CriSTaL
CRITICAL STUDIES IN TEACHING & LEARNING

2021, Volume 9, Issue 1
DOI: 10.14426/cristal.v9i1.236

Sewing friendship: Increasing inclusivity through creating shared social spaces for migrant and local populations in Durban

Innocent Tinashe Mutero[1#], Khaya Jean Mchunu[2] and Ivan Gunass Govender[2]
[1]*University of KwaZulu Natal*
[2]*Durban University of Technology*
[#]Corresponding Author: muteroinnocent@gmail.com

(Submitted: 3 December 2019; Accepted: 22 December 2020)

Abstract

Most women in South Africa are heavily burdened by unemployment, poverty, and inequality. However, African immigrant women in South Africa are faced with additional challenges such as xenophobic discrimination, economic and social exclusion, and poor integration of migrants in workspaces occupied by locals. This study took advantage of the growing demand for higher education to embrace engaged scholarship to embark on an engagement process that facilitated transformational learning by enabling experience sharing among a diverse group of local and foreign women from *Thusa Batho* Sewing for Africa, a community sewing project located in Durban. Results for this study, which was designed as a participatory action research, reveal the university's agency in nurturing associational enterprises that facilitate social change. Further, results show that inclusive, shared social spaces can be used as resources to facilitate both individual and group change through initiating shared problem identification and solving processes that can have a long-term impact on the community.

Keywords: Community engagement, shared social spaces, inclusivity, migrant populations

Introduction

This study focuses on the role of engaged scholarship in the creation and development of inclusive shared spaces for migrant and local populations in Durban, South Africa. In 2019, South Africa was once again filled with anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiments. Xenophobia and the societal exclusion of immigrants and refugees are arguably two of the most pressing challenges to the world. Migration has become a wicked problem as there is a growing number of people moving from their countries of origin either as regular or irregular migrants (Raadschelders, et al., 2019: 161). Globally, UNHCR is providing oversight to 26 million refugees. The Syrian refugee crisis continues to consume massive resources as the crisis in that region

escalates(UNHCR 2019). Presumably, aid to South Africa has been further reduced, resulting in less funds available for the local context (Mbiyozo, 2021).

The anti-refugee and anti-immigration sentiments are gaining traction in an era of liquid modernity that is marked by the mobility of ideas, people, and resources (Bauman, 2013). Migration is also viewed as a security threat or challenge, especially in America after the September 11 attacks in 2001 (Wohlfeld, 2014). In South Africa, the era is filled with structural inequality, growing social exclusion, disconnection, and an increasing sense of insecurity (Mutero and Govender, 2019: 109). Anti-foreigner sentiments are increasingly visible on both social media and traditional media while the state-sanctioned narrative understates xenophobia as 'just crime' (Gordon, 2019). Xenophobic incidences have been partly a result of 'the mismanagement of information…, misplacement and misrepresentation of facts about activities of the foreigners in the state, painting the foreigners in bad light before the indigenes and international community' (Wilson, 2017: 45).

The anti-refugee and anti-immigration sentiment have further fuelled the resurgence of nationalism, which consequently further 'scapegoats' immigrants and refugees et al., 2019). As a result, calls have been made for the academy to contribute towards positive social change through university community engagement. However, 'the focus of this contribution has often been analysed and discussed from the point of view of how individuals and countries benefit economically' (Mtawa, 2017: 1). There is hope in the emergence and growth of critically engaged research with a social justice orientation questioning politically structured suffering (Bourgois, 2006) and taking an activist slant to deal with social problems through participatory action research (Kaye and Harris, 2018). Following the set trajectory, in this study we worked with the sewing collective *Thusa Batho* Sewing for Africa to provide active opportunities for refugees and marginalised local women to explore their own awareness with each other in a shared social space and to rehearse conflict transformation in a country mired with hate and exclusion of minorities.

This paper is organised into four sections. Firstly, we introduce *Thusa Batho* Sewing for Africa and provide the context of the case and its location. The second section focuses on literature on transformational learning considered broadly from seminal works and then, narrowed specifically to the African context. In this section, we also offer the theoretical perspective on inclusive social spaces, which we argue, are the platforms that may enable transformational learning to occur. Thirdly, literature on university community engagement with a focus on the creation of participatory shared spaces that considers a polyvocal process. In the fourth and final section, we describe the methods used in the study focusing on its emancipatory potential, followed by a discussion of the themes from the study.

The project and context of the case

The Durban-based sewing project, called *Thusa Batho* Sewing for Africa, is used as the unit of analysis to show how the partnership between higher education and society through community engagement can provide a platform for prejudice, tribalism and xenophobia to be challenged.

Inversely, *Thusa Batho* Sewing for Africa presents an instance where peace and survival are inculcated in fragile contexts through meaningful interaction in shared social spaces (Mutero and Govender, 2019) and education (Lai and Thyne, 2007; Johnson, et al., 2019). The sewing project and the particular study that we conducted operated at the backdrop of the March 2019 xenophobic attacks that erupted in the city of Durban during which over 100 foreign nationals residing in the city sought refuge in a local police station and a mosque. While the issue of unemployment does not form a principal focus of our article, the study was conducted during a time when quarterly unemployment statistics were published indicating the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province as the second of two provinces whose unemployment rate increased (2.6 percentage point increase in the KZN) (Statistics South Africa, 2019). A later report published in the second half of 2019 by StatsSA showed an increase when the national unemployment rate reached 29% - the highest it has been since 2008. It is on the basis of this reality that we define fragile contexts in this present article. In the midst of these social quagmires, the existence of *Thusa Batho* Sewing for Africa plays an imperative role in addressing unemployment explicitly and xenophobia implicitly through adult education.

Thusa Batho is a Sesotho phrase that means 'to be of assistance to the fellow human being'. The name of the project branches out of the indigenous African philosophy of Ubuntu which is undergirded by the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* with the English version translated to 'I am because you are, therefore because you are then I am' (Mbiti, 1969) promoting the interconnection of persons (Gade, 2012; Wanda, 2015). Harmonising with this philosophy, *Thusa Batho*, as it will be named for the rest of the article, provides a space where the co-existence of human beings regardless of their age, nationality and sewing capabilities is encouraged.

The year-long training programme provided at the *Thusa Batho* premises and the Durban University of Technology attracts a diverse group of women residing in the coastal city of Durban, KZN. The diverse make-up of the project participants entails women of different age groups, as well as from different parts of the African continent who reside in and around the city. It is upon this context that the *Thusa Batho* project embraces the objective to provide training in sewing to the migrant and unemployed population in Durban by capacitating skills development training for employment or self-employment.

The sewing programme began as one of many projects by the Denis Hurley Centre aimed at patrons of the inner-city refugee centre. Currently, *Thusa Batho* operates independently, facilitated by two women who ahead of establishing the project acquired sewing skills from an organisation external to the Denis Hurley Centre. At the end of their training, the organisation provided the equipment and machinery required to run a sewing project. The now-trained women optioned to use the equipment, machinery, and the skills they gained from their training to share with patrons of the Denis Hurley Centre as their way of mobilising society.

In its early years, the sewing project was run independently from one of the venues at the Denis Hurley Centre. It was in 2016 that *Thusa Batho* integrated and collaborated with the Department of Fashion at the Durban University of Technology (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Fashion students and Thusa Batho woman discussing and laying out fabric before cutting and sewing the garment at the DUT Fashion department campus. Photograph taken by K. Mchunu

The training programme was designed and facilitated by the two women and one of the authors of the present article. This partnership aspect of the project is fashioned as a student service-learning project that involves fashion students from the HEIs partnering with *Thusa Batho* trainees on a collaborative design project. The *Thusa Batho* participants travel to the campus twice a week. Collaboration, co-creation, and participatory design are central themes in this aspect of the project. The two women from *Thusa Batho* are responsible for training the cohort to ensure that by the time they partner with the university students, they are familiar with some sewing machinery and equipment, as well as processes for basic garment production. The one author, who plays a role in this part, ensures that the venue for the collaboration is available and ready when the partnership begins. He is also responsible for preparing the fashion students who collaborate with the *Thusa Batho* cohort. Preparing this group of students entails their participating in preparatory activities such as watching YouTube videos as well as reading materials that is related to this service-learning project. For further reading on this aspect of the project see (Mchunu, 2017). The three-month long collaborative design project entails the sewing of a garment that the two women trainers and author would have agreed on. As an outcome, *Thusa Batho* participants receive certificates for their participation in the programme. A more detailed discussion on some graduates' post-training activities is the subject of a recent publication (Mchunu, 2019).

In mid-2019, the project was running the risk of dropping out due to financial constraints and the project facilitators relied on relationships that they had built with university actors on a different project to fundraise for the *Thusa Batho* class of 2019. In addition to its partnership with the Fashion and Textiles Department, the Department of Entrepreneurship was integrated. Through the NRF-funded project by one of the authors (Govender), the training was extended by incorporating the business workshop (Figure 2). Like the first cycle and the practice of making

the university a context for sharing knowledge and experiences through collaboration, co-creation and participation, the workshop in business skills took place.

Figure 2: Thusa Batho participants at the business workshop. Photograph: K. Mchunu.

Theorising transformational learning and inclusive social spaces

Transformational learning is associated with the thought of Paulo Freire (1970) as expressed in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. One of the key concepts in the work is that of conscientisation or consciousness-raising which implies developing the ability to analyse, pose questions, and take action on the social, political, cultural, and economic contexts that influence and shape our lives (Freire, 1970). In later years, the ideas embedded in transformational learning would be evolved by Jack Mezirow (1991).

Mezirow (2010) puts transformational learning as the process of using a prior interpretation to construct a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action. The socialization agents that one is subjected to in their early stages of life determine what they value, know and how they act (Kroth and Cranton, 2014: 1).

Transformational learning, then, allows one to reflect on the already established perspective and encounter a new perspective through interaction. Walters (2007: 40) postulates that it is important to reframe our experiences from existing traditional knowledge as it is a step towards decolonization. Knowledge, at least in transformational learning, is not viewed as something 'out there' to be taken in; rather, it arises within the social acts of trying to make sense of novel experiences in the day-to-dayness of our lives (Dirkx, 1998: 9).

However, Sahin, et al. (2016: 301) argue that the concept of transformation is often confused with that of change. It is a radical change or a subset of change instead of construction of a new meaning or interpretation. To fully comprehend transformation, a distinction between change and transformation must first be understood as change means going across structures

and beyond to completely change while transformation goes beyond change essentially configuring, or structuring, a strategic metamorphosis to build new norms.

Others have built on transformational learning and the need for it to be culturally- and context-sensitive (Tisdell, et al., 2001; Merriam and Ntseane, 2008; Ntseane, 2011). Merriam and Ntseane (2008) and Ntseane (2011) focus on culturally sensitive transformational learning using instances of adult education in the African context, specifically in Botswana. Drawing on, among others, Afrocentricism in their paradigmatic approach, both works integrate aspects of *ubuntu* or *botho* ideologies, the well-known African maxim of humanness. Importantly for our contribution, Ntseane (2011: 320) argues that transformational learning can be a collective process if it is related to development issues such as empowerment and equality, because 'communal involvement ensures an emphasis on awareness of others, thus promoting cooperation and a sharing orientation' (Ntseane 2011: 316). Sermboonsang, et al. (2020: 131) add that mindfulness plays a key role in transformational learning in order to promote effective and quality learning to achieve the set goals. Furthermore, in mindfulness, acceptance contributes to behavioural changes as it involves surrendering and being experientially open to the reality of the present moment without suppressing or acting it out.

In this article, we continue on a similar tangent; that is, appreciating the value of culturally sensitive transformational learning that is imbued with collectiveness and the awareness of another. Creating social spaces that challenge societal ills such as xenophobia should include a diverse range of actors driven by the imperative to interact, participate with and include others in social activities.

We argue that for transformational learning to take place, the context under which it operates has to be inclusive. But what does it mean to be inclusive? Lewis (2016: 326) asserts that inclusion 'is not a programme or an isolated set of practices, it is the guiding principle or belief system informing all decisions and practices'. Donais and McCandless (2017) situate inclusivity within peacebuilding discourse, calling for its move from principle to practice. We concur with this call and argue that engaged scholarship, in particular partnerships between higher education and society through community engagement, opens up ways in which inclusivity might transition from principle to practice.

Gaventa (2006) conceptualises the idea of social spaces and argues that the concept of space exists within a continuum. Within this spectrum of the space concept there exists, amongst others, a closed, invited as well as claimed/created spaces (Gaventa, 2006: 26). To align with our approach, the claimed and created space is apt as it implies a space that is claimed or created autonomously by the less powerful, like-minded actors (Gaventa, 2006: 27). Through their like-mindedness around common concerns emerges a set of common pursuits. Claimed or created spaces 'range from ones created by social movements and community associations, to those simply involving natural places where people gather to debate, discuss and resist' (Gaventa, 2006). The claimed and created space idea is closely matched with our view of the work and purpose of *Thusa Batho* as a shared and inclusive space, since on the one hand the sewing collective functions to bolster economic and skills development, taken at a deeper level it is a

dynamic place for social interaction, participation, belonging, inclusion, and sharing. The section that follows focuses on the role that university community engagement can play in contributing to the creation process of participatory, inclusive shared social spaces.

University community engagement

The academy has been accused of cowardice and inefficacy in contributing solutions to the challenges faced by society (Soudien, 2012: 8). Bauman (2013: 56) thinks that the impotence of the academy comes from the premise that the world is made and shaped by businesspeople while academy is there to interpret the world. The import here is two way: firstly, for effective change to happen there is need for more than ideas which the academy has; the political will is also important. Secondly, it is a call to the academy to act decisively. We prefer the second explanation, and our understanding comes from our collective belief that action research is a solid base to build academic inquiry and work towards change. Our belief is also buttressed by Shultz and Kajner (2013: 13) who forward that 'a revolutionary or critical praxis is needed to reveal and transform the relations that constitute the social contradictions inherent in knowledge production if the structures that make inequality possible are to be transformed'.

We are also aware that we have no moral authority to purport that we can give a voice to the marginalised. At the very worst, if we try to be representatives of plural silenced voices, we run the risk of perpetuating that which we seek to contribute to redressing. Beyond that we believe in the power of non-academic actors in contributing to change. We are held to Bhattacharyya and Murji (2013: 1362)'s persuasion that 'some of the most influential ideas in our area have arisen from outside the academy for instance Biko and Fanon'. Said differently, the academy has the potential to effectively address some of the challenges we face through engaged scholarship, if there is a collective effort coming from both the university and communities. Globally, academics and policymakers have also increasingly questioned the capacity of traditional disciplinary research in bringing about positive social change; advocating for a reconceptualization of the science-society relations in responding to the world's challenges (Fritz and Binder, 2018: 156).

Recognizing the value and agency of bringing community members and university actors to work in concert addressing some of the community's intractable problems, Mutero and Govender (2019) proposed the exploration of engaged creative placemaking. Essentially, engaged creative placemaking is when university actors and the various community stakeholders work together to create micro-publics in shared social spaces to achieve both shared and overlapping objectives (Amin, 2002). The currency of engaged creative placemaking is on relationships that are facilitated through interactions in shared social spaces (Courage, 2015; Mutero and Govender, 2019; Putnam, 2000).

Engaged creative placemaking is an outgrowth of a realisation that there is growing individuality resulting from individual citizen's quest for financial independence and struggle for autonomy against solid categories such as culture and religion. The effects for competition and a quest for survival are even dire for female minorities who are constantly othered (Lorde, 2012).

Similar to social practice creative placemaking, engaged creative placemaking forwards views that encourage the community to break out of habitual patterns of self and interaction, to learn new ways of being and relating. In the context of this present study, *Thusa Batho* presents an opportunity for marginalised women to create narratives that give them agency, a voice, and relational synergies that allow them to navigate some of the challenges they face in their daily lives (Ghorashi, 2014).

Shared social spaces are by no means a magic bullet to the present crisis currently being faced in South Africa as cautioned by Mutero and Govender (2019). However, innovation might be what we need to effectively face xenophobia as Crush, et al. (2017) have noted that there is a lack of effectiveness which comes from government and civic society led anti-xenophobia programmes. It is imperative that some of the efforts towards providing a just environment for migrants and refugees should be premised on what they think is right for them as long as they are not going against the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The participation of migrants and locals in proposing solutions to end the anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiments is fertile ground for creating a relational space which alter toxic structures (Fritz and Binder, 2018). As noted previously, *Thusa Batho* is a space for interaction and conversation to happen healthily that then might lead to transformational learning.

Research Methods to create inclusive shared spaces at *Thusa Batho*

The study followed a participatory action research design that was qualitative in approach, in order to engage marginalized local and migrant women in Durban in processes that enabled them to co-exist peacefully and respectfully first with each other and secondly with the outside community. According to Johnson, et al., (2019) a participatory design is centrally grounded, where collaboration of research relationships is formed between communities and academics, epistemologically, informed, by concern for knowledge of the local, in developing and producing research that is directly aimed at understanding and responding to issues that are important to both parties. Hopkins and Ahtaridou (2008: 47) posit that 'action research combines a substantive act with a research procedure; it is action disciplined by enquiry, a personal attempt at understanding while engaged in a process of improvement and reform'. To that end, participatory action research offered an emancipatory platform through which the women organically shared experiences, identified problems and explored means and ways to overcome the challenges. Participatory action research was also suitable for this study as it facilitated the women to depart from already existing 'othering' structures that inhibit sound relationships.

Qualitative research is not always carried out in the habitat of cultural members (Lindlof and Taylor, 2017). Non-probability sampling was used to select the participants, purposive sampling in particular as participants were eligible to participate by virtue of being part of the *Thusa Batho* class of 2019. The chosen participants were also aptly suited for the study as they came from different backgrounds in terms of age, nationality, ethnicity, religion, level of education, and language. The sample started with ten women and later in the process another three joined. The first ten individuals included seven from South Africa, two from Zimbabwe, and

one from the Congo. The three individuals who joined the project later in the process were all refugees who were Congolese by nationality. The participants were in contact for six months (which is the duration of the training programme), meeting daily except on weekends such that researching about their experiences at *Thusa Batho* allowed the study to blend and be part of their everyday experiences as naturally as possible (Chesebro and Borisoff, 2007). We chose to work in the Durban's central business district as it is the location of the *Thusa Batho* project but, importantly for the purpose of the study, it is also the hub of informal and small to medium scale economic activities. Mindful of the objective of social inclusion in the context of xenophobia, this site was also important because in Durban it is a hotspot for xenophobia which experienced the 2008, 2015, and 2019 xenophobic disturbances. While this may be the case, Durban central business district is also considered safe by foreign nationals who are afraid to stay in high-density suburbs and peri-urban areas which are highly concentrated with local people.

This study employed focus group discussions, conversational interviews, and observations to collect data and thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the outcomes of the iterative process. According to Hall and Rist (1999: 225) using a multi-method approach or three key strategies of qualitative data collection helps improve validity of data collected as the researchers can easily point out the accuracy of conclusions gathered when triangulating data from several sources. These methods used during the contact with participants worked as both data collection tools and intervention strategies. However, as we have mentioned earlier that the project was not conceptualized as a research, we should hasten to say that ordinarily these methods are intervention strategies. We used them as data collection tools after we realised that 'they have potential to elicit data which we would otherwise not get from using conventional data collection tools' (Mutero, 2017: 182). The intervention strategies, which formed part of the training programme, followed iterative cycles of participatory action research, as guided by Stringer (1999). Each cycle focused on a particular training and was followed by a reflection, which then led to another cycle. These are presented in the Table below.

Each training was, then, followed by a reflection that included us as researchers, a *Thusa Batho* facilitator, and the participants discussing plans for the next cycle. The reflections, however, adopted conventional methods like focus group discussions and conversational interviews. Observations were also tools used to collect data. We observed how participants relate during their everyday interactions and during focus group discussions where they shared different narratives.

Data was analysed using inductive analysis and creative synthesis where patterns, themes, relationships, and attitudes are searched through the spoken and non-verbal language material. This inductive analysis process is in line with the view credited to Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 139) that 'good research is not generated by rigorous data alone … [but by] "going beyond" the data to develop idea' through detecting the typical within the general and the general within the particular. The three themes discussed in the next section, namely Breaking the walls, Ubuntu and spirituality, and Unity, should be seen to be lived experiences derived from observations, focus group and interview discussions respectively and are discussed in this article.

Table 1: The iterative cycles with their purposes, duration and people involved

CYCLE	PURPOSE OF CYCLE	DURATION	STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED
Cycle 1	Training in basic sewing skills	February – July 2019	• *Thusa Batho* women • Fashion students • Researchers • *Thusa Batho* facilitator
Reflection	Reflect on training	July 2019	• *Thusa Batho* women • Researchers • *Thusa Batho* facilitator
Cycle 2	Workshop on basic business skills	August – September 2019	• *Thusa Batho* women • Invited speakers • Researchers • *Thusa Batho* facilitator
Reflection		September 2019	• *Thusa Batho* women • Researchers • *Thusa Batho* facilitator
Cycle 3: Final reflection	Lessons learnt and way forward	October 2019	• *Thusa Batho* women • Researchers • *Thusa Batho* facilitator

This study was confined to exploring the inclusion through creating shared social spaces for migrant and local populations in Durban. The study also focused on bridging this gap in the context of higher education community engagement.

In consideration of ethics, participants were informed of their right to privacy in that they are entitled to choose which information they wish to disclose or hold back about themselves. The researchers also assured the participants and ensured that participants' names were not used in this study and that no form of coercion was used to for participants to take part in that study. Participants were also informed they have the right to withdraw at any point should they feel uncomfortable for any reason. Only participants over the age of 18 were allowed to participate in this study.

We also explained that photographs of the process would be taken, and conversational interviews will be held at the beginning and end of the process. All *Thusa Batho* participants were assured that no costs would be involved for participating in this study. In addition to this, no compensation or monetary benefits would be granted for participating. However, because the study was being conducted via training interventions these are regarded as non-monetary benefits of the project. Only after these measures were put into place could the project commence.

Through inductive analysis and creative synthesis to determine categories and themes related to the study, we referred to the data drawn through focus group discussions, conversational interviews, observations, and the intervention strategies. The themes discussed

within the frame and purpose to increase inclusivity through creating shared social spaces among and for migrant and local populations in the context of *Thusa Batho*.

Results and Discussion

As a precursor to presenting and discussing the study findings we would like to mention that the ensuing discussion will follow an eclectic mix of both a descriptive approach and an anti-narrative reportage to present the research results. Following the narrative or story format to present some of the results was intended to situate PAR in the practices of everyday people. Sandelowski (1991: 161) argues that 'narratives link science with everyday life to reflect on the increasing reflexivity that characterises contemporary inquiry and furthers the postmodern deconstruction of the already tenuous boundaries among disciplines and the realisation of meaning'. On the other hand, the presentation is steeped in traditional anti-narrative reporting to juxtapose the study results with comprehensive views of other scholars and experts, with a view to offer a neatly analysed thesis on the use of expressive arts in strengthening a community's social capital. The result of this approach, which details results in everyday parlance, is that it demystifies that academia is esoteric and feeds on utopian ideals. Most importantly, it is a method to sort the work in an accessible chronological format (Mutero, 2017).

This study looked at the role of engaged scholarship in the creation and development of inclusive shared spaces for migrant and local populations. Our purpose was to show the potential that these spaces have in promoting the awareness of a human being, who at first, may seem different from another on many levels but through deeper immersion, similarities are realized. While different in nationalities and ages, differences were also evident in the reasons for joining the project. Amongst these there was a participant who already ran a hair dressing business and joined to get a new skill to complement what she was already doing. Another participant specialized in creating trendy jewellery using African wax print material and her reason for joining was wanting to learn new design skills. A third participant worked independently buying and selling clothing and desired to expand her business vertically through acquiring skills to sew. *Thusa Batho*, then, not only became a site to acquire these skills but also, as evidenced in this study, through which the women connect and explore their awareness of each other as a result of the interaction and participation that the project bolsters. We observed the process to arrive at this claim as discussed below.

We purposefully designed cycles with the objective to promote participatory, shared social spaces. For this study, the training was extended through the incorporation of the business workshop. Like the first cycle and the practice of making the university a context for sharing knowledges and experiences through collaboration, co-creation and participation, the workshop in business skills also happened at the university premises at another campus.

Breaking the walls

It is not insignificant that the project unfolds in contemporary South Africa at a time that the 'natives' are increasingly becoming divided. By natives here we mean South African citizens of all

races. There are growing incidences of racism (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013; Desai, 2018) , tribalism (Baloyi, 2018), and even colourism (Mbatha, 2017). The consequences of being a foreigner are ghastly to contemplate as shown by the many violent xenophobic attacks. In this context, the idea of migrants seeking inclusion and acceptance in a deeply divided society can easily be dismissed as foolish. But it is not. South Africa has a lot of good people and good things going on. The study participants live in the context we described above, and a larger part of the project intended outcomes is to facilitate regaining of voice and social inclusion of refugees. One of the biggest barriers the project had to deal with was breaking the walls, getting participants to speak with and know each other.

The process was, however, made easy by the fact that the women were clear about what they wanted. One of the first exercises the team engaged in was to set the scene through introductions and sharing expectations. The exercise was the first major step towards threading common interests that could sew friendships. The women had both shared and overlapping objectives. However, it was evident that participants of foreign nationality had a huge problem, which perhaps could not be dealt with conclusively under the context of the project. In a discussion, which centred around being a part of the community most of the foreign nationals revealed that it was not easy for them to be part of the South African community, as they felt invisible amongst their neighbours.

Paradoxically, the same people went on to suggest that they can trust anyone in the group. Our reading of the readiness to trust is that the foreign nationals used denial as defence mechanism. The pattern was that those who were ready for immediate trust came from war torn countries, while those who were in South Africa as economic refugees said they need time and interaction for trust to develop. South African-born participants were confident to voice out that they cannot trust anyone on face value. It appears therefore that, desperation, and past experience lead foreign nationals to quickly trust. The urge to break the walls and to be accepted leads migrants to speak in voices they do not own.

Though the shared social space was 'mechanically' created to foster interaction, the interactions of participants were natural. As time went on, we observed that levels of trust were built between participants who were working together in class. Besides being mechanisms through which solidarity and interactions are constructed, tasks such as sharing machines, cutting fabric, and cleaning the class together, were also revealed during a focus group discussion as contributing to building certain levels of trust among the participants. A response to a question about the kinds of relationships one participant thought they built with other members of the group included that 'friendship relationship that we could communicate out from school and we worked great together'. Sahin, et al. (2016: 300) emphasises that transformative learning is not only connected to significant life events of the learner but also embedded in how human beings communicate. Through a mix of discourse and reflection, individuals can shift their views, and this can yield a more inclusive collective view resulting in transformation.

Ubuntu and Spirituality

During the process, we observed and recorded some instances that we present here as exemplars of an inclusive shared space. *Thusa Batho* is built on the ubuntu and religious principles which respect oneness of humanity. As a result, when new participants join the group, they are received and included in the group for who they are, human beings. Inclusion in a shared social space, at least in the case of *Thusa Batho*, was inculcated through activities such as sharing sewing machines, cutting fabrics, and cleaning the sewing space collectively, as stated earlier. In addition to these, when the three women who joined later in the process, as a way to see whether the older group had gained any learning from her teaching, the *Thusa Batho* facilitator tasked the older group to show the newer individuals how to thread the sewing machines. Threading the sewing machine is a long and pain-staking process that needs to be done well for the machine to run smoothly. While it may look like something insignificant but showing others the extensive task of threading the machine also entailed exchanges and interactions and making those new to the project feel comfortable in a shared social space (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Participants who joined earlier showing a new participant how to thread the sewing machine. Photograph taken by K. Mchunu

While the study makes an important finding that the class upheld the Ubuntu philosophy, one question still lingers. How did they get to embrace Ubuntu as a way of life? It appears from the research process that underlying the cordial relations was a deep respect of, and spiritual connection. All the women believed in the sanctity of human life and reverence of a Supreme being. The women followed Christian rituals; however, these were not imposed on them. It was a choice that they made to pray for common purpose every day. One of the women also shared that pray through the pray she felt 'more involved and together; with each individual voice adding to the class's shared vision'. From our observations, the salience of venerating a Supreme being

in the context of this study is that it created a solemn ambience which brought the women together. Potentially, praying together facilitated mutual trust and communication thus making individuals comfortable to work with, and proud to be associated with, a community of oneness (Mutero, 2017: 285).

Unity should be seen to be lived

Through the influence of the *Thusa Batho* facilitator, and as one of the facilitators mentioned in a conversation, the group insisted on presenting themselves as a united team whenever they came to the university spaces for the different training cycles. For example, in the first cycle the team constantly wore black golfers that were embroidered with the *Thusa Batho* logo. This practice continued at the business skills workshop when the team insisted on wearing new golfers in entirely new colours. In an article on women leadership in an African context, Mchunu (2019b) argued that a democratic, nurturing and people-centred process pose the possibilities for developing solidarity and sisterhood among women more broadly in skills building projects. This was evident in this study and the dressed body, particularly the wearing of uniform, was used to build and show the unity and solidarity among the participants of the project.

Wearing similar clothes, particularly during 'outings' helped the women to pull in the same direction without anyone feeling prejudiced or out of place, as evidenced by one of the class members who asserted that she felt comfortable around her colleagues because they do not look down upon each other and there is no show-off. Mill (cited in Caruso 2007: 1) is also of the idea that what binds people is sameness and posits that '[i]ntimate society between people radically dissimilar to one another is an idle dream. Unlikeness may attract, but it is likeness which retains'. This similarity in circumstances, environment, hopes and aspirations can be read as the homophily principle, which is very important in building and sustaining relationships (McPherson, et al., 2001). But beyond the most immediate outcome of creating sameness in a group uniformity inculcated in participants that beyond the stereotypical differences they were all human beings who looked and can do the same.

Conclusion

The exclusion of the participation of certain women in the economy called upon us as scholars to design a socially responsive, community-engaged project. Some significant post-project outcomes and highlights of study includes graduates from the *Thusa Batho* project using the skills from the training to form businesses that they run from their homes. In addition to this, through some of our networks, a few graduates from the programme registered as mentees of a social entrepreneurship centre based at our university. This centre supports them through training in business management skills, which in turn strengthens their capability to run their home-based businesses. Such an outcome shows the rewards of bolstering the participation of women in processes of income generation.

Further to this, we acknowledge the limitations of the transformational learning process in terms of its output and agree that it does not directly result in the instant transformation of a

community (Pietrykowski, 1998:67). However, this study has also shown the role and value of university community engagement in facilitating transformational learning by enabling experience sharing through sewing among local and migrant women. This study engaged individuals in pursuit of social cohesion during a turbulent period of xenophobic violence coupled with escalating levels of unemployment in the city of Durban. Activities happening in a shared, inclusive social space were used as resources through which individuals were led to meaningful change and development in a learning environment. In the context of our project, *Thusa Batho* functioned as an associational enterprise facilitating social change through initiating shared problem identification and solving processes that can have a long-term impact on the community (Yule, 2012: 35). Participants engaged in narrative exchange processes that allowed for self-reflection and critical reflection (Mezirow, 2000) and involving their emotion, intuition and imagination (Dirkx, 2001, 2006). The project was not prescriptive but it engaged and motivated participants to learn based on their exchange of experiences and thoughts. Universities and by extension all higher education institutions have critical roles to play in creating inclusive spaces and engaging communities in activities that depend on citizen agency to address social and economic problems.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the National Research Foundation Community Engagement Grant [104860].

Author Biographies

Innocent Tinashe Mutero (UKZN) is an applied ethnomusicologist whose research interests are in university-community engagement, popular arts in Africa and research uptake.

Khaya Mchunu (DUT) is a lecturer and activist-scholar in the Department of Fashion and Textiles at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). He holds a Master's Degree in Fine Art (cum laude) from the University of Johannesburg and is currently a PhD scholar at the DUT.

Ivan Gunass Govender (DUT) is a senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Management Sciences at Durban University of Technology. Currently he is the grant holder of the NRF Community Engagement project that entails developing a monitoring and evaluation model for university community engagement

References

Amin, A. 2002. Ethnicity and the multicultural city: living with diversity', *Environment and planning A*, 34(6): 959-80.

Baloyi, E.M. 2018. 'Tribalism: Thorny issue towards reconciliation in South Africa-A practical theological appraisal', *HTS Theological Studies*, 74(2): 1-7.

Bauman, Z. 2013. *Liquid Modernity*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Bhattacharyya, G. & Murji, K. 2013. Introduction: Race critical public scholarship. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(9): 1359-73.

Bourgois, P. 2006. *Engaged Observer: Anthropology, Advocacy, and Activism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Chesebro, J.W. & Borisoff, D. 2007. What makes qualitative research qualitative? *Qualitative Reports in Communication*, 8(1): 3-14.

Courage, C. 2015 Moving beyond creative placemaking: the micropublic of a social practice placemaking project. *Association of American geographers Annual Meeting*. Chicago: University of Brighton

Crush, J., Tawodzera, G., Chikanda, A., Ramachandran, S. & Tevera, D. 2017. The double crisis: Mass migration from Zimbabwe and xenophobic violence in South Africa. Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

Desai, A. 2018. Social cohesion in South Africa: An exploratory concept. Social cohesion conference. Durban, South Africa. 27-28 September.

Donais, T. & McCandless, E. 2017. International peace building and the emerging inclusivity norm. *Third World Quarterly*, 38(2): 291-310.

Fritz, L. & Binder, C. 2018. Participation as relational space: A critical approach to analysing participation in sustainability research. *Sustainability,* 10(8): 155-162..

Gaventa, J. 2006. Finding the spaces for change: A power analysis. *IDS Bulletin*, 37(6): 23-33.

Ghorashi, H. 2014. 'Routed connections in late modern times.' In Vieten, U.M. (ed.) *Revisiting Iris Marion Young on Normalisation, Inclusion and Democracy*. London: Springer, 49-66.

Gordon, S. 2019. The popularity of state discourses on anti-immigrant violence in South Africa. *The Round Table*, 108(5): 567-578.

Hall, A.L. & Rist, R.C. 1999. 'Integrating multiple qualitative research methods (or avoiding the precariousness of a one-legged stool). *Psychology & Marketing*, 16(4): 291-304.

Hopkins, D. & Ahtaridou, E. 2008. *A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Research*. New York: Open University Press.

Johnson, M.T., Gallagher, V. & Appleton, R. 2019. Teaching participatory action research: Fostering impact. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 17(2): 191-121.

Kaye, S. & Harris. G. 2018. Participatory action research for peacebuilding. *Peace Review*, 30(1): 62-68.

Kerr, P. Durrheim, K. & Dixon, J. 2019. Xenophobic violence and struggle discourse. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 43(6):586-594.

Lewis, K. 2016. Social justice leadership and inclusion: a genealogy. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 48(4): 324-341.

Lindlof, T.R. & Taylor, B.C. 2017. *Qualitative communication research methods.* London: Sage publications.

Lorde, A. 2012. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkely: Crossing Press.

Matolino, B. & Kwindingwi, W. 2013. The end of ubuntu. *South African Journal of Philosophy,* 32(2): 197-205.

Mbatha, S. 2017. Understanding skin colour: Exploring colourism and its articulation among black and coloured students. Unpublished Maters Diss., University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa.

Mbiyozo, A.. 2021. Refugee resettlement pressure rises as funding dwindles. *The Conversation*, 11 February. Available at: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-02-11-refugee-resettlement-pressure-rises-as-funding-dwindles/ (Accessed 24 May 2021).

Mchunu, Khaya. 2017. Preparing fashion students for a socially engaged university project through Zulu Proverbs. 14th National Design Education Conference, 169-180.

———. 2019. Appraising understandings of a social justice-infused pedagogy: Adinkra symbols as probes. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the South*, 3(2): 68-83.

Mtawa, N.N. 2017. Exploring the role of service-learning in human development: Perspectives of staff, students and community members. Unpublished PhD diss., University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

Mutero, I.T. 2017. Conflict transformation through music and dance: The case of Mkoba, in Gweru, Zimbabwe. Unpublished PhD diss. Duran University of Technology, Durban, South Africa.

Mutero, I.T. & Govender, I.G. 2019. Advancing the exploration of engaged creative-placemaking amongst universities and communities for social cohesion in South Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies,* 32(4): 109-139.

Putnam, R.D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. London: Simon and Schuster.

Raadschelders, J.C., Larrison, J. & Thapar, A. 2019. Refugee migration as a "Wicked Problem": American controlling, palliative, and governance policies in global context. *World Affairs*, 182(3): 228-55.

Sandelowski, M. 1991. Telling stories: Narrative approaches in qualitative research. *Image: The Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 23(2): 161-66.

Sermboonsang, R., Tansuhaj, P.S., Silpakit, C. & Chaisuwan, C. 2020. Mindfulness-based transformational learning for managing impulse buying. *Journal of Education for Business*, 95(2): 129-37.

Shultz, L. & Kajner, T. 2013. *Engaged Scholarship: The Politics of Engagement and Disengagement*. London: Sense Publishers.

Soudien, C. 2012. The promise of the university: What it's become and where it could go. In Leibowitz, B. (ed.), *Higher Education for the Public Good: Views from the South*. Stellenbosch: African SUN Media, 31-43.

UNHCR. 2019. UNHCR global trends forced displacement in 2019. Available at https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2019/ (Accesed 24 May 2021).

Wilson, G. 2017. Xenophobic activities and its impact on African peace and development. *An International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 6(3): 41-50.

Wohlfeld, M. 2014. Is migration a security issue? In Grech, O. & Wohlfeld, M. (eds.) *Migration in the Mediterranean: Human Rights, Security and Development Perspectives.* Msida: Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, 61-77.