Soaring Beyond Boundaries

Women Breaking Educational Barriers in Traditional Societies

Reitumetse Obakeng Mabokela (Ed.)
Soaring Beyond Boundaries
TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

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Scope
Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy's (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity--youth identity in particular--the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to
help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some "touchy-feely" educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.

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Soaring Beyond Boundaries
Women Breaking Educational Barriers in Traditional Societies
Reitumetse Obakeng Mabokela (ed.), Michigan State University, USA
Soaring Beyond Boundaries
Women Breaking Educational Barriers in Traditional Societies

Reitumetse Obakeng Mabokela (ed.)

Michigan State University, USA
DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the women who have touched my life, past and present.

In memory of my grandmothers,
Blanche Maud Dinaane Tsimatsima
and
Ruth Mabokela

My mother, Mmutsi Emmah Mabokela
ABOUT THE EDITOR

Dr. Reitumetse Obakeng Mabokela is an Associate Professor in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education Program in the Department of Educational Administration at Michigan State University. She received her Ph.D. in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Masters in Labor and Industrial Relations from the same institution. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics (*magna cum laude*) from Ohio Wesleyan University, where she was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa honor society.

Her research interests include an examination of race, ethnicity and gender issues in post-secondary education; leadership issues among Black female faculty and administrators; and organizational culture and its impact on historically marginalized groups. Dr. Mabokela is the author several books including *Voices of Conflict: Desegregating South African Universities* (Routledge 2000); co-author with Jean A. Madsen of *Culturally Relevant Schools; Creating Positive Workplace relationships and Preventing Intergroup Differences* (Routledge Falmer, 2005); co-editor with Zine Magubane, of *Hear Our Voices: Black South African Women in the academy* (UNISA Press, 2005). She has published articles in academic journals including *Comparative Education Review, American Educational Research Journal, the Journal of Negro Education*, and *The Review of Higher Education*, among others.
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INTRODUCTION

SOARING BEYOND BOUNDARIES

The essays presented in this book examine and illuminate experiences of women students, faculty, and administrators from diverse geographic, cultural, political, and social realms. The question that emerges is what is so significant about understanding the significance of gender in education from a non-western perspective? The essays included in this volume presents scholarly work from research conducted in geographic regions that are generally under-researched (e.g. Iran, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Sudan), and where conceptions of gender are not well understood. Existing literature on gender is heavily dominated by Western conceptions, which are not always applicable and relevant to the realities of the developing and non-western world. Therefore, the scholarly work included in this anthology offers an understanding of how gender in education is constructed and understood in other social, political and cultural contexts.

When considering experiences of women scholars in Western contexts, research on academic women in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the United States highlights concerns and challenges that confront women students and scholars, albeit with varying degrees. What is significant are the common themes that transcend the experiences of women across very different social and political contexts. These bodies of work clearly demonstrate that the experiences women student and scholars are not isolated incidents and may offer alternative approaches to problems that seem insurmountable to those non-Western women at the bottom of the professional ladder. Conversely, a deeper understanding of educational experiences for women in countries such as Somalia, Iran, Turkey, may potentially present innovative insights to our current understanding of the representation and in some cases misrepresentation of gender within education.

The experiences of non-Western women scholars are important because it is only through an understanding of their educational conditions that institutions of education can implement policies and practices to respond effectively, and create work environments that are supportive to professional aspirations of these scholars. Effective policies can only be attained when there is a clear understanding of the barriers and challenges female students and scholars. Given that gender concerns have historically occupied and to some extent continue to occupy a marginal position in the daily operations of institutions of higher education, it is critical to highlight their potentially harmful effects not only on women scholars, but on the institutions as well. Critically, in this age of globalization, institutions cannot
afford to marginalize fifty-percent of their student, faculty, or administrators and hope to remain internationally viable and competitive.

Research conducted in various countries suggests that the marginalization of women scholars and administrators, albeit with varying degrees of success and disparities, is a global phenomenon. Dines (1993) indicates that “the global picture is one of men outnumbering women at about five to one at middle management level and at about twenty or more to one at senior management level” (p.11).

In country after country we find that women hold less than fifty percent of academic and administrative posts in higher education institutions. They are best represented in lower level academic and middle management positions and their participation relative to men decreases at successively higher levels. Representation varies between about ten and twenty percent at middle management level and from zero to ten percent at senior management level. Representation in the committee system follows a similar pattern with women ore likely to be members of departmental and faculty committees than on governing boards or councils. A consequence of this pattern of decreasing representation at successively higher level is that senior women frequently find themselves isolated in hierarchies which are predominantly male (Dines 1993, p.19).

Brooks (1997) research on academic women in the United Kingdom and New Zealand reveals disturbing patterns of exclusion for female students, faculty and administrators. Although patterns of representation of female students in the UK have shifted from complete exclusion at the turn of the 20th century, to the point where they represented 50% of the student population in the 1990s, female scholars and administrators continue to be marginalized. That is, the increase in the student population has not translated into a significant change in the representation of female faculty and administrators, even in departments where female students have been heavily recruited. Brooks (1997) notes that in 1991, female faculty comprised 4.7% of full professors, 10.3% of senior lecturers and readers and 23.1% of lecturers. Further, a disproportionately high percentage of women are employed as contract workers (non-tenure track) and occupy the lowest academic ranks, that is, lecturers, junior lecturers, or tutors. Similar patterns of inequity are prevalent in institutions of higher education in other countries including Canada (Acker and Feuerverger, 1997), Norway, South Africa (Mabokela and Magubane, 2004) and the United States (Acker and Feuerverger, 1997; Brooks, 1997; Glazer-Raymo, 2001). While the socio-cultural conditions and political particularities in these countries differ significantly from each other, the conditions of female academics are remarkably similar.

Available data from both developed and developing countries indicate that women scholars are under-represented in higher education, albeit at different rates. But local and cultural factors, along with the “glass ceiling” effect, impact more significantly on women scholars in developing countries, such as India, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Arab States (Chitnis, 1993; Hammound, 1993; Luke, 2002; Omar, 1993; Setiadarma, 1993). These factors may include psychological, political,
historical, religious, cultural, racial, social, and familial status of women in these countries, which exhibit both commonalities and distinctions compared with what their western counterparts experience.

In comparison with their western counterparts, academic women in developing countries suffer more in their professional progression from insufficient access to higher education. For example, in developed countries women comprise 52% of tertiary students, while such access ranges from 33% in China to 49% in Latin America and the Caribbean (Singh, 2002). India boasts one of the largest higher education systems in the world, even though the number of women’s colleges has increased substantially from 780 colleges in 1986-87 to 1195 in 1996-97, women’s enrolment only accounts for 34% of the total enrolment. As further noted by Chitnis (1993), the representation of Indian women scholars is extremely small and highly skewed in terms of disciplines and their geographically location.

It is even harder for women in some Asian countries to reach top management positions in higher education institutions due to the deeply ingrained feudal social and cultural prejudice against females. Drawing on the strategies adopted in western countries such as legislative and infrastructure support, financial and social measures to increase women’s enrolment in postgraduate education, training programs and courses, establishment of networks, and mentoring (Chitnis, 1993; Hammound, 1993; Omar, 1993; Setiadarma, 1993; Singh, 2002), some scholars advocate similar approaches in Asian countries. However, Luke (1999) contends that the western emphasis on individualism and goal-directed self-promotion for women's career mobility may not necessarily apply in “Asian” cultural contexts.

Similar trends have been noted in Arab States where even with advances in recent decades, the status of women and their representation in the workforce is till lower than that of men. Women accounted for only between 10-15% of the total labor force, recorded as among the lowest in the world. Data from Arab states also showed that women are underrepresented in both academic and administrative posts at higher education institutions, particularly in top administrative positions. Hammoud (1993) reported that in the institutions of his study, women constituted of the total chairpersons of academic departments, 5% of the total numbers of Deans of Colleges, and top level positions (President and Vice-President as well as Board of Trustees members) are almost 100% male. Of the factors impeding women’s access to higher education management in Arab states, traditional attitudes and stereotypes in these areas are most noteworthy. Women are primarily deemed as wife and mother, physiologically and intellectually inferior to men, naturally emotional and lacking in self-discipline, and thus not fit for leadership and decision-making positions (Hammoud, 1993). The two chapters presented by Karakehabadi and Abdulla highlight the complexities of gender identity within Islamic contexts and offer illuminating perspectives on the construction of gender identity within this cultural context.
OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

This book begins with an intriguing chapter authored by Sandra Schmidt, entitled *Gender Gap: The Disjuncture between Western-developed Policies and their African-determined Implementation*. In this chapter, Schmidt explores how the gender gap is constructed and addressed in policy, and how the local understanding of this gender gap affects the interpretation and subsequent implementation of policy. She interrogates the concept of space as a critical notion for understanding how definitions of gender and descriptions of the gender gap emerged; more importantly how definitions of space inform and influence policy formation and implementation. While Schmidt’s chapter is informed by research conducted in Sudan, it offers a relevant theoretical framework and raises a number of important questions that are critical for those conducting research in other countries, or those studying the “others.” Schmidt explores her place as a Western-trained, White, female researcher conducting a study in an African and developing country, and employing analytical lenses informed by her Western education. Her essay explores critical questions about the assumptions that researchers, whether insiders or outsiders, bring to their inquiry. Karkehabadi echoes similar questions in chapter 3, where she explores her space as a White American woman scholar, with some insider perspective through her familial connections to the country of her study, Iran.

In the second chapter entitled *Graduate Student Perceptions of Secularism in Turkish Higher Education*, Fatma Nevra Seggie examines understandings and misunderstanding of the concept of secularism through the eyes and voices of Turkish graduate students. Seggie’s study highlights the integral relationship between universities and political systems, and the broader socio-cultural broader role that universities play within a given society. Sharon Karkehabadi underscores this state-university relationship further in chapter 3, which explores *The Construction and Reconstruction of Gender Post-secondary Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. In this essay, Karkehabadi analyzes how gender has been constructed and deconstructed in post-secondary education in Iran from a comparative and historical perspective, with particular attention to the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran. She challenges the commonly held perception in Western media that Islam is anti-woman. Karkehabadi contends that the enforcement of *hejab* has in many ways legitimized women’s presence publically and even increased their participation, although in different guises and according to different rules.

In chapter 4, Fatma Abdulla explores gender and higher education issues in another Islamic society, the United Arab Emirates. In her chapter entitled, *Emirati Women: Conceptions of Education and Employment*, Abdulla investigates the meaning of higher education for Emirati women and uncovers factors underlying that underlie the discrepancy between women’s educational attainment and their employment aspirations. Abdulla’s study has significant policy implications that may inform how government could implement policies that maximize its national labor force, of which women could become significant contributors.
In chapter 5 entitled, *Women Administrators in Colleges and Universities in Mainland China*, Na Wei investigates the development of women leadership in Chinese higher education through an analysis of career paths of selected women leaders and an exploration of how societal, cultural, institutional, and personal factors have shaped their professional and leadership identities. In this study, Wei draws from personal interviews with women leaders and their colleagues, and illuminates how women leaders view themself and relative to how their (male and female) colleagues view them.

Wei-ni Wang’s chapter entitled *Gender Equality Education Act in Taiwan: Impacts and Challenges*, introduces the context and development of the *Gender Equity Education Law* and examines its impact on the Taiwanese educational system and policies. Specifically, Wang probes the core tenets of legislation that provided legal foundation for implementing educational policies that promote gender equity but also demonstrates Taiwan’s determination to build a just and multicultural society. While Wang does not seek to offer a comparative legal study, her discussion draws from relevant policies in the U.S. for example, Affirmative Action and Title IX, to illustrate parallel tenets.

In the concluding chapter, Christina Dokter explores *The Gender Gap and Information Communication Technology*. Through a critical literature of the review Dokter investigates ways in which gender and computers have been approached in various countries. She draws examples from countries such as Korea, which have established special funding mechanisms and programs to encourage women to enter the computer field. Her analysis explores the effectiveness of such policies and programs. If they are successful, what makes them successful? How have other nations approached the problem?

REFERENCES


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INTRODUCTION

A gap is a space, sometimes an empty space, between other spaces putting distance between them and creating an effect upon these differentiated spaces. Some gaps are desirable. Consider a gap in crotchet - the gaps are holes, empty spaces amidst the yarn, but critical to creating the pattern. And so, in this case, we leave them alone and do not consider them as problems to be solved, or emptiness to be filled. But often, the phrase “mind the gap” is more appropriate because gaps indicate deficiencies or danger. Consider a gap in our teeth – a space between two teeth, an empty space we try to fill using braces. When boarding a train, we jump over the gap between the safety of the platform and the train because the empty space in between is dangerous. The gender gap is another gap – traditionally one of deficiency - highlighting the achievement differences between girls and boys or men and women. Although the gap may not cause physical harm, common discourse – especially in education – presumes that this is a gap to be closed because the spaces it separates prevent women and men from accessing the same economic, political, and social positions in public space. Closing the gap will help women access the spaces that lie across the gap.

Closing the gender gap is a common chorus sung among policymakers concerned with “developing” countries. This chapter explores the efforts by policymakers to close the gender gap through/in education in south Sudan. At this chapter’s core is the concept of space and its relationship to gaps, paying particular attention to the complications in identifying a gap as a problem rather than accepting this as a given. Policy development engages space in a number of ways, although not necessarily intentionally. First, people who write development policies often have an interest in constructing spaces in a particular way. Policies are developed which organize spaces to maintain or to create particular economic, social, and political structures. Examples may be marketplaces where people can trade goods, schools where students can learn in a particular way, and voting
precincts for local and national leaders. Second, development policies are often constructed in a space in which particular individuals have more control than others. Development policies are written in a space and manner familiar to Western policy writers and do not necessarily engage the voices of the people they target. As people in African communities look to name their spaces (Mbembe, 2000), there is a growing need to find spaces they can name which are not confined by Western epistemologies and ontologies, a colonial tradition. Mbembe suggests the limiting idea of boundaries and the need to identify people within a set of boundaries. He notes that traditionally, many Africans live within the strictures of multiple communities without difficulty and claims that Africans should be allowed to live without limited Western ideas of boundaries and single states. Voices such as this are often missing from the dialogue of development.

In developing this project, I sought to explore how the gender gap in education was constructed and addressed in policy and how local understanding of this gap affected policy implementation. Rather than focus on the consequences of policy implementation, this chapter will focus on implementation as the worldviews that frame how the policies are understood and how people respond. Although by Western standards, there was indeed a gender gap in Sudan – I found that the number of boys in school was more than double that of girls, public offices were held almost entirely by men, and public and private sector jobs belonged primarily to men – these gaps were not particularly interesting to the Sudanese when asked about gender problems. Rather than a gap between male and female spaces, the Sudanese interviewed in this study described male and female spaces as distinct, but adjoining, sometimes penetrating. In this sense, they saw the gap between men and women more like the spaces in crochet than as a deficit needing remedy. However, the gap that did emerge in the study related to gender was one between policymakers and the problems they perceived, and the Sudanese and the problems they perceived. The policymakers and the Sudanese were situated in two different spaces each with its own organization of voices and people and there was a gap between them. Although there are gender problems according to the Sudanese, their resolution involves attention to the spaces men and women occupy and ultimately to changing the space where policy is determined.

This chapter is organized around the conception of space. Understanding space is important to each section that follows as it helps us to understand the methods of this project, the gender definitions that emerged, and the description of the gender gap. The first section uses the concept of space in research to describe the methodology underlying this project and the methods used to collect/produce data. Similar to the distinct spaces of policymaking and policy implementation, the space of research is often politicized and needs to be carefully addressed in this study of Other. Noting literature about the imperialist tradition of research, this chapter seeks to rethink the space of policymaking by engaging a methodology which creates a public space (Greene, 1996) in which African voices are asked to construct gender - and name - relevant problems and solutions. The second section of this chapter summarizes the discussion about gender which emerged in the interviews. Learning about the spaces in which men and women see themselves is