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TITLE: **The State, Bureaucracy and Gender Equity in South African Education**

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South Africa's transition to democracy has highlighted the role of the state and bureaucracy in tackling gender inequalities in education. New initiatives at national and provincial level have focused on the establishment of an extensive machinery to institutionalise gender concerns. Gender equity has found pride of place in the new constitution and legislative frameworks based on it. And yet there is also evidence of continuing conflict and resistances around gender issues at the level of both the state and civil society. In this context, how, to what extent and with what effect new initiatives are addressing gender inequalities becomes a key question. The state has historically been a crucial agency in the subordination of women. It is now seen as an agency and instrument in the liberation of women. To what extent it is actually capable of being so requires much closer scrutiny.

The role of the state and bureaucracy can be addressed in a number of ways. On the one hand, it is possible to sketch the actual changes in constitution and legislation and examine the extent to which gender relations and inequalities appear to have altered inside the education system. While helpful and important, such an analysis will simply describe what needs to be explained: the role of the state and bureaucracy in shifting gender relations. On the other, it is possible to draw on an extensive body of feminist literature in other contexts on constraints and possibilities of transformation through the state. In so doing, new light may be cast not only on the extent to which gender inequalities are and can be addressed, but also on the nature of the transitional state in South Africa.

This paper will thus proceed by examining new initiatives by the state and bureaucracy to address gender equity in education against the backdrop of the principal insights emerging from the feminist literature on the state. It will look specifically at efforts to mainstream gender and two case studies illustrating the limited reach of the state in addressing the full complexity of gender relations in educational institutions. It will argue that the majority of new initiatives can be described as classically liberal feminist, and are bound to encounter many of the difficulties already pointed to in the literature. The South African state remains a deeply patriarchal state; as such there are significant contradictions between the policy discourse and actual interventions. In analysing these, the paper will make use of Stromquist's differentiation between those gender policies in education which are essentially coercive and not transformative, those which are supportive and those which

are constructive, and embody new attempts to change the ideological processes and values which underpin gender inequality (1997).

The paper will first examine feminist theories of the state and bureaucracy. It will then consider the discourse of gender equity in education in South Africa and follow this with an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of efforts to mainstream gender including here a brief consideration of the role and position of gender machinery and women in the bureaucracy. It will conclude with a brief analysis of two incidents of gender violence in schools.

Feminist Theories of the State and Bureaucracy

An analysis of the South African state and bureaucracy in relation to gender equity in education must be set against both feminist approaches to the state and bureaucracy, as well as recent efforts to understand the nature of the transitional South African state and bureaucracy.

The limits and possibilities of state action to address gender equity is differentially understood by radical, liberal, social and poststructuralist feminists. Here there is a long-standing debate about whether the state is essentially a neutral instrument capable of instituting equal rights between men and women; whether it is the embodiment of male power and therefore incapable of reforming and of being reformed; whether it is the combined tool of patriarchy or capitalism and therefore has limited effect on gender inequality or whether it is a set of processes of regulation or a discursive site for the production of and resistance to gendered power. Whether thing, actor, subject or discursive site, all these approaches see the state as key in the organisation of gendered power: both in ensuring its reproduction and in some way capable of being acted upon to shift them (see Kenway: 1990; Connell: 1990; Stromquist: 1997).

For liberal feminists the priority is to ensure greater access, equality of opportunity and affirmative action for women in public sphere: the state and all its apparatuses and institutions, including education; and the sphere of work. Equality before the law is central in opening the doors of

possibility. The principal constraints are irrational prejudices and laws which, with sufficient will and mobilisation, can be overturned in the interests of women. An interesting variation of this approach has arisen in the context of 'femocrats' who, in the Australian context, have sought entry to the state in order to work through and in spite of the state to advance equality policies for women even as they have recognised that their entry does not necessarily alter the patriarchal character of the state. (Franzway, Court and Connell: 1989; Savage and Witz: 1992)

For radical feminists, the modern state as 'the general patriarch' (Mies: 1986; Connell: 1990) cannot be the vehicle for women's emancipation. Access to the structures of state power simply subjects women further to the invisible and hidden routines and networks of gendered power in the state (Ferguson: 1984; Franzway, Court and Connell: 1989; Stromquist: 1990; Savage and Wits: 1992). The emphasis on equality of opportunity within the state and at work also hides the connections between public and private spheres, and the impact of women's role in the family on their capacity to participate in public life (Kenway: 1990). The assumed gender neutrality and genderblindness of the state masks a male standard in terms of which even such a concept as affirmative action is constructed (Kenway citing Pateman: 1990, 3). Instead of seeking reform of the state, then, radical feminists work outside the state through alternative structures embodying women's networks.

Social feminists have seen the state as operating in the interests of both capitalism and patriarchy, and have focused less on whether or not to enter it to change gender inequality than on the practices and manifestations of inequality at work and in the home, and the connections between these and gendered educational practices. As a result, they have tended to neglect the organisational forms of the state and its structures, an issue that has been of greater significance to poststructural feminists who have drawn on the work of Foucault and his emphasis on regulation, 'governmentality' and discursive constructions of masculinity and feminity to understand the gendered institutionalisation of power (Ferguson: 1984; Kenway: 1990; Connell: 1990).

In the process, important new ways of conceptualising the state have emerged. On the one hand, there is the work of Connell who has developed the notion of the state as 'the central institution of

gendered power', and 'part of a wider structure of gender relations that embody violence or other means of control' (Connell: 1990, 519/520). In this view each state has a definable gender regime which can be analysed through its gender division of labour, the structure of power in the bureaucracy and the structure of cathexis or gender patterning of emotional attachments. On the other hand, the work of Kenway has insisted on seeing the state within a wider framework of globalisation, which is gendered and has a determinate impact on the restructuring of gender relations through repatterning of public/private domains within existing states. (Kenway: 1997). Both have worked in the context of a strong women's movement with its correlative in the state, 'femocrats', a concept which has particular pertinence within the South African context. (Franzway, Court and Connell: 1989)

Flowing from this and other work, 'the feminist position of distancing itself from the state has moved toward utilization of a double strategy: working with the state by putting pressure on it and conducting independent work through women's groups, particularly NGOs.' (Stromquist: 1997, 33) Seeing the state as more significant in influencing gender inequalities than the market, and its contradictions as 'creating windows of opportunity for transformative possibilities and organised action' (*Ibid*, 34), feminists have in recent years also placed greater emphasis on intervention in and through state policy to effect social change in gender relations.

Liberal, radical and socialist feminism has seen a great diversity of policies aimed at ending sexual discrimination, stereotyping, harassment and providing greater opportunity and social and economic possibilities for women. Equal opportunities policies promoted by liberal feminists have aimed at enhancing the access by women to positions of management and influence and removing barriers to girls participation and performance in mathematics and science, 'male' subjects. Radical, socialist and poststructuralist feminists have promoted sexual harassment policies, interrogated school textbooks for bias, addressed teachers' values about what boys and girls can and cannot do and raised awareness amongst women of the values and ideas which keep them subordinated economically, politically and socially (see Arnot and Weiler: 1993).

In attempting to assess what gender equity policies might have to say about the transformative agenda of particular states, Stromquist proposes a threefold classification of gender policies deriving from different feminist perspectives: coercive laws (enacted to prevent sexual discrimination); supportive laws (intended to promote or monitor implementation) and constructive laws (which provide incentives or new practices in educational institutions concerning programme and course development, teacher training, more scholarships, etc). Her analysis of policies promoted both by international agencies and national governments shows that even though international agencies pay a great deal of attention to gender equity which is in turn readily accepted by national states, on the whole national states focus on issues of access and 'do not promote a process to alter power relationships.' (57) Those policies which are implemented are generally innocuous, the reason for their implementation being that:

> States must engage in democratic but relatively innocuous and symbolic action to show their responsiveness to all citizens. Since most gender policies do not question relations between women and men but treat gender as an 'additive' category...the basic social structures are retained ....states ... change slowly because they are patriarchal and do not wish to alter a status quo beneficial to their interests .... Education offers symbolic returns to the state. By its very nature, education holds the promise of inclusion and distributive justice .... (57).

This insight seems crucial in understanding the dynamic in the South African context. It is also important in so far as it goes beyond the analysis of gender equity policies in developed countries and also considers these in relation to developing countries.

In South Africa, the approach taken to gender equity in education has been described as 'a conversation' between liberal, radical and socialist feminisms expressed in the discourses of gender and development, Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) (Chisholm and Unterhalter: 1997). Although liberal feminist or Women in Development approaches seem to dominate the public discourse, the recent Gender Equity Task Team Report embodied

recommendations which could be described as encompassing strategies derived from all these perspectives. Put another way, coercive, supportive and constructive dimensions are present in the recommendations of the Report. It is in the relationship between recommendations and implementation, however, that the liberal feminist reliance on the state as a neutral agency which simply needs to be reformed to transform gender relations becomes clear, and unstuck.

Within the feminist literature there has been a small body of literature which documents new emerging women's structures in the state and the restructuring of the state in relation to women (see for example Gouws: 1996; Makan: 1997; Watson: 1997; Moolman:1997). These contributions are fully aware of the pitfalls and strengths of liberal, radical and socialist feminism, but the state is paradoxically seen as a neutral agency which can be used to improve the position of women proved there is sufficient political will, feminist consciousness and policy coherence. More theoretical contributions have been made by Linzi Manicom (1992) and Debbie Posel (199) both of whom emphasise the limitations of existing feminist theorising on the state in South Africa and need for an analysis of institutionalised gender power of the state. Whereas Manicom uses a discourse-theoretical approach which is concerned to examine the state and state formation both as a gendered and gendering process, and the discursive construction of women as 'other' in the rules and rituals of the state, Posel has been more interested in the politics of the process of constitution of gender inequality. As such, she echoes the view of Steans (and that taken here) that seeks to 'draw upon many feminisms and approaches which view gender in terms of *social structures* and *processes* and approaches which concentrate on *discourses* of gender and *social practices*.' (Steans: 1998, 158). By contrast with the radical/socialist feminist position held by academics, the position adopted by gender policy activists in the Gender Equity Task Team signals both a liberal feminist orientation in the emphasis on mainstreaming of gender and a scepticism about a reliance on the law to significantly alter gender relations. This ambivalence is symptomatic of the general issue being addressed in this paper: the emphasis on the role of the state in addressing gender equity, and the muted recognition of its limits.

Moving beyond these, it is necessary to analyse the contradictions and ambiguities in at the level of

the state, bureaucracy and gender equity policies in a bit more detail. The paper will show that the domestic state discourse is primarily one of rights and affirmative action but that it is already hitting up against the same problems as identified in the feminist literature on the state discussed above, thus demonstrating on the one hand the deeply patriarchal nature of the state and on the other the symbolic character of the reforms being set in place. To demonstrate this the paper will first look at the discourse of gender equity in education, then at attempts to mainstream gender in the bureaucracy and finally at two case studies which illustrate the complexity of the issues at stake and limited purchase of the state on them.

Discourse of Gender Equity

The discourse of gender equity in education as constructed through different official documents is a variable one. On the one hand, there are the legislative enactments governing public schooling and higher education. On the other, there are the statements of the Gender Equity Task Team, the first official body to be appointed in South Africa to address these issues. In the former, the discourse is firmly liberal democratic in the assumption of a neutral state and the emphasis on doing away with discrimination and ensuring equal access and equal rights before the law. The South African Schools Act, for example, states in its preamble that 'The country requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in educational provision ... combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination and intolerance ... (and) ... uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators' (Government Gazette: 1996). The Higher Education Act, established amongst other to regulate higher education, also in its preamble asserts the desirability to 'redress (of) past discrimination and (to) ensure representivity and equal access and provide optimal opportunities ...' (Government gazette: 1997). No policy instruments are provided to combat sexism or promote alternatives; but a coercive rather than constructive or supportive approach is suggested.

The Gender Equity Task Team which was established in 1996 to investigate the feasibility of the establishment of a Gender Equity Unit as proposed in the White Paper of 1995 reported in 1997. (1997) It carries a much more broad-ranging discourse of gender as a relational category and gender

relations as having crucial structural and ideological dimensions. Thus, although the principal recommendations are for the institution of an extensive gender machinery, there is a consistent acknowledgement of the importance of addressing 'the ideologies of gender difference that legitimate girls' and women's subordination' through 'confronting the deeply held, largely unconscious beliefs and practices of people of all ages'. Where appropriate, changes and interventions are recommended at the level of the labour market, state and curriculum. As far as adult education is concerned, attention is drawn to the safety required by women attending adult education classes, the appropriateness of educational materials as well as their content. Women's position in management is also seen as more than merely ensuring access through affirmative action, but as also involving the institutional culture, value systems and gendered roles embodied in it (p. 11). Much of this relies on a definition of gender which emphasises that gender is a relational category in which different forms of masculinity and femininity are mutually constitutive and historically specific and gender equity is not simply about ending discrimination against women, but a much more complex matter in which girls can themselves harass boys or other girls or 'even take part in violence' (GETT: 1997, 93) and boys can equally be victims if they do not conform to dominant stereotypes of masculinity and are equally subjected to risk-taking, emotional alienation, death and injury, physical attack and suicide.' (94).

GETT sees the state as having both possibilities and limits. Possibilities are constructed in terms of a liberal feminist construction of what gender equity entails, namely:

> ... the promotion of equal opportunity and fair treatment for men and women in the personal, social, cultural, political and economic areas. Gender equity entails meeting women's and men's needs in order for them to compete in the formal and informal labour market; participate fully in civil society and fulfil their familial roles adequately without being discriminated against because of their gender (consultative conference: July 1997)

The Gender Equity Task Team sees legislation as an instrument to address in particular violence, sexual abuse and harassment in schools, but its limits are also recognised. This is illustrated in its

treatment of violence and sexual abuse. Arguing against an approach which individualises, psychologises and pathologises individual perpetrators of violence, the Report stresses the importance of legislation which would 'lay the responsibility of maintaining a violence free environment at the doors of administrators' (p. 95). Thus it introduces the notion of 'vicarious liability' and makes recommendations for legislation to be developed which set out the responsibilities managers of educational institutions have in preventing discrimination and harassment and managing these when they do occur. Thus it provides for a coercive policy, but also goes beyond. The Report maintains that while necessary, legislation will be an insufficient step on its own. What is required, in addition to legislation, coordinated strategies involving communities and other organisations, procedures and policies adopted by schools, is that 'the content of knowledge, the processes involved and the confronting of stereotypical ideas' that are the basic conditions for violence, be tackled head on.

Mainstreaming Gender

Gender equity can be addressed in a number of ways. On the one hand, following a radical feminist analysis, separate structures can be established and women's interests pursued through these. On the other, following a liberal or socialist feminist model, gender concerns can be integrated into the mainstream. In accordance with its commitment to inclusiveness and unity rather than exclusion and fragmentation, the liberal/socialist approach has been the model most favoured at all levels by the incoming South African state. The emphasis has accordingly been on access rather than content of institutions or on structure rather than culture. As such, with the possible exception of the GETT Report, there has been a marked use of the male norm as standard and construction of women's disadvantage in terms of a deficit in relation to men.

Commitment to redress of racial and gender inequality at national level has found expression in a number of structures and legal provisions specifically designed to address historically-produced inequalities in public life, including at different levels of the public service and educational system. At a legal level, the most important provisions have been the Constitution, an Employment Equity

Bill passed (1998), a White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service (1998) and the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1997). The deficit model of women's disadvantage is clearest in the latter's treatment of education where the aim of reform is increased access and equality of opportunity to educational institutions, qualifications and work through addressing barriers to enrolment, achievement and performance rates, participation in traditionally male-defined areas of work, study and sports, improvement of higher education and teaching qualifications and management structures of education.

Testimony to the commitment of the new South African state to mainstreaming gender issues is the creation of a number of high-profile structures to deal with gender in the apparatus of the state and bureaucracy. To this end, a comprehensive Gender Management System 'which fans strategically through structures in government, the legislature and independent bodies' is being established (CEDAW: 1997, 2). The main aim of this machinery is to integrate a gender perspective into all departmental work. As part of this initiative, the Office of the Status of Women was created at cabinet level in the Deputy President's Office and is replicated at provincial level. The aim is to coordinate gender units in all government departments, develop a National Gender Policy and lobby around issues such as Youth Day. The Constitution provides for a Commission for Gender Equality. It is responsible for advocating and overseeing the advancement of gender equality in the public and private sectors. One of its tasks is to monitor and make recommendations to Parliament. It exists alongside the Human Rights Commission and Truth and Reconciliation Commission to monitor gender equity. In May 1996, Cabinet also approved the establishment of gender focal points in all government departments. Their task included policy review, strategy development, coordination of gender training, monitoring and evaluation and establishment of mechanisms for liaison with civil society. A significant development has been the Women's Budget Initiative consisting of the Gender and Economic Policy Group of the Joint Standing Committee and Finance working with non-governmental organisations to analyse the budget from a gender perspective and lobby departments for policy changes. The principal focus of many of these initiatives is increasing access for women to public life and institutions and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.

In education, gender equity was 'mainstreamed' through its recognition as an issue at a discursive level in all policy documents. Practical commitment was expressed through the establishment of the Gender Equity Task Team which reported in 1997. The Report recommends the mainstreaming of gender equity concerns through the creation of a Gender Equity Unit and an extensive machinery and networks in government departments starting with the appointment of a high-level official at Chief Directorate level in the national department of education.

Despite this considerable political will, the mainstreaming of gender faces a number of hurdles, however, linked to the patriarchal character of the state and manifested in arguments against gender as a priority. According to CEDAW, progress had been made in integrating gender structures into government by 1997, although many gender desks and officers were located in human resource divisions or were employed as Equal Employment Opportunity Officers (CEDAW: 1997, 8). The same situation pertains in education where gender is part of the responsibility of the Transformation Unit, the Representivity and Human Resource Directorates of the national department. GETT argued strongly for the creation of posts at the highest possible level of the national department of education, given the gender division of labour in bureaucratic structures and the increasing representation of women in the middle management ranks but the existence of a 'glass ceiling' at higher levels. A post was subsequently created at a lower level, thus confirming the observation made in the course of the work of the GETT that 'people charged with gender responsibilities are low in the bureaucratic structures' (Wolpe: GETT Consultative Conference, July, 1997). Budgetary constraints have also been used as an argument against creation of specific gender structures in education. Provincial participants were drawn aside at the GETT Conference for discussions about the priority that could be attached to gender given financial constraints facing provincial departments. Doubts about the priority of gender in relation to race, age and disability were also raised.

Changing the state at the institutional level through the establishment of structures has faced difficulties. Although there are notably more women involved in the education bureaucracy at leadership levels than in the apartheid era, a closer examination of women in the bureaucracy is revealing. There are no women appointed to the most senior positions in the national department of

education. The most influential position is that of advisor to the minister. At the outset of 1994, the large majority of provincial Ministers of Education were women. Women were visibly in the most senior positions but invisible in senior and middle management positions.

At the provincial level, our argument is illustrated by the Gauteng Education Department, the trendsetter of education departments. Its gender profile is similar to that of other provincial education departments in that women dominate the profession but not its leadership and management (see Napo: 1998). The majority of teachers (83%) are women, but they comprise only 64% of heads of department, 24% of deputy principals and 27% of principals. The pattern prevails across schools, teacher education and technical colleges historically divided by race and privileged access to resources. Within departmental managerial categories, women typically occupy gender-specific and lower ranks. Nonetheless, key recent appointments of women to top positions in this province suggest a degree of progressive reform. The Minister of Education is a (white) woman, and one of the senior deputies was also a woman, but she soon resigned. However, only one out of thirty two chief directors is a women. And there are only nine our of 32 directors. It is clear that even at the level of access alone, there is still a great distance to be traveled.

The advent of even limited numbers of women into the state bureaucracy suggests both constraints and possibilities in what they are able to do. Bringing her keen feminist and anthropological eye to bear on her experience in a leadership position at the University of Cape Town, Mamphele Rampele has cast some insight into the pressures and conflicts that arise for women in South Africa's racialised and patriarchal public institutions. Writing of her position as Deputy Vice-Chancellor of South Africa's leading university, she notes that 'success in negotiating the world dominated by males ... depends on the extent to which one succeeds in changing the way the system works' and on seeking out and finding mentors (Ramphele: 1995). Not having a 'wife' to organise her domestic life is often unrecognised and ill-understood. Being black brings further difficulties, since the transgression that women in such positions commit by mere virtue of being there challenges deeply-held cultural stereotypes about the appropriate role of women. Recognition can often be derived only from an association with significant men. In fact, despite the real enjoyment derived from her

professional life, she is unequivocal that 'the support society offers to one comes at a price.' (p. 180)

In order to derive a deeper understanding of the gendered institutional culture of the education bureaucracy, we discussed the experience of being a women and the significance of gender issues with the Minister of Education, a chief director and director in the Gauteng Department of Education Regardless of the overt significance each attaches to race and gender, it is evident that both are significant, relational and negotiated in different ways. For the Minister of Education, gender is not as great an issue in her working environment as race, but 'being a woman softens the whiteness.' All three women indicated that the institutional culture of the bureaucracy is gendered. Gender power relations are vital structuring elements of their work in the new bureaucracy. Compromises are to be made between motherhood and professional life in a context which expects a strong separation between private and public life. On the positive side, femininity is seen as an advantage. For the MEC, 'my softness' means that 'people don't go for me'. The director is also conscious of the fact that 'people are aware that as a woman I am approachable, lenient and empathetic towards their problems.' On the negative side, the Minister said that her role requires an assertiveness which is often found unbecoming in woman and elicits bullying behaviour. As a woman she is outside the male networks of power. As a result, 'you have to do so much better to achieve the same recognition as man.' For the black chief director, public office requires 'shedding off your womanhood' despite 'valuing yourself as a woman and wanting to be treated like a woman.' It is an 'environment (that) is hostile towards women, and one has to behave like a man in order to adapt'. Failure is linked to gender in the case of women but not in the case of men. The conflict between motherhood and professional life is intensely felt by all three women.

The Gauteng Department of Education has self-consciously through its Minister taken steps to address gender equity through the appointment of women in high profile positions, the establishment of a gender desk, and the promotion of policy to promote gender equity. Explicitly acknowledging the significance of the social construction of gender through education, the Draft Gender Policy Document for the Department (Napo: 1998) involved an extensive process of consultation. Basing its approach firmly in the principles established both internationally and nationally on issues on the

achievement of gender equity in education, it proposes policies to address inequalities in the workplace, access for and retention of girls in schools, reform of curriculum and teaching practices, school organisation and management as well as safety for women in educational institutions. These are important steps, but thus far have not received significant backing for implementation purposes. The Minister, when asked about progress on gender initiatives in the Department, admitted that 'there is lot of lip-service to non-sexism, but it's almost joke, even in the ANC.' To large extent, then, gender reforms within the bureaucracy have to date been largely symbolic, encased as they are in an environment which is highly ambiguous about its commitment to gender.

This is most significantly evident where the reasons for refusal to address gender at structural and institutional level are cast in terms both of a broader equity argument as well as in the language of fiscal discipline and constraint. The equity argument implicitly charges gender activists with special pleading and practicing discrimination themselves (vis vis race, disability, and either black or white women, depending on the context) thus suggesting that 'although gender is important, there are other issues that are more important.' The economic argument is an argument that gender concerns should be shelved in the broader public interest of the nation. The public or national interest is constructed as fiscal discipline, both masculine concept and practice, and gender is once again discursively relegated to second or third place .

In short, then, it is clear that even as the new state recognises gender and has taken steps to address gender inequality, these steps are focused on access rather than gendered institutional power relations expressed in institutional culture and content. Institutional gender relations present powerful obstacles to the realisation even of the limited access offered by new equity discourses. High-profile structures and individuals express the commitment of the state to gender equity, but in practice not much is done to realise it. Gendered institutional cultures are persistently and powerfully patriarchal.

Gender Violence in Schools

The consequent limited reach of the state in dealing with the full complexity of gender relations and

inequalities in schools is illustrated by two cases of gender violence in Gauteng schools immediately following the election. Gender violence in schools is not a new phenomenon and was fueled by state violence during the apartheid years. The understanding of violence in schools in recent years has become more nuanced and its definition has widened to include physical, sexual, verbal and emotional abuse (Kenway and Fitzclarence: 1997). In South African schools, the focus has been on violence in black schools although it is by no means absent in schools with a different racial composition. It has however also included corporal punishment, unofficial assaults, bullying, rape, sexual and emotional abuse amongst and between both teachers and pupils (Morrell: 1992) Although the sources for and conditions of reproduction of gender violence in schools may well be beyond the state under any circumstances, the creation of a state working through consensus rather than force has created the conditions to regulate if not stem its occurrence.

The complexity of gender relations and their relation to violence in schools seems at present beyond the capacity of the state to grasp let alone address. They defy simple analyses of gender violence and suggest the need for more complex analytical tools than used to date in the South African context. Here the work of Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997), which has drawn links between masculinity, marginality, sexuality, intimacy, age and violence, is highly suggestive. Their distinctions between hegemonic, subordinate, complicitous and marginal masculinities in contexts of socio-economic and psycho-social insecurity can fruitfully be brought to bear on the South African context. The relational aspect of gender may require problematising femininity in relation to violence and applying these concepts to femininity as well. A full analysis of the cases in these terms can only be hinted at here since the purpose is merely to demonstrate the complexity and the main focus of this paper is on the ways in which the state is able to address the issues.

The two case-studies were selected because each resulted in the creation of a commission of enquiry and report. Both were significant events at the time of their occurrence, but the frequency with which such incidents occur has meant the relative lapse into obscurity and oblivion of these particular cases since 1995. One was a lower primary and one a secondary school in different parts of Soweto. In the case of Ve Lower Primary School, a number of parents had lodged complaints

about teachers who were abusing school children. The Minister of Education visited the school, confiscated switches and instituted the inquiry into nine female teachers who were accused of abuse and excessive corporal punishment. Parents at Vu Secondary School also lodged a complaint about teachers and in the context of cessation of teaching at the school, a commission of inquiry was instituted.

Both cases illustrate that gender relations that require attention are not simply a case of female abuse by men. At Ve Lower Primary, the teachers accused of corporal punishment and abuse were women. Amongst the abused children were boys. The gendered character of the incident at Vu Secondary School is less obvious, although a gender reading of the report reveals significant tensions between male students and male teachers on the one side and male students and female teachers on the other. These tensions erupted into open hostilities in which students sought the principal as ally. A number of incidents in the reports appeared as points of emotional cathexis in strained relations between male and female/male students and teachers, suggesting that a gender reading of the incident is perhaps more appropriate than any other. Kenway's concept of subordinate and marginalised masculinities (and femininities) asserting themselves in conditions of powerlessness and insecurity may go some way towards explaining and understanding these events.

In each case, the report of the commissioner is intriguing. Ve Lower Primary was assigned to a woman, the newly-appointed Director of Personnel, Human Resources Development and Organisational Development. Educated at a liberal South African university, she was also acutely aware of gender inequality and injustice. The inquiry at Vu Secondary School was placed in the hands of an Advocate, an outsider to the community to which he was assigned.

Two issues are significant. First is the similarities in the ways in which each commissioner deals with each, highly different case. Second is the outcome of each case. Both are linked. Ultimately we suggest that the very appointment of commission of inquiry and its method of dealing with the case is the (symbolic) means by which the new state dispenses gender justice. The actual recommendations are not half as significant as the very process of the workings of the commission

itself. Each commission recommends the transfer of particular students or teachers. Each commission report provides case by case examination of grievances, thus atomising and individualising the broader social issues at stake. Each story is heard. Each complainant is given a voice. Each report distinguishes between those matters which can receive attention (regulations) and those which should be dismissed (custom and practice). Each commissioner distinguishes between those issues which have direct bearing on the case and those which occurred 'in the past.' In the case of Ve Lower Primary School, allegations against some teachers were discounted as they referred to incidents occurring in the mid-1980s. Each commissioner trivialises some of the issues as petty and unsustainable.

In Stromquist's typology of coercive, supportive and symbolic gender strategies employed by states, the strategy of the appointment of commission of inquiry or of the transfer of teachers can be understood as neither coercive nor constructive, but as symbolic. The commission itself is the strategy: it embodies the procedures, rituals and routines of the liberal democratic state which in the short-term dissolve but do not resolve the issues and whose ultimate effect is to asserts the authority and power of the state. As such it is effective, in its hearing, in its giving voice to injustices and grievances silenced, trivialised and denied over time. But. like South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is necessary but not sufficient.

Conclusion

We have argued that the new state and bureaucracy have adopted and deployed new discourses and strategies to address gender equity, but these appear to be rooted in liberal feminist approaches and are thus confronting the same problems to which critics of liberal feminism have alerted gender equity activists. As a result, much of the activity in this sphere can to date be defined as symbolic rather than constructive of a new social order with new values towards gender.

Having said this, we do not want to argue that there is nothing that can be done, or that the strategies that are being adopted are totally useless. Instead, we are asking for a renewed debate about all the

itself. Each commission recommends the transfer of particular students or teachers. Each commission report provides case by case examination of grievances, thus atomising and individualising the broader social issues at stake. Each story is heard. Each complainant is given a voice. Each report distinguishes between those matters which can receive attention (regulations) and those which should be dismissed (custom and practice). Each commissioner distinguishes between those issues which have direct bearing on the case and those which occurred 'in the past.' In the case of Ve Lower Primary School, allegations against some teachers were discounted as they referred to incidents occurring in the mid-1980s. Each commissioner trivialises some of the issues as petty and unsustainable.

In Stromquist's typology of coercive, supportive and symbolic gender strategies employed by states, the strategy of the appointment of commission of inquiry or of the transfer of teachers can be understood as neither coercive nor constructive, but as symbolic. The commission itself is the strategy: it embodies the procedures, rituals and routines of the liberal democratic state which in the short-term dissolve but do not resolve the issues and whose ultimate effect is to asserts the authority and power of the state. As such it is effective, in its hearing, in its giving voice to injustices and grievances silenced, trivialised and denied over time. But. like South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is necessary but not sufficient.

Conclusion

We have argued that the new state and bureaucracy have adopted and deployed new discourses and strategies to address gender equity, but these appear to be rooted in liberal feminist approaches and are thus confronting the same problems to which critics of liberal feminism have alerted gender equity activists. As a result, much of the activity in this sphere can to date be defined as symbolic rather than constructive of a new social order with new values towards gender.

Having said this, we do not want to argue that there is nothing that can be done, or that the strategies that are being adopted are totally useless. Instead, we are asking for a renewed debate about all the

issues involved, strengthening of the structures and political will to address gender inequality in and through education and a more thorough-going assessment of and attention to how educational institutions and their overt and hidden curricula and social orders need to change.

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