

Gender in the Making of the Nigerian University System by Dr Charmaine Pereira – a book launch and discussion

Book Presentation on Tuesday 24th July 2007

Venue: Shehu Musa Yar Adua, Abuja

Time: 9 a.m.

Chair: Mrs Amina Ibrahim

Reviews by Professor Nuhu Yaqub, Dr Rueben Abati, Chief Joy Ezeilo, Barister Ayo Atsenua and Dr Clara Ejembi

Book publishers: James Currey, London and Heineman Educational Books, Ibadan

Host: Initiative for Women's Studies in Nigeria

The Research

The gendered character of the university system and its implications for women and for the kind of society that university education is in place to support, have rarely been the focus of enquiry. A recent study by Charmaine Pereira, titled *Gender in the Making of the University System*, shows how the multiple changes that the university system has undergone in the process of its formation are highly gendered, including deeply entrenched levels of gender discrimination, gender conflict and gendered violence. Addressing gender goes beyond increasing the numbers of women in universities to encompass the philosophies, values and mission of university education as well as its practice. This has implications for processes such as funding, management, institutional cultures, knowledge production and the quality of university education. Moreover, the most recent changes to the university system require wider and deeper consultation than has so far taken place and the gendered dynamics of these changes have to be put on the agenda.

The research on which the book is based was funded by the Partnership for Higher Education in Nigeria, a consortium of private US-based foundations that is supporting higher education across Africa. The partnership is also supporting the book launch, not only in Nigeria but in other countries where research on higher education was carried out, including Kenya and Ghana.

Support for the launch in Nigeria provides an excellent opportunity for not only reviewing arguments from the book but for opening up a discussion of ongoing changes to the university system and their gendered implications, to stakeholders within and beyond the university system. This is particularly significant in view of the considerable flux characterising the current condition of the university system, the current conjuncture of a change in government and the possibilities thus afforded for a potentially more empowering trajectory for the development of university education. The Initiative for Women's Studies in Nigeria (IWSN), formerly the Network for Women's Studies in Nigeria, is organising the book launch and the accompanying discussion. IWSN strengthens capacity for teaching and research in gender and women's studies. Its members are individuals, mostly based in

universities, working across a range of academic disciplines and spheres of practice. IWSN is currently engaged in a major action research project on the politics of heterosexuality and sexual harassment in university life.

About the author

Charmaine Pereira is a feminist scholar-activist, based in Abuja. She was born in Nairobi and spent her formative years in Kenya, Uganda, and Brazil before completing her education in the United Kingdom. She has taught at universities in England, Nigeria and South Africa, and came to Nigeria in 1993. Her previous writing has addressed subjects such as women organising, the state and gendered ideologies, and sexuality. Pereira has worked with a number of women's organisations and other organisations in Nigerian civil society on women's citizenship, political participation and violence against women. She is the National Co-ordinator of the Initiative for Women's Studies in Nigeria.

Gender in the Making of the Nigerian University System

by Charmaine Pereira

A synopsis

This book maps the changing character of the university system in Nigeria, with a particular focus on gender. 'Gender' is used here to refer to the processes that define 'acceptable' ways of being masculine or feminine in a particular social formation. The aim of the research on which the study is based is to further our understanding of the gendered workings of university education. Education, because it is capable of developing scarce skills and raising consciousness, holds out particular promise to the state in relation to its need to control society and the economy. At the same time, education poses a threat to prevailing relations of authority, since education is also capable of stimulating independent thought. *Gender in the Making of the Nigerian University System* explores questions such as how gendered structures and processes at the level of the university system, and the broader contextual level, have affected universities; the ways in which the workings of the university system have contributed to bringing about gender differentials; how women have contributed to policy issues in university education; and the gender implications of existing reforms of the university system.

The study's focus on an understanding of changes unfolding within the university system is driven by an emphasis on the kinds of changes that are necessary to propel the university system along a trajectory of greater gender equality and social justice. This entails understanding in the Nigerian context what forces subvert the building of institutions for knowledge production in this direction. It also entails an understanding of what strategies might promote the capacity of universities to engage in research, teaching and learning that are more likely to bring about democratization and gender justice. The overall goal has been to understand institutional power relationships, through an examination of the gendered formation and governance of the university system. Whilst considerable analysis of the university system has been carried out in other studies at various points in time, most of this work has been blind to gender.

Gender in the Making of the Nigerian University System is comprised of ten chapters. Following the introduction, chapter two discusses the historical basis for the educational system in Nigeria, as the overall system within which the university system is located. The

intention is to draw attention to the regional, sub-regional and class dimensions of the system, which configure gendered processes and relations that continue to have an impact today. The discussion then turns in chapter three to the post-colonial context within which the university system has grown in Nigeria. The contemporary configuration of university education and its gender politics form the subject of chapter four, exploring the legal framework underlying the system and the nature of the educational bureaucracy. Chapter five examines the policy environment and the relations between the university system and the job market. This is followed by a chapter addressing the politics of funding the university system and its implications for the quality of university education. Universities are examined as gendered institutions in chapters seven and eight, focusing on access, student enrolment, academic staff strength as well as institutional culture and equity agendas. Finally, sites of reform in the university system and the implications for greater gender equity are discussed in chapter nine, before presenting the conclusions and recommendations in chapter ten.