Momentum and Melancholia: Gender Equity in Higher Education

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Is the Present the Future That We Imagined in the Past?

- Did feminism/ the left/ counter hegemonic advocates predict the scale of neo-liberal driven change?

- Did the traditionalists predict the industrialisation and massification of HE?
Momentum and Melancholia

- Pessimistic repertoire of challenges for gender equity in the academy.

- Gender and melancholy are often deeply connected (Butler, 2002).

- Loss, hurt, anger and grief often underpin studies of gender and power in higher education.

- Writing/ discussing gender equality means referring to something that does not yet exist.

- Desire, as well as loss, needs to be considered.

- Tendency to critique, rather than to celebrate or engage in futurology.
Discourse of Crisis, Loss, Damage, Contamination, and Decay

- the university in ruins (Readings, 1996);
- the ‘degradation’ of academia (Nisbet, 1971);
- the university ‘in crisis’ (Sommer, 1995);
- the death of autonomy (Dill, 2001);
- proletarianisation (Dearlove, 1997).
Why Re-Imagine Higher Education?

Major site of:

- cultural practice
- identity formation
- knowledge formation and dissemination
- symbolic control.

Caught between:

- archaism
- hyper-modernisation
Disqualified Discourses

John Denham’s (UK Minister for HE) priorities (2008) for the next 15 years are:

- innovation, knowledge transfer exchange (techno-science?) and wealth creation (for others).

- not inclusion and equalities.

Emphasis on:

- knowledge liquification and optimisation

- not power/knowledge or knowledge as pleasure.
New Times/ Change Vocabularies

- Generative potential of the global;
- Academic hypermobility/ cosmopolitanism (Kenway, 2004);
- New ecologies of knowledge/ digitisation;
- Destabilisation of secure knowledge niches (Appadurai, 2006);
- Innovative ideas/practices from outside the North and outside of the academy (Santos, 1999);
- Knowledge transfer/exchange disrupting centres and margins (Biesta, 2007);
- Barriers dissolving between public and private (Bail, 2008).
Liquifying Higher Education

- Higher education is becoming a single, world-wide arrangement (Marginson, 2006).
- Boundaries and borders are no longer stable.
- Democratising of knowledge or de-territorialisation of hegemonies?
- Nationalised knowledge in a globalised world.
- Are gender inequalities also globalised (Morley et al., 2006)?
Tensions Between Desire, Desiccation and Distributive Justice

• Difference conceptualised as disparagement.

• Transformation driven by neo-liberal policies rather than academic imaginary.

• HE both commodified and commodifying.

• Need a sociology of absences (Santos, 1999).
The Underbelly of the Global Beast

• Hyper-modernisation of global, entrepreneurial, corporate, commercialised universities and speeded up public intellectuals on the move.

• Underpinned by domestic/private archaism of casual research labour, poor quality employment environments and conditions.

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Disqualifying Gender
Gender in Higher Education Policy Discourse

• Gender = access, disadvantage and remediation.

• Women’s increased access = feminisation (Leathwood and Read, 2008).

• HE products and processes = gender neutral.

• Power and privilege = under-theorisation.

• Redistributive measures = social engineering.

• Equity = threat to excellence.
Participation rates for women undergraduate students in higher education have increased between 1999 - 2005 in all regions of the world.

Global Gender Parity Index of 1.05 (UNESCO, 2007).

Unevenly distributed across regions, disciplines, and socio-economic groups.
Women’s newly-found professional and economic independence blamed for:

- societal destabilisation
- a crisis in masculinity
- devaluing of professions/ academic credentials.

(Evans, 2008; Quinn, 2003).
The Feminisation Debate as Partial and Exclusionary

Excludes consideration of:

- leadership in higher education
- whether quantitative change has allowed more discursive/less space for gender.
- intersecting gender with other structures of inequality including social class.

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Questions We Still Need to Ask?

- Is gender equality just about quantitative change?
- What are women accessing in higher education?
- Is gender mainstreaming working?
- Are feminists still speaking from the margins?
- How are gender differences relayed and constructed in higher education today?
- Is difference conceptualised as disparagement/deficit?
- Is transformation driven by neo-liberal policies rather than academic imaginary?

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Gender Challenges

- Gender insensitive pedagogy (Welch, 2006);
- Sexual harassment (Townsley and Geist, 2000);
- Gendered micropolitics (Morley, 1999);
- Limited opportunities for promotion and professional development (Knights and Richards, 2003);
- Gender and knowledge production and dissemination (Hughes, 2002)
- Gender Pay Gap (EU, 2007)
- Recognition and reflexivity (Hey, 2009)
- Gendered curricula and subject choices (Morley et al, 2006).
Missing Women (Sen, 2003)

- Women’s participation as undergraduate students globally has increased rapidly.

- Women’s participation in senior academic and executive positions globally is increasing very slowly.

- Women disappear when power, resources and influence increase.
Proportion Of Female Academic Staff by Grade in The European Union, 2004 (EU, 2006).

![Graph showing the proportion of female academic staff by grade in the European Union, 2004.](image-url)
Women’s Participation In Management and Academic Leadership in Selected Commonwealth Countries, 2006 (Singh, 2008)
Equity Scorecards

- Examine how diversity amongst students is translated into equity in educational outcomes.
  - (Bensimon and Polkinghorne, 2003)

- Measure advantage and disadvantage simultaneously.
Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania

Measuring:

• Sociological variables of gender, age, socio-economic status (SES)

In Relation to:

• Educational Outcomes: access, retention and achievement.

In Relation to:

• 4 Programmes of Study in each HEI.
• 2 Public and 2 private HEIs.

(Morley, Leach and Lugg, 2008)
www.sussex.ac.uk/education/wideningparticipation

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Equity Scorecard 1: Access to 4 Programmes at a Tanzanian Public University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>% of Students on the Programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Commerce</td>
<td>34.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLB. Law</td>
<td>26.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Sc. Engineering</td>
<td>27.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Sc. with Education</td>
<td>16.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Equity Scorecard 2: Access to 4 Programmes at a Private University in Tanzania**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Low SES</th>
<th>Age 30 or over</th>
<th>Women and low SES</th>
<th>Women 30 or over</th>
<th>Poor Mature Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Business Administration</td>
<td>42.06</td>
<td>10.28</td>
<td>18.87</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>7.48</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLB. Law</td>
<td>13.02</td>
<td>12.74</td>
<td>68.84</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MD. Medicine</td>
<td>42.81</td>
<td>9.90</td>
<td>13.42</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. ED. Maths</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>12.26</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Equity Scorecard 3: Registration of Second Year Students in a Public University in Ghana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>% of Students on the Programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Commerce</td>
<td>29.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Management Studies</td>
<td>36.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Education (Primary)</td>
<td>47.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Sc. Optometry</td>
<td>30.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Private Higher Education

- Female enrolments are higher in private than in public institutions in Ghana and Tanzania.
- Core and periphery provision.
- Are socially disadvantaged groups getting diverted into lower status provision?
- Is the market reinforcing stratification of the sector and social differentiation?
- ‘Buying an education becomes a substitute for getting an education’ (Kenway et al., 1993: 116).
‘Now’ Universities Built on Yesterday’s Foundations

- Hyper-modernisation of liquified globalisation.

- Archaism of unequal employment and participation practices.
Imagining the Gendered University of the Future...

• Challenge hegemonic messaging systems in higher education.

• Feminist reconstruction and develop new narratives of higher education.

• Find new conceptual grammars for theorising gender that go beyond quantitative (under)representation.

• Remember that gender is a verb, as well as a noun.

• Feminist theory to be applied to social practices.

• Need for a gendered cultural sociology of higher education that unmask inequalities.

• De-parochialise research - geographically and theoretically.

• Globalise and systematise concerns with gender equity and participation.

• Find new and robust ways to research gender that recognises differences among women.

• Acknowledge, as well as a booming knowledge economy, the possibility of a knowledge recession.

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