

Mapping Meritocracy: Intersecting Gender, Poverty and Higher Educational Opportunity Structures



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Widening Participation in Higher Education: Democratisation or Differentiation?



- Meritocratic equalisation/
democratising state intervention;
- Redistributing an unquestioned
'good' or diversion?
- Reinforcement of social
stratification processes;
- Mapping on to elite practices;
- Assumption that macro
(neoliberal) and micro level
aspirations will overlap (Naidoo, 2006;
Walkerdine, 2003)?

A Political Economy of Participation in Higher Education

Lack of data on:

- Higher education and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
- Private higher education and widening participation;
- How different structures of inequality intersect *e.g.* gender and socio-economic background;
- Motivations, subjectivities, educational trajectories and experiences of people from socially disadvantaged groups in low-income countries.
- Socio-cultural theory in context of African higher education.
- Democratising and building research capacity in low-income countries.

Geographies of Knowledge



- **Who has capacities to aspire?** (Appudurai, 2004)
- **Uneven distribution of capacity and capital is a symptom and measure of poverty.**
- **Higher education is dominated by messaging systems of the North.**
- **Santos (1995) argues that we need to start listening to the South, and need a sociology of absences (1999).**

Mass Higher Education?



Student enrolment worldwide:

- ✓ **13 million in 1960**
- ✓ **82 million in 1995**
- ✓ **137.8 million in 2005**

(UNESCO, 1998; UNESCO, 2007).

African Participation Rates in Higher Education



- 24% globally
- 5% in Sub-Saharan Africa
- 5% in Ghana
- 1% in Tanzania

(UNESCO, 2007)

Participating Women



- 1999 - 2005 Participation rates for women have increased in all regions of the world.
- Gender Parity Index (GPI) for higher education is 1.05.
- Unevenly distributed across regions and disciplines.
- Which women, which HEIs and which academic disciplines in a globalised knowledge economy?

Regional Variation



In 2005 there were more women in HE than men in:

- ✓ Northern America
- ✓ Western Europe
- ✓ Central and Eastern Europe
- ✓ Latin America
- ✓ Caribbean
- ✓ Central Asia

There were more men than women in HE in:

- ✓ East Asia
- ✓ Pacific
- ✓ South and West Asia
- ✓ Sub-Saharan Africa

What Impedes African Women's Participation?

- The morphology of women's bodies.
- Biological development assumes social dimensions (Butler, 2006).
- Cultural prescriptions of age-appropriate participation.
- Women perceived as a culturally conditioned social category.
- Gendered divisions of labour.
- Sons as agents of genealogical sustenance.
- Transformative potential of HE v resistance to detraditionalisation.
- Poverty.



Risk



- **Conforming to traditional female roles is a risk to educational opportunities.**
- **Non-conforming allows women to access education, but places them at risk socially.**

Intersectionality

- Multiple markers of identity that inter-relate;
- International HE policy e.g. UNESCO (1998), prioritise one structure at a time;
- In UK HE policy, gender is a disqualified discourse - emphasis on socio-economic status;
- Gender gains, in the form of affirmative action and access programmes, when scrutinised can often mask socio-economic privilege (Morley *et al.*, 2006);
- While policy interventions fracture identity, it is easy to demonstrate quantitative success in each category.

Gender and Socio-economic Status



- When gender is intersected with socio-economic status, participation rates of poorer women are extremely low in both African countries in this study.

Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing Equity Scorecards



Globalising the Research Imagination?

- ‘Don’t study the poor and powerless, because everything you say about them will be used against them’ (Nader, 1972: 295).
- Appudurai’s (2004) call for us to de-parochialise research.

Methodology



- **Quantitative methods:**
 - ✓ **International, national and institutional statistics**
 - ✓ **Developing Equity Scorecards**
- **Qualitative methods:**
 - ✓ **Analysis of policy documents**
 - ✓ **200 life history interviews with students**
 - ✓ **200 interviews with academic staff and policymakers**

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Quantifying Inequalities

What is an Equity Scorecard?

- **Examines how diversity amongst students is translated into equity in educational outcomes** (Bensimon and Polkinghorne, 2003)
- **Measures both advantage and disadvantage simultaneously.**

What We Are Measuring



- **Sociological variables: gender, age, socio-economic status**

In Relation to:

- **Educational Outcomes: access, retention and achievement.**

In Relation to:

- **4 Programmes of Study in each HEI e.g. medicine, management, law, education**
- **2 public and 2 private HEIs.**

Equity Scorecard 1: Participation on 4 Programmes at a Public University in Ghana by Gender, and SES (2006-7)

Programme	% female	% deprived school	% female who attended a deprived school
B Sc Physical Science	15.3	2.2	0.6
B Commerce	28.9	3.3	1.0
B Education (Primary)	41.4	4.6	1.2
B Management Studies	42.0	2.8	1.4

Data source: Project dataset: Enrolment on 4 programmes at Univ U, 2006-7

'Deprived schools' make up 31.5% of *all* schools in Ghana

Equity Scorecard 2: Overview of Access to 4 Programmes at a Private University in Tanzania by Gender, SES and Age (2007-8)

Programme	% female	% deprived school	% 30+	% female & 30+	% female & deprived school	% female, deprived school, & 30+
B Ed Maths	13.02	12.56	68.84	4.65	2.4	0.0
Medicine	25.00	6.03	12.26	1.89	0.0	0.0
B Business Admin	42.06	10.28	18.87	7.48	3.74	0.0
Law	42.81	13.42	9.90	3.51	2.56	0.32

Data source: Project dataset: Enrolment on year 1, 2007-8, University T

Date of Scorecard: 14 May 2008

Equity Scorecard 3: Access to 4 Programmes for Women and Men from Different Backgrounds at a Private University in Tanzania

Programme	All students on programme					
	% F, aged 30+, All schls	%M, aged 30+ All schls	% F Dep schl All ages	%M Dep schl All ages	%F Dep schl Aged 30+	%M Dep Schol Aged 30+
B Ed Maths	4.65	64.19	2.40	11.16	0.0	5.58
Medicine	1.89	10.28	0.0	6.03	0.0	0.87
B Business Admin	7.48	11.32	3.74	6.54	0.0	2.80
LLB Law	3.51	9.90	2.56	7.35	0.32	1.92

Source: Enrolments on Year 1, 2007/8

Date of Scorecard: 14 May 2008

Equity Scorecard 4: Measuring Intersection Through Indices. Access to 4 Programmes at a Private University in Tanzania, 2007-8

Programme	Gender Index for Deprived School	Gender Index for Mature Students
B Ed Maths	0.85	0.52
Medicine	0.0	0.62
B Business Admin	0.86	0.95
Law	0.60	0.61

Gender Equity Index: Per cent F in group pop / percent F on programme

Source: Project dataset: Enrolment on year 1, 2007-8, University T

Date of Scorecard: 14 May 2008

If all women had the same opportunity for access, whatever their SES or age, the index would be 1.0



Illuminating the Statistics

Life History Interviews with Students



Soliciting data on:

- ✓ enablers & barriers to participation;
- ✓ social and learner identities;
- ✓ how identities might influence educational choices;
- ✓ linkages between auto/biographical, cultural, discursive, emotional and material factors;
- ✓ how gender, socio-economic status and age shapes resources, capital and educational aspirations.

Interviews with Staff and Policymakers



- **Soliciting data on:**
 - ✓ **WP policy initiatives and implementation;**
 - ✓ **Organisational strategies, challenges, monitoring;**
 - ✓ **Barriers, enablers for access, recruitment and retention;**
 - ✓ **MDGs.**



Some Life History Interview Findings to Date



Gender: Heteronormativity and Hegemonic Disciplines

Access: Gender

- **Hegemonic codes of femininity and masculinity continue to influence subject choice (Lapping, 2005);**
- **Gender constructions lead to gender appropriate disciplines;**
- **Dominance of STEM agenda/ liberal feminist interventions;**
- **Compulsory heterosexuality/inevitability of marriage and motherhood;**
- **Higher education perceived as disrupting hegemonic age-related marriage and motherhood norms;**
- **The higher education woman as stigmatised or celebrated 'other';**
- **Education of girls as a poor investment.**
- **More women in private than public HE in both countries.**

Women in Antagonistic Relationship with STEM Subjects

- **Conflict between codes regulating performance of femininity and codes regulating successful STEM academic performance.**
- **Liminality between female social identity and the required male academic and professional identity.**
- **Success constructed as crossing a gendered threshold to become more like a man, rather than removing the gendered code from the activity.**

Embodied Disciplines

- **Certain body types are associated or disassociated with STEM disciplines:**

Normally, when people see me, they ask me what course am I doing I say optometry then everybody laughs- like six years in this school! And moreover I'm a girl and I'm doing this course. They are surprised. They are very surprised because I'm also not that big. I'm smallish in nature and they are very surprised ... Because normally females read art courses and even in our class we are only four girls and the rest are males (Ghanaian female student).

The Hard/Soft Disciplinary Binary Reinforces Gendered Divisions

- Traditional view that STEM subjects require physical and cognitive strength (Morley et al, 2006).
- Cultural script if a subject is 'hard' it is unsuitable for women (see Larry Summers' comments).

Interviewer: And what, what has it been like to be a female student on Engineering, in general terms, because Engineering is well known to be a male dominated area?

Interviewee: Yaa, they are just claiming that the subjects in that field in fact it is difficult, so people have to fight. Maybe many females they don't want to work hard... to disturb their heads, maybe that is the reason for me to find that there few numbers of females in Engineering (Tanzanian female student).

Difference or Sameness?

It was the moment when I was working with the carpentry workshop. When we started working on the filling locks... Things were very tough, but it was too hard to hold the jerk plane which we use to make the plain surface for the wood. It was too difficult. But when I came to finish that one, that is where it gave me the courage that I can do men's work (Tanzanian female student).

Women Carrying the Burden of Difference

I'm studying mathematics and in our level I'm the only woman, so sometimes they do tease me, they call me something, but I take them to be a joke or something ... sometimes maybe I feel bad (Ghanaian female student).

Affirmative Action as Reverse Discrimination

Last semester, we were doing this abstract algebra. Our lecturer was like he was so happy about the ladies that he always made sure we understood everything that he teaches. So being a lady has favoured me (Ghanaian female student).

Reluctance to Educate Girls

For sure my sisters are very bright but the issue is school fees, always school fees was a problem... We have an extended family, so the children of my uncles, aunties they also live with us at home....the girls didn't get {Education} actually....it is unfair and so disappointing... They were actually disappointed but they were forced to accept it because there was no way out (Male Tanzanian Student).

The Inevitability of Marriage

Yes, an advice always to young girls, through my experience I advise them at this time when they finish their A-levels they shouldn't get married first, finish your education, complete your education then get married (Tanzanian, mature female student).



Private Higher Education: Complex Material and Discursive Space

Opportunity of Exploitation?

- **Decoupling of HE from direct state control.**
- **Subjecting HE to market forces/ market colonialism.**
- **Redefining HE as a competitive private good.**
- **Incapacity of fiscal states to finance education contributes to private sector growth in low-income countries.**
- **New forms of economic and political domination unleashed on developing countries.**

New Opportunity Structures or Diversion?

- **In Ghana, women comprise:**
 - ✓ **32% of the overall undergraduate population**
 - ✓ **41% of the students in private higher education.**
- **In Tanzania, women comprise:**
 - ✓ **30% of the overall undergraduate population**
 - ✓ **36 % of students in private higher education.**

Faute de Mieux

- ***I did not have any information about this university. I only came to know about it after applying to University of Dar es Salaam and could not get a vacancy (Female Tanzanian student).***
- ***Actually, I wanted to go University of Ghana, Legon. .. my grade wasn't good so ... I came here (Ghanaian female student).***

Disrupting Links Between Past Achievements and Future Development?

I had a colleague here before I came here and she told me about the good parts of the school. The curriculum that they offer and their way of admitting students, such that they do not discriminate or disregard you through your previous grades. They give you a stepping-stone for you to prove yourself that you are really capable of making it in the university (Ghanaian female student).

Poor Quality Diploma Mills?

- *We wrote the paper I think last February ok, and they brought the result only in May ... (Ghanaian female student).*
- *We have lack of lecturers because they are just trying to find lecturers from other institutions. Maybe this of course it's the serious case we can stay even for four weeks without having a lecturer (Tanzanian male student).*
- *The difficulty I encountered if the lecture starts at 4:30 pm and you don't come at 4:30 pm, you won't get a place to sit. It means that the place could not accommodate all of us (Ghanaian male student).*
- *The library is not that big enough to take the capacity of the students we have. So most of the time we have to hang around or stay outside the library...even in the rainy season... (Tanzanian male student).*
- *So we don't have books in our library here. For me this is one of the most difficult things because you can't just rely on handouts from lecturers. You need to read good books and enrich your knowledge (Ghanaian male student).*
- *Here the teachers are not very cooperative with the students, that is another problem (Tanzanian female student).*

Corporatisation and Commercialisation

- *We cannot see our copies of exam scripts unless we pay (Ghanaian female student).*
- *I always say that ... we don't have residence and we don't participate in any other activities but the fees are still high (Tanzanian male student).*

Equity Implications of Private HE

- The development of new marketised provision paradoxically offers new opportunity structures for new constituencies of students.
- Core and periphery HE.
- Socially disadvantaged groups could be getting diverted/ re-routed into peripheral higher education.
- Reinforces stratification of the sector, social differentiation and reserves the higher-status universities for the elite (David, 2007).
- ‘Buying an education becomes a substitute for getting an education’ (Kenway *et al.*, 1993: 116).

Summary

- Widening Participation promoted at macro and meso levels;
- New constituencies of students are entering traditional power relations and practices in public higher education, or poorer quality provision in private higher education;
- Socio-economic and gender privilege are coded as academic merit.
- Opportunity structures are constrained by cultural constructions of gender differences and age appropriate, heteronormative lifestyles.
- The higher educated woman is in antagonistic relationship to other discursive practices – especially in poorer communities.
- When gender is deconstructed and intersected with socio-economic status, poor women disappear.
- Quantitative targets to let more women into higher education can fail, or be meaningless while femaleness continues to be socially constructed as second class citizenship.
- Are WP initiatives exacerbating social differences rather than closing opportunity gaps, contributing to elite formation or redistribution of educational opportunities?
- Questions remain as to whether enhancing participation translates into poverty reduction and gains for wider civil society.

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