



Just men? Towards the education of men for gender justice in a context of religiously legitimised patriarchy: A South African case study



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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the education of men for gender justice in a context of religiously legitimised patriarchy, through a case study of a Catholic theological institute in South Africa. It draws on interviews with students and staff and participant observation conducted during a pilot study in 2011. The data highlight ideological justifications and internal norms which both support and oppose women's subjugation. The contestation of gender justice is seen in practice in both resistance and an emergent insider advocacy. Finally transformative examples of education for gender justice are described. The potential for such education is thus underlined.

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1. Introduction

Despite their social significance, and the extent to which they can perpetuate gender injustice, religious institutions have broadly been ignored as sites for education for gender justice. Perceptions of religions' complexity, sacred authority, irredeemable patriarchy and conservatism can lead the secular world frequently to ignore these potent social forces and the way their negative impacts might be lessened, and their positive impacts increased (Winter, 2006; Alolo, 2007). Where education for gender justice is envisioned it can also tend to focus on women, rather than men (Jaschok and Chan, 2009). This paper considers the practicability of the education of men for gender justice (as seen from a secular perspective) in a context of religiously legitimised patriarchy by means of a case study of a Catholic theological institute in South Africa.

This study sets the Catholic Church against Anne-Marie Goetz's (2007, 30) definition of gender justice, namely 'the ending of – and if necessary the provision of redress for – inequalities between women and men that result in women's subordination to men.' Within the Catholic Church

use of exclusively male images for God, male clergy, lack of inclusive language in prayer and worship, [and] limited roles for women in ministry and decision-making speak loudly of the [ir] second class status ... [with] profound effects on the way women are viewed, and, of course, treated (Rakoczy, 2004, 291).

Encouraging men as (future) power holders to pursue the dismantling of such institutionalised subordination is significant in its own right, in an organisation with over a billion adherents, and also as a case study for religious institutions more broadly.

Building on Goetz's (2007) analysis of gender justice within social institutions and Unterhalter and North's (2010) survey of gender mainstreaming in education this paper highlights the importance of exploring internal justifications for and against unjust doctrines and practice, the power-laden contestation of such practices, and educational approaches associated with bringing about, and resisting, gender justice. Having highlighted both the importance of, and challenges in, involving men in education for gender justice the paper continues to explore gender (in)justice in the Catholic Church.

The results of the case study of a Catholic Seminary in South Africa, drawn primarily from interviews with staff and students and participant observation during a pilot study conducted in 2011, are analysed in terms of the justifications articulated, the stances adopted, and the educational approaches employed, for or against women's subordination. From the discussion of this data the Institute emerges as a dynamic entity in which education for gender justice is already proceeding, if slowly, and in which, as a result, much greater transformation is readily conceivable.

2. Education for gender justice within religious institutions

2.1. Gender justice within institutions: internal norms and justifications

Anne-Marie Goetz (2007, 16), adopting a rights definition of gender justice, argues that

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the constitution of gendered rights and privileges can be read off from the basic contracts (formal or implicit) that shape membership in a range of social institutions ... [including] the institutions of establishment religion ... Understanding the ideological and cultural justifications within each arena for women's subordination can help to identify the means of challenging patterns of inequality.

She highlights, however, that constraints in other contexts mean engagement with gender justice tends to focus on the more public spheres, like the state and the market. Winter (2006) recognises that working with religion can be difficult and complex. Further, Alolo (2007, 12) suggests that religions' sacredness confers an 'authority that restricts the degree to which they are challenged' seemingly leaving secular writers unable to address them with confidence.

Goetz emphasises three particularities of religious institutions which are particularly pertinent to the Catholic Church. The first is that 'ideologies and conventions about women's subordination to men and the family are often rooted in assumptions about what is 'natural' or 'divinely ordained' in human relationships' (Goetz, 2007, 17). This is seen in the natural law tradition in the Catholic Church, which emphasises the '[p]hysical, moral and spiritual difference and complementarities' of the sexes (PCJP, 2005, §224). Challenge to these ideologies is particularly controversial in that it is seen as transgressing the natural order.

These arguments form the basis of 'male capture and bias in rule-making institutions' (Goetz, 2007, 32). Again female exclusion from the Catholic priesthood, and consequently the whole Catholic hierarchy, is a prime example. This in turn militates against accountability to women within the institution, which Goetz (2007) views as being key to her model of justice, encompassing as it does the possibility of redress. Yet again accountability in the Catholic Church functions upwards, to the hierarchy and ultimately to God, rather than downwards in democratic fashion, the dangers of which Goetz highlights in relation to its sexual abuse scandals.

Goetz's article is grounded in the premise that change is possible within and through such institutions (cf. Winter, 2006). To this end she describes three possible practical approaches, one of which this study seeks to adopt. This involves 'identifying ... those aspects of customary law and practice', alongside 'norms that are "readable" within' the Catholic Church, which could be appealed to and built upon to support gender justice, where 'challenges on the basis of norms derived from external institutional arenas' might fail (Goetz, 2007, 42,52). This requires that the ideological justifications for women's subordination referred to earlier be understood, and on that basis the internal resources which could be used to challenge it identified.

2.2. Gender mainstreaming within educational institutions: politics and pedagogy

Identifying such foundations constitutes a first stage in the process of establishing gender justice within an institution. The next stage is to encourage the embrace of counter-hegemonic beliefs and practices throughout the institution on the basis of these internally accepted laws and norms. Such efforts to establish gender-just norms within an institution have received most attention within the substantial literature on gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming involves incorporating gender considerations into all aspects of an institution's functioning (North, 2008). It has been subject to a wide range of criticisms: that it lacks clear goals, encourages backlash (Morley, 2007, 2005) and reinforces conservatism (Daly, 2005). Most importantly it treats the pursuit of gender justice as a technocratic enterprise, rather than recognising its necessarily political nature (Woodford-Berger, 2007; Morley, 2007). Nevertheless gender mainstreaming's aim of

raising considerations of gender justice at every level of an institution is a necessary corollary to Goetz's approach. Elaine Unterhalter and Amy North (2010, 401) finish their survey of recent analyses of gender mainstreaming in education by raising three concerns which are pertinent to the current study:

the significance of assessing ownership of strategies for change, the importance of investigating the political economy and socio-cultural contexts of institutional shifts, and the form and content of education practice associated with gender justice and rights.

While thorough investigation of the wider context and political economy is beyond the scope of this study, analysis of interests, power relations, and their enforcement and contestation through political practices is critical (Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Goetz, 2007; Mosco, 1996). Together with, and building on, the analysis of ideological justifications for women's subordination and internal norms and practices which could serve as a basis for challenging it, these considerations of the political practices entailed in educational approaches which (could) lead to an embrace of gender justice, constitute the key focus of this study.

2.3. Involving men in institutional education for gender justice: slow necessity

While other studies have both recognised the negative impact religious institutions can have from a gender justice perspective, and also the possibility of pursuing change within them through education (e.g. Haddad, 2002b; Ong, 2006; Para-Mallam, 2010; Jaschok and Chan, 2009), this study is distinctive in maintaining a focus on the education of men with regards to gender justice. There is increasing recognition of the importance of engaging with men, who tend to be (perceived as) the primary power-holders, if shared gender justice goals are to be met; indeed in its report on the subject in 2004 the Commission for the Status of Women explicitly focused on encouraging 'religious leaders ... to provide positive role models of gender equality' (UNESCO, 2004: 11). Much of the theoretical basis for such work derives from R.W. Connell's seminal work on *Masculinities* (2005), which highlights that masculinities, as femininities, are constructed and that 'different masculinities are produced in the same cultural or institutional setting' (Connell, 2005, 36–7). Of these the hegemonic position which 'embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy' is nevertheless 'contestable', and so subject to change (Connell, 2005, 77,76). Others, like Robert Morrell (2001, 25) question the existence of one dominant or hegemonic masculinity, emphasising the existence of multiple masculinities 'jostling for ascendancy'.

Studies which have focused on engaging with men for gender justice through education in religious contexts are very limited, and only scattered indirect references can be found (e.g. MacPhail and Campbell, 2001; Walker, 2005), though there are indications of their having positive impact. The wider range of studies outside religious settings have frequently come to similar conclusions as those made by Morrell and colleagues in South Africa. They found that while change can happen, social conditions, the practices of gendered actors (including teachers), the difficulty of transformative language leading to transformed practice and the continued existence of hostility to gender equality mean that 'transformation ... is very slow' (Morrell et al., 2009, 192).

3. Background and research context

3.1. Gender (in)justice in the Catholic Church: challenges to patriarchy

From its early days the feminist stance towards the Church has been one of critique (Daly, 1973); Connell (2005, 252) recently

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