationship with XXX, I think I constructed myself as the apprentice. I was complicit in that. And I think he enjoyed being a master. It worked, at that time, but it worked for a time and then I kind of broke out of it when I really said "No, I can't do what you ask me to do. It doesn't make sense."

They also note that subservience (to a powerful supervisor) is often anecdotally learnt and that some students continue to perform such subservience despite attempts to disrupt this. For many supervisors, care begins with "tangible" acts of relinquishing titles, that is, embracing an active process of using first names. A participant explains:

> This does require work, because the initial assumption, also from the student's point of view, is that here is a supervisor, who has a title, who is in a position, who knows more, and so on. … It is also that tension that the student feels, in terms of power and the powerlessness. And that is based on, kind of broad condition, where titles, knowledge and power is so commodified and in hierarchies.

Participants were also very aware that hierarchy dissipation is seldom a smooth, linear process and that hierarchies can get "triggered" and re-instated at any point in the long supervisor-supervisee relationship, especially when students are held to standards that they have not met. Of significance, though, is an awareness of how and when disequilibrium might emerge and importantly, the immediate move to care. Participants observe:

> Yeah, so what happens, is that it takes a period of time, in which the initial response is, "Oh, so you all heard that I'm very strict? Yes, I am, but I'm also going to show you

(another) side to me." And so, what it does, is over a period of a few months, or years, they realise how the power relations have been dissolved. And how it can be enabled, and it can also be triggered, especially when the chapter is not in a good shape. … It also requires that kind of intimacy that I was talking about, which means that you don't just leave your students.

So, I think one of the core elements of this is, who are you as a supervisor? What is your level of generosity of spirit? How do you come across to that student?

When I'm talking about intimacy, I'm talking about caring. I'm talking about the reduction of power. I'm talking about the practice of caring when a student sends you something and responding immediately. So, it's that level of care.

Supervisors in this sample were determined not to present as all-knowing. They instead attempted to proceed from the premise that they are also in a learning space. They shared the following:

Research supervision is teaching and learning combined because often, I think I learn more than the persons that I'm supervising.

The kind of intimacy, in terms of how I relate to them … this notion of intimacy is so important, because I drop down all levels of this kind of, I am a "know it all". I've never been like that. It's always been, like "Alright, I'm going to be learning from you."

How do I continually see myself in a shifting role? In other words, sometimes I am the one with the knowledge, and sometimes it's the student that's with the knowledge. It's always that ongoing shift until there's a point where, I think, I tell the student, "You know what, you know more than me. All I'm going to do is support you to see how you can get there."

An issue that some participants in this study highlighted concerned dispelling preconceived perceptions that students might have of them, especially relating to their early career supervisory practices. Care in this instance entails not presenting as unapproachable or as difficult to work with. From the excerpts below, we see that supervisors make a concerted effort to negate factors that might compromise a healthy relationship with their students. Learning from past supervisory "mistakes" and applying such learning to their current practice is indicative of a kind of careful reflective practice. The participants say:

One matures as one stays longer in the field, you know? Initially, the critique, for me, was most important and having some experiences and writing articles around critique and care has helped me understand how those need to be balanced, but also how one has to deal head on with the assumptions and the reputation one has outside. Students that don't know you have all kinds of ideas that maybe you're too harsh, maybe you're too demanding and all of that, you know? And how does one deal with that? So, I find that I have to spend a lot of time working with students to dispel those myths.

"We've heard you're so strict. We heard you're so like, …" I said, oh goodness. I said, "Write that down when you're finished, done with me." … And that's why I'm hoping that you will also interview the students, to really triangulate this.

These participants were quite certain that after the five-to-six-year journey with their doctoral candidates these candidates would have changed their perspectives of their supervisors, an issue that appeared to be quite important to the supervisors in this sample and something that they felt they had to give constant and due attention to. What was important to many supervisors in the sample was the need to be authentic and sincere, especially when engaging with "extraneous" challenges that students share. They believe that this kind of affective connection moves the relationship to another level and is likely to facilitate progress in the academic project. One participant explains:

I think it's important [for students] to develop a trust relationship with the supervisor and also, it's also about respect as well. … It shows that my supervisor respects me and cares about me …wants to know how I'm feeling about things as well, what's happening in my life. … So, it's about an ethic of care. … I don't think you'll really connect with your student if you're only looking at one aspect, the academic aspect. … This is where I think the relationship can become fractured.

Caring about Helping Students Develop Self-Belief and Recognise Self-Worth

There are various reasons why students enrol for doctoral studies, ranging from the purest notion of wanting to enter the world of scholarship (research and academia), to having been forced to enrol by employers who demand this as a minimum qualification, to ego-inspired motivations that come with the title on graduation. As such, students enter such programmes with different levels of self-belief and self-worth. Given that several supervisors in the sample drew attention to this, it makes it a phenomenon worth analysing, especially in a South African context where "race", culture, gender and language dynamics have been and continue to be hindrances to success at doctoral level. Advisor-advisee relationships and the importance of recognising cultural differences are important factors that require due cognisance (Schlosser et al. 2011). The following excerpts speak to the notion of developing self-belief:

We have many students who come from a very fractured past … the apartheid past, the type of disadvantaged, the type of deprived communities that they come from, the type of schooling that they come from … and the type of work environment that they are currently in. … So, they are grappling with quite a few social issues.

I do care about my students, and I tell them that: "I care about you because I know you're capable of doing something really good, that when you give off this piece of work, you're going to be able to see the words you're thinking, you're going to be thinking differently, and you're going to be shaping the space."

> Trust and respect are important markers for any relationship. And for me, that is why I think students take a year longer when they're with me … because they slowly learn to trust that we know where we're taking them, they're okay with it.

Participants were aware that doctoral students may not have blind faith in their supervisors and that trust and respect are in fact earned over time. It is important for these participants that they work at this affective dimension.

Discussion and Concluding Comments

One of the primary intentions of this article was to argue for constructing neoliberal university managers as care *receivers*. This might be considered a radical construction and will even likely be scoffed at by these beneficiaries of care. There is a level of oblivion as it relates to an understanding of how a dense network of neoliberal-informed university policy demarcates the terms of reference for the multiple facets of the university's operations. Academics are coerced into tacit and overt terms of reference or workload "agreements" with the neoliberal university, all of which are solemnly documented in online human resource archives, and against which academics are measured and scored on a bi-annual basis (Maistry 2015). The accountability and surveillance machinery are unrelenting, irrespective of the emotional and physical health of the academics on a non-stop production line (Note that in the world of hard factory production, even machines break down and need servicing and part replacements). In harnessing the collective efforts of its workforce, university managers become bona fide care receivers, are taken care of—they exercise privileged irresponsibility by demanding care of the key performance areas which they (managers) hold dear. Rank-and-file academics have to demonstrate that they care for the achievement of managers' quantifiable goals for research output. It should be noted that this kind of analysis and counter-discourse is not likely to be tolerated in the corridors of power at universities. What has become patent is that neoliberal managers act like neoliberal governments, creating conditions for individual entrepreneurialism (Peters 2005), by regulating the rules of engagement through policy with little patience for those who do not comply or who are deemed to be inept at harnessing resources for self-advancement. They are loath to recognise how this collective self-advancement culture that is foisted on rank-and-file academics feeds their personal agendas as neoliberal agents. They are rarely aware of the collateral damage that comes with internal competition (for resources) and the trauma created for those who rank low on various league tables. This, one might argue, is privileged irresponsibility at its height in the higher education space.

This article has taken issue with the aspect of research supervision and how this competence is being reframed and reshaped. Yet, despite this attempt at reshaping, research supervisors in this study were determined not to succumb to such neoliberal persuasions. The inherent care in their pedagogical dispositions and their profound understandings of the nature of doctoral work as identity work and scholarship present alternatives to the neoliberal paradigm that Tronto (2017) urges should be embraced. I

conclude with an apt quotation from Zembylas, who draws inspiration from De Oliveira Andreotti et al. (2015), as he proposes an approach to decolonising higher education, a hacking that might be just as effective in challenging the neoliberal university:

> I envision … the development of intellectual and pedagogical spaces in which different strategies may be taken up as a form of hacking … creating spaces within the system, using its resources, where people can be educated about the violence of the system and have their desires re-oriented away from it. This requires "playing the game" of institutions at the same time that rules are bent to generate alternative outcomes. (Zembylas 2018, 8)

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