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RECOUP Working Paper No. 21

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February 2009

DFID Department for
International
Development

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Abstract

The knowledge gathered and reviewed in the field of gender studies has been disseminated globally over the twentieth century but has paid relatively little regard to the contexts and meanings that have simultaneously emerged in other regions of the world. The emergence of global equality agendas in education associated with new frameworks and metrics for national growth provides a unique opportunity to bring together these diverse understandings of gender. This paper compares gender education theory in Western Europe and North America on one hand, and those from locations within Africa and South Asia on the other. We examine the major contributions of Southern gender theorists, two from Africa and two from South Asia, though four themes raised by these authors: the category of 'third world woman' and by implication the 'girl child'; the othering of motherhood; the sexual/gendering of the body and the consequence of dislocation on academic positionalities. A new feminist research agenda is indicated that aims to reduce binaries, increase bi-cultural workings, and readdress the role of positionality in the field of gender education research.

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Keywords: EFA; gender education; othering; Nego-feminism

Decentring hegemonic gender theory: the implications for educational research

Howsoever development is defined, the regeneration of indigenous knowledge systems is part of the developmental challenge (…) The dialectic between indigenous and modern knowledge will have to be self-consciously and systematically guided to be mutually enriching. (Bhola, 2002, pp.1 & 21)

The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed a profusion of new thinking in the field of gender across the social sciences within North American and Western European universities. New philosophical and political conceptualisations of gender equality have been substantially reworked to take into account new social agendas around multiculturalism and diversity while new notions of citizenship and nationhood have required a reconsideration of how to position women in contemporary society (Benhabib, 2002; Yuval-Davies and Werbner, 2005). This re-engagement with the theoretical foundations of gender research occurs at a time when gender concerns have been placed on international agendas. Gender education today is now far more strongly linked to the drive to alleviate poverty through economic growth, universal human rights, and the development of democratic governance which, in turn, is assumed to provide the conditions for empowerment (Nussbaum, 2002; Sen, 2001). This emergence of global equality agendas associated with new frameworks and metrics for national growth also provides a unique opportunity to bring together the diverse understandings of gender that are emerging from the different trajectories taken by academic traditions in Western Europe/North America and other regional/national traditions of research (Tsing, 1993).

However while the knowledge gathered and reviewed in the field of gender studies has been disseminated globally over the twentieth century, it has paid relatively little regard to the contexts and meanings that have simultaneously emerged in other regions of the world. Connell's (2007) latest work on *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science* shows how the hegemonic knowledge created in the powerful academic apparatus of global metropoles systematically denies the creativity and contribution of academic knowledge coming out of other regional and national academies. The gender scholarship in education has consequently been part of a one-way traffic that leaves Western Europe and North America without having been influenced by insights from other cultural traditions. Also the channels through which this metropolitan knowledge is transmitted to the global periphery confirm the belief that policy is generated, if not internationally, then through state agencies and private enterprise (Fennell, 2007). Consequently gender education research and policy-making appears to be located more within development studies departments, government ministries and NGOs than in the university faculties of education or institutes for training new teachers. As a result, the impact of global gender education research on national educational systems tends to be diffuse and ill defined. Thus, even through gender researchers located outside Western metropoles work in innovative ways within their own countries and cross national boundaries

in order to undertake comparative international research, their local research on gender and education (schooling, adult education and informal education) has difficulty achieving international scholarly impact. Indeed localised knowledge about education and the functioning of the school system appears to be less significant than research funded for an audience of global policy makers.

National gender agendas in education, therefore, are in danger of being both the symbol of progress and the vehicle of contemporary neo-colonialism. Where international agendas uncritically import liberal individualising models for education into developing countries, they could undermine women's position and future and perhaps could even aggravate existing gender divisions. As Unterhalter (2007), Mundy and Murphy (2001) and others point out, transnational declarations of gender and education, even those which highlight gender equality rather than gender access, can be Trojan horses – in other words vehicles for other ideologies, only some of which might be liberatory for women. The tendencies of such hegemonic gender education research are to recreate its own knowledge in distant geographies in its own image. It is noticeable that the new thinking in gender research relating to the Millennium development Goals (MDGs), on the whole, does not tend to challenge the hegemony of Anglo-American gender education theory nor question its assumptions and conceptual suppositions. The concept of Education for All (EFA) with its implications for national growth is in effect an incentive to export current hegemonic gender theorising in education globally, encouraging other regions of the world to focus their attention on formal mass schooling (rather than informal education), open up individual 'choice biographies' and cultivate policies that release girls from the traditional cultures. In this context, the lack of critical engagement with and validation of 'Southern' gender theory arguably disadvantages precisely those countries which are the target of the MDGs.

According to Bhola (2002), writing in *Africa Today,* there are two intersecting dialects – that between education and development and between modern knowledge and what he calls indigenous knowledge. In resolving these conflicts especially in a context in which there is considerable international pressure to deliver certain targets, national institutions of education within a developing nation are in danger of losing the creative knowledge and imagination of their indigenous cultures. Such nations are also likely to find it hard to feel ownership of what is seen as alien cultural/political agendas. A more productive response to new global education agendas is to confront and understand the particular historical and intellectual forces in different cultures/nations which generate specific conceptual and analytical frameworks. Connell (2007) suggests that the key is to return to the manner in which knowledge is gleaned, accumulated and distributed across nations and the world. In the gender context, such accounts will constitute what Ramamurthy (2007, p.1) called the 'geographies of feminist knowledge formation'. Using this approach, the millennium targets for gender and education could provide new arenas in which to conduct such studies, even if international agencies which promoted such targets did not include such South-North learning. In the case of gender and education, the Millennium Development Goals offer a rather unique opportunity to start such dialogical work.

This paper represents our own first attempt to engage with those global dialogues and to reposition gender theory in relation to education and development. The way we have structured the paper is to think first about the national and international contexts within which gender education research has been situated. We compare the settings as they have been perceived and analysed in Western Europe and North America on one hand, and those analysing the dynamics of gender in education from locations within Africa and South Asia, on the other.[1] We then highlight four main themes which have been developed by gender theorists from this latter group, many of whom have been trained mainly in the US, but are critical of the hegemonic tendencies of what they see as 'Western' or so-called 'Northern' gender theory. This much neglected group of gender theorists, we argue, have identified new ways of thinking about gender that are of great significance for the gender educational field internationally. We begin our discussion by contextualising Southern feminist challenges.

Southern feminist challenges to universalising agendas

EFA provides a particular and unique contemporary vantage point from which to view the international impact of gender research on education. The push for EFA was a response by international and national governments to address the inability of economic development to ensure the education for all citizens (Education International, 2003). The new agenda therefore breaks away from a long tradition of development thinking where education was regarded as the handmaiden to achieve this objective. The effect of this shift in thinking is that gender relations are now evidenced in the education policies and documents put out by governments.

However long before this policy shift, feminist researchers had questioned whether women's contribution to economic growth had been adequately recognised in the then prevalent approach to development.[2] Mainstream economic categories cast women into one of two roles – those of *productive workers* and *reproductive mothers* – in a manner powerfully reminiscent of the Western European and North American feminist debates of analysis (Barrett & McIntosh, 1982; Mies, 1986) and post-Marxist critiques (Tinker, 1990) of national planning for economic growth. The critiques of human capital set out by Western European and North American gender theorists offered a new global vantage point with which to understand the impact of development processes on gender relations. These critiques evolved into a more radical Gender and Development (GAD) approach to gender analysis within the UN system. Development feminists also revealed the lack of recognition of gender disparities within national planning with the education of women and children relegated to smaller government departments such as social welfare rather than powerful ministries such as those of finance or human resources.

The recent emphasis on gender education within the field of international development is both a cause and a consequence of the Millennium Development Goals for 2005 and 2015 which focus on gender equality in access and participation. Surprisingly, however, despite a history of feminist

pressure on international agencies, especially post Beijing, development feminists and Southern gender theory appears to have had little influence on the UNESCO Global Monitoring Reports (UNESCO, 2002; 2003; 2004). A sustained dialogue between metropolitan and Southern intellectual gender education traditions could have opened up an opportunity, if not a rationale, to engage development feminism with North American and Western European theorising on education and to encourage more interfaces between these two traditions and the writings of Southern gender theory.

Growing numbers of international students migrating to universities in Europe and North America to study, research and teach have led to more critical interrogations of metropolitan gender theory. Such writing provides new voices within feminist education research that engaged critically with the colonial and postcolonial European and American epistemologists. Globalised feminists now use their lived experiences in specific Asian and African locations to identify postcolonial and indigenous feminist standpoints. Such contributions challenge contemporary American and Western European feminism which does not have much room for the local specificities of African and Asian feminist history, epistemology and analysis. The postcolonial predicament in which American/European feminism is caught is now increasingly evident. Arguably the time is ripe for researchers engaging in EFA to recognise the hegemonic influences of such gender education research traditions.

Bringing the non-metropolitan voices to the centre and acknowledging the importance of the hegemonising aspects of metropolitan knowledge in social science is a huge task (Connell, 2007). At a less ambitious level, we have started on the process of 'hearing' African and Indian feminists' critical readings of metropolitan gender theory as a way forward in constructing a more globally informed field of gender educational research. We have elicited four themes which are particularly relevant to educational researchers (even if not originally discussed as such), whilst recognising that there are many more complex arguments to be found in theorisations of gender in many other global locations. The first such theme is one that encourages us to deconstruct universalisations within gender theory.

De-universalising categories: the problematic 'Third World Woman' and by implication the 'girl child'

In 1988, Chandra Talpade Mohanty[3] who described herself as 'a Third World feminist trained in the United States, interested in questions of culture, knowledge production and activism in an international context' (Mohanty, 2003a: p.45) wrote a now celebrated piece 'Under Western Eyes; Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' (Mohanty, 2003b). Here she pointed out that what she regarded as 'Western feminist research' was 'colonising' in the manner in which it depicted women from other societies as an essential category of 'Third World Woman'. Women in the developing world were categorised by their female gender (read; sexually constrained) and Third World character (read: poor, uneducated, tradition bound, domesticated). The ideological construction of 'Third World Woman' was based on a presumed social homegenity, or shared characteristic, despite the existence of

major differences in rach and social class and experiences in the real lives of these women. The effect was to create a single story of male violence and oppression on subjugated and powerless women who were seen as dependent on men, oppressed by religion and family systems and where the way forward was to create a single sisterhood that was united in its struggle for 'freedom'.

In 'Cartographies of Struggle', Mohanty (2003a) extended her analysis of Western hegemonic knowledge showing the ways in which the term 'Native', constructed in anthropology in the early twentieth century, drew on racial and sexual stereotypes to provide the epistemological basis of the term 'Third World Woman'. This analysis offered a valuable examination of the paralysing power of binary forms of 'othering', creating in this case a distinction between the 'West' and the rest of the world.

The implication of Mohanty's analysis is that knowledge production in the literary and social-scientific disciplines as a 'discursive site for struggle' is just as important as material struggle (Mohanty, 2003a, p.76). Her call for a more nuanced and political understanding of the categories used by social scientists (particularly those involved in development studies) is equally relevant for gender educational research in today's global context. The concept of the universal 'girl child', for example which is applied to Southern contexts and often used in relation to female educational access in EFA targets, may well be another example of such essentialising. Despite sophisticated awareness of the intersectionality of social class, ethnic and gender identities in metropolitan social science, the concept of the 'girl child' in Southern countries is used to explore educational access, participation and treatment. It too could be regarded as part of hegemonic knowledge production that infantiles girls, seeing them not only as 'childlike' hence without agency, but also as a homogenous (undifferentiated) group located within economic, familial and legal structures and the product of oppressive age and gender power relations within Southern societies. As a result, the diversity of experiences of young women within such societies, the range of possible femininities, and indeed their contribution to the survival of their families and their own negotiations and resistance are likely to go unrecognised.

Mohanty (1988) also argued that, as a consequence of these discursive constructions of 'third world' women, only those aspects of their lives which relate to what she regarded as 'Western' epistemologies were opened up for investigation. When international development brings education into the centre of its aid agenda and political concerns, there could well be a similar danger – that new universals regarding gender (this time of young people) will again be based on, for example, the historical features of the western European industrial experience and the way these models have been cast in theories of economic development. The plight of the 'girl child' (or boy for that matter) in relation to educational goals may be considered only within the framework therefore of individualised transitions from family to school and from schooling to work rather than through the deeper formations of subjectivity, identity and belonging within complex colonial and traditional cultural heritages (Bhola, 2002).

Contemporary research about gender and education in Southern contexts today has to consider whether it recognises the influence of such historical and negative stereotyping of the 'third world' girl, her teacher and her community. As Mohanty pointed out, women (and we would argue, female children) cannot be studied as gendered beings without recourse to the histories that have created the nation states within which they are located and how these histories have been refashioned by the colonial encounter. Hegemonic gender discourses that are woven in these contexts permeate into the micro-politics and family practices that surround them. The plurality of gender relations in multicultural societies such as those in Africa and South Africa also requires that gender difference should be replaced by *differentiation* with regard to oppression, conflict and struggle (Mohanty, 2003a). Mohanty argues that what is needed is a transnational multicultural feminism which is radical, antiracist and non-heterosexual and which can challenge a hegemonic capitalist regime thus, the task that 'feminist educators, artists, scholars and activists face is that of historicising and denaturalising the ideas, beliefs and values of global capital such that underlying exploitative social relations and structures are made visible.' (Mohanty 2003c, p.124)

The 'othering' of motherhood and the importance of relational worlds

The second theme we want to consider relates to the types of 'othering' of the relational worlds inhabited and experienced by women outside the metropoles of North America and Western Europe. Obioma Nnameka, a Nigerian Professor of French and Women's studies at Indiana University, takes this critique of universal categories further in *The Politics of (M) othering: Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature* (1997). In the introduction to this collection Nnameka identifies the opposition between Western and African feminism as the failure of the former to examine the relational roles which women take on, as a basis for identity. Nnameka, like Mohanty, points to the apparent hostility of Western feminism to motherhood – which she calls the 'othering of motherhood'. This process of 'othering' leads to an underprivileging of African women's roles and identities.[4] In the Nigerian context, a woman gains the status of a mother through acts of bearing and nurturing her children. The denial of women's roles as mothers (or even sisters and daughters) in associational African contexts has impoverished the social scientific understandings of female power in these communities. This has meant that the role of mothering as a relational identity and a form of resistance in opposition to local power relations has been hidden from the gaze of Western feminist researchers (Nnameka, 1997, pp.1-26). Nnameka's emphasis upon the importance of relational gender roles recasts the domestic sphere as an active site for small acts of resistance. Indeed recent educational research on female para-teachers working in domestic-based pre-schools and schools in India and Bangladesh points to the ability of young women to use the discourse of the familial and the communal and women's status in the domestic sphere to achieve small levels of empowerment. In some cases, they are able to employ gender roles in what Saigal (2007) calls 'acts of citizenship'. Teaching for example, gives girls access to new educational and livelihood paths

(Raynor, 2007). Bringing in notions of domesticity and mothering allows us to view the education and lives of women not as circumscribed between the private and the public (as in Western European thinking) but as developing a public role in the community that concurs with, rather than opposes, their life within the family.

Nnameka (2003) also argues that, in Nigeria, there is interplay between gender, temporality and spirituality and that bodies, time and space operate in a non-linear manner. Relational worlds that are mediated buy members of a community cannot therefore be fully comprehended by models that follow single lines of causality, i.e. a woman's life does not fall into time-mediated compartments of girl, sister, mother and grandmother, but these may overlap and coexist through her life (and across lives). In this context, it is also important to explore notions of female friendship that are present amongst women in the Yoruba tribe. These are not always mediated by kinship. Women's friendship groups are a long-standing part of communal life and provide African women with important pathways to survive, gain status and assume positions of power in a community. Nnameka steers clear of imposing the Western concept of 'feminism' to describe such groups – the term, she argues, is not relevant to the African context. Oyewumi,[5] in her book *The Invention of Women* (1997), argues along similar lines, although she places more emphasis on the importance of kinship. Without a recognition of the role of kinship, faulty conclusions have been drawn by researchers that women living in societies outside Western Europe and North America are subjugated by their men and worse off than those who were located in Northern geographical regions (Oyewumi, 2003a, b). The incomplete, and often faulty, learning's that feminist research has gained from the analysis of gender in African societies have usurped the local positions of power that women have access to as a consequence of their associational experiences (Nzegwu, 2003). It is the denial by Western feminists of African women's power within such indigenous relational worlds, forms of negotiation, friendship and systems of knowledge construction that relegates them to the status of subject/victim, rather than their cultures.

The implication here is that policy recommendations to empower African women have created an epistemic basis for understanding gender relations that fails to recognise African women's right to community and forces them into the liberal market economics of a globalising world. Of great significance to researchers in the global education field is the need to see female *friendship* and *kinship* as the framework and context for analysing gender relations in education.

Individualism and the sex/gendering of the body

The third world theme we have drawn from African and Indian gender writing relates specifically to the critique of individualism and its focus on individual embodied selves. These concepts form the basis of so much Anglo-centric gender education research. In the African context (for example, the Nigerian), this bodily focus can distort the analysis of gender relations. Regarding bodies as gender and sexual sites is highly problematic, according to Nnameka (2003). There are

epistemic consequences from representing the gendering of the body as necessarily linked to sexual acts. Here again Nnameka argues that, in African societies such as her own, it is within these relational acts that bodies gain gender values. These values do not accrue from the sexual aspects of the body but from its age and experience as these are regarded as key in the relational world. For example, the older member's age and experience adds value to younger members who are their apprentices, in rituals and in social exchange.

Similarly Oyewumi highlights the dangers of basing research on the needs of the individual and a view of bodies as merely biological entities (Oyewumi, 2005). This, she argues, is a false basis for research outside the American experience of modernity. American and European philosophical traditions, she reminds us, should be considered exceptional rather than the norm. In *The Invention of Women* (1997) she highlights the ways in which western European and North American history and social science understands the body through its *visual sense.* Consequently, it is the body of the individual that is regarded as the central actor rather than the actions of the individuals which contribute to a particular act or ritual. In a fascinating analysis, she highlights how the practices of African body clothing, piercing etc. are regarded as degrading by European and American feminists because they involve placing the body in seemingly demeaning positions. Yet these very practices are regarded as important rituals by African theorists (Oyewumi, 2003a). Secondly, she argues that the visual world is downplayed in African societies where there is a greater emphasis on an oral tradition of learning. Learning by listening gives considerable significance to the *auditory senses*. Where a young man or women is associated with a headman/headwoman in an oral discourse, they acquire the power of headship through these acts – they are not regarded as young and unlearned, since in such conversation they take on the attributes of the old and experienced (Oyewumi, 1997).

Agency, dislocation and positionalities in the global gender education field

The concepts which have emerged in a variety of Indian and African feminisms do not find an easy equivalence with the gender theorising in the West. Positioning oneself in relation to the tensions between colonial American and European discourses, postcolonial feminism and indigenous knowledge forms is a far more difficult task than most education researchers admit to. The fourth theme which emerges from this literature relates to issues of *agency, dislocation and positionality*.

The concept of *agency* that is being advocated in the world of African gender studies is that agency should not be seen 'in terms of dependence or independence but interdependence and intersubjectivity' (Nyamnjoh, 2002, p.118). By engaging with and reworking notions of agency found within American and European social science, a number of Indian and African theorists have subjected the internal contradictions that have emerged in indigenous feminisms to an expanded Foucauldian framework (John, 2004).

This debate about agency and the value of the contribution of Foucault to that discussion lies at the heart of much feminist reaction to North American and Western European theorising. A number

of writers outside these metropoles employ poststructuralist deconstruction methods to voice their discontent with the hegemonic intellectual apparatus. They have reworked the underlying concepts of structure and agency within American and European social science to privilege both contextual and indigenous meanings. Many draw on Spivak's (1985) influential writing[6] where she points out that it is only by 'decentring' the individual at the heart of a Foucauldian analysis and removing the geographical imperialism that lurk behind his analysis that agency can be fully understood. Spival asked whether 'the subaltern can speak?' in poststructuralist research as long as her voice is directed by intellectuals who are unable to de-centre themselves or their established forms of epistemology. If 'subalterns' such as 'Third World Women' are to be heard then we need to change the way in which we as academics use and work with ideas or we will not be able to interpret the position of an individual as a consequence of being situated within a particular set of relations, must ensure that postcolonial analysis does not continue to give central place to dominant knowledge systems – it must be willing to move away from such existing systems of knowledge to permit exchanges between speaker and away from such existing systems of knowledge to permit exchanges between speaker and listener (c.f. Connell, 2007).

From Nnameka's point of view Foucauldian theory also offers little help in redressing the *political* problems associated with Western European and North American epistemologies since 'post structuralism's focus on discourse and aesthetics instead of social action encourages the egocentricity and individualism that undermines collective action.' (Nnameka, 2003, p.364).

Escaping such egocentricity and individualism would involve the construction of a different sort of gender theory, other than that of post-structuralism. A recognition of the complexity of African countries requires the Nnameka's view what she calls *'Nego-feminism'* – a feminism of negotiation or the non-ego form of feminism. Essentially Nego-feminism challenges the Cartesian duality of public/private spheres and male and female forces on which North American and Western European research is premised. It also implies a full exploration of these relational worlds of young men and women without slipping back into the forms of individualism and individualisation associated with Western liberal democracy. The African sense of identity is located within the communal rather than individual space.

Despite its limitations, the attraction of post-structuralism for gender theorists outside North America and Western European metropoles is that it requires feminist researchers to unpack not just the epistemologies that they have encountered but to also be prepared to be equally scrupulous in the manner in which they unpick their own learning's. The opportunities provided by the principles of *reflexivity* and *positionality* to undertake such a journey are numerous, but the researcher must be prepared for the personal and professional consequences of turning one's gaze within. Reflexive writing by American and European gender researchers working on education in the development context is surprisingly low. In contrast, a number of the African and South Asian authors we have cited have considered their own journey across the divide and dislocations between metropolitan and

Southern theory. For example, in her article 'Genealogies of Community, Home, and Nation', Mohanty (2003d) describes in great detail what it meant for her to arrive from India and to engage with feminism in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. Her own genealogy is: 'partial and deliberate. It is a genealogy that I find emotionally and politically enabling – it is part of the genealogy that underlies my self-identification as an educator involved in a pedagogy of liberation.' (Mohanty, 2003d, p.136).

Mary E. John also writes eloquently about the difficulties and dangers of such *positionality*. Having completed her PhD in the History of Consciousness Programme in 1991 at the University of California, John now also heads the Centre for Women's Development Studies, in New Delhi. In her article 'Postcolonial feminists in a western intellectual field', John (1996b) described herself as a 'Third World Feminist'. She put forward a notion of 'discrepant dislocations' to understand how 'the dislocation from a sheltered Indian middle class environment, where a consciousness of privilege predominates, to a milieu as highly sexualised, and with such intensified and refined technologies of gender as this one, does lead to the espousal of a more explicitly feminist politics.' (John, 1996b, p.16).

John critiques American and European feminist research for its inability to understand such complex positionality and she points to the need to construct a new politics consequent on such personal dislocations. She argues that it is the insistence of working with a notion of a primary process of knowledge construction that prioritises a single alien epistemology and a hegemonic system of knowledge production. One result of this hegemony was that American feminist research drew on anthropological antecedents to place the non-American researcher in the position of the 'native informant', treating them as the object of research.

John also questioned post-structuralism's inordinate concern with epistemology and abstraction and decried the relative disregard for the specific. Interestingly John drew upon Spivak's critique of Foucault's notion of 'specific intellect' which relies upon an *unrecognised* specifictiy'. In not being specific enough, Foucault is understood to have glossed over imperialism and other historical inequalities such that his theory was in danger of encouraging denigration and was unable to deal with the consequences of its own vagueness and lack of historical regard. John was thinking here not just of her own positionality but also the place of gender within specific locales. On the personal front, John pointed out that 'feminism is a politics before it is an epistemology – where questions of representation must deal with who speaks for whom as much as with what is being said (John, 1996b). John argued that the extreme marginalisation that Mohanty spoke of in the early 1980's was being replaced by a growing recognition of the contributions of post-colonial intellectuals, and 'the emergence of Third World feminists…eager to delve into archives or engage in fieldwork in order to lay claim to a lost and repudiated history.' (John, 1996a, online article).

These postcolonial critiques have constructed an intellectual apparatus which gives greater attention to history, and particularly to those power relations between colonial power and colonised

subjects that continue to permeate social science research. The call for a decentring of hegemonic power is welcome but the promise can only become a reality if serious consideration is given to how to ensure that local and national specificities are brought into the centre of gender education to the need to understand the 'subject' of study is valuable but will not itself prevent the tendency to create binaries within the postcolonial exposition (Suleri, 1992). Decentring requires a repositioning which involves an overturning of the master narratives, a disordering of existing hegemonic knowledge construction.

While these discussions about postcolonial feminism have taken place *within* women's studies and gender studies and have, in tern, encouraged the development of precisely the forms of poststructuralist/postmodernist debates which the above authors address, it is fair to say that there has been little spillover into the world of gender education research. The volume *Disrupting Preconceptions: Postcolonism and Education* (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews and Woods, 2004) raises important questions as to whether the tradition of postcolonial debate that is evident in India, and now in the region of South Asia, can be achieved in the metropole. The beginning of a two-way migration of epistemic knowledge proffers the promise of a new international agenda around national growth and poverty alleviation. Gender education researchers in Western European, North American and developing nations will need to consider their own positionality in relation to such 'postcolonial' agendas in education and development.

Learning from gender education research in other regions

The writers we have quoted have raised important questions for global educational research on gender. The concepts of the body, the 'ego' and the self which lie at the heart of North American and Western European research currently frame our understanding of what it means to be an individual and 'a subject' within an economically developing nation. They lie at the heart of the concept of 'national growth'. As we have found in our own research, these assumptions are extraordinarily hard to challenge. On the other hand, European and later North American inspired Foucauldian discursive analysis can uncover the ways in which dualities of public and private, the 'othering' of motherhood, and how particular constructions of other regions into metropolitan paradigms are embedded within development agendas. Using this methodology it is possible to understand the MDG goals and their targets as constructing a discourse about gender power around notions of individual 'educational disadvantage' rather than economic/material and cultural inequalities – an educational discourse that precisely embeds indivualised notions of self within educational systems.

As we have shown, African and South Asian feminists aim to move gender research towards an 'indigenous ' approach to knowledge systems and their creation (John, 1996b) – a construction of knowledge that would derive from the specifics of location and history. Yet defining a research methodology that is based on 'building on the indigenous' (Nnameka, 2003) is not easy. In her latest

work, John (2004) uses the notion of indigenous knowledge to explore the growth of the women's movement and feminism over the last two centuries in India – which is best captured by the tensions and conflicts between culture and politics. John argues North American and Western European researchers regard 'construct' rather than 'construction' as central so they look for categories rather than the forces that generate particular etymologies. They are equally caught up with the identification of results (i.e., the 'product') and do not devote their energies to understanding the dynamics/pathways (i.e., 'processes') of a relational world. Consequently North American and Western European feminist researchers have found themselves in difficulties trying to understand the internal formation of Indian feminisms that have occurred through contestations in the local sphere.[7] In its place, they have sought to find a single Indian feminism located at the national level. National feminists within India similarly have privileged conflicts with the national state to interpret the meaning of Indian feminism

Nnameka argues that hegemonic forms of knowledge production currently only recognise findings from North American and Western European feminist research projects rather than indigenous systems of knowledge construction. This leads to the disempowerment of the indigenous community especially with its blatant disregard for the latter's processes of learning, sharing and communicating. The systems of 'Othering' continually and cumulatively dispossess Southern national and local communities as the keepers of knowledge (Nnameka, 2005). The displacement, even effacement, of local knowledge systems in Africa is a form of devaluation of the process-based learning that results from an individual's journey through different relationships and rites during the passage of life. The replacement of this form of community learning by an externally imposed system of knowledge has also eroded epistemic abilities within African academia placing them in the position of subject rather than creator/makers of knowledge (Nnameka, 2003). If we take her argument further, we might consider the ways in which gender research, particularly within liberal and neo-liberal traditions, celebrates formal educational knowledge, individual achievement and identity and transitions into a form of adulthood that separates the individual from the community. If applied to the African context, educational knowledges and community/relation integration through learning and marginalise, without intention, the development of indigenous gendered forms of education.

If the community is to be considered the repository of knowledge, then we need to have more discussion about social scientific research methodologies that are being constructed and applied outside North American and Western European academic spaces. The tracing of relational life in the community needs to recognise that the role of elders is central not just to the maintenance of the corpus of knowledge, but that their collective presence directs the transmission of knowledge and draws together the supernatural, the temporal and the spatial aspects of life (Oyewumi, 2002). Indigenous methodologies which have emerged in the Southern hemisphere and in New Zealand are designed to work with the notion of community and its attendant collective knowledges. Researchers here tend to approach the maintenance of cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part

of a research methodology (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.15). Indigenous researchers working among the Maori, for example, do not consider these elements as mere formalities to permit access to the research site, but give intrinsic value to the relational aspects of life; they work with locally emergent notions of space time and spirituality. Tuhiwai Smith points to the productive results that have emerged through bi-cultural research in New Zealand where researchers drew on the mapping of the community as set out by the elders, respecting it as a form of epistemic knowledge rather than beginning with their own academic notions of mapping. These emergent methodologies are also at the heart of the work undertaken by Alexander and Mohanty (1997) where their joint research began with an intensive learning period, where they each read about the other's cultural context so that they became 'fluent in each other's culture'. This starting point allowed these authors to embark on their fieldwork from a position where they both had worked towards a more equal exchange regarding their positionality and understanding of the micro-macro politics and practice and praxis. The construction of a new feminist research agenda around education that works to reduce binaries, increase bi-cultural workings, and readdresses the role of positionality would help take us forward in the field of gender education research.[8]

The contradictions between local, national and international meanings of gender equality in schooling which we have identified have only now begun to come to the surface (Unterhalter, 2007). Any investigation into how education is regarded whether by a disgruntled local administration, an irate teachers lobby or by agitated and often relatively powerless communities, all stakeholders in the education of the 'girl child', is likely to be severely hindered by the lack of a nuanced indigenous feminist research tradition. Only a new approach to gender and education can take us away from the consequences of an essentialising definition of gender that is limited to the search for universal categories of analysis. By working more closely with the relational world of everyday lives, where education research could be situated within existing community pathways of knowledge dissemination.

The international project of Education for All, the Millennium Development goals and the fast increasing interest of governments to prove that they are on track in terms of closing gender gaps in access, participation and outcomes of schooling, as well as the need to alleviate poverty, means that, in effect, there is now a common gender and education project. That project at a minimal level is about ensuring that all boys and girls have equal rights to schooling across the globe. More than that, we now need to develop a field of global gender education studies which engages with dynamic and textured rather than essentialised notions of culture, and ensures that the growing interaction between feminist, indigenous and international knowledge about gender is garnered to identify the most important theoretical, political and empirical questions to ask in order to achieve education for all.

Notes

[1] The focus on South Asian and African authors does not signify that critical reflection on gender education is not underway in other geographical locations. We have chosen particular authors because they provide a new core of feminist theorising on categories and processes of gendering within and between nations. We are aware that there is a related literature on gender education and the state that is being generated in the Latin American context that is situated within the changing NGO politics for women's empowerment (Alvarez 1999; Stromquist 2007).

[2] It gave rise to the now famous progression from Women in Development (WID) to women and Development (WAD) frameworks within the UN set of intuitions.

[3] Chandra Talpade Mohanty is Professor of Women's studies at Syracuse University. She came from India to the US significantly to study for her doctorate within the field of education.

[4] Mothering was recognised within the category of reproductive women in the mid-twentieth century Western gender analysis, and it re-emerged as a category of analysis in radical feminist work on feminist revolutionary action within the women's peace movement (Roseneil 1995). Mothering however was not used as a focus to analyse gendered relations across a society. What African studies indicate is a society-wide prevalence of mothering as a gendered status that is conferred on and sought by women through biological and social rights of passage.

[5] Having studied both in Nigeria and at the University of California, Berkley, Oyewumi is now a Professor of Sociology at SUNY.

[6] Subaltern studies emerged in the 1980s as an alternative approach to history and social analysis more broadly. It focuses on the agency of non-elites, i.e., subalterns to bring about political and social change.

[7] There has been considerable dissent among Indian feminists about whether all women's movements can be accurately regarded as feminist in their orientation and objectives.

[8] In conceptualising our DIFD funded project on *Youth Gender and Citizenship*: *An intergenerational study of education outcomes and poverty* under the theme of social and human outcomes. Northern and Southern teams encountered difficulties of ensuring a two-way participatory research process due to the different understandings of gender across disciplines and partner countries.

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