HANDBOOK OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

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Introduction

Despite the institution of global social equity imperatives such as those represented in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, gender justice remains an elusive ideal. Indeed, in spite of the long time focus on women and gender equity within international policy (see UNIFEM, 2005–2006) and a specific emphasis on girls in the sphere of education (e.g., the frameworks in Dakar, 2000; Jomtein, 1990; UNESCO, 2006) women’s position in relation to poverty and oppression has, by some accounts, barely improved (Tikly, 2004). While other accounts contend that the situation for women and girls worldwide has slowly, albeit inconsistently, improved since the institution of such global imperatives, it is clear that girls as a group continue to face extensive issues of disadvantage in relation to education. In many “developing” countries girls are denied even the most basic education; in others where they do obtain access to schooling, many are the victims of sexual harassment and abuse; in many locations girls’ high illiteracy and poor retention rates are alarming, as is the quality of the education that some receive at school when compared with that provided to boys.

Prevailing social and cultural traditions, particularly in “developing” countries invariably compound these gender disparities. Cultural traditions that position boys’ schooling participation as more important than that of girls have become more pronounced and the situation has been exacerbated by issues of poverty and the rising costs associated with schooling. Of concern in recent times, and fortifying the barriers to closing such inequities in many non-Western contexts, particularly those in the Islamic world, are the enduring tensions associated with the imposing of Western ideologies of “development.” Certainly, the ideological conflicts between the West and Islam, as we argue in this chapter, do little to militate against the existing broader cultural barriers that constrain girls’ progress in terms of education.

The situation for girls in the “developed” world is somewhat different. Against a resource rich backdrop and decades of feminist reform, girls as a group in many Western countries generally fare much better than their non-Western counterparts. From the late 1970s, there has been a concerted focus in many Western countries on national equity policy to raise girls’ schooling achievement, which has generated substantial improvements in girls’ general academic attainment. However, from the early 1990s, a backlash context against feminist gains in education has meant the downstreaming of gender reform for girls (Blackmore, 1999; Hayes, 2003). Girls’ equity issues are now sidelined or ignored alongside an aggressive recuperative politics of “What about the boys?” (Linggard, 2003).

In this chapter we locate such trends in gender priorities within the globalizing processes of neoliberalism and the new international politics post-September 11. The chapter
begins by tracking the regressive impacts of the global neoliberal agenda. We articulate here how the masculinist and neoiperialist regimes embedded in this agenda constrain women’s economic, social, and physical well-being and narrow educational priorities in ways that distort gender justice goals. We consider these issues in light of the changed global politics post-September 11, and thus draw attention to the ways in which new narratives of national security, antagonistic relations between the West and Islam, and resurgent nationalism (Rizvi, 2004) pose particular problems for gender equity. Principally, we express concern about how these narratives constrain gender justice through shutting down dissent and championing a return to conservative or fundamental values.

In exploring the localized gendered effects of these global narratives, we draw particular attention to some of the gender equity and schooling trends in Australia and Egypt. We do not suggest that each is representative of Western and non-Western contexts, rather, that each provides a means of illuminating particular dominant “turns” taking place within the global field of gender justice and education. The selection of these two contexts enables a discussion of the global implications of gender policies constructed within a neoliberal paradigm, whilst at the same time enabling a discussion of the ways in which recent tensions between, and within, countries allied with the United States and countries influenced by Islam are impacting upon the educational gender agenda.

Globalization, Neoliberalism, and Gender

The valorized Western-led discourses of neoliberalism have acquired hegemonic status within global politics since the mid- to late 1980s. The dominant norms of efficiency and an “ethic” of cost-benefit analysis have served to venerate the “market” as the organizing principle of public policy (e.g., Apple, 2005). Within understandings that markets are driven and regulated by consumer choice and demand, neoliberal discourses construct an unquestioning faith in their essential fairness and justice in terms of their capacity to work in ways that will distribute resources efficiently and fairly according to effort. However, as many commentators have consistently argued, far from creating fair and equitable societies, these economizing and depoliticizing strategies actually exacerbate the inequitable distribution of resources and power along racialized, gendered, and classed lines (Apple, 2005; Eisenstein, 1998; Mohanty, 2003).

There has been much debate about how the global expansion of neoliberal or capital- ist discourses impact on non-Western or “developing” contexts. Many commentators understand this expansion as an imperialist project that works to homogenize culture in unidirectional ways from “the West” to “the Rest” (Giroux, 2002; Rizvi, 2004). From the underlying premise that global capital needs local states to ensure the social cohesion and economic growth necessary for capital accumulation (Rizvi, 2004), this process works to construct and perpetuate vast global inequities through incorporating so-called developing nations into regimes that render them economically useful and politically docile (Tikly, 2004). Tikly (2004), and others (Goldman, 2005; Hardt & Negri, 2001), contend that this agenda “…serves to secure the interests of the USA, its Western allies and of global capitalism more generally” (p. 173).

Along these lines, Tikly (2004) notes the often conflicting ideologies relating to social change or development in Western and non-Western traditions. He is especially critical of how Western ideas of progress, imposed on alternative cultural traditions, perpetuate bias in defining underdevelopment simplistically, in terms of “lack.” Such disciplinary paradigms highly restrict the capacities of developing countries to determine their own social agendas (Chabbott, 2003; Tikly, 2004). Exploring these issues, Blackmore (2000) talks about the Western “mantras” of efficiency and economy embedded in struc-
tural adjustment and conditional lending policies instituted by organizations such as the World Bank. These regulatory policies are not only seen as limiting the autonomy of “developing” nations but also as compromising social equity goals within these contexts (Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2006; Goldman, 2005; Mohanty, 2003) including progressivist agendas seeking to reduce poverty and women’s oppression (Blackmore, 2000).

Invariably, this is because the neoliberal ideals of individualism, independence, and freedom underpinning these economic-centric policies are inherently masculinist in their endorsement of gender inequities. Such ideals, it is well established, tend only to acknowledge the masculinized self of the public sphere and thus “…obscure a fundamental source of power and inequality in relations between the sexes” (O’Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999, p. 45). These principles have generated a global environment of increased privatization and deregulation of public services and a weakening of the welfare state that has compounded gender disadvantage. In Western and non-Western contexts alike, poverty levels have increased since the 1970s for many women, and other disadvantaged groups, through neoliberalism’s whittling away of affirmative, protectionist, and welfare policies (Blackmore, 2000; Bulbeck, 1994; Hatem, 1994). Such protectionist and welfare policies are, of course, imperative to pursuing the goals of gender justice in a global climate where:

…women and girls are still 70 percent of the world’s poor and the majority of the world’s refugees; [where] girls and women comprise almost 80 percent of displaced persons of the [“developing world” and where] women own less than one-hundredth of the world’s property, while they are the hardest hit by the effects of war, domestic violence and religious persecution. (Mohanty, 2003, p. 234)

Clearly constraining in terms of any hope of beginning to remedy these stark gender inequities, Blackmore (2000, p. 475) argues, that in subsuming political imperatives with the market, “…gender equity is [generally] perceived to be a luxury that democratic states, new and old, cannot afford…” Within this paradigm, as she points out, gender equity policies can only be justified if linked to productivity.

Such links between women and issues of productivity are key characteristics within the discourses that surround the policies and initiatives of multilateral agencies concerning women in the developing world (Tikly, 2004). Developing and integrating women’s productive capabilities more effectively into national and international economies are central poverty remedying strategies of the World Bank. Another remedy for addressing issues of poverty concerns the Bank’s discourses around women’s reproductive capacities. Here concerns about overpopulation and issues of increased poverty, have resulted in various initiatives aimed at controlling women’s fertility in low-income contexts. Such economic-centric initiatives are strongly condemned as disciplining women in neoinperialist and bioracist ways (Tikly, 2004; Wangari, 2002). In particular, they ignore the gross disparities in the consumption patterns between populations in low and high-income contexts and “…the effects of economic globalisation on poverty and the local environment” (Tikly, 2004). Most significantly perhaps, the justification of gender equity policy through neoliberal regimes of efficiency and economy imposes:

…a western conception [and homogenous worldview] of women’s empowerment based on the notion of individual rights, sex equality and the nature of sisterhood… [that] fails to connect either with the unique forms of oppression and power relationships experienced by many women in low-income contexts, [or the] alternative, more
collectively orientated and indigenous forms of struggle organised around an alternative view of basic needs as constituting “rights.”’ (Tikly, 2004, p. 184)

While by some accounts these Western conceptions of women’s empowerment have changed some women’s positions in countries of the developing world for the better in terms of improved socioeconomic conditions, many other accounts point to the failure of initiatives based on these conceptions to reduce poverty and redress women’s oppression (Keddie, 1991; Mohanty, 2003; Tikly, 2004). Keddie (1991) for instance, tells of the suffering particularly poorer women have endured under these broader imperatives, such as substandard working conditions, poorly paid employment, and removal from the security of rural life.

Neoliberalism, Education, and Gender Equity

Globally, neoliberal discourses have had a major impact upon public institutions such as education. In endorsing the core relationship between education and capitalism, these discourses resonate with a vision of students as human capital (Apple, 2005). Here resource provision for educational reform agendas in Western and non-Western contexts alike, have tended to be driven by concerns that ensure states are globally competitive. Such concerns are based on the need to ensure that students are appropriately educated as future workers in order that they can be productive in an ever increasing and intensely competitive global economy. While, as Apple (2005) points out, the educational initiatives arising from neoliberal concerns with human capital growth are varied, many have focused on increasing policy and practice around education for employment and work-related education programs and involve a stress on higher academic standards and more rigorous testing.

Taylor and Henry suggest that the ascendancy of these tenets, and in particular, the “...increasing emphasis on markets to drive educational provision...[and] a focus on outcomes rather than inputs as a policy and funding lever...” (2000, pp. 1–2) is highly regressive for social equity. They argue that a deregulated environment of competition, reduced funding, and the pressure of “market advantage” is incongruent with producing enhanced equity outcomes (see also Gillborn & Youdell, 2000). The cultures of performativity generated in schools by these pressures have resulted in an obsession with academic results and the measurement of specific aspects of education, principally, easily quantifiable and measurable literacy and numeracy outcomes. Such a focus is seen as narrowly defining success and achievement and delimiting measures of school effectiveness in ways that sideline broader social concerns (Mahony, 1999; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997). To these ends, critical educational issues, especially those that impact negatively on girls, such as the perpetuation of gender dualisms through schools’ masculinist infrastructures (Mahony, 1999), and the level of violence and sexist harassment in schools, tend to be overlooked (Kenway, Willis, Rennie, & Blackmore, 1998; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997). Moreover, and particularly regressive for groups of students who are marginalized through gender or other identity relations, such as class or race, these cultures of performativity have produced a schooling climate where teachers generally place greater emphasis on efficiency and basic skills rather than social justice outcomes (Lingard, 2003).

Amplified within a backlash context against feminist gains in education, these broader discourses, in Western contexts such as Australia, have shifted gender equity concerns from a social justice focus on girls in the 1970 and 1980s to a selective emphasis on standards and the current overwrought concerns with boys’ schooling performance (Lingard, 2003; Mills, 2003). Indeed, the rearticulation of equity in education to stress lit-
eracy outcomes, has enabled a re-presentation of boys as educationally disadvantaged and provided impetus for many large-scale government funded programs, such as the A$19.4 million Success for Boys initiative in Australia, aimed at improving boys’ educational outcomes. The broader context within which such initiatives are generated has been extensively criticized as hindering the pursuit of gender justice goals. This climate reflects a counterproductive “competing victims approach” to issues of gender justice; sidelines the significance of class and ethnicity in compounding educational disadvantage for many boys and girls; ignores any recognition of boys’ and men’s relative economic and social advantage beyond the school; and is particularly hostile in terms of disregarding the issues of disadvantage that continue to be experienced by many girls (Collins, Kenway, & McLeod, 2000; Francis & Skelton, 2005; Lingard, 2003).

Priorities associated with academic standards and the school-to-work nexus resonate in many ways with the schooling concerns of countries within the developing world and can be associated with the alignment of education in these contexts with the global imperative of economic growth. Underpinned by a view of education as a key factor in economic development—a view adopted by the United Nations in 1960—human capital theory has dominated much of the literature on education in the developing world (Resnik, 2006). Indeed, raising human capital for the purposes of sustaining the economic growth of developing nations remains a central platform of World Bank discourses about education and remains a key policy area for the multilateral development agencies (Little, 2003; Schultz, 1971; Tikly, 2004). To these ends, agencies like the World Bank have significant disciplinary power in relation to shaping the educational agenda of developing nations through social intervention and discretion over resource provision (Chabbert, 2003; Jones, 1998). Tikly (2004) refers here to initiatives such as the extension and expansion of education and training along Western lines.

Such initiatives are criticized as promoting an integrated world system along market lines (Jones, 1998). While Tikly (2004) and others (Stiglitz, 2002) are cognizant of the relatively recent shifts that associate the resource provision of multilateral agencies with addressing social concerns such as the development of global citizenship through education, they also align this shift with broader neoimperialist imperatives that view social cohesion within nation states as central to the sustainability of global capitalism. While such shifts can clearly be seen as reflecting benevolent concerns for human rights, Ball (1998) contends that organizations such as the World Bank see equity as a residual concern of governments and as such the social and welfare purposes of education are systematically played down.

Notwithstanding these interpretations, such priority areas continue to enable a focus on girls as a disadvantaged group that requires affirmative action and special treatment—unlike the focus on boys in the West. The World Bank, for example, supports the Millennium Development Goals, one of which is to promote gender equity and empower women, another of which is to achieve universal primary education (UNESCO, 2005). A current innovative program supported by the Bank to achieve these two goals in the developing world is a stipend initiative to reward parents for allowing their daughters to attend school. This stipend helps families in abject poverty with the costs of schooling and compensates for girls being away from home (World Bank, 2006). Global social movements around such gender justice goals, as Rizvi argues (2004), exemplify the generative principles of a cosmopolitan global solidarity. While addressing gender equity issues within a Western led neoliberal paradigm is far from unproblematic, as the above discussion points out, this focus on girls has made some inroads to reducing gender injustices in the developing world and is thus undoubtedly positive in terms of global equity.
Nonetheless, the regressive impacts of the global neoliberal agenda on gender justice and schooling goals in both Western and non-Western contexts are marked. The emphasis on performative cultures that prioritize the market over social justice concerns has worked against the interests of girls in the West in distorting gender equity priorities to produce a focus on boys as an equity group. Outside the West some aspects of the neoliberal agenda (in generating a focus on women and girls as equity groups), can be interpreted as progressive for gender justice. While not wishing to detract from this, the valorization of the West in terms of imposing a particular homogenized view of women’s and girls’ empowerment remains problematic in its cultural exclusivity.

We now turn to a discussion of the new global narratives post-September 11, namely those associated with security, resurgent nationalism, and increased antagonism between the West and Islam. In particular, we draw on, and juxtapose, some of the educational debates in Australia with those in Egypt to illuminate some of what we suggest pose major impediments to gender justice.

Gender in the Post-September 11 Context

Global narratives espousing a concern for national security have dominated the political agenda in many Western countries since the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001. Such security concerns, fed by a culture of fear, particularly in Western countries allied with the United States, have fueled a resurgent nationalism and increasing demonization of those who associate with Islam (Rizvi, 2004). Resurgent nationalism in contexts influenced by Islam, conversely, has been shaped by an anti-U.S./Western sentiment. The shutting down of dissent associated with the nationalistic imperatives produced by the global “war on terror” that champion a return to conservative or fundamental values, signify potentially deleterious implications for gender equity worldwide.

The various Western responses to the September 11 attacks in the United States, alongside wars instigated against Afghanistan and Iraq, have seen a greater policing and surveillance of marginalized local, usually Muslim, communities within countries such as Australia, the United States, Canada, and Britain (Rizvi, 2004). This concern with national security has also worked to stifle critical debates about matters relating to social justice. As with many wars, the “war on terror” has seen nationalist discourses being deployed in ways that seek to unify nations’ residents into an “us” who is opposed to a “them.” The achievement of an “us” requires the absence of dissent, an adherence to a common set of values (read in the West, values that align with White, conservative, Anglocentrism), and a fear and distrust of “them.” The “them,” within the current climate are Muslims who threaten “our” way of life, and “our” fear of them has been used to justify the oppression of Muslim communities, and has worked to construct those opposed to so-called Western values as undermining the “war effort.” Such nationalistic discourses, fed by the simplistic moral certainty of broader political rhetoric, have hindered democratic debate (Giroux, 2002; hooks, 2003; Rizvi, 2004). Commentators, for example, hooks (2003), express particular concern about this stifling of critical debate post September 11:

In a matter of months many citizens ceased to believe in the value of living in diverse communities, of anti-racist work, of seeking peace. They surrendered their belief in the healing power of justice. Hardcore White-supremacist nationalism reared its ugly voice and spoke openly, anywhere. Individuals who dared to dissent, to critique, to challenge misinformation were and are labelled traitors. As time passed, we wit-
nessed a mounting backlash against any individual or group who dared to work for justice, who opposed domination in all its forms. (p. 10)

Fed by the neoconservative narratives associated with the right-wing politics of the Western alliance against the “war on terror”—the so-called “coalition of the willing,” this upsurge in uncritical and morally righteous nationalism along White supremacist and patriarchal lines has impacted on schools and schooling in highly regressive ways in terms of social justice. Particularly, as hooks (2003) suggests, because such nationalism serves to stifle socially critical pedagogies and heighten surveillance in relation to what is taught in schools and how it is taught. In Australia, for example, neoconservative imagery along Anglocentric and masculinist lines has framed the federal government’s agenda for national values education. This agenda has been accompanied by a flag pole initiative in schools to develop a nationalist pride amongst young people and a call for more rigorous teaching of Australian history (usually with a focus on Australia’s British heritage rather than on its development as a multicultural society). Such initiatives have been accompanied by overt suspicion of Islamic schools, in terms of government surveillance of curriculum and pedagogy, as well as attempts to police particular cultural traditions. For example, there have been in Australia, as in other places, most notoriously France, ministerial calls for a banning of Muslim girls’ wearing the hijab at public schools—this symbol of Islam is seen as a sign of “iconic defiance” to the “Australian” way of life. In the United Kingdom, there are plans to bring Islamic schools under the control of the local educational authorities. Ironically, in a country that prides itself on its commitment to free speech, some teachers in the United States who have criticized its war effort in Afghanistan and Iraq, or have sought to examine the reasons behind the September 11 attacks, have been fired from their jobs (Giroux, 2002).

These broader trends are clearly damaging for the gender equity project. It is well established that the social critique and debate of dominant ideologies are cornerstones to facilitating pedagogies of gender justice in schools (Alloway, 1995; Davies, 1993; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005). Stifling such questioning and debate in the area of identity politics and sociocultural justice, particularly within a schooling context where performative cultures have already skewed equity concerns and sidelined social outcomes, is likely to be constraining for gender justice. Such trends will do little to disrupt the masculinist discourses within and beyond schools that continue, for example, to silence the misogynistic regimes that undergird the sexual harassment and cultural marginalization of females endemic in school cultures.

At the very least, these trends can be seen as fueling the current widespread and highly vocal political backlash against progressive education. Endemic in the “back to basics” approach of conservative politics, this backlash has sought to suppress the critical agenda of particular curriculum materials that promote debate concerning the exploration of contentious political and cultural issues. Such progressive agendas are regularly attacked in the Australian media. The Australian newspaper, for instance, has taken a particularly resolute stance against critical literacy—frequently condemning such practice as excessively nihilistic, excessively critical of Eurocentrism, nationalism, and conservatism or ridiculing it along the lines of “destructive postmodern claptrap” (Donnelly, 2006). More broadly, such neoconservative trends, particularly given the antifeminist politics within Western countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (indeed, the then Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, implied the irrelevance of feminism, publicly commenting that he believed Australia to be in a “postfeminist era”), would seem likely to further amplify the gender disparities of an already regressive neoliberal
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environment where conservative ideologies of women and the family have taken a firm hold in government policy and public consciousness.

In non-Western contexts such as Egypt, the new global narratives post-September 11, also pose significant problems for the pursuit of gender justice. This is principally because, as Mazawi (2002) points out, as a response to global Western culture, “...there has been a worldwide revival of fundamentalism in its myriad forms” (p. 60). Within a context of increasing anti-Western sentiment in Egypt, and ever growing concern and resentment associated with how Western/liberal ideologies are eroding and undermining Egyptian identity, heritage, and tradition, this revival in fundamentalism is unlikely to be tempered. This is particularly so given that the new rhetoric of security has enabled the United States to reassert its global authority and preeminence in international relations (Rizvi, 2004).

Nonetheless, containing religious fundamentalism, and more specifically militant Islamic fundamentalism, and promoting social stability in Egypt, are key imperatives underpinning the development and aid agenda of the major international donor agencies. Certainly, this nation’s geopolitical characteristics mean that it is an important ally of the United States and Western European countries—particularly post-September 11, given the perceived threat that instability in the Middle East and North Africa regions continues to pose for Western interests (Sayed, 2005).

Within broader discourses of national security, the public education system in Egypt is positioned as one of the central ways that this stability can be generated. Indeed, as Cook (2000) argues, public schooling is seen to be the primary means of combating Egypt’s most dangerous threat—Islamic extremism. To these ends, considerable aid has assisted Egypt’s endeavors to modernize their nation along Western development lines, and more specifically to expand secular schooling (Cook, 1999, 2000). Many Egyptians, however, according to Cook (1999, 2000), and others (see Mazawi, 2002; Sayed, 2005), are highly critical of secular schooling, principally because its antireligious and liberal tenets are seen to fundamentally conflict with Islamic tradition and philosophy. Cook (2000) argues that many in the Islamic world align secularized schooling with “educational apartheid” and see it as representing the epitome of Muslim decline. Furthermore, as Cook (2000) points out, a prevailing and far from uncommon view is that secularist educational policies and Egypt’s blind imitation of the West, are responsible for Egypt losing its identity.

Amid heightened antagonism post September 11 and disillusionment toward Western approaches to development that have done little to remedy Egypt’s enduring poverty and hardship and within a broader global climate of resurgent nationalism that has intensified Egypt’s search for a national identity distinct from the West, Islamic militant groups have managed to develop strong and growing alliances with the general Egyptian public (Sayed, 2005). Of significance, these groups have been able to tap into the public’s general disdain toward secular schooling and are increasingly providing educational alternatives for poor and disenfranchised communities (where religious fundamentalism is likely to be most prevalent) based on conservative Islamic values (Sayed, 2005). Such trends, especially within a context where gender disparities are considerable, throw up particular concerns along the trajectory to meeting such gender equity and primary education imperatives as those within the Millennium Development Goals.

While under the global Education-for-All umbrella (UNESCO, 1994), concerted efforts have been made by Egypt’s Ministry of Education to improve the situation for girls, particular sociocultural barriers continue to hinder their attendance, attainment, and training. Exacerbating the gender gap, these barriers are associated with, for example, parental concerns with protecting their daughters’ modesty and security; a lack of
enforcement of compulsory education policies; issues of poverty and the rising costs associated with schooling and basic school supplies; prevailing attitudes that families feel that it is a better investment to educate their sons; cultural expectations in terms of girls’ domestic responsibilities and parental reluctance to send their girls to coeducational schools; and the association between girls’ early marriage and their elevated school dropout rates (World Bank, 2003).

It is contended here that the cultural and socioeconomic barriers hindering girls’ schooling attainment are likely to be exacerbated within Egypt’s current climate of tension between the perceived Westernization of schooling and a resurgent nationalism founded on particular Islamic principles. Much has been written, especially by feminists, about the ways in which conservative or fundamentalist readings of Islam are particularly oppressive to women (Ghoussoub, 1987; Kazemi, 2000; Keddie, 1991). Such oppressions are generally seen to relate to how the Quran represents women in ways that emphasize and rigidify gender difference and where unequal practices (related to, for example, political representation and economic security) are justified on a perception of men’s and women’s different natures and needs (Keddie, 1991). The amplification of women’s oppressions in nations such as Egypt in the more recent past has been attributed to increased anti-Western sentiment and more specifically, Muslim resistance to Western-sanctioned change and Western views of women’s empowerment. Against this backdrop, as Keddie (1991) argues, the home has become the last bastion against the cultural, political, and economic offensive of the West and thus attempts to retain the Islamization of women’s roles have been concerted because this is a touchstone of Islam. As Keddie (1991) further points out, this is partly because: “...a return to Quranic injunctions on dress, polygamy, and so forth are a highly visible way to show one is a good Muslim” (p. 17). And in the current context of anti-Western, or more precisely anti-U.S. feelings in these locations, being a “good Muslim” can be constructed as an act of defiance and resistance to a perceived Western cultural imperialism.

When considering that many of the barriers that constrain girls’ school attendance and performance are cultural barriers that would be further fortified through conservative readings of the Quran, the future trajectory in terms of reaching the Millennium Development Goals for women, equity, girls and schooling, does not look bright. Certainly, for example, it would seem that the cultural traditions that hinder girls’ attendance and attainment at school would likely be further reinforced within the fundamental interpretations of Islam which have burgeoned in the post-September 11 context.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored some of the gender equity implications that are associated with the globalizing processes of neoliberalism. In particular we have drawn attention to the ways in which the regimes of efficiency and economy embedded in these processes are at odds with creating an environment conducive to pursuing gender justice goals. Within an ethos where politics becomes subsumed by market imperatives, and where notions of democracy shift from political to economic concepts, the inequitable distribution of resources and power along gendered (as well as racial and class) lines becomes increasingly pronounced. The decline in social policy and reduction of welfare services, as a product of such imperatives, has had particularly adverse effects, to varying extents, on women worldwide. In the non-West or developing world the imperialism of these imperatives, particularly in terms of imposing homogenized views of women and empowerment, has in many ways compounded issues of disadvantage for many women and girls.
In articulating how these regimes adversely impact on the sphere of equity in education, we foregrounded key issues of gender injustice. We highlighted here how the limited academic, and more specifically literacy, outcomes focus of performative cultures within many Western schooling contexts, skews gender equity concerns to position boys as a disadvantaged group and to silence key injustices that continue to characterize the schooling experience of many girls. In discussing how these regimes tend to impact on the sphere of gender equity and education in non-Western contexts, while acknowledging how some aspects of the global neoliberal agenda have made inroads to improving the lifeworlds of many girls and women, we expressed concern about the ways in which these regimes are unresponsive to the cultural specificities of non-Western environments.

Drawing on these concerns, we explored some of the gender debates and issues in countries such as Australia and Egypt, within the context of the changed imperatives for education, post-September 11. We argued here that the new narratives of resurgent nationalism, security, and increased antagonism between the West and Islam, that have pervaded the global education agenda, pose particular problems for pursuing the goals of gender equity. Such narratives were seen as intersecting with some of the key educational trends in Australia and Egypt to further exacerbate some of the negative byproducts of the neoliberal agenda. Constraining gender justice in many Western countries, and in particular, Australia, we argued that the new narratives post September 11 served to stifle the socially critical and progressive agenda in schools and to strengthen the Anglo-centric resolve of the conservative/neoliberal politics already seen as highly regressive to the gender equity project. The debates in Egypt, a non-Western context seen as reflective of the educational experience of many other Muslim countries, were similarly juxtaposed with the narratives post-September 11, to propose a highly regressive trajectory for gender justice. Here we foregrounded the ways in which heightened antagonism and disillusionment toward imposed Western approaches to development, including education, in Egypt, intensified through the “war on terror,” has strengthened the grip of Islamic fundamentalism in many parts of this country. This state of affairs was argued as further compounding the many cultural barriers that continue to constrain the gender justice possibilities for girls and women in the Egyptian context. The current upsurge in anti-Western sentiment, fueling the revival of Islamic fundamentalism, conservative readings of the Quran, and the amplifying of women’s and girls’ oppressions, is far from conducive to generating the cosmopolitan trajectory necessary to realizing the gender equity and schooling Millennium Development Goals.

In pursuing the goals of a global gender justice, it is clear that these negative trajectories in both Western and non-Western contexts need to be disrupted. In taking up struggles against the neoliberal discourses that drive the global capitalist juggernaut, much has been written in the area of social equity and antiglobalization about ways in which such disruptions might take place (e.g., Giroux, 2002; McLaren, 2000). However, despite, as we have articulated in this chapter, girls and women bearing the brunt of globalization, gender analyses have tended to be absent from such writing (Mohanty, 2003). Within the masculinizing discourses of globalization, on the one hand, and the masculinization within antiglobalization movements, on the other, Mohanty draws attention to the urgency of making feminist agendas and projects explicit. Her call for a feminism without borders that proposes a global feminist solidarity organized against capitalism, that exposes and makes visible the various, overlapping forms of subjugation of women’s lives and reenvisions forms of collective social resistance for women, offers a trajectory of hope. In a world where global capitalism, while destroying possibilities for social action, also opens up new possibilities, she urges a transnational feminist solidarity “...across
the divisions of place, identity, class, work, belief…” (2003, p. 250). The reimagining of liberatory politics, she proposes, is possible through a solidarity that is attentive to both the micropolitics of everyday life as well as the macropolitics of global economic and political processes. Such solidarity that works against repressive politics will be central to challenging and transforming the increasingly brutal cultural landscape post September 11 (Mohanty, 2003).

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