National Policies on Pregnancy in Education Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa: the case of Botswana

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ABSTRACT   *The article critiques pregnancy policies in the education systems in sub-Saharan Africa. Policies discussed are divided into expulsion, re-entry and continuation policies. Arguing from the standpoint of theories of oppression, it is postulated that expulsion policies symbolise direct violence against girls who become pregnant and are more common in those countries with poor human rights records. Continuation and re-entry policies are prevalent in countries that have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Children. It is argued that re-entry policies also violate girl mothers' right to education through a retreat ideology that requires temporary withdrawal of the pregnant girl from school. Moreover, gender inequalities are built into the policies and supported by traditional and institutional ideologies that make re-entry of the girl mother into the school difficult. The Botswana re-entry policy is reviewed to illustrate difficulties in the readmission of girl mothers to school.*

Introduction

There has been an increase of gender-sensitive policies in education in sub-Saharan Africa in the last decade. These gender-sensitive intervention policies seek, among other things, to remove imbalances in school access, participation, and achievement between boys and girls. According to the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) (1995) about 36 million girls in sub-Saharan Africa are missing from school. Only 34% of girls complete primary school, while 10% complete secondary school, compared to 36% of the boys. Allowing schoolgirls who get pregnant to continue with their education has been one of the strategies to give girls and boys equal opportunity to educational access and participation. This article provides an overview of pregnancy policies in the education systems of 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa from a gender perspective. The pregnancy policies are categorised into expulsion, re-entry and continuation policies. The article advances the argument that while expulsion policies symbolise overt violence

against those expelled, re-entry policies also result in subtle forms of violence against those affected. I argue that there is a close correspondence between a country's socio-political environment and the type of policy adopted. To illustrate the relationship, a brief description of the socio-political environment of the countries as indicated by a country's mode of governance, human rights record and education enrolment rates is presented.

The article's main argument is that even when a policy allows girls to re-enter the school system, administrative bureaucracy and ideologies of exclusion at the level of the school disable girl mothers, thus perpetuating subtle forms of violence against them. To illustrate the argument, the re-entry policy in Botswana is explored using theories of oppression, amongst them radical feminism and socialist feminism. One of the basic tenets of radical feminism, for instance, is that every institution is a source and vehicle through which male oppression of females is constructed, sustained and reproduced through a system of patriarchy. For sustainability, patriarchy produces a web of violence, which may take the form of physical cruelty or more subtle modes. Clarifying this strand of radical feminism, Ritzer (1992, p. 474) explains that:

> Violence exists whenever one group controls in its own interests the life chances, environments, actions, and perceptions of another group, as men do women.

Socialist feminists consider historical materialism as the starting point for understanding men's domination of women. They however broaden the concept of materialism not only to include economic conditions and relations over time but also:

> other conditions that sustain human life including the human body, its sexuality and involvement in procreation and child rearing; home maintenance with its unpaid invisible round of domestic tasks; emotional sustenance and the production of knowledge itself. (Ritzer, 1992, p. 479)

The perspective of the author is that Botswana's re-entry policy is constrained by the ideologies within which it was conceived and the persistent traditional customs that are biased against women in general. It is postulated that the formulation of the policy in the 1970s was heavily influenced by society's views about pregnancy before marriage, and by a gender division of labour that ascribed childcare and nurturing entirely to women. A brief historical account of pregnancy and motherhood is presented to demonstrate the ideologies which inform and constrain the implementation of the re-entry policy. The stance of the author is that beliefs about pregnancy, rituals involved after childbirth, beliefs about maternal fluids for example, breast milk, and a traditional motherhood ideology inform the exclusion and seclusion ideologies that disable the majority of girl mothers from re-entering the school system. An analysis of the policy further shows how the language used in the pregnancy policy is implicated in constructing and perpetuating a system of differential treatment of boys and girls.

Overview of National Policies on Pregnancy in Educational Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa

This section provides an overview of the practice and procedures in the approach to pregnancy policies in education systems in sub-Saharan Africa. Examples are drawn from 20 countries, namely, Botswana, Cameroon, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, Mozambique, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe. Policies within these coun-

tries can be categorised as follows: expulsion, re-entry and continuation policies. It is postulated that there is a relationship between the kind of policy adopted and the wider socio-political context.

Method

A variety of sources were used to obtain data on the identified countries. Information on the type of policies in place in the countries outlined is based on responses to a questionnaire on Adolescent Pregnancy Policies and Programmes in Africa. The questionnaire was distributed to African Ministries of Education by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE, 1997). Case studies and country reports presented at the 1994 ministerial consultation on school drop-out and adolescent pregnancy also provided valuable data. Descriptions of the socio-political environments in the countries selected are based on Humana's World Human Rights Index (Humana, 1992). Another valuable source was *The Economist: Pocket Africa* (Dallas, 1995), which provides profiles, facts and figures about Africa.

Expulsion Policies

The practice of expelling pregnant girls from schools was prevalent during the colonial days and still prevails in Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, Togo and Zanzibar (Mapuri, 1994; FAWE, 1997). During the colonial period, Christian missionaries managed the majority of schools in Africa. The religion of the missionaries regarded pre-marital pregnancy as immoral and those who conceived were expelled. In most schools, starting on the first school day, all girls had to undergo a medical check-up to make sure that they were not pregnant at the time. During the school year, periodical checks were organised to detect any pregnancy. In the event of pregnancy, a girl was immediately and forcibly expelled (Bennars, 1997). Today, in most countries where there are no explicit policies, the values, norms and attitudes of the society towards pregnancy determine the fate of the pregnant girl, and this is invariably expulsion. But some countries have formal expulsion policies.

In Mozambique, to date, girls are automatically expelled from school once it is discovered that they are pregnant (Wamahiu, 1998). In Togo and Zanzibar, girls are required by law to drop out of school. In Zanzibar, which is a predominantly Muslim society, pre-marital pregnancy is regarded as a disgrace and a manifestation of the erosion of moral standards (Mapuri, 1994).

The Socio-political Context of Countries with Expulsion Policies

Expulsion, despite its disadvantages to the girl mother, is upheld through the state's organs, such as the law, the moral imperatives of religion and the national socio-economic environment. Most of the countries that expel pregnant students are ruled by either a military government or a dictatorial single party and have poor human rights records. Mali, Tanzania, Togo and Zanzibar are one-party states, while Liberia is a military state. Nigeria returned to multiparty democracy in 1999 and Mozambique in 1994. The human rights ratings for these countries are described as either poor or bad (Humana, 1992). In Tanzania, for example, there is no political and legal equality of women and there is no equality of the sexes during marriage and divorce proceedings (Humana, 1992). Expulsion can be viewed as a symbol of direct violence against those

students who become pregnant. The violence may be perceived as an extension of the value system of military states and single-party states, and especially their disregard for human rights.

At the community level, violence against women as part of a value system is manifested in traditional practices such as the genital mutilation of women. For example, this is outlawed but still practised in Nigeria and Tanzania, where up to 25% of the girls are mutilated (Humana, 1992). In Mozambique, traditional practices reinforce male dominance, while in Togo, customary law perpetuates male privilege and the subordination of women (Humana, 1992). The predominance of traditional practices is reinforced by low literacy rates, for example, 35.5% in Mozambique and 45.5% in Togo (Dallas, 1995). In such contexts, the question that must be asked is, 'who will engineer gender-sensitive education policies when the mothers are denied basic human rights?'

There is also a close correspondence between the type of policy adopted by a country and the enrolment ratios across the educational ladder. Education is an important scarce resource and in sub-Saharan Africa in particular, one's level of education determines one's entry point into the labour market. There is, therefore, competition for access to education. The competition is toughest where enrolment ratios are low. Mali, one of the countries with an expulsion policy, has a primary enrolment ratio of 24%, which is the lowest in the world. Mozambique and Tanzania have the lowest secondary enrolment ratios in the world: 8% for Mozambique and 5% for Tanzania (Dallas, 1995). It is also in these countries that the proportion of girls to boys in school is lowest. It would appear, therefore, that policies are so much embedded in the values of the state and its socio-political context that gender-sensitive policies may be difficult to achieve before there is a transformation of the state and its various structures.

Continuation and Re-entry Policies

Emerging policies on pregnancy in schools which are 'girl-friendly' take into consideration the personal development and empowerment of the girl mother, her academic, physical and physiological needs as well as that of her offspring. These policies can be categorised as continuation policies (Wamahiu, 1997) because they allow uninterrupted continuation of school by pregnant girls, lactating mothers and married adolescents. Such policies exist, for example, in Cameroon, Madagascar, Namibia and Sierra Leone. In Cameroon and Madagascar, pregnant girls can go back to school immediately after delivery and are not compelled to take maternity leave. In Cameroon, girls can negotiate with their schools on the duration of maternity leave and can arrange for extra classes to be organised so that they do not fall behind their classmates. In Namibia, the girl can go back to school immediately on condition that a social worker expresses satisfaction that the baby will be cared for by a responsible adult. These policies are still new and their impact is therefore difficult to assess.

Some countries allow re-entry into the formal education system after a specified period of compulsory leave during pregnancy and lactation (Wamahiu, 1998). Such countries include Botswana, Guinea, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia and South Africa (FAWE, 1997; Vilikazi-Tselane, 1998). Kenya adopted the policy in 1994 and Malawi is still working on the modalities of re-entry. South Africa and Zambia require 12 months leave of absence. In South Africa, most schools prefer to expel the girl immediately on becoming aware of her pregnancy and readmit her 12 months after delivery (Vilikazi-Tselane, 1998). In the majority of these countries, the re-entry policy applies to prospective boy and girl parents but is sometimes applied differently depending on the sociocultural pressures.

The Socio-political Context of Countries with Continuation Policies

All the countries with continuation and re-entry policies are multiparty democracies. Another common feature of these countries is that they have ratified the United Nations Organisation Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. These two conventions together form a human rights framework that may help change gender-biased attitudes and practices of policy-makers and the public at large. They provide a context within which to shape and create legal codes and statutes, and educational policies and supporting action plans that are gender sensitive. The ratification of the conventions by these countries symbolises a degree of political will to address the asymmetrical relationship between men and women and girls and boys.

Most of these countries have higher primary and secondary school enrolment rates and higher literacy rates compared to countries with expulsion policies. For instance, Kenya has a primary school enrolment ratio of 95% and a literacy rate of 70.5%. Schools are one of the most important sites where gender bias is created, and by the same token, an important institution through which gender relations can be challenged. High primary enrolment rates provide an entry point to begin to transform some of the structures that impact on gender policy implementation. Countries in this category therefore do not only have a conducive political environment but also provide an enabling social environment to transform structures to accommodate gender-sensitive policies.

Re-entry policies, however, fall short of challenging and transforming existing gender relations. This is because they are still bound to traditional ideologies that encourage domination and oppression of women by men. The policies, for instance, violate the rights of girl mothers to education through a retreat ideology that requires temporary withdrawal from school. Because of their connectedness to traditional and institutional repressive ideologies, re-entry policies have failed to address the quality of life of the girl mothers in the school, their retention and other structural barriers that militate against retention. In order to illustrate some elements of traditional and institutional repressive ideologies, a case study of the re-entry policy in Botswana follows.

A Case Study of the Botswana Re-entry Policy

Method

The case study draws from a much larger study on adolescent pregnancy in Botswana funded by the Forum for African Women in Education (Chilisa, 1997). In the study, an analysis of the policy and a trend analysis of drop-out and readmission of students involved in pregnancy was made for the years 1985–95 using data from the Central Statistics Office. A survey questionnaire was also administered to 1760 students, 110 teachers and 29 school heads from a randomly selected group of junior and senior secondary schools. Of the 1760 students in the sample, 58 girls had been pregnant while 16 boys had been responsible for a pregnancy. The survey questionnaire sought, among other factors, the attitudes of students, teachers and school heads towards students involved with pregnancy and the quality of their life in school. What follows is a brief history of the socio-political context of Botswana, a discourse on the social construction of motherhood and a presentation of the survey results on the pregnancy policy.

The Socio-political Situation in Botswana

Botswana has enjoyed a multiparty democracy since independence in 1966. Its human rights record is rated as good and among the best in sub-Saharan Africa (Humana, 1992). Following the United Nations Conference on Women in 1975, Botswana took commendable steps towards bridging the gap between men and women in the social, economic and political fields of development. Major developments have been the adoption of the National Policy on Women and Development in 1996. Botswana also acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1996.

Despite the long-standing commitment to the advancement of women, gender inequalities and, in particular, gender violence, have persisted. Women are a majority in the country, constituting 52.25% of the population. Botswana has a high percentage of female-headed households (47%) (Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, 1999). Nevertheless, women are underrepresented in key decision-making positions, they have limited access to and control of resources, and consequently are among the poorest of the needy. Women's representation in parliament, for example, is only about 15%. Botswana has never had a woman high commissioner, speaker of parliament or a chief justice. Culturally, cattle, which are a significant source of income in the country, belong to men. For instance, the 1991 population census showed that women owned only 14% of the cattle compared to 86% owned by men (Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, 1999). Within the cash income-earning population, the proportion of women earners is only 40% compared to 60% of men. These women are concentrated in the lower paid category and in insecure jobs where the conditions of service are poor and basic employee rights and legal protection is limited.

Poverty, lack of power in the family, politics, and generally, underrepresentation in key decision-making positions place women in a vulnerable position. The nature, degree and severity of 'gender violence' vary, depending on the age group. The girl child in comparison to the boy child is denied personal development when she is forced to drop out of school because of arranged marriages and pregnancy. A trend analysis of educational access by gender shows that girls outnumber boys at the primary school level but become outnumbered at senior secondary school and tertiary level. In 1994, girls formed 50.4% of those enrolled at primary school. At the same time, female students formed 44.1% of those enrolled at all educational levels (Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, 1999). In 1996, women formed 43% of those enrolled at the tertiary level (Central Statistics, 1998). This diminishing participation of women as they climb up the educational ladder is partly attributed to high drop-out rates due to pregnancy, early marriages and poor academic performance. Fig. 1 shows the number of drop-outs due to pregnancy between 1985 and 1997. The average drop-out rate between 1985 and 1997 was about 3%.

Reports show that only a small number of girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy re-enter the school system (Bayona & Kandji, 1996; Chilisa, 1997).

Pregnancy and the Social Construction of Motherhood

Feminist writers (Wearing, 1984; Gordon, 1990) have argued that ideologies on motherhood have been constructed and reproduced to perpetuate a gender-based division of labour and to control women's sense of identity and self-concept. Adding another dimension to the social construction of gender differences, Grosz (1994) argues that
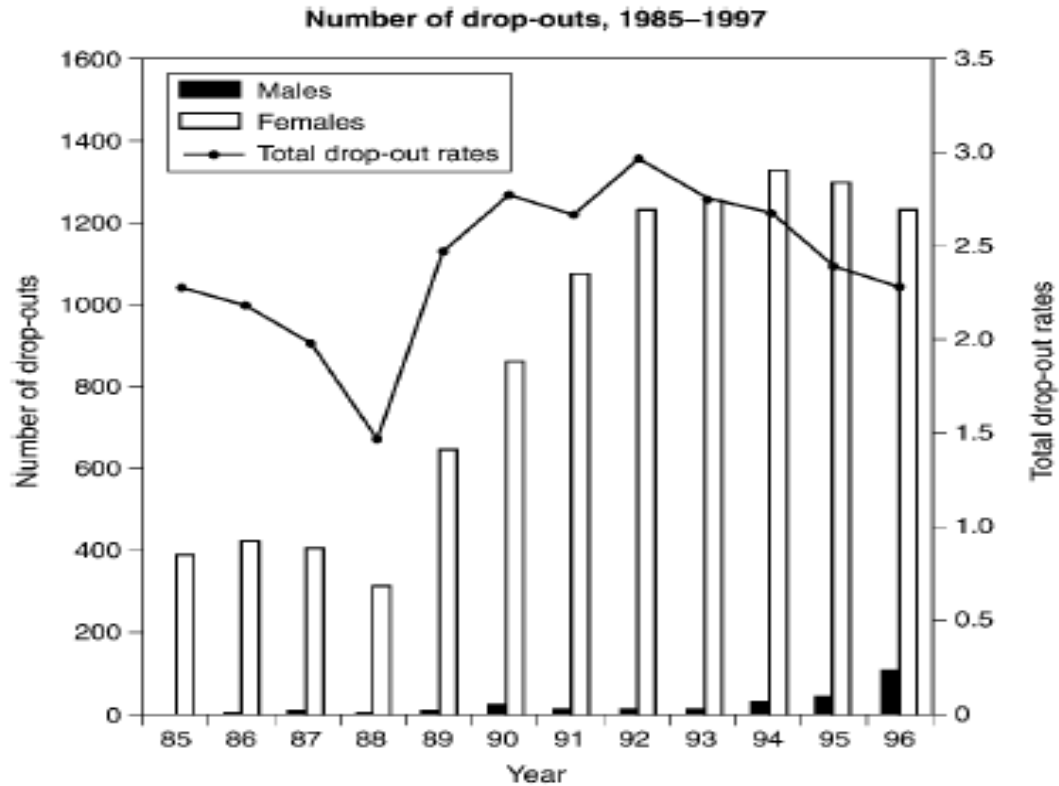
Number of drop-outs, 1985–1997

FIG. 1. Number of drop-outs, 1985–97.

pregnancy, childbirth and female bodily fluids (for example, breast milk) are used to control women's self identity, self-worth and life chances. In the context of Botswana, 'gender violence' starts with society's control over women's reproductive role. This is illustrated by attempts to regulate the ideal time for women to bear children. In pre-Independence Botswana, for example, a girl had to be married before she was allowed to conceive. According to Schapera (1938), a girl who conceived before marriage was subjected to punishment and became an object of scorn and ridicule. The father of the child was penalised unless he married the girl. During pregnancy and after the birth of the child, the mother (referred to as *motsetse*, one who has given birth) had to observe taboos and ceremonies that were deemed necessary for the welfare of the child. Among the Bakgatla, a mother was confined to her room for a period of up to 6 months after delivery. The practice of *botsetse* (confinement) is still prevalent in the rural areas, for example, among the Babirwa, where confinement periods go up to 3 months (Tlou, 2000). Among the Bakalanga, confinement periods will differ depending on the totem of the father of the child. Generally, these periods may differ depending on the income, employment status and the principles, taboos and customs invoked to justify it. All the same, the confinement period serves a purpose, tying the woman to the household chores of caring for the baby, while at the same time seeming to be taking generous interest in the welfare of the mother.

During botsetse, maternal flows (such as breast milk) are used to confine the woman to the private sphere of nurturing and caregiving, and to define a woman's space and place in society. A motsetse is expected to stay away from the public eye because of the alleged pollutant nature of the breast milk. A motsetse is also associated with uncleanness.

She cannot even today share utensils with the rest of the family (Tlou, 2000). The repulsion of a motsetse on the basis of the pollutant nature of the breast milk is a phenomenon also common in South Africa. According to Vilikazi-Tselane (1998), educators and parents justified the exclusion of the girl mother from school for 12 months after giving birth on the basis that the breast milk would affect the learning ability of other students.

The spatial separation of a motsetse from the rest of her age group also marks her entry into a new domain of responsibilities as a mother. It is a period in which a new identity is built. Societal expectations include suckling the baby for as long as possible and ensuring that the child is fed through out its period of growth (Schapera, 1938). There is strong emphasis on motherhood, which is the image against which girls who have had children are judged, their self-worth and sense of being. Central to the definition of a mother is the notion of caring and responsibility that means confining the mother to the home so that she can fend for and feed the baby. The new identity of a mother was predicated through myths and proverbs. According to Schapera (1938), a mother had to see to it that her children were properly fed by cultivating the ground assigned to her and by cooking for them the produce of her labour. Among the common proverbs are:

> *Ngwana wa mosadi ga a ke a wela mo isong* (A woman's child does not fall into the fire from exhaustion due to starvation);
>
> *Ngwana wa mosadi ga a ke a bopama kgotsa a swa* (A woman's child does not get lean or die from starvation); and
>
> *Mosadi mooka o anya le mariga* (A woman will always provide even during difficult times).

Medical health clinics have endorsed this practice by recommending breastfeeding for periods as long as 12 months.

The proverbs refer to mothers as women. Motherhood therefore also marks entry into womanhood, a concept that is heavily codified by societal expectations and norms that are opposite to what is expected of men. The word *mosadi* (woman) implies *yo o salang*, that is, one who remains at home. *Monna* (man), on the other hand, implies one who is outgoing, public and visible. The cultural meanings of mosadi and monna reinforce the marked gender roles and responsibilities in the womanhood/manhood domain.

Unmarried mothers, irrespective of age, remain peripheral members of the family, depending on the affluence of the family. Traditionally, marriage gave women (among other things) the right to participate in some decision-making processes relating to the family group. Up to today, in some families, an unmarried mother may not participate in the marriage negotiations of her family group, including her own children (Selolwane, 2000). Unmarried mothers form a stratum, albeit not homogeneous, whose subtle denial and exclusion from certain decision-making processes illustrate a form of 'gender violence' based on society's negative attitude towards bearing children outside marriage. This cultural norm has with the development of the capitalist economy been commercialised. A man is required to pay over and above the bride price a 'penalty fee' should he have a child with a woman he is engaged to before the marriage is formalised (Selolwane, 2000). It would thus appear that some traditional customs have been carried into modern society, presumably because they provide opportunities for acquiring capital.

First Child at a Young Age

The myths, ideologies and the language associated with bearing a child outside marriage at a young age demonstrate remnants of traditional customs that inform girl mothers'

sense of identity and self-worth. The girl mothers are made to feel inferior and impure through a system of social labelling that centres on their bodies. When a girl becomes pregnant outside marriage, the usual saying is that *'o robelwe leoto'* (her leg has been broken). The saying alludes to the restricted movement of a pregnant woman, or a motsetse that is imposed by society. These societal expectations are enforced through a system of taboos, for instance, a pregnant woman should not walk by a herd of cattle for fear the cows might abort.

A girl's pregnancy is referred to as *tshenyo*, meaning spoilt, damaged, defiled, or deflowered. Society refers to the act of getting pregnant as *'go digwa lebele'*, that is ' to bring down the breast', referring to the physiological changes of the breast after breastfeeding. Families of an unmarried girl up to today seek compensation for tshenyo, referred to as damage compensation. Families do not seek compensation when a second child is born but mothers can, by invoking the child maintenance law, do so if they so wish (Molokomme, 1991). Society further reinforces the social order by stigmatising the child born out of wedlock. Such a child is referred to as *letlaleanya*, that is, 'one who comes feeding' and 'illegitimate' by the state law to distinguish the child from the other children should the mother get married.

It should also be added that teenage pregnancy is itself a form of violence against the girl child. But society ignores this form of violence by focusing on what parents can get as compensation for damages (tshenyo). This societal outlook is embedded in the cultural norm that endorses marriage at an early age. Traditional customs certify the girl ready for marriage as soon as she reaches puberty. The Marriage Act allows girls to be married from the age of 14 years while boys may marry at 16 years. Customary expectations are that men marry women younger than them. A hierarchy based on age is thus imposed on relationships. This hierarchy allocates power to men, making women and girl children obedient and submissive to men, not only as partners or husbands, but also as elders who they look up to for wisdom.

From an analysis of the ideology of motherhood, it is clear that an ideal mother is one who is always available for the child, nurturing and caring for the child. It is also clear that pregnancy and confinement, irrespective of the time involved, restrict the movement of the girl mothers and therefore their life chances. Control over the movement of the girl mother is justified by further depicting the motsetse as unclean and the motsestse body as producing pollutant fluids. The female body is further marked and attached social constructed meanings. My perspective is that uncleanness associated with bodily fluids and a devaluation of the girl mother associated with the physiological changes of the body could have a negative impact on the self-identity and self-concept of the girl mothers. The girl mother assumes multiple identities as provider, who is nevertheless passive, helpless, and voiceless, and a commodity whose value diminishes with childbearing. The image of her as defiled, deflowered and spoilt or damaged, but all the same a provider, creates a frame of reference that other students later use to create ideologies of exclusion. She might also use these images to define her self-worth, space and place in the school community. It is these ideological overtures that form a framework for an analysis of the policy.

Analysis of the Re-entry Policy

Following the 1977 National Commission on Education (Government of Botswana, 1977), a re-entry policy for students involved with pregnancy was adopted. The policy required the girl to withdraw from school immediately her pregnancy was discovered,

only to return 12 months after delivery. In the re-entry policy, the 12-month leave was designed to enable the mother to be restored to full health as well as acting as a deterrent to pregnancy. But this long leave of absence was also grounded in the culture that required seclusion of the mother after delivery for long periods.

Immediate withdrawal of those affected by pregnancy may be viewed as punishment, reflecting society's disapproval of pregnancy before marriage. The physical separation through expulsion of those involved with pregnancy from the rest of the students is symbolic of the importance of reproduction in distinguishing between adults and children, especially as giving birth marks entry into womanhood.

A girl mother is expected to return to school 12 months after giving birth. The 12 months' retreat ideology is embedded in the history, rituals, and cultural practices of botsetse, with its emphasis on segregation and restriction of movement of the motsetse. It is also reflective of the socially constructed meaning of motherhood, which requires restriction of movement of the mother, and caring responsibilities that require time. It is these constructed meanings of motherhood that restrict girl mothers' re-entry into school.

Definitions of motherhood not only restrict girl mothers' re-entry into school but also form the basis for a systematic discrimination between boy fathers and girl mothers. The way the policy is written, for instance, is not only reflective of perceived differences between boys and girls but also encourages discriminatory tendencies against the girl mother. A deconstruction of the policy text shows how the notion of separation, retreat and the time involved is embedded in the policy and is an effective ideology for keeping girl mothers out of school. The policy states that:

> 34   (1) If a pupil becomes pregnant the parent or guardian of such a pupil shall be required to withdraw her from the school at which she is enrolled; and her admission to a school, which shall be other than that from which she was withdrawn, shall be at least one calendar year after cessation of pregnancy and subject to the written approval of the Minister.
>
>   (2) The parent or guardian of a pupil who is responsible for the pregnancy of another pupil shall be required to withdraw him from the school and his return shall be subject to a written approval from the Minister.
>
>   (3) A pupil shall not be allowed to write an examination at school while she is pregnant.
>
>   (4) A pupil who was withdrawn from a school on account of her pregnancy shall not be allowed to write an examination at a school until at least six months after such pregnancy has ceased.
>
> 35 A pupil who has been expelled from a school under regulation 34(2), at which he was enrolled shall not during the academic year during which he was expelled or withdrawn, be allowed to write an examination for which he had registered at such school unless the Minister authorises otherwise. (Republic of Botswana, Education Regulations, 1978, 58–68)

The narrative in the policy demonstrates that the framers of the policy perceived a fundamental difference between boys and girls. This is demonstrated by the physical separation of clauses affecting girls from those affecting boys. This could imply, among other factors, that their standing towards society is made different by the fact that the girl performs the biological reproductive role of carrying the foetus while the boy does not.

Linguistic emphasis, omissions and ambiguities in the policy further reinforce the perceived differences between boys and girls, resulting in discriminatory practices against the girl mother. For instance, while the girl has to wait 12 months after the cessation of

pregnancy before she can go to school, the time period that a boy who may be responsible for a pregnancy has to wait is not specified.

In addition, Clause 34(2) is ambiguous. School heads have different interpretations of the clause. Some school heads have interpreted the clause to mean that the boy could come back to the same school the following year. Others interpret the written approval of the Minister to mean the approval of the parents of the impregnated girl. School heads revealed that in most cases where the involved parents negotiated, the parents of the girl involved conceded to letting the boy continue in school provided the boy's parents paid for maintenance of the child. Of the 16 boys in the study responsible for pregnancies, all reported continuing school.

There is also differential treatment of boys and girls in the procedures for taking examinations. Clauses 34(3) and 34(4) reveal these discriminatory tendencies. The clauses relating to the girls make it categorically clear that the girl cannot take an examination at any school while she is pregnant. It is also clear that an examination can be taken 6 months after the delivery of the baby. The clause regarding the boys could be interpreted to mean that he can take an examination at a school other than the one he attended, while the girl is still pregnant, with or without permission from the Minister. The boy can still take an examination at the same school if the Minister approves. The clause regarding girls does not leave any room for negotiation. It is also interesting to note that the approval of the Minister does not have to be in a written form, as in the other clauses.

Administrative Bureaucracy as an Exclusion Ideology

Systematic bureaucratic arrangements have allocated the burden of childcare to the girl mother through ground rules that make it impossible for her to go back to school until the child is 12 months old. For instance, the procedure to readmit boys and girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy were standardised in 1995 and included the following:

1. A girl cannot be re-admitted into the same school.
2. A girl should have spent a year of absence of leave.
3. A girl should produce a birth certificate to verify the date of birth of the child.
4. Boys and girls should produce a testimonial and school reports from previous school.
5. The age of the applicants should meet the admission age criteria.
6. Applicants should produce an identity card so that their age can be verified. (Ministry of Education Memorandum to School Heads, 1995)

If girls and boys are the same, unlike treatment is inequality and serves to demonstrate how pregnancy, childcare and breastfeeding are stigmatised and used as instruments of control and exclusion of the girl mother from school. The first three rules apply only to girl mothers, not to the boys who impregnate them. These rules have long- as well as short-term impacts. For example, girls seeking readmission pointed out that a major constraint was the submission of their children's birth certificates. They reported that the Ministry of Home Affairs took a long time to process birth certificates, which created delays in returning to school. An analysis of responses of 54 girl mothers revealed that 66% had waited for a period ranging between 12 months and 25 months before they were readmitted.

Readmission of girls into *new schools* was also a major constraint. School heads reported that many of the girls who fell pregnant left the school without informing the administra-

tion because of the stigma attached to pregnancy. Some heads reported that because of poor record keeping, and staff turnover, it was difficult to verify if a student had been in their school unless they had reported the pregnancy before they left the school. Most of the students who left without reporting their pregnancy failed to get testimonials for transfers to new schools.

The requirement to readmit the girl to a school other than the one she attended disadvantages girls from villages with a single school. A student in a small village who gets pregnant is forced to look for a school elsewhere, outside the village. The applicants are therefore faced with accommodation problems in another village, maintenance costs, transport costs while they are looking for a place and emotional stress caused by separation from the baby and the parents.

The age requirement disadvantaged a considerable proportion of girl mothers who wished to be readmitted. These are mostly girls from rural and remote villages who, because of the distance children walk to school, enrol at an older age than those from urban areas.

Exclusion and Schools

The school as an institution is gendered. As students act out the gender norms, they recreate the ideology of exclusion, creating borderlines and boundaries between those who have children and those who do not. A survey of students' views on the re-entry policy showed that pregnant students and girl mothers were not welcome in the school community. The 1760 students in the survey were asked to make a choice about what should be done to girls who fall pregnant or to boys who make girls pregnant, based on the following options: (1) continue school; (2) should be suspended; and (3) should be expelled.

Responses to the question on the boys were different from those on the girls. About 33% recommended expulsion of boys, compared to 50% recommending expulsion of girls. About 16% recommended that boys should continue schooling compared to 7% recommending continuation for girls. School heads and teachers showed a stronger bias against pregnant girls. Some 43% of the school heads and 30% of teachers recommended that the boy should continue in school, compared to only about 21% of the school heads and 12% of the teachers that recommended girls to continue schooling. School heads and teachers strongly recommended suspension, which implies temporary withdrawal from school. About 42% of the school heads and 65% of the teachers were in favour of the policy where pregnant girls were withdrawn and readmitted after 12 months.

Students had further constructed myths to justify the boundaries of exclusion of girl mothers from school. Among the common myths reported by students and school is a belief that pregnant girls make the rest of the students sleepy. A system of social labelling is also used by the students to stigmatise, intimidate and scare girl mothers out of school. This social labelling created a feeling of insecurity among girl mothers. They reported that most students viewed them as 'misfits' because of their age, 'elders' because they had engaged in sexual activities, and 'mothers' because they had babies. One student observed:

> I just feel like everybody in this school and inside my classroom knows about it [the fact that she has a baby] and that they might shout at me about it.

The teachers further confirmed the rejection of girl mothers by the student community. One school head remarked:

> The girl feels shame, she also feels rejected by her community, her teachers, her peers who should be offering help, support and guidance. Having been out of the school in most cases for more than one and half years, and being thrust into motherhood, I feel many girls lose the will to continue schooling.

Some girl mothers felt a feeling of self-reproach. For some, it was difficult to cope with schoolwork and taking care of the child at the same time. A few mentioned that they had experienced health problems that continued to persist, thus making schooling difficult for them. The experiences of the girls clearly show that the re-entry policy fails to address the psychological, health, academic and security needs of girl mothers who re-enrol. The exclusion ideology at the level of the school, especially the system of social labelling, creates a state of fearfulness, hopelessness, shamefulness and self-reproach among girl mothers. The policy hardly addresses the health needs of the girl mother and that of their babies. The girl mothers are thus torn between societal expectations and the obligation to fend, care and feed the baby, and the need for educational development. As one girl notes:

> Schooling is different because I have a baby. It's something that always makes your mind think if the child gets sick, what will I do? You never feel free, you always feel embarrassed and ashamed.

Policy Impact

Although the re-entry policy requires all those involved in pregnancy to drop out of school, boys responsible for the pregnancy rarely do so. The survey (Chilisa, 1997) showed that despite high rates of drop-outs among girls, readmission rates for girls are lower than for boys. For every 100 girls that drop out, only about 10 are readmitted, while as many as 35 boys are readmitted. Although the readmission policy was earmarked for pregnant girls and boys involved in pregnancy, many of the boys are readmitted for reasons other than pregnancy. Boys who fail to get access to senior secondary schools, for instance, seek readmission to repeat a form so that they can make the grade to senior secondary. Some continue schooling in private schools and later seek readmission in government schools. The policy gives the opportunity for boys who fail to get access to senior secondary schools to re-enter as repeaters, thus further aggravating the existing imbalances in the opportunities for schooling between boys and girls. Thus, the re-entry policy in Botswana has had minimal success, mainly because it has scarcely addressed the cultural practices that reinforce unequal power relations between men and women.

Summary and Conclusion

This article has argued that countries which expel students involved with pregnancy from school violate the students' rights to education, particularly that of the girls. Common among these countries are the fragile economies that increase, in general, the competition for resources and, in particular, competition between boys and girls for access to education. From this perspective, expulsion of girl mothers becomes a way of creating spaces for boys.

Re-entry policies, by imposing a compulsory leave of absence on students affected by pregnancy, also violate the students' rights to education. The case study on Botswana has shown that gender inequalities are built into the policy and are supported by traditional ideologies, a socially constructed school ideology and stringent administrative procedures. The society and the school, for instance, control the perceptions of pregnant girls, and girl mothers, through intimidation, stigmatisation and oppressive mythologies that disable girl mothers from re-entering the school system. It is also clear that the language used in the policy is an important instrument for structuring inequalities between boys and girls. The conclusion drawn from the case study is that an insignificant number of girl mothers are readmitted into school. The assumed advantage of readmission has only helped to create spaces for boys, who, for reasons other than involvement in a pregnancy, were not in school.

Thus, it would appear that continuation policies provide the most opportunity for gender equity. Continuation policies are the most progressive because they challenge the societal and family values and attitudes that separate school from pregnancy. However, the challenge is to gain the support of members of the various structures of society, state institutions and the family. The aim should be to ensure that everyone is involved to some extent in either curbing teenage pregnancy or ensuring that pregnant girls and girl mothers continue school in a safe school environment.

Throughout this article, I have focused on unmarried girl mothers in school. The ideologies of exclusion are those constructed in the school to control girl mothers' self-perceptions and life chances. Some 47% of women in Botswana, as indicated, are not married and are among the poorest of the poor, despite numerous policies to alleviate their economic status. Studies on how differences are constructed between unmarried mothers and the rest of society are worth pursuing to understand gender violence and oppression in a larger context.

Acknowledgements

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