Reimagining an African university and its implications on pedagogic encounters and transformation in African Higher Education System

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Abstract: **This paper highlights the implications of a reimagined African university on teaching and learning with special reference to institutions of higher learning in Africa. Interpretive research methodologies and critical inquiry have been employed to gather data. The main arguments advanced in this paper are firstly; higher education in Africa has the potential to make students understand and respond to the socio-economic, political and environmental problems currently confronting Africa as a continent. Secondly, how in becoming pedagogy can hold potentialities that can enable students to determine their own choices on how they co-belong. To achieve these, universities have to embrace active values of democratic citizenship in their teaching and learning. Precisely, universities in Africa should promote active citizenship in their teaching and learning programs as a way of preparing students to deal with violence and other problems confronting the continent. My research conclude that education policies in African universities are a mirror to the political and historical background of the continent and this is why I am calling for the reimagining of the African university pedagogy. Furthermore, I recommend universities in Africa to be pedagogical sites where deliberative and friendship encounters are cultivated and nurtured.**

Key words: **Higher Education, Democratic Citizenship Education, Active citizenship, in becoming.**

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper explains the implications of a reimagined African university on university teaching and learning with special reference to institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Kenya. I am arguing in this paper that higher education in Africa has the potential to make students understand and respond to the socio-economic, political and environmental problems currently confronting their countries and those problems Africa faces as a continent. I say so drawing on Dewey's (1917, 1976: 123) explanation that education has the potentiality to develop the critical faculty of an individual to understand the complexities of social, economic and political environment. Dewey further reiterates that the development of critical faculty does not simultaneously happen because students have attended a school, church or university, but the kind of citizenship as well as the type of university pedagogy to which students are exposed can either help them (students) to think critically, create relational encounters of responsibility, friendship, and think radically to emancipate themselves and value humanity

of the other or disempower students through an oppressing pedagogy that does not promote critical thinking in students.

In this regard, I will in this research consider how university classroom encounters can be transformed in line with DCE perspectives where students, administrators and lecturers can constantly learn to think and speak differently about the challenges confronting the country and the continent in higher education. I concur with Foucault (1995) that in plural states like Zimbabwe, South Africa and the rest of African states, universities should be viewed as sites where different social forces and ideologies struggle for domination and hegemony but this is only possible if democratic checks and balances are allowed to participate through the civic society in the political and education system of the African states. The argument is further extended to portray that DCE in becoming can hold potentialities that can enable students to determine their own choices on how they co-belong. This is so because like I reiterated earlier on, the kind of socialisation to which students are exposed either at home, school or church has the potential to determine who they are becoming. This therefore calls for a reconceptualised view of a university that is commensurate with DCE in becoming in whatever singularity- so that students are able to integrate their cultural experiences into what they learn in the classroom with those with whom they co-belong.

I set off my argument by drawing on Waghid's (2010:56) view that university education can be a place for pedagogic transformation towards a democratic society in becoming. While I would want to concur with Waghid's view, I also want to argue that pedagogic transformation can only be realised if the environment in which education is encountered is potentially viewed as in becoming process. In this way, universities can become potential locations where students are educated about their potential to co-belong in order to transform the society at large and universities against inequalities and violence in whatever singularity. On that note, I advance democratic encounters in the teaching and learning as these can potentially allow students to think differently (thinking anew) in their own privations (Starkey, 2004). This means that, in the university teaching and learning process, students' independent ability to think and speak is a potential aspect in their learning that potentially can deal with new problems or conflicting situations that students

encounter–without rash judgement (Waghid, 2010: 50). For instance, Derrida's (1997) politics of friendship affirms that pedagogy ought to allow students to be different, because no two persons are the same. Meaning to say, education ought to open windows or spaces for the other– who co-belongs, and for the new – fresh ways of thinking about particular problems that affect humanity (Waghid, 2015: 104).

To buttress my discussion, let me briefly give a general synopsis of the continent of Africa. Africa is a continent of close to 1 billion people, who are found in 54 different countries. The continent has more than 800 different ethnic and linguistic groups (Mazrui, 2004). This diversity is also seen at country level as well. For an example, Zambia has 72 different languages and ethnic groups, Zimbabwe has 16 ethnic groups and Kenya has 24 while South Africa has 26 (Chiroma, 2015). It is because of these large numbers of people and the diversity of the people on the continent and within countries that differences are replete in these countries. The differences can be based on tribal lines, religious backgrounds and economic class. This has created a lot of polarization within societies and countries resulting in sporadic inter-tribal fights to full blown ethnic based genocides like in Rwanda where Hutus and Tutsi clashed into a genocide that claimed more than 800 000 lives in 1994. These are just few examples which countries in Africa face.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was interpretive in nature. Interpretive methods have been used as the primary research methodologies and critical inquiry other informing methodology. The choice of interpretive method is an acknowledgement by the researcher that the aspects of democratic citizenship in African universities are too complex to measure with standards instruments. Interpretive research is rooted within the qualitative research method that seeks to explain, interpret and analyse social phenomena that are difficult to quantify (Waghid, 2003a: 96). The methodology was chosen because it allowed me to use "archival knowledge, as well as narrative or observational knowledge" (Fay, 1996, in Waghid, 2003a: 47). Archival data such as journals, policy documents, minutes of meetings and circulars are used in the study as data gathering methods. Since my research stretches between 1980-2015, interpretive inquiry was used as the most appropriate method in gathering in-depth historical information that can no longer be observed. This was also ideal for my research because it allowed me to identify information about subjects especially on sensitive topics, under-researched areas or groups that are hard to reach (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010: 240). The sensitivity of my research is on how politics has affected the implementation of democratic citizenship education in African institutions of higher learning. This justifies connection of interpretive inquiry with critical inquiry. Critical inquiry was used to identify ideological shortcomings as well as offer insights into the origins, growth, theories and personalities as well as the crisis arising from the political and economic challenges due to a lack of democratic citizenship in

Africa. Critical inquiry offers description, and explanations as well as criticism and change not only to understand it, but to develop interest in particular historical situations and gives explanations that help people to change, (to reimagine university education).

My analysis was not confined to analysing the situation, but it also involved reading about what others have written about democratic citizenship education in Zimbabwe's higher education. The idea was 'to try to make sense of something that seems problematic' Taylor (1985: 87). In this research, the problematic issue was how universities in Africa may respond to socio-economic, political and environmental challenges confronting the continent through pedagogic encounters.

III. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The need for transformation

Unequal Distribution of Resources

Educational resources include human and material resources that aid proper and effective teaching and learning process. Material resources in this case are both financial and non-financial material such as money, buildings, infrastructure, laboratories, etc. This research identified some of the challenges that require transformation as those do with unequal distribution of education resources, access to quality institutions of higher learning and violence. I noted that the distribution of resources in Africa is fraught with corruption, favouritism and nepotism. On the same note, the distribution of resources is biased as this is done along partisan and ethnic lines (Shizha & Kariwo's, 2011). An example of the material effect of preferential access to resources along ethnic lines is the study conducted by Zembere's (2017). She found out that ethnicity was a significant factor in the distribution of resources in Zimbabwe. Her observations are that out of 18 institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe, 14 are situated in three of Mashonaland provinces while two Matabeleland provinces have two universities each. This unequal distribution is not peculiar to Zimbabwe alone as Kenya's administrative units created during the colonial era along ethnic boundaries are still distinct such that development in Kenya follows ethnic patterns (Chiroma 2015). In Ghana and Nigeria, research by (Gencoglu-Onbasi 2011) indicates that the distribution of resources is determined by the patron-client relationship between the ethnic group of the ruling elites and the government. In states like Ghana, Kenya and Zimbabwe, the ruling elite use the state resources for the benefit of its own allies or ethnic community. In the light of this observation, I argue that critical pedagogy is a preferable means of developing students into democratic citizens who not only understand and fight against social injustice during their college careers, but continue to do so after college has ended.

Violence

I further noted violence as one of the challenges confronting higher education and the society at large. This (violence) disrupts the smooth running of institutions of higher learning. This means that higher education in Africa requires innovative pedagogy that can disrupt violence and social imbalances that characterise the continent. Let me draw back to the situation in Zimbabwe after 199I when the country experienced riots by university students, violence caused by the falling economy, land reform and electoral violence after 2002, 2008 and 2013 elections. Violence in Zimbabwe posed challenges to the democratic vision the country so desire to achieve. In South Africa, student protests over the existence of Rhodes' statue at the University of Cape Town -Rhodes Must Fall degenerated into violence across South African universities. This was again followed by the Fees Must Fall mantra where students demanded a decrease and/or removal of university fees. The prevalence of violence in universities is an indication that education has failed to eradicate ethnic prejudices and election violence leading to the creation of incompatibilities and a confused sense of belonging for students and lecturers in universities. What this entails is an actualised higher education system which has impotentialities to contain conflicts and violence.

The way forward

Critical Pedagogy

The central task of critical pedagogy is espoused by Biesta 2001 in McLaren (1995) as to understand the oppressive aspects of university life and the society in order to generate pedagogical, individual and societal transformation while at the same time developing pedagogical strategies that work towards the elimination of various forms of subordination based on class, gender, race that strengthen students' possibilities for genuine learning and powers to fight against inequalities of the world. According to Joubert, (2007: 107) critical pedagogy can provide a chance for students and lecturers to study, think and talk about the social-political transformation in university education for justice. Being critical can enable students and teachers to find their own voice and privations in whatever singularity. The learning environment in which the student is granted the opportunity to explore and manipulate the learning environment has the effect of empowerment on the students while at the same time promoting the inclusion rather than internal exclusion of students (McLaren 1995). Critical pedagogy allows students to think of how to alleviate the vulnerability of others in a conflict or violent situation if they are given the opportunity to imagine the consequences of violence such as post conflict trauma. In the long run, students are able to think and imagine ways to respond or react to similar circumstances. By so doing, students demonstrate a critical attitude by looking for meaning beyond their current situation and finding solutions for future problems in case they reoccur. In the case of African universities, the problems that persist are student protests, poverty, inequalities, ethnic clashes and violence. In this regard, higher education in Africa should provide students and lecturers spaces to engage meaningfully (democratically and deliberatively) to deal with instances of intolerance, corruption, injustice and inequality in the university education system. This provides spaces for pedagogy (critical) with nuances of DCE in becoming for sustainable university education (Biesta & Stams (2001:57).

Pedagogy becomes critical pedagogy when it aims to bring transformation of values, beliefs and cultural prejudices, when it fosters public engagement in a dialogue about the experiences of daily life. In higher education, critical pedagogy promotes the intellectual development of the learner by expanding learner's knowledge and skills base (Biesta & Stams, 2001). Accordingly, critical pedagogy offers students and lecturers the potentiality to become critical citizens. This is achievable if higher education environment is conducive enough to promote democratic engagement and interaction between educators and students. In critical pedagogy, students become active and not passive. Critical pedagogy can encourage university students to act against inequality and undemocratic changes in universities as well as in communities where they live.

Critical pedagogy promotes active participation of students in their learning process, such that the teaching and learning is characterised by student involvement in their learning and that teachers cannot do the thinking for the students (passive citizenship). It is however prudent to mention that passive citizenship does not allow creativity in students and therefore their potentialities remain actualised. This is why Agamben indirectly proposes pedagogy in becoming that potentially values humanity not in an actualised sense, but in relation to what the students can become in being human – co-belonging. A reconceptualised view of an African university presupposes that through experiences in the classroom, students can be alienated and their sense to belonging disrupted. In most cases, students are exposed to negative experiences in the education system that propagate and contribute to violence, inequality, injustice, prejudice, hatred and poverty (Lawy and Biesta, 2006). Universities in Africa should spearhead the transformation through classroom practices. This therefore calls for a pedagogy in becoming that is concerned with how equality and rights and instructors (lecturers are evolving within classroom practices in whatever singularity in tandem with their independent thinking, speech and decision making without rash judgement (Waghid,2010:50). Such pedagogy (in becoming) potentially can encourage students to participate and be responsible in the teaching and learning process in whatever singularity with respect to their own individuation (Waghid, 2010).

The university community in-becoming to disrupt violence

The continent requires concerted social, economic and political efforts in relation to poverty, injustice,diseases, social inequalities, political violence, ethnic conflicts, resistance to

democratic practices and so forth (Waghid 2002: 458). All the above stated challenges require a reimagined African university that is responsive to the challenges faced by the African continent. On that note, higher education in Africa should focus at individual development as well as the social, economic and political development of the peoples of Africa in an endeavour to disrupt violence. This is only possible if educators create new pedagogical encounters for students that make the students value and respect the humanness in others. Failure to acknowledge each other as equal human beings, and failure to recognise the vulnerabilities inherent in each other impairs the potentialities of both the students and their educators to disrupt violence.

Waghid (2010:49) posits that if educators do not acknowledge their students as fellow beings, and students on the other hand fail to acknowledge their educators as fellow beings, their engagement becomes merely that of talking to the other, at times past the other, and at times down to the other. This kind of pedagogical encounter does not promote meaningful communication that results in the connectedness of students and staff by way of deliberation, compassion and cosmopolitanism. A university that acknowledges that all people are always in becoming, their being human and that everyone has the potential for something worthwhile as well as the impotential for something not worthwhile (Waghid,2010:54). Such a university community in becoming is potentially in the making,one that is yet to be realised – that is, it is not yet, but potentially can be. If a university community is not yet actualised but in becoming, then there is hope that as a becoming university will be able to deal with the violence with which it might be confronted because it is a community in becoming that can deal with violence. This is because a university community in becoming lacks a shared intersubjective identity, it a community without reference to either identity or difference. In a community like this, the affiliate individuals do not make reference to their differences. In a university environment, students are affiliated on the grounds of being persons not because they share identity with other students that are outside scholarship. Since all students are members of a university community in becoming, they honour the sacredness of life and desist from using violent ways to cause bodily and death to others. In such a community where every member co-belong, all individuals endeavour to disrupt violence for the sake of being human and living their humanity, even if it means engaging with those who are seemingly at the lowest point of humanity, those who perpetrate violence (Waghid, 2002: 455). Such a university community in becoming does not make the end of violence its aim, but rather the struggle against violence becomes a continuous human experience.

Active citizenship

An active citizenship education in becoming is that which can orientate its citizens towards what is lovable and in this case violence is not lovable. For Mills, (2008: 109) active

citizenship education in becoming requires the 'suspension of the transition from potential to act, and the maintenance of impotentiality' Considering the Land issue in Zimbabwe which has brewed conditions that perpetuate racial and electoral violence in the country-eliminating such kind of violence might not be simple. This makes the desire to eliminate such violence a potentiality or a possibility. What this entails is that an active citizenship may have or may not have the potentiality to counter violence. However, an active citizenship education in becoming has the potentiality to counter violence makes it possible for citizens of such an education to exercise their freedom in their own singularity (Agamben 1993:67). The university classroom that promotes active citizenship and acknowledges the humanity of others, and the sacredness of life, is one that promotes active citizenship in becoming. The classroom environment promotes knowledge transfer and students have the rights to perform tasks so that ultimately as educated citizens they are not excluded from holding certain positions (Fish, 2008).

Radical Pedagogy for the university in Africa

Radical pedagogy has traditionally been seen as an umbrella term for a wider range of feminist and critical pedagogies committed to social justice, social transformation and democracy (Bell, 1994). Radical pedagogies give primacy to the promotion of social transformation through education. However, Ranciere, through his theory of politics has opened up new ways of imagining the radical project through a discussion of what is possible via education. Rancière's discussion helps us to envision the consequences of attempting to achieve transformative and social justice goals through education. According to Ranciere, (1991, 1999, 2006), radical pedagogy's efforts to promote social justice should begin with the exposure of the dominant ideological and cultural relationships because it is these relationships that precipitate injustices and inequalities. What Ranciere is putting across is that human beings bear potential equal intelligence and have the capacity to exercise their potential intellectual agency in a democratic manner because these beings understand one another and for Ranciere, only an equal understands an equal (Ranciere, 1991: 73). Human beings understand one another through speech, because we share the performance of language that we understand when we are told where we do and where we do not belong (Ranciere, 1999). In view of this, equality finds its meaning in expression. Meaning to say, university pedagogy should be engendered through the in becoming thought.

Pedagogically, the implication of Rancière's notion of equal intelligence is that every learner and the educator bears potential intelligence that can enable them to participate in the teaching and learning environment to determine whatever they may become through democratic classroom encounters.This notion of equality accords equal opportunities to the voices of the learner and the educator basing on the assumption that everyone is equal regardless of their qualifications because they are able to speak and act. The place of radical pedagogy

in university teaching and learning is that of emancipation of both the learner and the educator. This according to Ranciere is potentially possible if classroom spaces in universities are organised in a way that potentially enable students and educators to have spaces in which they encounter the intellectual agency of everyone in a teaching and learning environment (Ranciere, 2006). University teaching and learning must reflect pedagogy as disruptive encounters for just practices. This means that radical pedagogy calls for classroom encounters to be disruptive as they strive to contribute to meaning making. Such pedagogical encounters are not only emancipatory in themselves, but signify equality of intelligence in all humans. In this regard, every learner is able to participate in deliberative engagements and has the ability to disrupt such conversations through his or her ability to speak and understand (Waghid, 2013: 63).

The other implication of Rancière's views is that they provide the nuances necessary for DCE in becoming that open pedagogical spaces to reimagine policies in university education to counter social inequalities. In Rancière's terms, hatred for democracy refers to those who would want to dominate and control a democratic practice. In summation, an education drawn on Rancière's assumptions on equality and democracy will consider the capacity of all people to think, speak and act as equals. I argue that the occurrence of pre and post-election violence in Zimbabwe and Kenya and many other African states resulting in the death of many people is an indication of lack of respect for the moral human life and the otherness of the other. The argument that I draw from this discussion is that higher education in Africa has failed in its role as a democratic space for propagating citizenship because it is undermined by violence. Educationally, there is need for students and lecturers to think differently about collective acts of violence that are actualised in order to reimagine citizenship education within the African higher education. This entails that universities in Africa can reimagine their pedagogy within classroom encounters so that any collective violence that is pre-planned can be dealt with pedagogically. Pedagogical encounters within university classrooms ought to provide avenues for deliberation, respect and non-violent encounters to potentially enable teachers and students to think differently about mechanisms that are necessary to resolve problems in non-violent ways and mechanisms that can enhance care for the other. A university education that is conceptualised along hospitality, care, compassion and friendship can transform pedagogical encounters in African universities to pedagogy of care and compassion that characterise and mirror the African society and humanity. Again, ethnic and electoral violence characterising the majority of African states can be contained if universities and their communities stimulate pedagogical encounters that can cultivate the African spirit of Ubuntu.

IV. CONCLUSION

The paper recommends universities in Africa and to organise their pedagogical encounters in a way that can potentially address the challenges (violence) confronting the continent. This is possible if universities in Africa can organise classroom pedagogies to offer spaces where deliberative and friendship encounters are cultivated. I further recommend critical pedagogies as pedagogies that are emancipator, and promote classroom encounters that bear respect, mutuality and friendship and that universities in Africa can teach students to become human with others, to respect and value human dignity.

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