

**Cosmopolitanism, global social justice and gender equality in education**

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Abstract

This paper examines a debate in the literature on cosmopolitanism concerning different understandings of global social justice in the light of a number of declarations by UN organizations on gender equality in education. The paper attempts to locate the existing literature on gender, education and notions of the international within the discussion on global justice. A debate within the political philosophy of cosmopolitanism concerns differences between those who consider we can make claims regarding justice only of those with whom we share citizenship, and those who see global social justice as a wider project across national boundaries. This raises particularly interesting issues concerning the ways in which gender equality in education is understood and the ways in which the capability approach is positioned in this debate. Drawing on two examples of how attempts to implement gender equality in education have proceeded at global level - namely the attempt to implement a fund for global financing for Education for All through the Fast Track Initiative and the attempt to introduce improved forms of monitoring of gender equality in education at national and international level- the paper assesses the form of the debates invoked, some of the difficulties encountered and some of the implications of these pragmatic issues for considering the debate about cosmopolitanism, capabilities, gender and global social justice.

**Introduction**

Gender equality in education holds a special place in global visions, policies and practices concerned with social justice in the contemporary period. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted in 2000 at the UN Millennium Summit, and still a major component of global and national strategies for economic and social development, have gender parity (that is equal numbers of girls and boys) in school as the first target to be met by 2005. A second target is that by 2015 all girls and boys in the world will have completed a full phase of primary education. This entails that by this year (2007) all children of primary school age should be entering school to enable them to complete an eight year primary cycle by 2015. These targets for gender equality in education (even though the meaning of equality here is very restricted) have been set with earlier dates for completion than all the other MDGs (which are to be achieved by 2015) because education generally, and gender equality in education more specifically, are seen to underpin the achievement of all the MDGs (Vandemoortele, 2003). The importance accorded to gender equality in education in the MDGs has implications for its position in the international architecture of global strategizing. The MDGs form the centerpiece of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) – which runs from 2005-2015. Initiatives currently developing nationally and internationally to take forward DESD thus give gender equality in education as an idea and practice a setting with some considerable

potential (UNESCO, 2006) . In addition plans evolving for the reform of the UN, strongly supported by the Commission on the Status of Women, envisage all the UN agencies that deal with gender and women's issues coming together under a Deputy Secretary General with a well resourced capacity to take forward both normative and operational work (CSW, 2007) . If this strongly supported plan succeeds gender equality may well be mainstreamed and adequately resourced with staff and money throughout UN programmes, many of which are concerned with education.

The centrality thus accorded to ideas concerning gender equality in education, while rich in possibility for feminist work in education, has tended to be somewhat neglected by scholars working on gender issues at national level, and has suffered from a simplistic interpretation of gender equality in education only in terms of 'get girls in' [to school], in many instances of international development policy (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2005) . At the same time sections of the women's movement have been skeptical of the potential of these declarations and political maneuverings (Antrobus, 2005). Key concerns of the global women's movement – violence against women and lack of provision for adult education – have no MDGs associated with them. In an attempt to critically review the potential of the moves associated with UN reform and the institutional support being accorded the MDGs for feminist engagement with aspirations for gender equality in education this paper reviews these in relation to debates concerning global social justice and cosmopolitanism, different meanings of 'the international' and of the obligations of justice with respect to different understandings of gender equality and education. In the second part of the paper two initiatives to put in place policies and practices linked to gender equality in education are reviewed drawing out the contrasting views of global social justice entailed and some of the implications for further feminist scholarship in this area.

### **Contested framings of gender equality in education: Cosmopolitanism, global social justice and the idea of 'the international'**

The meaning of gender equality in education has been much contested in discussions of global social justice (Unterhalter, 2007a; Unterhalter, 2007b). Gender equality has signalled at one end of a continuum a minimal meaning concerned with giving girls access to a few years in school and, at the other, a larger meaning entailing a challenge to unjust forms of power, a denial of rights and capabilities, inequitable distribution of resources and restrictions on participation and empowerment through education. These different meanings of gender equality line up with particular interpretations of the 'international' and ideas about cosmopolitanism and global social justice.

I have schematically distinguished two overlapping periods in which the space of 'the international' has been reconfigured (Unterhalter, 2007b). The first runs from approximately 1945 to 1992, and the second from 1993 to the present. The first is associated with the primacy of the idea of states in global space and I want to signal this meaning by calling the first wave inter-national in that global space is considered constituted by nation states interacting with each other. The space of the global and the national are distinct and formally connected with the global conceived as 'above' the national. This was the shape of the world made initially at Versailles in 1918, confirmed at Yalta and Potsdam in 1945, and not significantly destabilised by decolonisation and the emergence of new states in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

The second wave, which came into being with the end of the Cold War (although local events and realignments make its emergence some time after the fall of the Berlin Wall) is associated with intersecting global and local networks, sometimes of states, civil society, corporations, sometimes of combinations of these. I signal this meaning by calling the second wave in/ternational in that the global, the national and the local become intermixed forming and reforming each other without the sharp distinctions of the previous era. Thus the global is mixed in with the national as much as the reverse is true. While formal distinctions remain, there are also informal crossings of boundaries between national and global. The 'global' in terms of economic relations, political imperatives, and social and cultural flows is inside the 'local', while at the same time 'local' concerns for example with worsening drought or attacks on particular communities become matters of global policy, politics and regional realignments. The first period does not end when the second begins, but the second places a palimpsest over the first so that it is no longer simply a matter of always reading the 'inter-national' on its own terms, it is now always in addition seen through the 'in/ternational'.

These shifting meanings of 'international' have been associated with a lively debate with regarding cosmopolitanism and global social justice, which has some significant implications for thinking about feminism and gender equality in education. Cosmopolitanism, initially used by the early Greek philosophers the Stoics, means literally 'citizen of the world'. In its original context it connoted concerns and duties attached to a space that was common to all, not just bounded by locality, that is a particular village, community or state. In its contemporary form, however, cosmopolitanism is usually understood as a commitment to take the well-being of individuals wherever they are located in the world as central and is concerned with distributive justice across nation states and through transnational institutions (Beitz 2001; Moellendorf, 2002). Thus, it is concerned with how justice regarding schooling is secured for individuals, regardless of gender, in every country of the world and how this might be achieved across different political settings by people who may not share obvious ties of affiliation, such as common citizenship, faith, or notions of ethnicity. As such it has considerable resonance with the universal aspirations of feminism (Basu, 1995; DAWN, 1995)

Debates about cosmopolitanism are concerned with normative explorations of the content and weight of obligations we owe to those who are not citizens of the same state, but whose lives are affected by our actions, and who in turn affect our lives. What kind of education, for example how many years in school or with what form of instructional materials, do we owe to people with whom we share no ties of common citizenship? How much account must we take of their gendered lives and the nature and form of global gender inequalities in thinking about this education? How must we consider their interests in social justice in relation to those of our fellow citizens? How much is cosmopolitanism a restatement through analytical philosophy of ideas already engaged by feminism with ready applicability to education?

Cosmopolitanism has been criticized as an empty 'grand idea' which ignores giving appropriate attention to local concerns (McKim and McMahan 1997). The powerful realist school in international relations reacted against imbuing states or global institutions with moral ideas (Mandle, 2006). Feminist comments on

cosmopolitanism raise concerns with questions of power, policy and agency highlighting how citizenship and the state, which have powerful purchase on how we envisage cosmopolitanism, have provided only ambiguous support for gender equality aspirations (Eschle, 2004; Rai, 2003) . Feminist political commentators suggest that new social movements and global governance structures associated with cosmopolitan aspirations themselves have to be subjected to similar critical scrutiny (Varga, 2003; True, 2003) . These commentaries highlight how any discussion of cosmopolitanism must necessarily engage a consideration of the state. Contrary to the views of many of its critics much contemporary writing on cosmopolitanism does recognize the existence of states, communities, and different languages which exert ties of affiliation, but there are divided views on how to place the state in assessments of global social justice.

Miller distinguishes between what he calls thick and thin notions of cosmopolitanism. Common to both is the view that in deciding on an institutional form or a particular action, for example with regard to gender equality as a foundational value in legislation on schooling, the claims of each person affected should be weighed equally. For strong or thick versions of cosmopolitanism

all moral principles must be justified by showing that they give equal weight to the claims of everyone, which means that they must either be directly universal in their scope, or if they apply only to a select group of people they must be secondary principles whose ultimate foundation is universal.

(Miller, 1998, 166)

Thus, for thick cosmopolitans, gender equality as a key component of legislation on schooling must apply in *every* country of the world. The overarching universalism of strong versions of cosmopolitanism is contrasted with a weaker meaning of the term which, in what is termed thin cosmopolitanism, entails that

We may owe certain kinds of treatment to all other kinds of human beings regardless of any relationship in which we stand to them, while there are other kinds of treatment that we owe only to those to whom we are related in certain ways, with neither sort of obligation being derivative of the other.

(Miller, 1998, 167)

For thin cosmopolitans, regardless of our citizenship, we owe concern to redress certain aspects of gender discrimination worldwide, for example that girls should encounter no barriers in access to school, but our interest in gender equality as the foundational dimension of legislation on schooling as it applies to curriculum, teacher training, the management of sexual harassment, opposition to violence against women, and decisions about levels of expenditure, is something we owe only to those with whom we share a common legislative system. Thick cosmopolitans therefore might argue for energetic establishment of institutions that deliver gender equality in education globally because they are governed by principles that give equal weight to the valued lives of each and every man and woman. Thin cosmopolitans might argue that we owe opportunities to access to a bounded package of a set number of years in school to all people in the world, regardless of whether or not we are citizens of the same country, because this is entailed by a notion regarding equal claims of everyone to what is considered an appropriate amount of schooling that will protect against

harm. These claims entail some obligations to help girls gain access to schooling, but this obligation might be met through a donation to a charity which supports a girl at school or our government contributing some form of aid. It does not place obligations on us to make arguments to the governments of countries in which we are not citizens about the content and form of schooling or gender relations within and outside school. These are arguments we can legitimately make to our own governments. Thus thin cosmopolitans have more affinity for meanings of gender and education concerned not with the gendered power relations of institutions but with girls' and boys' access to schooling. Thick cosmopolitanism characterizes the stronger demands of gender equality as a global aspiration. Thick cosmopolitans are concerned with the interplay between inter-national and in/ternational as sketched above, while the view of thin cosmopolitans is that the more formal meaning of inter-national must always trump or over-rule the more fluid forms of the in/ternational.

David Held has outlined a position between the thick and the thin forms, writing that cosmopolitanism denotes an 'ethical and political' space which lays down 'regulative principles which delimit and govern the range of diversity and difference that ought to be found in public life' (Held, 2005, 18) . He is concerned here to link together a thick and thin cosmopolitanism. Thus he affirms certain principles from thick cosmopolitanism about the nature of persons, the form of institutions, and processes of prioritisation in decision making. He considers these can work with a particular form of thin cosmopolitan support for local interpretations, a plurality of value sources, and different ethical forms of institutions (Held, 2005, 18-19). Held seems to be arguing for gender equality in education as a matter of global social justice ethically entailed by a form of thick cosmopolitanism which rests on particular notions of the person - that is equal worth and dignity, active agency and political accountability. Institutions, such as schools and education departments and ideas about curriculum must allow for the consent of participants, collective decision making and inclusiveness. These principles also address the processes entailed in decision making about education on a global scale, and can be interpreted as enjoining the avoidance of serious harm through all children being given access to school and attention to the sustainability of initiatives given the fragility of the changing climate.

Elsewhere Held characterizes this approach as promoting the values of social democracy in a global context (Held, 2004, 16-17). He suggests that social democracy offers an alternative global policy agenda to neoconservatism, neoliberalism and radical anti-globalisation. He sees this approach based on reformulated global rules for security which will entail new aspects of international human rights law and a regulation of global markets. This will entail democratization of national and suprastate governance, for example incorporating concerns with global justice into national legislation and reforming global institutions like the UN and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). But Held stresses that these strong meanings do not entail any particular injunction about the form of agency, accountability, and collective decision making or a particular form for the delivery of welfare.

The implication of this is that there is no particular pre-given commitment to gender equality in education. In a particular society, all women and men may consent to women being excluded from decision making about curriculum or school finance or access to the labour market. They do this because they consider it is consonant with

ideas about equal worth and dignity arguing that women's worth lies in looking after children at home. Providing serious harm is avoided because all children have a minimum of, say, five years in school, Held's version of the cosmopolitan aspiration would have been satisfied because principles regarding the dignity of all persons would have been upheld, all would have participated in deciding on the form of institutions, and the process of whether to prioritise the rearing of children at home over women's participation in politics and economics outside the family. Local meanings about family and women's worth would have been given value.

The central divisions between thick and thin cosmopolitanism concern the relative ethical weight of different spaces of justice and the significance of competing values. For thick cosmopolitanism, family, community or national spaces for justice operate no differently to the global space; and they see cosmopolitan principles as especially weighty. They draw on ideas of the contemporary period as shaped by international forces. Thin cosmopolitanism draws a sharp distinction between the spaces of justice and it sees cosmopolitan principles as having no more weight than other, sometimes competing values associated with community or locale, thus drawing on ideas of an inter-national global sphere. Held attempts to bridge the divide between thick and thin cosmopolitanism. He argues that interpretations of cosmopolitan principles, for example regarding the equal worth of each person, will be made locally. A revamped system of global governance will regulate and advance global social democracy which will protect these values by regulating markets and enhancing security.

While on some level this is an appealing vision, it leaves out any concern with advancing equalities. It is primarily concerned with establishing rules and building institutions. One such rule affirms the importance of local interpretations. But local value pluralism in relation to gender or education can be in tension with the universalism of strong cosmopolitanism which argues for gender equality in all institutions. If it is considered good in some communities that girls do not receive more than minimal education and are taught nothing of mathematics and science, while cosmopolitan principles affirm it is right that they should be given as much education as boys with the same curriculum, Held's global covenant cannot secure this equality. Thus, it is not clear how Held's position can be distinguished from that of thin cosmopolitanism.

Feminist engagements with cosmopolitanism range from trenchant support for thick cosmopolitanism in the work of Martha Nussbaum, defense of a Kantian statement of global duties by Onora O'Neill and a socially situated account of the route of global obligations in the work of Iris Young. In discussing each one in turn I want to draw out the implications of their ideas for thinking about gender equality in education and capabilities. Martha Nussbaum defends her view of global obligations in terms of the entitlements which all people in the world have to capabilities to function (Nussbaum, 2006, 271-324). Thus all have entitlements to education, irrespective of gender or other social divisions. This does not mean everyone in the world has a duty to provide education for all, but we have a collective duty to think about how we can provide for that education up to an appropriate threshold (Nussbaum, 2006, 281). The capabilities approach focuses on what valued aspects of doing and being can be secured. In Nussbaum's work the thin cosmopolitan boundaries drawn by nation states are not adequate because a contract among citizens may not adequately secure

enough education. In many countries there are high drop out rates from school with distinct gender features. In these instances governments are manifestly not able to provide for education capabilities and a thick cosmopolitan statement of entitlements that goes beyond minimal provision holds up values not to governments but to many forms of social organization. In Nussbaum's view these ideas form part of the institutional architecture of a global structure which can make demands of governments and societies to provide for capabilities up to a minimum threshold (Nussbaum, 2006, 322). Nussbaum thus welds thinking about global entitlements secured by in/ternational action, together with an appreciation of the importance of working with in the existing forms of citizenship and social contract laid down in the notion of the nation state and the inter-national.

Onora O'Neill does not start with entitlements, but with duties and argues that there are minimal global duties we can all agree on. These duties exist irrespective of the boundaries of states or the dividing lines of inter-national or in/ternational and comprise acceptance that actions by individuals or institutions should not be based on deception, violence, or coercion (O'Neill, 2000, 159). Although this is a highly abstracted notion of cosmopolitan duties, it makes considerable demands in terms of global social justice. O'Neill argues that in designing policies and practices we must ask whether the 'arrangements that structure vulnerable lives are one that could have been refused or renegotiated by those they constrain (O'Neill, 2000, 163). Drawing on examples from Northern Kenya I have considered how much this principle of cosmopolitanism with regard to gender equality in education goes beyond what is funded and supported even by some of the most innovative projects working to expand education and address gender equality (Unterhalter, 2007, 28-29). This notion of global duties thus evades some of the pragmatic problems associated with policies raised by thick and thin cosmopolitanism. O'Neill suggests that individuals and institutions constituted either through inter-national or in/ternational forms of global relations are similarly enjoined to assess their actions in relation to this form of global obligation.

By contrast Iris Young theorises the notion of global obligation not from a process of abstraction or a statement of entitlement, but a reflection on the level of structured social connection between people contoured by social structural processes in which they are placed unequally. She thus imbues the notion of the in/ternational with particular power relations and is concerned in advancing an argument about social connection and the responsibility this entails to address the obligations that exist across boundaries of power and powerlessness (Young, 2006). She draws her examples from the global market for clothes produced in sweatshops setting out the connections that exist between those who buy and make clothes. She comments on connections and obligations with regard to wages and work conditions. This analysis can be extended with regard to education enjoyed or foregone by those connected through global power relations in the clothes industry. This connection with regard to education addresses both inter-national relations between states who might invoke trade relations linked to the garment industry as one aspects of an aid relationship or other forms of dialogue about gender and education. The connection might also address formations of the in/ternational links between trade unions, financial organizations, and social action groups.

Despite the disappointment of some feminist activists that the MDGs or DESD do not go far enough in securing gender equality aspirations and despite the cautions of those who argue for thin cosmopolitanism, these feminist theorists defend notions of global obligation, and either explicitly or implicitly make a case for the significance of drawing on ideas of global justice to expand the provision of education and secure wider meanings of gender equality. How successful have global institutions been in delivering these versions of global social justice? In trying to assess this I want to look at two initiatives that have derived from attempts to make practicable the global declarations on Education for All (EFA) outlined in the Dakar Programme of Action (2000) and the MDGs articulated in the Millennium Declaration (2000) and vigorously promoted through the work of the Millennium Project (Sachs, 2005). The first, the introduction of gender concerns into the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) to fund EFA, is an attempt to use the provision of international financing to advance consideration of gender issues. The second, the development of a new monitoring approach to gender equality in education, is an attempt to use the apparatus linked to monitoring and evaluation of EFA to expand the ways in which gender equality is assessed.

The Fast Track Initiative (FTI) was established in 2002 as a global compact to help low income countries achieve EFA. The FTI aims

to provide the incentives and resources to empower poor nations to build and implement sound education plans. Developing nations are responsible for taking ownership of crafting national education plans, with budget accountability and a greater commitment of political and financial resources, while donor nations commit to providing the additional technical know-how and funding required to ensure that no nation that met its obligations would fail for lack of resources or technical capacity. (FTI, 2002)

The FTI review of progress in September 2006 reported that 20 countries had developed education plans that could secure them funding through the FTI, 12 more were expected to have plans endorsed for funding by the end of 2006, and 27 countries had expressed an interest in joining the FTI process (FTI, 2006). The FTI process signals that increases in funding for EFA through aid and improved budgetary scrutiny are beginning, but much still needs to be done. Increasing flows of resources into education have not been matched by increasing concerns for practices to develop gender equality in education. The FTI was slow to take account of gender in establishing its appraisal guidelines (Rose, 2005). Nonetheless some steps have been taken. A paper published by the UN Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) in 2005 looked at integrating gender into the FTI and the assessment process used when the FTI helps countries develop their national education plans (Seel and Clarke, 2005). The paper concluded that there was huge variation in the in quality of gender analysis countries undertook to qualify for FTI support. It showed that while most countries collect some gender disaggregated data and have objectives to improve girls' enrolments, only four countries had developed plans on the basis of a broader concept of gender equality and only Ghana had made a commitment to mainstream concerns with gender.

The paper made a series of important recommendations:

- strengthening UNGEI's commitment to mainstream gender and develop capacity to do this;

- strengthening the FTI assessment and endorsement guidelines so that gender disaggregated data is provided in all the documents used to take the assessment and endorsement process forward;
- countries make an overall summary of objectives and strategies for achieving gender equitable universal primary completion,;
- the costs of addressing gender inequality be added to proposals for funding.

At the end of 2005 the FTI meeting in Beijing agreed to revisit the FTI goals to include an explicit commitment to gender and to strengthen the FTI appraisal guidelines to highlight gender planning. Whether these are put into place needs close monitoring.

The moves to integrate gender into government planning for education provision and into bids for finance for the FTI are encouraging, but the UNGEI paper highlights how the need to develop capacity to undertake the work of gender analysis remains a considerable challenge. Thus while changes at the FTI indicate that some steps have been taken to move an agenda for gender equality in education further, this is proceeding slowly and action within countries is often sparse and unsupported. The fragmentary and fragile steps regarding gender associated with the FTI highlight how difficult it is to move from cosmopolitan principles to appropriate institutional actions. In the FTI there is a version of Nussbaum's institutionalization of a global social contract on gender equality in education, and there is an attempt to alter the power relations of social structure in relation to global responsibility outlined by Young. But these steps are preliminary and very under-resourced. Any attempt to take financing issues down to the level of individual lives enjoined by O'Neill has barely begun. The fragility of the project is not only at the level of institutions and bureaucracies that move slowly. It is also evident in the absence of any sense of global connectedness by the women's movement or the EFA movement to the workings of the FTI on gender. The global compact is not being held to account for its limited work on gender, either through inter-national or in/ternational forces. The impatience of the global women's movement with the MDG agenda has left a vacuum in which demands regarding gender and global education financing are not being made. The significance of this is that IMF conditionalities on aid mean that there are real ceilings to the amounts that can be paid to teachers and other workers in the education sector, and that increases in the pay of large numbers of women, who are the lowest paid amongst teachers, is being blocked (Archer and Marphathia, 2006). As yet no large scale campaign or invocation of in/ternational action has raised these issues, although some small-scale advocacy is in place.

A second instance also exemplifies the difficulties of institutionalising concern with gender equality in education on a global scale. Existing methods of monitoring progress on EFA look at gender issues in terms of levels of gender parity, that is whether there are equal numbers of boys and girls participating in different school phases. Gender parity is a very weak proxy for gender equality, as many studies show how equal numbers of girls and boys can be enrolled in school, but deeply entrenched processes of gender inequality with regard to access to power, resources, and valued outcomes are in place (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2005; Subrhamanian, 2005; Vavrus, 2003; Kakuru, 2006). An attempt to develop a more complex measure of gender inequality in schooling – the gender equality in education index (GEEI) – was developed by the research and advocacy project *Beyond Access* (Unterhalter,

Challender and Rajagopalan, 2005; Unterhalter, 2006; Unterhalter, 2007a; Unterhalter and Oomen, 2007a). The index was an attempt to use features of the inter-national, that is the comparison of GEEI scores between countries, to prompt further thinking about how gender was monitored and evaluated in relation to EFA. The index was picked up and used in advocacy work in 2005 in South Asia by the network ASPBAE, in China by UNICEF and in Africa in speeches to the Commonwealth Education Ministers conference by the South African Minister of Education. However, despite the existence of a new monitoring approach, the support of some important NGO, IGO and government networks, the global discussion of monitoring progress on EFA goals as articulated in UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report paid little attention to different approaches to measurement or wider meanings of gender equality (North, 2006). The challenge of using in/ternational forms of organisation and debate to examine how gender is monitored though forms of the inter-national has not been taken up.

These two examples highlight how difficult the process of institutionalising global cosmopolitan relationships are. The boundaries of states are relatively robust against cosmopolitan demands for gender equality in education, but the formations of global institutions, such as UNGEI, the FTI and UNESCO, find it difficult to embrace richer notions of gender equality, entitlement and connection. The absence of interventions from the global women's movement in campaigns on education makes it harder to challenge the bureaucratic approach of UN organisations. The argument for global social justice has been powerfully made by Nussbaum, Young, and O'Neill. However the organisational and institutional capacity to realise this is weak, generally unsupported and under –scrutinised. The challenge for cosmopolitanism with regard to gender equality in education, does not lie only in refining ideas, but in linking ideas with substantive actions.

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