

Review

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Change and Transformation in Ghana's Publicly Funded Universities: A Study of Experiences, Lessons and Opportunities. Takyiwaa Manuh, Sulley Garba and Joseph Budu. Oxford: James Currey; Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2007; and

Gender in the Making of the Nigerian University System. Charmaine Pereira. Oxford: James Currey; Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books. Nigeria, 2007.

These two titles present the latest in a series of valuable case studies of African universities, commissioned and published in association with the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA). The partnership that commissioned these two studies has tasked itself with supporting (rather than bypassing) actual African initiatives, so its interventions – including the publications reviewed here – are worth watching.¹ It's still an open question what the impact of this goodwill – and the money it brings – will actually be.

African intellectuals are quick to point out the irony of this new interest, but can only welcome it, given that the West is now, albeit belatedly, agreeing that decent tertiary education is central to the region's survival and development. The meaning of "revitalisation" that is offered remains contested, dominated by competing notions of the meaning of "reform", some neoliberal and economic, some liberal and well-intentioned, others highly critical of both of these tendencies and insisting on retaining a focus on social justice agendas. However, for all of us, the two main questions are these: what can Africa's universities contribute to the continent in the context of globalisation and the neoliberal economic reforms? How can we ensure that our universities go beyond servicing the global market and facilitating brain drain, to contribute to the development of democracy, social justice and gender equality in the region?

Between them, the universities presented in these two books produce the majority of Africa's graduates and career academics. Both books are framed by a deep interest in the possibilities of institutional transformation. They describe studies and research carried out by leading scholars living and working in the countries in which the public universities they study

are located. They do an excellent job of presenting the institutions in their national and political context. However, as national case studies, they do not address a key limitation of the post-independence universities: institutions that have not pursued the possibility of playing a more substantial role in developing cross-border intellectual, political and policy agendas.

Both books discuss the close interaction between the campuses and their surroundings, in nations where the universities have survived and grown through periods of repressive military rule and severe economic crisis, structural adjustment strictures, and through transitions to civilian rule. Throughout all this, Nigerian and Ghanaian universities have remained key sites for teaching and research, always sustaining some levels of reflection and dissent. This has often come at a cost to their academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

Led by well-known feminist scholars Takyiwaa Manuh in Ghana and Charmaine Pereira in Nigeria, both of whom are as committed to activism as they are to research, it is not surprising to find that both studies engage seriously with gender as a tool of analysis, even though both were conceptualised as national case studies, rather than as gender studies. Pereira's book is a study of gender by default, having been designed as part of an ill-fated national study. In this respect she is to be commended for following through on her own steam to produce the first-ever book-length study of gender in Africa's largest higher education system. Pereira does indeed take us beyond the questions of women's access that were the focus of Kwesiga (2002, reviewed in FA1). We must hope that these initial studies will be followed up by other feminist scholars who have already carried out valuable research at various locations, not all of which research is yet available in published form (but see FA8 for some examples).

Both books offer gender-statistical profiles of the major public universities in Ghana and Nigeria, noting that the inequalities that abound go far deeper than statistics. They highlight the under-representation of women in policy-making, and the curriculum struggles that have produced teaching in gender studies. Together, they expand the emerging pool of African gender and higher education studies and extend the work presented and reviewed in previous issues of FA (Kwesiga, 2002, reviewed in FA1; Mabokela *et al*, 2004, reviewed in FA4; FA8), and this issue, FA9.

The studies on which the books are based differed methodologically. Both include useful reviews of existing research, archival work and analysis of policy documents. But the Ghana study is able to present more original material,

derived from a series of far-reaching consultations and workshops held in the major public institutions. The debates and deliberations documented convey a good sense of the collective interests and contestations between various stakeholders in the Ghanaian university system, and its rather limited engagement with other research and policy institutions.

Pereira's study is somewhat constrained by its reliance on existing sources and documents, although she makes good use of the discussions with what looks like a rather modest sample of key informants drawn from only a handful of the 47 or so public institutions in 2001. It is clear that the time is ripe for much more comprehensive field-based gender research in a wider range of Nigeria's universities.

Both studies point to the centrality of gender as a systemic aspect of all educational institutions, and go on to document persistent gender disparities in access, as well as within the system and its institutions. They find that gender is not taken seriously by university stakeholders or policy-makers, despite their sometimes progressive rhetoric (a theme more fully examined in the contributions by Tsikata in FA8, and Shackleton in this issue). For Nigeria, Pereira grimly observes that:

The stark absence of a transformative agenda for university education on the part of the government constitutes the single most significant obstacle to push forward an agenda for gender equity (108).

Manuh *et al* are no less bleak in their observation that:

. . . gender did not seem to be a conscious issue on the (university authorities') agendas. The public universities in Ghana have no gender policy, and their policy frameworks are not attuned to gender concerns... they pay little attention to gender issues and inequalities (128).

Whereas Manuh *et al* include one chapter dedicated to a focus on gender, Pereira's whole book is all about gender in the university system. Her far-reaching title invokes somewhat more than it proves possible to deliver, no doubt because of the methodological and practical difficulties of actually isolating and addressing gender dynamics in the making of any system. These dynamics would be especially profound in the complicated, dispersed, and poorly-coordinated university system that she describes. To isolate and identify gender dynamics in any system requires in-depth qualitative research methods that go beyond the analysis of statistical profiles and policy statements to explore institutional cultures, in full cognisance of the manner in which gender permeates the cultural identities, social relations and

subjectivities of the women and men who live, work and study in the system. In this sense, analysing gender in Nigeria's university system would actually have required a very different study from that which was possible within the Foundation-sponsored national case study that gave rise to this book.

Nevertheless, Pereira's discussions with a number of women who have worked in particular universities (Ahmadu Bello University and the University of Ibadan) offer rich and nuanced insights that make the reader wish she had been able to gather far more – and had included interviews with women and men currently involved in university life. In the absence of these, she makes extensive use of the conversations she did gather, and draws on her own experience within the system and in the scholarly networks she has been participating in, to sustain a provocative discussion that effectively sets the scene for further in-depth research. After presenting a necessary overview of the history of higher education in Nigeria, the structure of the system, and statistical profiles, the chapter (eight) on institutional culture addresses women's poor representation in policy-making. This is followed by a discussion of sexual harassment, introduced, discomfortingly to my mind, as “the flipside of women's poor visibility at the top... its subterranean complement”. This discussion reviews the existing literature (drawn in part from the Southern African work of Bennett and others), noting the reluctance of Nigerian policy-makers to engage with this particular scourge. Pereira introduces the term “sexual corruption”, presumably to accommodate a wide range of sexual transactions that occur, and in response to the fact that Nigerian men constantly allege that they are victims of harassment by women. This difficult territory demands more detailed research and attention, because we cannot afford to have the veracity of sexual harassment – of women by men – undermined by the fact that there are other kinds of sexual transactions that occur and compromise both sexes.

There is a brief presentation of women's organisations on the campuses – listing the National Association of University Women formed in 1959, the Network for Women's Studies formed in 1998 and the five campus-based centres for gender/women's studies at the universities of Ibadan, Ife, Ahmadu Bello, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Nsukka. This important chapter could have been much longer. As it is, it ends tantalisingly, with a quick list of the familiar ways in which men resist women's presence on campus, which in this reader's view is exactly the terrain on which to investigate how gender dynamics work in the “making of the system”.

Overall, it becomes patently clear that gender has barely been addressed within a Nigerian university system in which sexual harassment and blatant discrimination are widespread, and in which men are highly resistant to any proactive engagement with gender discrimination. The policy context is hardly favourable, as policy-makers within and beyond the campus also show little interest in changing the status quo.

The Ghana study is more broadly cast to address “Change and Transformation”, concentrating on the contemporary context with less attention to history, and focusing on the three premier institutions: University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast and Kumasi National University of Science and Technology. The chapter dedicated to gender addresses both institutional and intellectual aspects, albeit briefly. Ghana, too, displays continued gender disparities in student enrolment and staffing. Manuh *et al* depict the universities’ institutional cultures as being imbued with conservative patriarchal assumptions that marginalise women and subject them to varying degrees of overt and subtle discrimination. In the Ghana study too, sexual harassment is identified as a major aspect of gender oppression on the campuses, with highly problematic transactions arising between staff and students, between staff, and among students. Manuh *et al* also adopt the concept of “sexual corruption” alongside that of “sexual harassment”, although without fully exploring the political and policy implications of doing so.

In terms of the curriculum, they find that the lack of leadership support and resources (as in Nigeria) is offset by the enthusiasm displayed by staff and students towards the inclusion of gender in the core curriculum. As is the case elsewhere in Africa, what course content does exist is due to the efforts of individual faculty located in mainstream departments. In this context, it is positively surprising to learn that there are as many as 16 courses addressing gender at University of Cape Coast, and over 20 at University of Ghana.

Intellectual cultures, the core concern of gender and women’s studies, are clearly not the focus of any of the other institutional studies in the PHEA-supported series, so both Pereira and Manuh’s books contribute valuably to thinking about scholarship – an aspect of universities that many of us would consider to be absolutely central. The androcentrism of mainstream intellectual cultures is largely intact and unquestioned in West Africa, despite the discursive shift that has been achieved in the political and policy arenas where gender and gender mainstreaming are irrefutably now part of the general discourse. Mainstream teaching and research have proven highly resistant to any real engagement with gender analysis, let alone feminist

theory. In this respect, the impact of those who have sought to introduce gender studies is remarkable, and owes a great deal to both the activist roots of academic feminism, and to the transnationalism of women's movements that reach across the broader national and international environments with which the universities are compelled to at least attempt to keep pace.

These two studies demonstrate the diffuse understanding, if not confusion, around the meaning of managerial and administrative "reform" in the African higher education sector. There has been minimal engagement with the policy implications of the current global scenario for universities that have remained primarily national institutions, poorly equipped to engage with regional integration, let alone the global market economy. The gender implications of the economic and administrative reform processes that are ongoing have yet to be explored in any detail, along with the implications for regional intellectual development. These two aspects clearly need to be central aspects of future studies. Neither of these studies attempts a critical engagement with the philosophical and intellectual challenges of envisaging the higher education that postcolonial African societies must now develop. Indeed their engagement of the intellectual culture is limited to tantalisingly brief consideration of research and the teaching curriculum, and notes the presence of gender studies. However, both books are essential reading for those working and studying in universities, for policy-makers, and for researchers who seek to contribute transformative knowledge to the cause of Africa's development and transformation.

Meanwhile, the recommendations of these two books are clear: universities need to take their public accountability and social responsibility on board, and this means making more deliberate and concerted efforts to dedicate resources and develop expertise that will facilitate institutional and intellectual transformations that take matters of gender equity and social justice seriously, for the greater public good.

From an activist perspective, they offer important raw material for the advance of feminist struggles in the academy. The questions they raise may not be new, but clearly remain to be addressed if African universities are indeed to be revitalised and rehabilitated. It is clear that universities have to be radically changed and their intellectual assumptions seriously transformed, and it is here that a feminist perspective has the most to offer.

References

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Endnotes

- 1 The Partnership was founded in 2000 by four leading philanthropic foundations, which united with the expressed aim of reaffirming “the importance of a vibrant intellectual environment in Africa in nourishing social, political, and economic transformation”. The “big four” (Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation) made an initial commitment of US\$100 million to be spent within the first five years. The countries targeted for this investment are Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. By 2005, the target funding was extended by a further US\$50 million, and the Partnership committed a further \$200 million for the coming five years, now joined by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Kenya was added to the list of Partnership countries, to be followed by Egypt and Madagascar in 2006. In April 2007, the Kresge Foundation became the seventh member of the partnership.