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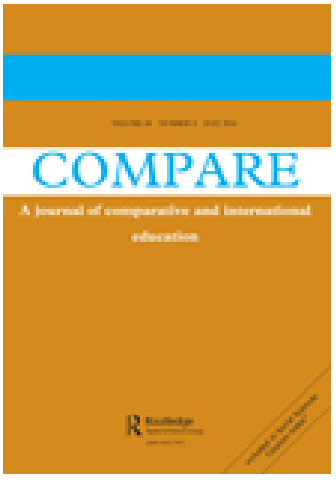


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# De-colonising international collaboration: The University of KwaZulu-Natal-Mauritius Institute of Education Cohort PhD programme

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This paper explores the setting up of the partnership across the Mauritian and South African higher education contexts with respect to the development of a postgraduate PhD doctoral studies programme. The Mauritian Institute of Education (MIE) aims to develop staffing capacities through engagement with doctoral studies, especially in the context of limited experience in doctoral supervision. The South African model of doctoral cohort supervision at The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) School of Education is a recent alternative model of delivery in the building of these student and staff capacities through shared ownership of the process and products of doctoral education and development. This paper highlights the expectations, constraints and enabling features of the setting up of the UKZN-MIE PhD programme across international boundaries, driven by mutual reciprocity through valuing of indigenous local knowledges, a non-colonising engagement and innovative methodologies for postgraduate education. Adapting the UKZN cohort model for the international context is the subject of this paper. The paper draws on the experiences of the designers and deliverers as well as users of this programme. The paper explores what drives this form of international collaboration for both contracting partners in the context of shifting conceptions of a teacher education institution.

**Keywords:** international collaboration studies; decolonisation; migration; doctoral education

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## Introduction

The development of a relationship usually draws on the trajectories of the contracting partners: their histories and aspirations, their fears and their beliefs, their articulated and embedded hopes for the future and their symmetrical or, often, asymmetrical power differentials. In this paper, we explore from two vantage points the trajectory of the relationship that culminated in the development of an international collaboration around a PhD

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programme between two institutions, one in South Africa (the University of KwaZulu-Natal [UKZN]) and one in the Republic of Mauritius (the Mauritius Institute of Education [MIE]). We point to the shared histories that characterise these two partners where the roles and responsibilities of a teacher education institution shift in dialogue with the macro-landscape of international and national policy environments, as well as the micro-institutional curricular landscapes within which they find themselves. This comparative study shows how discourses about teacher education institutions recur in different circumstances and how lessons from each can be drawn to project a forward trajectory in international collaboration.

The paper is structured in three broad movements: the *history* (the macro-context of coloniality and nation-building), the *present* (the national and institutional education landscapes) and the *prospects* (the programmatic intervention). This evolving history maps the shared discourses around coloniality that both contexts share, impacting on their desire to find more socially just forms of collaboration across international borders by drawing on internal local institutional resources and models for doctoral education. The specific macro-national and micro-institutional landscapes of both contexts (in their similarity and diversity) influencing the choice of the contracting partners form the background to the partnership doctoral education model developed. The paper questions whether the project of a more egalitarian partnership is evolving.

## The history: coloniality and nation-building

### *Coloniality: trade routes of afore*

The history of indentured labour from the Asian sub-continent (especially from India and China) into the Mauritius island context began as a first major 'labour experiment' around the 1820s, when the British colonial administration sought a means to till the land of their sugarcane fields. The project of 'indentured labour' was arguably an attempt to import on a large scale into the colony working-class labourers who willingly wanted the opportunity to better their life chances. This took the form of a contract, which, upon expiration, could provide a return passage back to their land of origin (Ebr.-Vally 2001). Most indentured labourers chose not to return to their homelands and instead promoted a permanent residency, which ushered an inflow between the two countries as newer family members joined the early prospectors.[1]

Similarly, some 40 years later (around 1860) another wave of migration from the Indian sub-continent was directed towards the sugarcane plantations of Natal, the eastern coast British colony of the present-day Republic of South Africa. What distinguished these immigrants from the pattern of forced slavery was that the indentured labourers chose voluntarily to be part of the experiment. It could be argued that their cultural heritages were not

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openly subverted. The termination of the formal contract permitted (in theory) the possibility for a return to their native land. However, patterns of subjugation and marginalisation were the order of the day as the hierarchies of the authoritarian and capitalist colony found footprints in the lives of the indentured workers.

Originally the British colonial government saw this controlled migration as an opportunity to address the shortage of skilled manual labour, but subsequent waves of immigration in both the Mauritian and South African history saw examples of different ranks (in its caste or class structures) of the Asian sub-continent make their way into the African continent (Gordon-Gentil and Constantin 2007). The trading classes, teachers and other professionals constituted subsequent migration patterns. The migrant had become part of the colony. As the migrant community settled, the characteristic routines of social jurisprudence inevitably arose. Today, the Indian South Africans constitute one of the largest aggregations of peoples of Indian origin outside of the Asian sub-continent. Similarly, Mauritian society is characterised by a majority Indian population, which exercises forceful political power. As a consequence of these waves of migration, notable communities of Afro-Mauritians, Mauritians of Chinese origin and Indo-Mauritians share the multicultural community, together with the more wealthy remnants of colonial ancestries.

A Creole community and language was a natural consequence of the interactions between various communities. Both South Africa and Mauritius now represent a melting pot of many different cultural heritages of colonialism and conquest: with similar histories of the British, the Dutch, the Portuguese and the French colonising influence, who each saw the strategic and geo-political location of the countries in the trade routes of afore, and who made their homes in these foreign lands within the African continent together with their communities of imported labour. These patterns of migration were repeated throughout history as peoples having different persuasions, heritage and skills chose to move (or were moved) to places where the prospects of better opportunities presented themselves (Gamlen 2010). In the First Report of the Ramphal Commission on Migration and Development, Gamlen (2010) argues:

> Migration, along with birth and death, has always defined human populations, and today it is one of the most powerful currents shaping global society. Migrants are now more numerous than the resident populations of all but four countries in the world, and their remittances, at around US$414 billion in 2009, constitute one of the largest and fastest growing cross-border financial flows. …There is renewed optimism about the relationship between migration and development. Well-managed migration is thought to support development by empowering individuals, bridging cultures, creating wealth, and balancing inequalities. Yet poorly managed migration can undermine development by making migrants vulnerable and destabilising origin and destination communities. Effective migration management requires cooperation among origin and

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> destination countries and migrants. This is currently best achieved by partnerships among communities and countries directly linked to each other by migration. (10)

Matters of social justice and exploitation of the 'border crossers' continue as part of the agenda, despite the fall of official colonialism and the rise of local formerly-subjugated groups.

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### *Nation-building: new global trade routes*

In the context of more recent discourses around globalisation and internationalisation (Crossley, Bray, and Packer 2011), increased homogenisation of different cultural variables and the rampant invasion of the technological literate highway, the boundaries between nation states that share colonial histories are increasingly becoming blurred and the partners are staring at each other across the so-called 'divides' to recognise themselves in each other. Whereas coloniality was usually circumscribed by exploitative trade relationships between the North and the South colonial partners, this paper will focus on a South-South higher education partnership between the Faculty of Education at UKZN and the MIE some 200 years after the first major labour immigration waves. The specificity of the contexts of both Mauritius and South Africa described in the previous section sets the scene for analysing the issues around the choice for a more egalitarian and reciprocal South-South relationship in higher education within a post-colonial context. Whether it is possible to transcend the shared heritage of exploitative colonial history characterises the subject of the new partnership being showcased in this paper.

## The present: higher education and teacher education landscape

Both the national state authorities and the institutions themselves are caught in complementary and sometimes conflicting discourses as they attempt to rid themselves of colonial history. These discourses emanate from both within and outside the institutions themselves, confirming the view that no cultures are pristine forms without the effects of competing forces of influences (Le Grange 2005). This section of the paper considers the competing local agendas and expectations currently affecting higher education and teacher education.

### *Mauritius*

A few demographic factors may offer an interpretation of the present-day national context of Mauritius.

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Table 1 suggests that there are serious fluctuations in the confidence of the sugarcane industry (the pioneering backbone of the country) to support the present economic development of the country. A relative increase in the tourist industry is noted but, more importantly, a surge in 'export oriented enterprises' is evident. These export industries are increasingly characterised by technological industries and their products, which service the hub of island countries on the east African coastline. The interests to produce technologically capable citizens who can contribute to the development of these service industries are now argued to be a national priority. Multi-national partnerships are being planned to draw in prestigious institutes, especially from India, to assist in fuelling the development of technological literacy at all levels of the society. Gouges (2012) reported in the *University Worldnews* that a new higher education institution, to be called the 'International Institute of Technology' and funded by a US$20 million investment, will set up base in Mauritius in partnership with the Indian Institute of Technology (ITT) (Delhi) to offer an offshore delivery of high-level engineering courses.

The Mauritian Minister of Tertiary Education, Science, Research and Technology, commented with enthusiasm about the ITT prospects as follows: 'We are able to quickly respond to changes and innovations' (Gouges 2012). Quite clearly the national policy agenda has prioritised (at least symbolically) the intention to cast itself as a midwife of innovation and

Table 1. Some Mauritian social and economic indicators.

| | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total population* | 1,260,403 | 1,268,565 | 1,275,032 | 1,280,924 | 1,286,051 |
| Industry | | | | | |
| Growth of 'sugar' sector | +14.1 | +4.6 | +13.0 | −5.9 | +0.8 |
| Growth of EPZ/ EOE** | +11.2 | +1.6 | −0.9 | +6.5 | +7.8 |
| Tourism | | | | | |
| Tourist arrivals per annum | 906,971 | 930,456 | 871,356 | 934,827 | 964,642 |
| Tourist arrivals increase over previous years | +15.1 | +2.6 | −6.4 | +7.3 | +3.2 |
| Employment by sector (%) | | | | | |
| Primary | 9.1 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 8.1 | 8.0 |
| Secondary | 33.5 | 32.7 | 31.4 | 30.8 | 30.4 |
| Tertiary | 57.4 | 59.0 | 60.4 | 61.1 | 62.6 |

Source: Mauritius Government provided to the Commonwealth Meeting of Ministers of Education conference, Mauritius (August 2012).
Notes: *Excludes Agalega and St Brandon Islands.
**EPZ/EOE: EPZ = Export Processing Zone. Export Oriented Enterprises includes enterprises formerly operating with Export Enterprise Certificates.

development in the region. Economic development is seen to be driven by the capacities of the competent and technologically savvy in a global arena. Higher education degrees and postgraduate education are seen as tools for ushering in a new era of growth, as they are seen to activate employment.

This belief that economic growth is fuelled by an up-scaling in the production of senior degrees is a relatively recent but recurrent discourse in international development circles. However, Wolhuter (2011) argues that little empirical validation exists for such a claim, which needs to be more robustly researched. Some skeptics argue that economic development should be targeted at the presently economically marginalised communities, the economically downtrodden and the unemployed. Fuelling doctoral education is seen to be a form of elitism, which carries the prospects of only the middle class and aspirant owners of economic power.

Despite these contentions, increasingly governments across the globe are investing in the possibility of higher education degrees to fuel economic development. The future direction for economic growth is argued to be reliant on the development of joined-up multi-disciplinary teams working across regions, national and international borders in a range of scientific, technical, social, organisational, environmental and health intersected projects.

The Mauritius Labour Party has made clear, since 2005, its policy of transforming the island into a knowledge hub (Government of Mauritius [MOFED] 2012). The signal is strong: higher education is set apart as the driver of economic development, given higher status within the world of education and, more importantly, conceived within the framework of international partnership with foreign institutes of high repute. The Minister for Tertiary Education explained:

> The government is actively encouraging foreign investment to create a knowledge hub and make the country a regional platform offering higher education opportunities … (Bignoux 2012)

Despite the professed policy of opening up higher education to international providers, the number of UK-based universities that have been granted operational licences in partnership with local institutions is conspicuously higher than any other country. This is unsurprising in the context of the colonial past of Mauritius, when the acquisition of a British degree signified membership in the elite. It is highly symbolic that access to British degrees is now seen to be democratised. Moreover, in the context of international labour mobility, the other unwritten assumption is that Mauritian graduates would seek out future prospects in northern countries. Curricular borrowing from such contexts is, thus, seen as consequentially appropriate. The process of 'liberalising'[2] higher education is welcomed as a necessity for legitimising the position of Mauritius as a knowledge hub in the region. The implicit assumption is that local institutions have not the resources, the capacity nor

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the creditworthiness to grant degrees that can serve to attract the student population worldwide.

We thus posit that the higher education landscape in Mauritius can be read through the lens of coloniality through the established hierarchies between Mauritian institutions of higher education and foreign collaborators and the subsequent importation systems of Knowledge. The blueprint currently in operation in European countries, especially the UK, is handed to institutions in developing countries through a series of partnership agreements and memorandums of understanding with a view to importing the 'culture' of academia and research. The 'induction' is expected to guarantee the quality of Mauritian awards and serve to attract foreign students and earnings in the long run. Indeed, the 'force field' operating within the neo-capitalism setup of higher education in Mauritius demands compliance with international standards in all aspects of institutional functioning of which research is key. Research is, hereby, associated with the importation of epistemologies, methodologies and practices from abroad.

### *South Africa*

The post-apartheid discourse of South Africa is characterised by the mantras of realising greater freedoms to previously disadvantaged individuals. The raising of standards of living and levels of earning of the previously exploited Black[3] population is arguably the central agenda of development discourses. This has filtered into the reconstitution of several policies, including the reconfiguring of the higher education landscape.

The State oftentimes is interpreted as unduly exercising more control over the agenda of higher education institutions, especially in the context of their perceived slow transformative trajectories of higher education institutions. More accountability to the *public good* (rather than individual affirmation) is demanded of higher education institutions, which some may argue is a threat to the autonomy of higher education. Divala and Waghid (2008), however, argue for a 'deliberative democratic' (9) governance stance between the state and higher education institutions, which entails the process of holding each other accountable in discursive dialogue not in *a priori* established convictions, but in arguments and debates about interests and concerns, including the interests of the public and private good. Therefore, Teferra and Altbach (2004) argue that we need to question across the African context whether African universities are in fact vestiges of the values of colonial policies, in their limited access, their choices of preferred languages of instruction and their limited choice and execution of the curriculum, in the closing off of discursive critique. Are universities in Africa truly embracing their role as uplifting the under-developed, alleviating poverty and contributing to the overall wellbeing of the wider society, or are they complicit in producing a new elite?

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The UKZN as a merged institution is itself an attempt to harmonise the fragmented apartheid racialised histories of separate institutions. It brings together a former dominantly White institution (The University of Natal) and a historically disadvantaged Black institution (The University of Durban-Westville [UDW]). It represents one of the country's 23 higher education institutions tasked with transformation towards a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society (Makgoba and Mubangizi 2010). Its student population is approximately 42,000 and its teacher education section caters for approximately 8700 students in initial and continuing teacher education and research degrees. Of the 860 postgraduate students, 135 (16%) were registered for a PhD in 2011 (UKZN data).

In setting its agenda of reconstruction, the new institution chose to set itself up as the 'Premier University of African Scholarship'. This motto marks an intention to position the institution as a source of development to the African continent, offering a hub for the development of a scholarship that moves epistemologically 'beyond aping the west'. It is also an acknowledgement of gratitude to the many partners within the African continent who provided refuge to the exiled opponents of the iniquitous apartheid system. A South African Development Community (SADC) protocol therefore grants recognition status to students from these countries as not international migrants, affording greater mobility and access into South African higher education.[4] The institution sees itself as positioned to reclaim an 'African identity' that celebrates the knowledge, resources and potential of the African continent.

However, this positioning should not be without an understanding of the hegemonic influence that the South African economy has within the African continent. South Africa could easily be interpreted as a colonising influence on the African continent and the infiltration of its vocabulary, as standard within the continent, has been often interpreted as a new form of colonisation (Bond 2003; Southall and Melber 2009). Therefore, how South Africa markets itself within the African continent is crucial to whether it merely perpetuates old forms of colonialism disguised in new politically correct discourses.

### *The institutional landscape: MIE*

The MIE, by contrast to its larger South African partner, is the only institution within the country responsible for the formal training of teachers. The MIE was set up by an act of parliament in the immediate aftermath of the post-independence struggle, which reads as follows:

> The objects of the Institute shall be to provide facilities for and to engage in educational research, curriculum development and teacher education and thereby to promote the advancement of learning and knowledge in the field of education … (Government of Mauritius, Attorney General's Office 1981, 629)

The first three mandates are resonant with the international expectations assigned to institutions of higher learning involved with the production of teachers. The impetus for the last mandate, however, was driven by the requirements of Mauritianisation of the school curriculum. The legislation provided the parameters for framing the institution as an academic and parastatal, non-degree awarding body operating and being accountable to a parent ministry. The hybrid nature of a parastatal body in academia as construed in the Mauritian context makes for both its strengths and constraints. Technically, the institution is governed by the administrative and financial provisions prevalent in all government bodies but structurally it is organised as a tertiary education institution along the lines of Schools and Departments.

This arrangement provides a very close working relationship between the Ministry of Education (political organ), the bureaucracy of the Department of Education (administrative organ) and the agent of delivery of teacher education (MIE). This relationship is perhaps understandable in the specific context of a small island where there are about 400 primary and secondary schools. All formally qualified teachers are likely to be graduates of the MIE. Most members of these above-described government organisations share common institutional background heritages as graduates of the MIE. This provides for a joined-up policy–practice linkage, which promotes easy access into the education field and an inter-relationship with the tertiary institution MIE.

The MIE is tasked with the double-edged responsibility of being player and referee within the field of education. Staff of MIE are contracted by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources to serve as the developers of any innovation with respect to the curriculum offerings at primary and secondary school levels. The MIE staff design and develop the textbooks and resource materials for the Mauritian schooling system. This often leads to an amalgamation of the roles of the MIE staff as simultaneously designers of the curriculum, the implementation agents, as well as potential sources of monitoring and evaluation of the interventions that they, themselves, proposed. The degree of autonomy as a higher education institution is usually compromised in such situations, but MIE has chosen to interpret this space as a form of sharing collaborative dialogue with the official education legislators.

As producers of teachers, the MIE is positioned to offer the Bachelor of Education degrees and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Most secondary school teachers enter into the field of school teaching after they graduate with a general bachelors degree, but they subsequently (either through full- or part-time study) read for PGCE as their professional qualifications. The primary school teacher is usually expected to have a two-year full-time Teacher's Diploma offered by the MIE. One postgraduate degree, the MA in Education, has been awarded jointly with the University

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of Brighton since 1998. To become a researcher in education, most choose to register for qualifications outside of Mauritius: mainly in India, Australia, France, Canada, the USA or the UK.

### *The institutional landscape: UKZN*

Governed by the University Act, the UKZN is an autonomous institution (UKZN 2006). It has the latitude to appoint the majority of its senior management and staff. It has the task of being an agent of critique of the educational landscape. Its teaching, community engagement and research functions are jealously guarded so as to position itself as an independent organ. The 23 teacher education institutions located within the higher education ministry are granted the freedom to interpret the broad guidelines of educational policy, and their curricular interventions can and do vary according to chosen preferences. This autonomy may, however, increasingly be held to account for aforementioned reasons.

Increasingly, since its establishment as a new merged institution in 2004, UKZN has chosen to foreground its identity not just as a knowledge consumer, but as a knowledge generator. It has embraced formally its intention to be ranked amongst the top *research* universities not only nationally, but internationally. Currently, the institution is celebrating its position as the third most research-productive institution in the country and is amongst the top 500 institutions ranked internationally (UKZN Vice Chancellor's Communiqué 2012). The institution has openly challenged the construction of the higher education institution as an 'agent of the state'. Instead, it sees its roles as being supportive of the goals of reconstruction of the country but offering in-depth guidance and critique of the State agenda. The university is not an organ of the government, even though it draws its primary resources of subsidy from government coffers. However, within a climate of accountability to State expenditure, the worthiness of the university is interpreted (amongst other expectations) in terms of the number of research-productivity units it is able to generate, to publish in national and international contexts and to support the development of postgraduate studies.

This shift in identity was not without contestation, especially with the former establishment of the new Faculty of Education[5] in the new UKZN. The merging forces of the establishment of the new faculty drew from histories of the former 'Colleges of Education', which largely constituted themselves as 'teacher training institutions'. These teacher training institutions were previously linked directly to the provincial racialised government departments, which were also tasked with school education. College staff drew their identities largely from that of being 'producers of practitioners' to enact the state-driven and state-designed curricula. The new identity for UKZN as a research institution thus seriously challenged this identity (Wassermann and Bryan 2010). The new faculty adopted the model of a

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collaborative cohort supervision of the UDW postgraduate doctoral programme and re-interpreted it to provide a support structure for all staff to more forcibly embrace the agenda of a research identity. This meant that the programme had to both promote the development of a research culture within the institution and develop the capacities of supervising Masters and PhD study. The plan has to a large extent contributed significantly towards achieving the goals of a researching faculty. The school has moved from being ranked fifth in terms of research productivity within the institution to third position in 2011. It is projected that by 2016, at least 75% of its staff will have a PhD, from a baseline of approximately 23% in 2004. The model of doctoral cohort supervision was thus seen as a productive catalyst for activating a research culture (Samuel and Vithal 2011) (see discussion of this model later). The agenda of building a research culture embraced the challenge to re-negotiate what kinds of knowledges were being produced for the education system, in whose interests such knowledges were being supported, as well as to de-centre the dominant traditions of knowledge consumption and corporatisation of the university environment. Le Grange (2005) called this potential agenda of post-apartheid a means of seeking a re-engagement and creating new spaces for reconstruction.

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## Prospects: programmatic interventions

This third section outlines the process of setting up the doctoral cohort model at MIE and the key principles underpinning its operations. Its theoretical rationale to provide a celebration of South-valued agendas, indigenous local knowledge systems and the talking back to coloniality is examined in this section. The following questions are critical to this paper:

- To what extent can a South-South model of collaboration between two higher education institutions potentially lead to more symmetrical power relations?
- Can the cohort model of doctoral studies jointly proposed by MIE and UKZN offer a platform for renegotiating hierarchy and decolonising systems of knowledge?
- Do our colonial and institutional cultural histories offer the resources for negotiating alternate discursive spaces to empower individuals, bridge and celebrate local cultures, create opportunities for growth and balance inequalities?

To answer these questions we draw on documentary evidence in the form of:

- correspondences and written reports that describe the setting up of the PhD programme. This set of data gave access to the principles that underpin the conceptualisation and implementation of the programme,

- the memorandum of understanding that sets the conditions for sharing of responsibilities between the two institutions,
- the formal evaluation reports of all participants in the weekend seminars, which constitutes the core of the model.

Our insider status favoured the assuming of the reflexive stance adopted: interactive interviewing between the authors of this paper occurred during several iterations of constructing this paper (July–September 2012). The engagement in self-reflective inquiry of the managers and supervisors of the PhD programme also constitute the data for this paper.

We, thus, argue that our histories offered us new principles on which to build partnerships. We argue that diffusion of power differentials occurred at two levels: inter-institutional and programmatic. We also analyse the contextual and intra-institutional factors and processes which work against the intended aims of the partnership.

### *Setting up the partnership: creating bridges*

The first stages of exploration of a partnership began in individual exchange visits of the management of both institutions to each other's campuses. These meetings set the agenda for exploratory phases of opening up the MIE to possible resources available within the South African context. The first notable resonances between the UKZN and the MIE context were around the patterns of marginalisation of the economically deprived and the goals towards reconstruction of a more equitable education system. Unlike the models usually drawn in the MIE content from more developed world contexts, South Africa provided a laboratory of comparative developing world and social justice interests. The first steps involved reflections on the degrees of similarity and shared history that characterised the partner institutions. This was particularly important, especially in the context where the perceived West or North traditions of developed-world contexts were interpreted to be the benchmarks for aspirations. These individual visits were then translated into a programme of visiting lecturer workshops conducted by members of UKZN at MIE in areas where it was believed institutional capacity was lacking.

Increasingly, the UKZN model of a PhD programme was presented as a possibility for further professional development for especially newly appointed staff. A formal Memo of Understanding between the two institutions was signed in June 2011. A total of 15 students constitute the first cohort: 1 of these students is a member of the Ministry of Education, whilst the others are MIE staff. Staff from UKZN and MIE would serve as mentor supervisors in a collaborative venture in a programme spanning three years of support in a seminar-based programme, delivered onsite at the MIE campus. Unlike the other UKZN PhD programmes, the MIE cohort programme

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entails UKZN staff (supervisors), rather than the doctoral students, travelling and attending the on-site
seminars held in Mauritius.

The initial *climate and ethos* of the prospect of doing a PhD were important. The initiators of the programme deliberately aimed to promote dialogue, tolerance and respect for the input and contributions of the MIE and UKZN partners from both institutions. Each contributor had to feel that there was recognition of self-worth of their ideals, fears and beliefs. It was a recognition rather than a subjugation of ideas, allowing the MIE staff/students to recognise that what they had to offer the world of knowledge was of value. Their own interpretations of the educational landscape were to be the building blocks and the outside UKZN force was merely a catalyst to activate this. The programme, nevertheless, had institutional backing as it was presented as a planned staff professional-growth strategy. The special recognition given to SADC students by the South African government also has welcoming qualities. The registration as full-time students permits the UKZN to offer fee remission to these students, thus making the programme financially most lucrative in comparison with other international programmes.

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### *The UKZN cohort model*

The academic doctoral programme of the UKZN is not a taught programme but a system of providing guidance to students in a community of supervisors and students, each of whom adds to the development of each other. The programme spans the three broad phases of *headwork* (refinement of the proposal and research design), *fieldwork* (engagement with producing data) and *text work* (producing the final product of a doctoral thesis). The seminars assemble staff from MIE and UKZN in a three-day weekend seminar, six times a year over three years. This programme has the intended consequence of supporting the development of models of postgraduate supervision, especially for the many MIE co-supervisors who are in possession of a doctoral degree but who do not have extended supervisory experiences. The model, like its introduction within the UKZN context, achieves the dual purpose of supporting both doctoral students and their supervisors in the doctoral research production enterprise and, above all, engendering a research ethos and culture within the organisation.

### *Programme design and development*

The programme aimed to promote *mutual reciprocity* at all levels – at the exchange and involvement of staff on both sites and in the support workshops to develop candidate research proposals for admission into the PhD programme. The design of the weekend seminars and the exchange of staff

across borders were negotiated by both partners. Co-ordinators of the programme at both MIE and UKZN were tasked with a flow of communication between the two institutions, involving the management and administrative support staff to ensure a smooth delivery of travel, accommodation and curriculum programme-design matters. Students were also circulated draft programmes to ensure their contribution. Each doctoral seminar concluded with open oral and written reflections and evaluation for the weekend programme making recommendations for the focus, topic and input of different staff/students during the forthcoming cohort weekend.

The UKZN is the degree-awarding institution and thus has the jurisdiction to finalise matters of selection, admission of students and appointment of supervisors. A list of potential co-supervisors from MIE was provided to UKZN, whose Higher Degrees Committee appointed the supervisors based on the students' topics and areas of expertise of staff. This has resulted in only a limited number of MIE staff out of the large potential pool being assigned co-supervisory status. In order to address exclusionary tendencies, the cohort programme has been opened to all MIE staff on the opening plenary session, which is a public seminar about doctoral research usually presented by MIE, UKZN or Mauritius-based scholars. Additionally, non-supervisory staff have requested observer status during the weekend to promote exposure to the UKZN PhD model. To date, the plenary sessions have been well attended by staff across the MIE, and three additional staff have utilised the observer status opportunity for the remainder of the weekend.

### *Against systems of knowledge: opening theoretical and methodological horizons*

The UKZN-MIE PhD programme has the following underpinning philosophical threads. The programme aims explicitly and implicitly to connect both the local and global research theoretical landscapes. The key focus is on drawing dialogue between the specificities of the local Mauritian context, and the students' interpretations of such, and the need to generate a knowledge resource for theorising that would serve on an international platform. It aims to position the doctoral candidate as a producer of knowledge drawn from the local Mauritian context and offering from its vantage an exploration of a theoretical phenomenon that spans across time, space and context. In setting up the Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions, Anil Gupta (2006), in the Indian sub-continent, sought to upscale and convert the grassroots products of especially the 'marginalised-poor, but knowledge-rich' local populations. He suggested that by blending excellence in the formal and informal science, as well as respecting, valuing and rewarding the local indigenous populations, their everyday knowledges could become accessible for wider usage and innovation in the

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international context. The South African partners of supervisors in the UKZN–MIE PhD model aim to infuse into the discussion a menu of possibilities drawing from a range of theoretical, epistemological and methodological perspectives. Local knowledge systems are simply not valorised unconditionally because they may in themselves also embed exploitative and oppressive rituals and routines of the past. Thrupp (1989) argues that when affirming such local knowledge, one should 'recognise its unique values, yet avoid romanticised views of its potential' (6). Robust engagement with the limits and potential of local knowledges is required through discursive critique.

Strong qualitative research methodologies (usually with a social justice bent) characterise the UKZN model since many of its supervising staff draw from these traditions within their own work. By contrast, the dominant methodologies of research production of the MIE students draw from the strong empirical quantitative research traditions. The programme, thus, becomes a negotiation of different paradigmatic perspectives, exposing the limitations and potential of each tradition. The initial stages included opportunities to share cultural, institutional and curricular similitude through direct exposure of staff through visits to each other's institutions. The incremental exposure to a range of alternate epistemological, theoretical and methodological approaches of different staff members from the partnering institutions provided a vocabulary of possibilities for the prospective doctoral candidates and their supervisors.

The programme has consciously attempted to provide multiple perspectives on research design at PhD level through exposure of all students to each other's topics (which vary according to discipline, focus and methodology); through different staff members with different paradigmatic and epistemological preferences (from MIE and UKZN) offering critique and commentary in a collaborative venture during the seminar; and through an onus to expose oneself in a climate of research trust and questioning. This latter competence is an inherited learning as a consequence of all participants in the cohort recognising that they do not have the sole interpretation of the 'correct way' in which to design and develop research. Many possibilities are promoted and the cohort leaders are cognisant that this view is promoted.

### *From vertical to horizontal: decolonising relationship*

The programme aims deliberatively to diffuse power differentials across academic staff and students, since it is believed that all have the potential to offer new insights into the academic world of knowledge production. However, this ideal is never free of power hierarchies due to age, experience and expertise. Amongst the supervisors, it is evident that UKZN has a longer trajectory of supervising doctoral education students, and that the MIE

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programme is built on the premise of building MIE staff supervisory capacity. This immediately sets up a hierarchical relationship between the participating staff from both institutions, where feelings of inadequacy or superiority can and do enter the relationship. The official requirement that UKZN has the final say in appointment of supervisors also reinforces patterns of power.

However, the programme is built with the ultimate purpose of the MIE becoming a self-awarding postgraduate degree institution with the ability of its own staff to offer doctoral education degrees. The UKZN-MIE model has, thus, a built-in premise of a 'self-destruct system': where its success will ultimately be determined in relation to whether the MIE is able to gain this self-degree awarding status (decided upon by the local Mauritian authorities) independent of UKZN. The model is, thus, geared towards building capacities of self-sufficiency for the staff to self-determine their long-term trajectory as members of a fully-fledged higher education institution. This trajectory is already on the agenda in negotiations with the ministry, and the increasing enrolment in postgraduate studies in the institution with institutions such as UKZN, as well as the possibility of increased numbers of staff with PhD qualifications, augurs well for this goal. The success of the UKZN-MIE model will thus be determined when UKZN is no longer required to offer the support to offer PhD studies. This might, however, reinforce a rather insular view of doctoral education, which the partners are presently not keen to adopt.

The programme also aims to disrupt these power differentials by organising the doctoral students as agents in the design of the programme, the interactive plenary and breakaway sessions. Students are tasked with chairing and scribing each other's work, taking co-responsibility for the development of each other's doctoral work. Supervisors and co-supervisors are often reconfigured in different group-work sessions, allowing for varied perspectives and scrutiny. Over time, this pattern of sharing power aims to inject into the doctoral candidates the degree of confidence to be assertive independent knowledge producers, to critique and contribute to the education system not just nationally, but also internationally. Rather than the model of doctoral supervision following an imitation of the master guru by the apprenticed doctoral student, the programme's intention is to afford agency and autonomy for independent thinking by the doctoral student. The extent to which this is successfully achieved varies individually. One of the possible reasons for this is that considerable time is needed for participants to exercise voice and unlearn patterns of student/teacher engagement to which they are acculturated. More seasoned staff, acclimatised to former models of master-apprenticeship conceptions of doctoral education, find the shift towards a more democratic culture somewhat threatening of their status as 'supervisors of the PhD'. Re-definitions of roles are not always an easy transition, especially when students are increasingly asserting their individu-

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ality and agency. This ultimately entails a re-negotiation around matters of power.

### *Speaking back to coloniality*

The above section describes the various ways in which the cohort model of doctoral studies deliberately works to transcend the colonising practices that appear to dominate transnational partnerships in the higher education landscape in Mauritius. How does this experience, which is located in a small-island insular state, speak to a broader international community in terms of decolonising practices?

We first make an incursion into the nature of collaborative projects, arguing that the case study offers an alternative to the usual configuration whereby one institution endeavours to meet the requirement set by the dominating partner. Instead, we showcase an example where a conscious nurturing of relationships at institutional and personal level galvanised support for the partnership across borders, making it more robust and academically rewarding. In listening to each other's voices, we were able to 'name' our reality, acknowledge our different and similar historical trajectories and negotiate how priorities and concerns could be accommodated within the model. The logic of the partnership was not primarily 'strategic' in the sense of developing an alliance to capture a market share, but, rather, centred around shared values and identity. Institutional growth was construed more in terms of the qualitative gains for staff and how these would help pursue social mandates. In foregrounding these as the drivers of the partnership, we stand away from the dictates of economic rationality and strategic positioning.

Programmatic mechanisms were set up to make it explicit that control over decision making and outcomes was distributed. Both students and co-supervisors have a say in deciding the programme structure. Students are encouraged to seek help from staff outside their officially assigned supervisory teams, giving them the possibility to exercise choice on their epistemological orientations and engage in multiple conversations. We posit these mechanisms as 'decolonising' doctoral studies. However, even in these 'decolonising spaces', one should not romanticise that power differentials are not present. More importantly, though, is how these power differentials are interrogated in the discursive spaces that seek to disrupt, reinterpret and reconfigure new patterns.

The topics of the present 2012 cohort reflect a focus on a range of theoretical considerations affecting the Mauritian context. It is more interesting to note that the draft proposals of these studies introduce a degree of agency to assert a Mauritian perspective as a knowledge producer through the research process. A range of studies focus on the topic of the introduction of technologically driven agendas within (teacher) education institution(s).

Another focus is on the interpretation of the challenges facing specific (linguistic/cultural/subject/discipline) traditions within the schooling context. Other topics focus on the analysis of the identity and operations of the MIE itself, or of Mauritian government policy to activate social transformation of under-performing schools. This suggests that the programme is yielding an interest to service local contexts. Moreover, in their methodologies many students are exploring alternate approaches: narrative, life history methodologies; qualitative research designs to activate the voice and presence of teachers of the schooling system or within the MIE itself; and self-studies that examine the implicit role in transformation of the (teacher) education system. This suggests a shift in the discourse of doing research *on* participants towards research *with* and *for* participants.

The variety of issues and methods that characterised the presentation of students is testimony to engagement with the diversity of worldviews which acknowledges situatedness and multiple meanings. Exposure to a wide range of research traditions also worked against the imposition of particular ways of knowing. By reclaiming subjectivities, reinstating knowledge of the local, the model attempts to break the colonial matrix.

## Concluding thoughts: crossing the kala pani ('black waters')

The interaction between a local and global discourse is what characterises the small island context. Ironically, the larger South Africa partner, because of its relative scale, is perhaps less overtly cognizant of how the agendas of international educational discourse are being played out. Perhaps UKZN, as part of the South African discourse, may be so overwhelmed by the magnitude of national transformation issues that it is unable to see the broader landscape of shaping influences within the international arena. The MIE is a mirror to UKZN in this regard.

Movements of staff and students across the borders between South Africa and Mauritius have allowed the possibilities to see oneself again from an outside perspective. This can only strengthen the skills of being a competent researcher. We all have to constantly see ourselves anew, research our intention, goals and drives.

The UKZN-MIE PhD programme has yielded opportunities to examine the importation and exportation of models across national and international borders. It has assisted in seeing how dominant approaches currently operational within the local Mauritian context could be providing particular interpretations of the problems that confront the education system and the society. All methodologies and theoretical approaches have limitations and potential, so long as one is guarded about what kinds of values and hidden assumptions are embedded in our researcher approaches. As researchers, we are all implicated in the knowledge we produce by virtue of who, what,

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when, how and why we conduct research in the way we do. Doctoral studies provide the opportunity to ask different questions and allow us to question our assumptions.

It is noted that the UKZN-MIE PhD model operationally counteracts the migratory flow of students from the country of origin to the country of destination for doctoral education. Instead, there is a mutual flow of exchange between the source and host countries of both the staff and students involved in the programme, each mutually reinforcing the capacities of the other. The model suggests that when mutual reciprocity is a key ingredient in the setting up of programmes, participants learn self-worth and dignity. Individuals use the opportunities to extend beyond their comfort zones, are prepared to move beyond interpretations in recipient mode and become producers and agents of their own development. When managers of the border-crossing allow for both the deliverers and the participants to know each other deeply and value each other's contribution to mutually agreed-upon goals, then patterns of shared trust and respect emerge. Immigrants are always interpreted as the 'other' until they are embraced as co-constructors of how we read, interpret and develop our new colonies collaboratively. Colonies can avert asymmetry, prejudice and injustice when dialogue and exchanging of learning are their founding principles. Our models of educational exchange should pay concerted effort to such respect. Crossing the 'Kala pani' of oceans (Ebr.-Vally 2001) between our worlds need not be a frightening experience.

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## Notes

1. The engagement with the island by Arab traders, French and Portuguese colonial authorities pre-dates this steadier pattern of Indian and Chinese migration. The French East India Company maintained a territorial strategic oversight of the trade route between the East and the West, using the slave trade and settlement of retired European masters to entrench their identity on the island. Their links with the Portuguese in Mozambique are noted as means to establish a labour supply, and their conflicts with the Dutch East India Company based at the Cape of Good Hope (South Africa) and, later, the British, were always volatile (Asgarally 2008).
2. Liberalisation, in the Mauritian context, is taken to mean the process of opening up tertiary education to private providers, both local and foreign.
3. This term refers to person other than that of White origin in European contexts. It includes the apartheid categories of so-called Indian, Coloured and African persons.
4. Mauritius is regarded as a SADC country. Recognition of equivalence of qualifications obtained is still required through the South African Qualification Authority for entry in South African institutions. As the numbers of SADC students swell beyond the targeted 5%, the Ministry of Higher Education is deliberating the possible capping of numbers (still under review) (Macupe 2012).

5. After a five-year review in 2011, the Faculty of Education has been reconfigured as School of Education.

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