Restore, Reform but do not Transform: The Gender Politics of Higher Education in Africa

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Abstract

This paper uses gender analysis to reflect on the emergence and development of higher education in Africa. The available statistical picture indicates that despite the absence of formal exclusions, women's entry into higher educational institutions—as students and as employees—has remained slow and uneven, suggesting the need to look beyond the numbers. The overall pattern of exclusion and marginalization is true for both administrative and academic tracks but is at its most extreme for senior academic and research positions. The persistence of extreme gender inequality is most easily and often attributed to external social and familial factors. Here, however, it is argued that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that, despite institutional and managerial claims of administrative neutrality, the institutional and intellectual cultures of African institutions are, in fact, permeated with sexual and gender dynamics.

Résumé

Ce papier utilise l'analyse sur le genre pour montrer l'urgence du développement de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique. Les statistiques existantes montrent que malgré l'absence d'exclusions formelles, l'insertion de la femme dans les institutions de l'enseignement supérieur—comme étudiants ou comme employés—est encore lente et inégale, d'où l'a nécessité de voir au-delà des chiffres. Toute forme d'exclusion et de marginalisation existe dans l'administration et dans le cursus universitaire mais c'est pire à un niveau supérieur universitaires et en position de chercheurs. Cette persistance d'une extrême inégalité du genre est pour la plupart du temps facilement et souvent attribuée aux facteurs socio familiaux externes. Il est cependant démontré ici, qu'il y a suffisamment de preuve pour dire que malgré les demandes institutionnelles et directoriales pour la neutralité dans l'administration, la culture institutionnelle et intellectuelle des institutions africaines est en fait, filtrer à travers une dynamique sexuelle et du genre.

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Introduction

Why is African tertiary education attracting new attention within the current global scenario, and what are the gender implications of this new attention? Observers often point to the rapid economic and technological developments that are seen as heralding the arrival of 'the knowledge society'. Those concerned with development note that poorer nations and other historically marginalised groups of people—most obviously Africa and her people—are unlikely to benefit from globalization, unless something is done to redress the parlous state of the higher education sector. Yet the longstanding global patterns of division and inequality look set to persist within a sector that has been severely depleted by contemporary macro-economic policies of reform and structural adjustment.

In previously colonised contexts, public universities have always been highly regarded as key vehicles for the pursuit of all of the national and continental development aspirations intrinsic to political, economic, and intellectual decolonization. In terms of the 'core business', this meant the production of both knowledge and people equipped with the intellectual capacities needed to pursue national and regional advancement. African governments have not formally excluded women from participation in this project, as the colonialists did. They have tended to treat the attainment of nation-statehood as a collective restoration of conventional masculinity, however, which has precluded full and equal participation of women in the national project. Access to education, commonly regarded as a major route to upward mobility and status, has remained deeply inequitable.

It needs to be said that, despite the broader patterns of gender inequality persisting in the tertiary sector, public higher education also remains the main route to career advancement for women in Africa. Their constrained access, therefore, poses a constraint to the pursuit of more equitable and just modes of political, economic, and social development. Moreover, it is broadly accepted that rectifying gender injustice requires a degree of intellectual specialization, as can be indexed by the proliferation of gender studies within African universities. The interconnections between gender and all other social divisions are now increasingly understood to require competent analysis and theorisation, as well as carefully designed practical and policy interventions, and these constitute the intellectual focus of most African gender studies units (Boswell, 2003).

From independence onward, the developmental significance of African universities ensured their initial establishment and proliferation and generated an impressive increase in the availability of higher education (HE) in most of the African continent (Ajayi et al., 1996; Sawyerr, 2002). Since the develop-

ment crisis of the 1980s set in, however, Africa's capacity to supply HE has been severely diminished, and the availability of resources for this expanding sector has been curtailed. The World Bank was a key player among the architects of the structural adjustment programmes that contributed to the qualitative deterioration of African Universities during the 1980s, against widespread campus resistance and expressions of concern from the African intelligentsia. African governments found themselves caught between the directives of international financial institutions and popular demands but increasingly indebted to the former, and they demanded reductions in public expenditure.

At the same time, university communities grew increasingly critical of undemocratic and corrupt regimes throughout the 'lost decade' of the 1980s, and these criticisms did little to endear them to the regimes of the day. Overall, academics found themselves increasingly unable to sustain themselves professionally and either emigrated or turned to other pursuits and survival strategies. As observers have consistently pointed out over the years, the resulting externalisation and depletion of African intellectual capacity has had major implications for the capacity of universities to generate the much needed cadres of skilled professionals, with long term implications for regional development, as well as regional integrity and autonomy. The lack of intellectual capacity across Africa has now become a key feature of the development crisis and its perpetuation.

The arrival of the 21st century has seen a change of heart even within the powerful international financial institutions that only a decade or so ago considered HE a luxury African could ill afford. The World Bank recently acknowledged that tertiary education:

> …is a critical pillar of human development worldwide. In today's life-long learning framework, tertiary education provides not only the high level skills necessary for every labor market, but also the training essential for teachers, doctors, nurses, civil servants, engineers, humanists, entrepreneurs, scientists, social scientists, and myriad personnel. It is these trained individuals who develop the capacity and analytical skills that drive local economies, support civil society, teach children, lead effective governments, and make important decisions which affect entire societies.
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> Ramphele, 2002, p. x

The fact that World Bank now acknowledges something that Africans have always understood about the value of higher education signals the targeting of African universities as key sites for a new round of intervention in the name of globalization. While the meaning of globalization continues to be deeply contested, much as development has always been, there is little doubt that the

interventions of particular agencies are designed to advance their particular agendas. While there are many stakeholders involved in higher education (international financial agencies, aid agencies, U.S. Foundations, African governments, and African regional organizations and educational associations, to name only the most visible), it would seem self-evident that the World Bank's agenda for African higher education must surely owe more to the "Washington consensus" of the day, than to the visions and aspirations of millions of disenfranchised and disempowered Africans.

Whatever the agenda, it is a fundamental fact that Africa continues to suffer from gross under-provision of higher education in comparison to higher education in developing countries, not to mention in developed nations such as Japan, North America and Western Europe.[2] This disparity exists despite the public commitment which saw the gross rate of enrollment (GRE) across most of Africa grow sharply at independence, as more public universities were established in almost all countries. Sawyerr (2000) cites rough estimates that show a growth in GRE from an estimated 181,000 in 1975, to over 600,000 in 1980. After a plateau during the 1980s, gross enrollment more than doubled once again, reaching 1.75 million by 1995. Despite this spectacular increase both in the number of institutions and in the number of students enrolled in them, the African continent still has the lowest regional GRE in the world. These insufficient levels of educational provision look even worse when examined in conjunction with the fact that Africa also suffers from dire shortages of locally grounded development capacity—or person-power—in almost all sectors. Furthermore, the quality of the education being provided has been compromised by the shrinking availability of public resources. In effect, the continent faces the emergence of a 'knowledge society' severely short of highly-trained personnel and with the key institutions that might produce this personnel in a perilous condition.

The nature of the intellectual and institutional capacity required to rise to the challenges of Africa's ongoing problems is a far more controversial issue; one that cannot be fully explored here. The ongoing debates on the continent clearly reflect a consensual understanding of HE institutions' continuing to be key sites for the production of intellectual capacity that is both socially responsible and relevant to regional development agendas. The agenda of gender equality should also be included within this understanding of the requisite capacities. It is in the contemporary development context that higher education is such an important site for the production of both the personnel and the knowledge required to pursue gender equality in African countries.

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2   Japan with the same population as Nigeria has almost as many universities as the entire African continent.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are, by and large, obligated to honor the existing national, regional, and international policy commitments to gender equality that their governments have signed. Local commitments to gender equity require first that nations take steps to ensure that they are not themselves reproducing the problem of gender inequality and injustice within their own institutional systems, policies, and procedures. Secondly, higher education institutions are expected to produce gender-competent graduates, who are able to understand and uphold constitutional and international commitments in their various spheres of work. Thirdly, universities in particular—as key sites for research and knowledge production—are might be expected to generate equitable knowledge. Such knowledge equity requires research and scholarship that does not passively reproduce the gender biases of malestream epistemologies, methodologies, and disciplinary rubrics. Today, it is clear that the institutional, pedagogical, and epistemological demands of gender equality require much deeper levels of specialization than might initially have been anticipated. They require gender-competent theory, research, and analysis that are fully cognizant of African realities, extend across the disciplines, and offer resources for addressing the challenge of supporting the pursuit of equitable development, from the micro-politics of individual identities to the macro-politics of global economic policies and strategic interests.

The above section serves to outline the historical antecedents of Africa's universities from a gender perspective. The section that follows presents a review of the statistical picture and the evidence that is available for constructing a gender profile of African public universities. The third part examines the institutional cultures of public universities and how these cultures present their own challenges to the attainment of gender equality in African universities.

Inequitable Legacies

Prior to the establishment of modern universities, adult learning took place in three main kinds of institutions, all of which were deeply patriarchal. The first century Islamic academies of Karawyyn in Fez and Al Ahzar in Cairo, the 13th century Timbuktu, and other pre-colonial centres of advanced learning, were all-male Islamic establishments, which excluded women. Secondly, there were 'indigenous' or 'traditional' institutions of social and cultural reproduction, including age groups associations, patrilineage and matrilineage associations, initiation schools, religious schools. These were not only gender segregated, but were also explicitly concerned with the reproduction of traditional norms for masculinity and femininity. Thirdly, colonial colleges were established in the countries that were to become Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana, Malawi, Uganda and South Africa. These colleges were also largely male preserves, dedicated

to the production of good colonial subjects intended to inherit the exclusively masculine mantle of colonial leadership and further the existing imperial interests dominating the African political and economic landscapes.

None of these educational models can be described solely as antecedents of African universities, however, because elements of them still exist, within and alongside today's African universities. For example, elements of the earlier Islamic higher educational traditions continue in contemporary Islamic universities (e.g., Al Azhar in Cairo, Usman 'Dan Fodio in Sokoto). In the same vein, Africa's educated youth has grown increasingly familiar with contemporary sexual norms and cultures, however informally, during their formative years spent on the campuses, even while traditional rites of passage are still observed in many places. The 'African' universities established after independence did not mark a radical departure from the colonial modes of organizational and intellectual life already prevailing in the West.

When Edward Blyden and Leo Africanus Horton called for the establishment of *African* universities on the eve of the twentieth century, they were fully aware that the production of a committed and independently minded African intelligentsia would prove crucial to the continents' emergence from centuries of slavery and colonial exploitation. From a gender perspective, it is worth noting that it is unlikely that Blyden and Horton envisaged these new African universities as places that would be equally accessible to women. At the time, the Western academies that offered models to African nationalists were themselves proving resistant to the inclusion of women, as the testimonies of many eminent European women thinkers confirms.[3] Colonial primary and secondary schooling was already heavily gendered, with women's capacities being channelled almost exclusively into imported bourgeois notions of femininity centred on domesticity and wifehood. A major legacy of the colonial period was that it left very few women either qualified or socially equipped to enter either the formal economy or the universities, which were as masculine in their composition as they were masculinising in their educational philosophy. At that time, the dominant discourse centred around the production of *man*power, first for colonial service, and then for the independent African states.

For Africans, the idea of an African university has long been imbued with a multiplicity of aspirations that can be grouped under the shifting rubrics of Pan-Africanism, nationalism, and developmentalism. In other words, the currency of the university in Africa was directly linked to aspirations of nationalism and nation-statehood. Universities the world over have always been public

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3   E.g., Virginia Woolf in England, Jessica Bernard in the USA. See also Dyhouse's (2001) paper on social mobility and HE in England.

or publicly oriented institutions, but this connection to the public is even more significant in Africa. African universities were established in direct response to enormous and growing popular demands that they have never been able to fully accommodate (Ajayi et al., 1996; Sawyerr, 2002; Manuh, 2002). Independent Africa's universities initially accommodated people from diverse class and ethnic backgrounds, offering men as well as women the opportunity to further their education beyond the mission schools, colonial colleges, and barracks of the colonial era.

African women have proved to be particularly strong supporters and consumers of African higher education. They, generally, faced a more restricted set of curriculum options than their male counterparts, as a result of past and present gender divisions of labor as well as the restrictive social roles ascribed to women. For example, very few women were employed in the colonial public service, and those who were often had to relinquish their jobs when they got married (Denzer, 1989). This changed with the generally expanding access to education brought about during the first decades of political independence. For those women who made it beyond secondary school, tertiary education offered a respectable route to professional employment, one that promised a somewhat broader set of options in a heavily male-dominated formal economy, which had only begun to open up to women after independence in most African countries. Women's conventional nurturing roles also meant that they bore substantial responsibility for the raising and schooling of successive generations, often supporting the educational advancement of their own spouses and extended kin networks.

It is in this light that the educational background of the women who emerged as leaders during the 1920s to1950s is informative. Constance Agatha Cummings-John (nee Horton) [4] attended the Annie Walsh Memorial School, the Methodist Girls' High School and then joined the Freetown Secondary School for Girls when it opened in 1926. She describes the goal of the latter thus:

> … its goal was to provide a good academic curriculum for young ladies as well as to teach them the things that the elite believed ladies should excel in, like sewing, embroidery, and music.
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> Cummings-John, 1995, p. 6.

To pursue her education beyond this level, however, it was necessary for Cummings-John to go abroad, first to Britain and then, in the 1930s and 40s, to

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4   Constance Agatha Cummings-John, a descendent of Africanus Horton, was the first African woman to be elected as a councilor in Freetown City Council in November 1938. This was an event that signalled the entry of West African women into political life. In 1966, she took up office as mayor of Freetown, becoming the first woman to govern a modern capital city on the African continent.

the U.S., where she studied education, colonialism, and home economics at Cornell. She returned home to establish the Eleanor Roosevelt Preparatory School for Girls in Freetown in 1952 and to pursue a political career (Cummings-John, 1995).

Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and Margaret Ekpo in Nigeria, Mabel Dove Danquah in Ghana, and others of their caliber had career trajectories that were similar to that of Constance Cummings-John, in which socially respectable careers as teachers and educators preceded their political involvement in nationalist struggles. For them, as for their male contemporaries, education was not only a pre-requisite for pursing personal liberation but was also an indispensable facet of national and regional liberation. Attending local universities was not an option for any of the first generation of leaders, male or female, and very few women were able to study abroad.

The history of Uganda's premier public institution is also illustrative. Makerere College only admitted its first women students in 1945 after a long struggle. This 'experiment' was closely monitored and regulated, and the number of women enrolled fluctuated between 1 and 13 in the years leading up to independence. In 1968, there were still only 328 women.[5] Elsewhere, the National University in the Congo was established in 1954, and, although women were not formally excluded, no women were admitted until 1962; and as late as 1971, women made up only 6.75% of the enrollment at the National University of Côte d'Ivoire (Ajayi et al, 1996, p. 184).

How substantively did women's highly inequitable and constrained access to higher education change with political independence? On the face of it, the expansion of provision of higher education created an historic opportunity to overcome the divisive legacies that had characterised colonialism, including those of Victorian patriarchy. The majority of Africa's universities were established *after* independence, essentially as modernising institutions:[6]

> Widespread university education is essentially a post-colonial phenomenon… only 18 out of the 48 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa had universities or colleges before 1960. With the approach of political independence or immediately thereafter, many African countries regarded the establishment of local universities as a major post of the post-colonial national development project. The new universities were to help

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5   Nearly thirty years after independence, the total number of women enrolled at Makerere was still only 610 in 1990, and even this number is attributed to the highly controversial affirmative strategy adopted in that year (Kwesiga 2002, p. 207).

6   South Africa is the only country in which an HE system was explicitly designed to maintain mass disenfranchisement, in keeping with the apartheid agenda.

the new nations build up their capacity to manage and develop their
resources, alleviate the poverty of the majority of their people, and close
the gap between them and the developed world.

Sawyerr, 2002, p. 2

Present estimates place the number of universities at 316, and this figure would
be much higher if polytechnics, technical and vocational colleges, and other ter-
tiary institutions were to be considered. The figures on university expansion are
even more impressive when placed in the context of Africa's extremely difficult
political and economic circumstances, notably in those countries that have suf-
fered the effects of war and conflict, or prolonged military dictatorship.

The fact that financial support for HE has been constrained by increasingly
stringent loan conditionalities since the 1980s—the 'lost decade' in which struc-
tural adjustment largely over-rode African aspirations with regard to develop-
ment—only underlines Africa's almost relentless commitment to the provision
and pursuit of higher education. The deteriorated circumstances of African
HEIs in the present global context have given renewed credence to old ques-
tions about the mission and vision of African HEIs. Meanwhile, even the sig-
nificantly expanded provision that exists today falls far short of demand, has
remained male-dominated, and looks set to become more rather than less ex-
clusive, as I shall argue below.

The Numerical Profile: Enrollment, Throughput, and Employment

Today, over three decades after independence, one key source suggests that
only 3% of Africa's professoriate are women and that women make up only
25% of those enrolled in African universities (Ajayi et al., 1996).[7] Further-
more, the gender profile suggests that the majority of the women who work in
African universities are not academics and researchers, but rather the provid-
ers of secretarial, cleaning, catering, student welfare, and other administrative
and support services. The detailed statistical picture is likely to be far more
complicated and diverse than these global figures indicate. Proper analysis is
hampered by the fact that the available statistical picture for Africa's tertiary
institutions is largely incomplete.

Gender and Enrollment in Public Universities

Data disaggregated by gender is hard to come by. Kwesiga's 2002 book, per-
haps the most substantive source available on women's access to higher edu-
cation in Africa to date, does not present any overall data that might assist in
constructing an empirical gender profile of African universities, or the specific

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7   Excluding North-of the-Saharan countries and South Africa.

situation with regard to enrollment. The gender-disaggregated gross enrollment data presented below (Table) has been extracted from a recently compiled publication (Teferra & Altbach, 2003) and should be interpreted with great caution, because the diverse sources involved mean that it is not possible to draw meaningful comparisons across countries.

Table: Women's Enrollment in African Universities

Country	Source and Date of Data	% Women enrolled
Angola	Unspecified	40
CAR*	2000–2001	9
Congo	Mbemba (2003)	24
Egypt	Supreme Council of Universities (SCU) (1999)	46
Ethiopia	EMIS—MOE: Education Statistics (1999)	15.6
Ghana	Manuh (2002)—University of Ghana	35
Kenya	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Statistics Section (2000)	30
Libya	Secretariat of Education and Scientific Research (2000)	51
Madagascar	UNESCO (2000)	46
Malawi	Unspecified	25
Mali	Global Education Database, UNESCO, USAID (1999)	19
Morocco	Unspecified (1998)	43
Nigeria	Unspecified	35
Senegal	Unspecified (1995)	47
Sierra Leone	Ministry of Education (2000)	18.7
Swaziland	VC's report to Congregation (2001)	51.9
Uganda	Academic Registrars Office Makarere (2000)	34
Zambia	UNESCO Statistical Year book (1999)	33
Average	N = 18 countries	33.5

* Central African Republic

Range = 9% (CAR)–51% (Swaziland)

Highest: Over 50%: Swaziland, Libya (51%, 51.9%)
            40–50%: Angola, Egypt, Madagascar, Senegal, Morocco
            30–40%: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia
            20–30%: Congo, Malawi
            10–20%: Ethiopia, Mali, Sierra Leone

Lowest: 0–10%: CAR

This evidence is hard to interpret without further research, but it does indicate a very wide range in women's enrollment in African public universities. Some of the poorest and least equitable nations have female enrollment rates that compare favorably with those of the richest and apparently most equitable countries in the affluent West. African countries displaying relatively high women's enrollment rates (above 40%) appear to have little else in common, as they include nations as different from one another as Angola, Egypt, Madagascar, Libya, Senegal, Swaziland, and Morocco.

Nonetheless, it is clear that women's enrollment remains far short of equity in the majority of African public universities.[8] Analysts are constrained by the dearth of reliable and comparable data and tend to focus their attention on disparities in primary and secondary enrollment rates rather than on tertiary education (e.g., Assie-Lumumba, 1993; Eholie, 1993; Namuddu, 1995). Ajayi et al. (1996) point to the incremental gains that are recorded at primary and secondary levels, erroneously predicting that parity would be attained by the year 2000. As a result, this research offers little to enhance our understanding of women's experiences within 'the African experience' that is the subject of their book, preferring to attribute the gender differentials to the higher 'drop-out' rate of women. There is little statistical evidence to support the assumption that women, once in, are more prone to 'drop-out'. Furthermore, the term places the entire responsibility for their departure on those who 'drop out', rather than on the HEIs. It implies that the reasons for leaving are to be found wholly in the personal lives of women, rather than in the institutions themselves, so eliding the possibility that there might be gender dynamics within tertiary institutions that operate to create an environment that may, in fact, 'push-out' women students.

Before going into the internal dynamics of HEIs, however, it is worth considering whether the tertiary gender deficit does, in fact, arise because the pool of women with sufficient secondary qualifications is still too small to allow for equity at the tertiary level, as so much of the research seems to assume. Given the massive overall shortfall of HE provision, it seems quite unlikely. It is, presumably, in response to this disparity that the new University for Development Studies in Ghana proposes to eliminate the gender gap simply by admitting all the women who meet the minimum entrance requirements (Sawyerr, 2002, p. 18). This new admissions practice would mark a radical departure from the current norms, and it would offer a unique opportunity to explore

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8 The exceptions deserve special attention, given that the extraneous reasons and conditions for high female enrollment are far from clear, and the impact of numerical gender parity on the institutional culture has not been documented either.

how true equality of access would contribute to gender equality in tertiary education.[9]

In the meantime, the fact remains that there are a great many qualified women (as well as men) who never gain entry to tertiary education. This strongly suggests that gender disparity might be partly sustained at the gateways of public universities, through the apparently neutral admissions systems that determine who among those who qualify actually are admitted. As long as university entrance procedures are not designed to ameliorate the deficits that accrue at the secondary level, they will inevitably reproduce them. Even if evidence of greater drop-out existed, technically, it would be perfectly feasible to design an affirmative strategy that would see enough women admitted to mitigate the effects of 'drop-out' and ensure equitable graduation rates.

In the few instances where affirmative action strategies have actually been designed and implemented they seem to have produced results. When the National Resistance Movement (NRM) Government assumed the reigns of government, Makerere University introduced an affirmative action strategy, which allocated a 1.5 points bonus to all eligible women who apply for admission to the public institution. Kwesiga (2002, p. 98) shows that this admission innovation increased women's enrollment from 20% to 33%. In contrast, women's enrollment rates have remained low in teacher training facilities and even more so in technical colleges, where a similar strategy has not been deployed. Kwesiga argues that without the 1.5 rule, women's enrollment would still be in the hundreds, not in the thousands.

Certainly women's enrollment jumped significantly when the policy was implemented in 1990, but in the absence of proper research to evaluate the strategy, it is not possible to establish how far the marked increase in female enrollment since 1990 is due exclusively to the 1.5 rule, as opposed to any of the other substantial changes that have swept Ugandan society since the NRM came to power. These changes have included affirmative action in the political sphere, which has heightened mobilization of women in Ugandan civil society (Tripp, 2000). More importantly, Makerere University has undergone major changes at all levels as a result of the reform process. Cautionary observers have drawn attention to the inadequate housing provisions for women students and the 'security' issues around the introduction of evening classes to accommodate the large numbers of private students being admitted to cover costs under the new financial arrangements. Among these security issues is the reported increase in incidences of gender-based violence (Bennett, 2002; Sawyerr, 2002, p. 48). Nonetheless, the immediate, measurable positive effects of affir-

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9   This is a private institution.

mative strategies on both enrollment and graduation rates for women at Makerere University are highly suggestive.[10]

Another angle on the enrollment question can be found in the preliminary evidence coming from the gender profiles of fee-paying private institutions, some of which are showing higher women's enrollment than public universities.[11] While the various factors creating this situation are yet to be explored, it does challenge—or at least complicate—the widely-held assumption that women's under-representation is partly or wholly an effect of women's economic disadvantage and their disproportionate representation among Africa's poor. The relatively high enrollment rates among women suggests that significant numbers of the women who are excluded from public universities will find ways of paying for tertiary education. The quality and kind of training offered by private institutions is clearly different from what might be expected of a public university, however, given that most are religious or profit-making corporate concerns, which are correspondingly limited in their course offerings.

Regardless, enrolling women is only the first hurdle in a much longer process toward gender equity, and it may well be where the greatest gains have been made, simply because access has been the main focus of advocacy efforts to date. But what do women achieve once they get into the university? What proportion of those who enter come out with degrees, or continue into postgraduate studies or academic careers?

Throughput data, which could present the statistical profile from entry to graduation, is even harder to come by than enrollment data. A comparison between enrollment rates and graduation rates in the two countries for which data was available shows that for Egypt, the enrollment rate of 46% is accompanied by a graduation rate of 47%. In Ethiopia, a women's enrollment rate of 15.64% is accompanied by a graduation rate of 14.1%. These two cases suggest a high throughput rate and offer no evidence of women having a significantly higher 'drop out' rate than their male counterparts.

Once women have found their way into the system, then, gender differentiation manifests qualitatively, not least in terms of the gender distinctions within and across the various courses of study. There is great variation between coun-

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10 An example worth further study is that of Libya, where women's enrollment has more than doubled, rising from 21% in the 1980 to 51% in 1999. Exactly how this was achieved is not indicated in my source (Teferra & Altbach, 2003).

11 The Sawyerr, 2002 data on selected institutions in countries suggests that some of the burgeoning private institutions may be showing higher female enrollment than has typified public institutions in the same countries, although the extent to which this is true, and the reasons for it, are yet to be investigated.

tries, but, generally, women tend to be better represented in arts, humanities, and social sciences and less represented in certain branches of the natural sciences.

With regard to science, it is worth noting that African governments have generally promoted science over arts and humanities, not least because of the presumed link between science and modernization and the assumption that science will help Africa 'catch-up' with Western industrial capitalist contexts.[12] Ghana and Nigeria for example, have long maintained a policy commitment to the 60:40 ratio, favouring science over the arts and humanities. It is within this context that gender advocacy has tended to focus on women's under-representation in science, perhaps to the detriment of the general picture of under-representation. Women's under-enrollment in science courses is only one facet (or symptom) of an overall under-representation in universities and their concentration in low status fields of study. The general under-representation of women in the social sciences, commerce, and law, as well as in the arts and humanities, also persists in many African nations.[13] The gender-balance in science classes may be significant, but the implications of this need to be revisited in contexts where laboratories have long ceased to function as a result of financial constraints, and where most women still have severely constrained access to higher education of any description. The emergence of more African women equipped to excel as writers, artists, and social theorists would also be a welcome development.

It is also worth noting that women are very well-represented in at least one major arena of science—the health sciences. This does not eliminate a gender gap, however, because, even within medicine, most women are more likely to be studying nursing, while the men prepare to become doctors, surgeons, and research scientists. Very little corresponding attention has been directed towards getting more men into traditionally 'feminine' fields such as nursing, teaching or home economics.

Women's Employment in Public Universities

When it comes to employment within Africa's public universities, the statistical information is hard to come by and even harder to trust. It is clear from

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12 The masculinist nature of the modernization approach to development has been challenged by African women intellectuals since the early 1970s, and was a key reason behind the formation of the Association of African Women in Research and Development (AAWORD/AFARD) in 1977.

13 FAWE's research tends to highlight this aspect. A recent article notes that women form 21.5% of Kenya's university students, and 20% of science students, figures that appear to have provided the rationale for the on-going calls for better representation of girls in science, and indeed a new Ministerial initiative on girls in science (Women's e-news, Feb 18, 2003).

simple observation, however, that the gender gaps are generally wider than those in student enrollment and that there is an overall picture of gross under-representation of women in the employment profile of public universities.[14] This gender disparity is most severe at senior academic and administrative levels.

Whatever there is, suggests that many women are employed in junior administrative and support capacities, but there continues to be gross under-representation of women among senior administrative and academic staff, and this disparity becomes more pronounced as one moves up the ranks. The available figures for the proportion of women hired as academic staff range from as low as 6.1% for Ethiopia,[15] to as high as 19.7% in Uganda, with Nigeria (12.4%) and Sierra Leone (17.6%) falling in between (Teferra & Altbach, 2003). Very small overall numbers of women make it into senior administrative and or academic/managerial positions.

In sum, rank-related gender inequalities remain pronounced in African universities, where they have critical effects across the society. Furthermore despite the proliferation of institutions and the substantial increase in gross enrollment, since independence, the African continent is still faced with some of the world's worst HE capacity deficits. As such, African countries struggling to overcome the persistent reliance of African governments on the importation of high-cost 'technical experts' and consultants reported elsewhere, can ill afford to exclude the potential of women.[16]

The question that remains to be addressed is this: Are there gender dynamics in HEIs themselves, which reproduce gender inequality? Recent scholarship suggests strongly that universities do not necessarily present the gender neutral organizational climate that tends to be assumed in HE. There is evidence to suggest that they may, on the contrary, operate in ways that reproduce gender inequality and injustice, instead of challenging it.

Beyond the Numerical Profiles

The ongoing efforts directed at pursing gender equality in African higher education have been the subject of much recent discussion, both in the extensive panel discussions at the Women's World's Congress held in Kampala in July

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14   The picture is different for vocational and training schools in traditionally feminine areas such as nursing and teaching.

15   It is curious that this figure is presented alongside a very similar figure for the number of expatriates employed in the same university.

16   Mkandawire and Soludo (1996) use the figure of 100,000 technical experts being imported in a single year at a cost of 4 billion US dollars.

2002, and in several recent papers. While there are some who would suggest that African women academics have been complacent in this regard, this perspective is belied by the evidence and analysis presented in recent discussions of gender advocacy efforts (e.g., Bennett, 2002).

There is now a substantial literature on the 'gender gap'. Much of this goes further than documentation to advocate a series of affirmative action strategies designed to bridge the gap (e.g., Namuddu, 1995). It is also becoming clear, however, that gender cannot be effectively treated in isolation from other divisions. Bennett points to a complex postcolonial reality in which:

> While questions of male-female ratios tend to dominate broad-based research on gender and African higher education, … context-specific studies illuminate the "gender-gap" as a narrative shot through with the complications of rural/urban divides, competition for location within elites established by colonial and/or post-"democratic" pockets of huge privilege, and the demands of markets whose priorities respond to Northern economic trajectories and interests.
>
> Bennett, 2002, p. 39

In other words, even with regard to simple access, the situation is one that requires a sophisticated theorisation of gender that can rise to the challenge of deepening our understanding of the complex dynamics of postcolonial inequality and injustice, and the mutual interconnectedness of myriad social divisions. This social complexity plays out in all aspects of campus life, affecting students, academic staff, and administrative staff in diverse ways. It is this complexity that makes gender transformation a highly complicated matter.

Returning briefly to the analysis of affirmative action strategies, it is worth recalling that the 'add-women-in' approach is premised on the liberal assumption that institutions are basically egalitarian in their functioning and that the gender gap is a residual effect of past inequalities of various kinds. This line of reasoning leads to the conclusion that bringing more women in will automatically redress the balance and produce gender equality. Important considerations that remain, however, are whether this assumption holds true, and, if so, under what conditions.

There is now a substantial body of work on the workings of gender and sexuality in modern organizational life.[17] This research shows how ostensibly neutral formal procedures for selection, recruitment, and promotion often have gendered outcomes that are seldom acknowledged, because of the hegemonic assumption that institutions are essentially rational and egalitarian in their functioning. This body of work indicates that more substantial gains have been

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17 For example see Gherhardi, 1995 and Hearn, 1991.

made in the socially accountable public sector than in the profit-oriented private sector. The fact that contemporary models for higher education reform are currently being drawn from the financial and corporate models that privilege the abstract notion of 'the market' over social accountability should, therefore, give cause for concern (Bertleson, 1998).

The present situation is one in which women have been able to gain entry to African public universities in incrementally increasing numbers, only to meet a series of unforeseen and sometimes-traumatising challenges within the institutions themselves (see e.g., Sall, 2000; Bennett, 2002). It is to these that one must look in order to theorise on the persisting shortfall of women at higher levels of study and employment.

Students

The prevailing sexual culture in African HEIs has not been comprehensively researched or analyzed from a gender perspective. There is enough anecdotal and qualitative evidence, however, to suggest that HEIs are significant institutional sites for the production and reproduction of contemporary gender identities (masculinity and feminity) and sexual practices. For example, in the context of unquestioned heteronormativity, it is widely assumed that women will find their future spouses on the university campus. Marital 'success' is widely understood to be conditional on women not 'over-qualifying' themselves on the academic front, however, as high academic performance is commonly viewed as 'unattractive' to prospective male partners. More insidiously, recorded instances of peer harassment and abuse appear to target explicitly women scholars who are deemed to be 'uppity' and might refuse to engage in sexual relations with their peers, as the notorious and tragic death of Levina Mukasa at the University of Dar es Salaam illustrates (Yahya-Othman 2000).

Faculty-student relations are also imbued with gender dynamics that often include sexual overtones. Attention has been drawn to the commonality of sexual transactions between female students and male faculty and the associated tensions. The rise of what Pereira (2002) refers to as 'sexual corruption' is something that has been observed on a number of campuses, and seems likely to be exacerbated by the withdrawal of subsidies and growing student poverty. Existing work in this area has attempted to use the Western rubric of 'sexual harassment', with limited efficacy, given the profound contextual differences between North American and African campuses. These differences include economic, institutional, and cultural circumstances, not to mention differentials in the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.[18]

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18 As is noted in Bennett, 2002.

Southern Africa offers some of the more extreme illustrations of the negative and often violent sexual dynamics on campuses (i.e., exhibiting some of the highest HIV infection rates in the world). In some cases, male students have been known to take to the streets to protest against 'discrimination' in terms of what they regard as women student's 'sexual advantage', namely that they can and do engage in sexual transactions with male lecturers. The 'one-student, one blanket' protests also indicate that male students resent the non-availability of female students resulting from the 'unequal competition' being enjoyed by male lecturers engaging in multiple relationships with female students (Bennett, 2002).

More generally, in contexts where sexual transactions are a pervasive feature of academic life, women who do succeed are unlikely to be perceived as having done so on the basis of merit or hard work and may be treated with derision and disbelief. As economic conditions have deteriorated and subsidies have been withdrawn from various campus services, it has become increasingly common for women students to find themselves cooking, washing, and at times providing the food, soap, and other necessities for their male peers.

This preliminary evidence suggests that sexual and gender dynamics are not only key features of student academic life but that they operate in ways that are very likely to jeopardise women's academic career prospects.

Faculty

The experiences of women faculty have remained largely un-researched, with a few notable exceptions. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the hierarchies of power are sexualized in ways that reflect conservative gender ideologies, notably the unequal gender division of labor between the domestic and professional spheres. Those women that do make it into leadership positions are commonly employed in positions that relate to student welfare, human resources, and other aspects of administrative and support work deemed to benefit from a 'feminine touch', because of the resonance with women's conventional domestic and nurturing roles within the family. It is probably worth investigating whether the small pool of highly qualified women are systematically finding themselves channelled into general administrative tracks, instead of continuing in an academic track to become 'great thinkers' or accomplished researchers; or if, perhaps, women do not at times find it expedient to substitute administrative competence for academic excellence.

The under-representation of women as intellectual leaders has long-term implications simply because it is senior academic staff who are responsible not just for training successive generations of students and would-be academics—many of whom are young women these days—but also for the very production

of knowledge through research and publication. The dearth of women who are respected as accomplished thinkers, researchers, and writers presents one of the most intractable aspects of gender inequality in higher education systems all over the world. Feminist historians of science have uncovered a number of instances in which women pursuing careers in science have had their contributions appropriated by male colleagues in institutional environments still extremely resistant to the idea of women being scientists at all, let alone brilliant scientists.[19] Clearly Africa is not unique in this respect.

The existing literature further reveals the ways in which women's continued sexual and reproductive responsibilities make it vary hard for them to compete on equal terms with men, whose success continues to rely on the exploitative positioning of women on the home front (e.g., Tamale & Oloka-Onyango, 2000). In the absence of maternity, child-care, and domestic support provisions and/or a change in gender relations and sexual cultures to allow men to share in both the pleasures and the burdens of time-consuming domestic and parenting responsibilities, women will continue to find it difficult to meet the increasingly complex and competitive demands of academic careers.

Higher education reform processes have, so far, involved reducing the social and administrative expenditure of public universities through outsourcing. The cutting-back and privatization of services that address the social needs and well-being of faculty, most especially of women faculty, is more a reversal than a transformation—with the full burden of the care economy (welfare, health, familial, and other social responsibilities and services) being restored overwhelmingly to women, on the campus and beyond it.

Conclusions

While international, national, and institutional policy statements reflect greater imperatives towards gender equality, the picture presented here suggests that the demands of academic careers in today's African universities might well undermine the realization of policy commitments towards gender-equitable transformation. Public institutions, where one might have looked for examples that illustrate the implementation of equitable, if not transformative, policies, are busy adopting corporate models of governance, even as corporations now seek new ways of introducing 'collegiality' into management practice and encourage young executives to spend 'quality time' with their families. As a re-

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19 The best known example being that of Rosalind Franklin, who played a key role in the discovery of the double helix structure of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), but was deprived of her dues by her Nobel-winning male colleagues.

sult, the introduction of support systems and services that might enable more women to pursue academic careers has become increasingly unlikely.

Women, therefore, continue to carry out much of the informal, invisible, and often feminised work of institutional maintenance and interpersonal services on the campuses. Further, beyond the academy, the multiple burdens of women in Africa have intensified, rather than diminished, as the broader economic reforms of structural adjustment have undermined public services that might have mitigated their exploitation within the care economy. Women in Africa continue to carry the burden of familial, social, and community development responsibilities, a situation which does not seem likely to change, given its reproduction within the very institutions training and educating future citizens and leaders, institutions of higher education.

The purpose of reviewing our understanding of higher education in an African context, and from a gender perspective, is to facilitate the instigation of institutional and intellectual strategies that might more effectively advance the broad goal of gender equality. The material reviewed in this article shows that even the basic data on women's involvement in higher education is incomplete at the institutional level. On the basis of what evidence does exist, it is nonetheless possible to conclude that gross inequalities have persisted, despite the absence of any formal exclusion policies. Beyond this gross overall picture, many analytically interesting nuances also emerge. There appear to be wide national, disciplinary, and institutional variations in the overall picture of gender division and gender differentiation.

Addressing the persistence of institutional inequality so long after the formal exclusion of women was ended requires a deeper level of analysis than is possible on the basis of existing research, much of which is still a) quantitative and b) incomplete. There is an urgent need for more gender-disaggregated data, more refined statistical analysis, and national and institutional case studies, not to mention the design of rigorous and gender competent qualitative, analytical, and biographical methods. Only through this kind of research can we begin to unearth and map the institutional dynamics of inequality and the complicated manner in which these inequalities interconnect with other major social divisions, to augment and/or mitigate the dynamics of gender oppression in the context of globalization and unrelenting poverty.

The absence of a fuller and more detailed empirical picture continues to hamper both the formulation and implementation of effective institutional change strategies and the proper evaluation of the strategies currently being employed. Today, these strategies tend to be affirmative strategies rather than transformative strategies, since they rely on integrating women into mainstream institutions. As such, they fall far short of challenging the inequitable proce-

dures, practices, and rituals that might exposed more clearly by deeper and
better-informed gender analyses, using methods which go beyond the superfi-
cial picture revealed by numerical profiling. These deeper levels of analysis
utilize qualitative, discursive, and historical methods that enable researchers to
address matters of subjectivity and social relations, normative procedures, and
practices in the prevailing institutional cultures of African universities. Re-
gardless, it is clear that in the absence of definite strategies that can ensure
changes in institutionalized gender dynamics and patriarchal epistemologies,
the institutional and intellectual resistance to women's equal participation is
likely to continue.

On the intellectual front, which has not been addressed here, existing gen-
der analyses of African research output strongly suggest the need for the theo-
retical insights of feminist theory to be taken more seriously by mainstream
scholars (see e.g., Mama 1996; Imam & Mama 1997; Perreira, 2002b). To
date, gender studies has remained a separate field of endeavour largely under-
taken by women, which is tolerated but ignored, while the so-called 'core busi-
ness' of male-dominated teaching and research proceed uncontested in its in-
completeness. The efforts directed towards 'gender mainstreaming' have so
far focused on institutional matters and, as such, have not even begun to en-
gage with the major and far-reaching challenge of intellectually mainstreaming
gender theory and analysis.

Addressing this challenge will require a sustained development and expan-
sion of existing intellectual capacity and competence in gender theory and analy-
sis, within and beyond the field of gender studies. Currently, the intellectually
and institutionally transformative potential of gender analysis and studies re-
mains constrained by the resource and capacity considerations discussed above.
African universities might find their taking gender studies departments and
programs seriously worthwhile, in order to maximize the potential to attract
and retain women in academic careers, as well as to generate the intellectual
skills and knowledge necessary to support and sustain the gender-equitable
transformation of African universities, and beyond. In any case, without seri-
ous intellectual and institutional investment, the well-intentioned rhetoric about
'gender mainstreaming' currently being articulated within the higher educa-
tion reform agenda is unlikely to get very far. Put simply, the numbers of gen-
der competent scholars and the textual resources that would be required to take
gender mainstreaming seriously simply do not yet exist in African universities
and cannot usefully be imported from Western institutions either.

Turning the limited existing capacity, currently spread rather thinly across
the 30 or so rather isolated sites currently engaged in gender studies in African
universities, to the service of mainstreaming, is likely to deplete, rather than

strengthen, their potential for generating the requisite intellectual capacities. An alternative interpretation of 'gender mainstreaming' would see African public universities mainstreaming their support for the development and strengthening of gender studies, by making it a part of their core budgetary considerations, instead setting it up to attract short-stay donor funding. At the very least, any serious commitment would see a more sustained development of the specialized intellectual capacities necessary for advancing gender mainstreaming, not to mention the broader challenge of producing gender competent graduates to pursue careers in other spheres of life.

The current context poses new challenges to the agenda of advancing gender equality in African higher educational institutions. It is hard to anticipate the likely consequences of higher education reform for this agenda in the absence of serious research over time. Even though 'gender mainstreaming' features in the reform discourse of some agencies, the reform efforts appear to have been pursued in the absence of an adequate situation analysis with regard to prevailing gender inequalities, and worse, as a cost cutting option.

The preliminary analyses which are available suggest that contemporary trends in higher education financing and governance may well run the risk of curbing the greater access gained by the proliferation of African public universities since independence and could result in new forms of social exclusion and marginalization locally. Diminished governmental financial support for public higher education could ensure the perpetuation of the existing system, which favors external influences over African research and teaching. It is not at all clear how reform efforts will work in favor of marginalized and impoverished social groups, among which African women are still disproportionately represented, as they may actually compound the existing dynamics of inequality and further constrain access unless explicit strategies are designed to counter such effects.

As universities become less accountable to the African public, the gender equality agenda risks being submerged along with other considerations of public good. The signs are that, if hegemonic arguments favoring technocratic, market-driven notions of efficiency and financial diversification prevail, educational philosophies imbued with a sense of regional history and mission, including those espoused by feminist intellectuals, are likely to be mortgaged. In this case, Western and patriarchal intellectual hegemonies and institutional forms are likely to be re-inscribed in African universities as the money comes in, perhaps to the detriment of any sustained gender equality agenda.

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