

Education Policy & Social Inequality

Volume 2

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Tebeje Molla

Higher Education in Ethiopia

Structural Inequalities and Policy Responses

 Springer

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For my family: Yeshi, Fetayel and Ménabe.

Foreword

Each year, around the time that universities admit students into their fold, the question is invariably asked about who gets in: Who is being granted the opportunity to access higher education? It is more controversial and sells more newspapers if the question is directed at our most elite universities—those institutions that produce most of our leaders and which tend to have a record of restricting access not simply to those with the right academic credentials. Interestingly, the right academic credentials that grant access to elite universities (and universities more generally) tend to be restricted to certain groups of people—white, affluent, male, etc. It is the stuff of classic Bourdieuan sociology—social and cultural attributes misrecognized as academic ability, which legitimates admission decisions dressed up in the illusion of merit: ‘We take the brightest and best, no matter who they are or where they come from’—and yet the ‘brightest and best’ bear an uncanny resemblance to a restricted social, cultural, economic group.

At the time of writing (November 2017), the UK’s latest higher education admissions controversy has been sparked by David Lammy, a British Labor MP (the first black Briton to study at Harvard University and law graduate) who has published data (obtained through freedom of information requests) about the demographics of Oxbridge students, comparing offers made in 2010 and 2015. The data show an increasing concentration of students from elite backgrounds. The release coincided with the publication of an article (Reeves et al. 2017) in the *American Sociological Review*, which, among other things, showed a high correlation between students (predominantly male and white) who first attended Clarendon schools (a collective term for elite schools in the UK), later attended Oxbridge universities, and then took up elite positions in British society. Some described the data as evidence of social engineering. Others said that it is more about the poor ‘being excluded from the aspiration to try for it in the first place’ (‘A failure to dream keeps the poor out of Oxford’, Jenny McCartney, *The Sunday Times*, 22 October 2017). The Sutton Trust also took the opportunity to release its report (*Admissions in Context*, 2017), which showed that the UK’s leading universities are not taking into account students’ contextual differences when making their admission decisions, even though the evidence is that students from poorer

backgrounds with lower entry qualifications can perform as well at university as their more affluent peers with higher entry qualifications.

To those who research and work with inequalities in higher education, the issues are very familiar. And so are the ways in which they are conceived. Each year, we continue to think about structural inequalities in higher education from positions of advantage, rarely from the position of the least advantaged, blaming victims for their own exclusion. We imagine that the inequalities are simply about access without thinking about what is being accessed, offering a higher education that is pedagogically and epistemologically skewed towards a privileged few and reducing for others its potential appeal and value. And we imagine tensions between excellence and equality rather than appreciating an excellent higher education devoid of equality as diminished for all.

This is why this book is so important—because it takes these issues seriously. It provides the first comprehensive account of structural inequalities in Ethiopian higher education, combining a robust analysis of the structuring of inequalities and a positive approach to their resolution. There is much to learn in this book, not just for the future of Ethiopian higher education but also for higher education systems more globally. In particular, Tebeje Molla helps us to see the importance of a higher education that equips people with the capabilities they need to live lives of value to them and their communities, and not simply a higher education that contributes to the instrumental human capital agenda of governments and corporations. These are important questions to ask, which go beyond just asking about access and opportunity.

Trevor Gale

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Melbourne, Australia
02 January 2018

Tebeje Molla

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAU	Addis Ababa University
AfDB	African Development Bank
ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Movement
AU	Asmara University
AUA	Alemaya University of Agriculture
BDU	Bahir Dar University
CA	Capabilities approach
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSA	Central Statistical Agency
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DfID	Department for International Development
DIF	Development and Innovation Fund
ECA	(The United Nations) Economic Commission for Africa
EFA	Education for All
EHEECE	Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESDP	Education Sector Development Plan
ESLCE	Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGD	Focus group discussion
GDP	Gross domestic product
GNI	Gross national income
HE	Higher education
HERQA	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency
HESC	Higher Education Strategic Centre
HESO	Higher education system overhaul
HSIU	Haile Selassie I University
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

IDA	International Development Association
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education (Ethiopia)
MoEFA	Ministry of Education and Fine Arts
MoFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (Ethiopia)
NICHE	Netherlands Initiative for Capacity Development in Higher Education
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo People's Democratic Organization
OU	Odaax University
PRSPs	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
SEPDM	Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TFHES	Task Force on Higher Education and Societies
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UCAA	Addis Ababa University College
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WB	World Bank
WCHE	World Conference on Higher Education
WHO	World Health Organization
WU	Washeray University

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