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HIGHER EDUCATION PATHWAYS

SOUTH AFRICAN
UNDERGRADUATE
EDUCATION AND
THE PUBLIC GOOD

EDITORS PAUL ASHWIN & JENNIFER CASE

Higher Education Pathways

South African Undergraduate Education and the Public Good

Edited by Paul Ashwin and Jennifer M. Case

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vi
<i>Notes on contributors</i>	vii
PART A: SETTING THE SCENE	1
Chapter 1 Introduction <i>Paul Ashwin and Jennifer M. Case</i>	3
Chapter 2 Transformation, the state and higher education: Towards a developmental system of higher education in South Africa <i>Rajani Naidoo and Rushil Ranchod</i>	10
Chapter 3 Subsidy, tuition fees and the challenge of financing higher education in South Africa <i>Gerald Wangenge-Ouma and Vincent Carpentier</i>	27
Chapter 4 South African higher education, society and economy: What do we know about the relationships? <i>Stephanie Allais</i>	44
Chapter 5 Understanding the role of university graduates in society: Which conception of public good? <i>Rosemary Deem and Tristan McCowan</i>	61
PART B: WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING	79
Chapter 6 A multi-dimensional approach to fair access <i>Melanie Walker</i>	81
Chapter 7 International perspectives on equality of higher education opportunities: Models and strategies for accessibility and availability <i>Vincent Carpentier, Yann Lebeau and Jussi Välimaa</i>	95
Chapter 8 How higher education research using the capability approach illuminates possibilities for the transformation of individuals and society in South Africa <i>Monica McLean</i>	112

Chapter 9	The conceptualisation of students' personal transformation through their engagement in South African undergraduate education <i>Paul Ashwin and Janja Komljenovic</i>	125
Chapter 10	Understanding the relationship between institutional cultures and pedagogical change <i>Rebecca Schendel</i>	136
Chapter 11	The lenses we use to research student experiences <i>Amanda Hlengwa, Sioux McKenna and Thando Njovane</i>	149
PART C: SITUATING: WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION		163
Chapter 12	The rising challenge of university access for students from low-income families <i>Langutani Masehela</i>	165
Chapter 13	#FeesMustFall: A media analysis of students' voices on access to universities in South Africa <i>Mikateko Mathebula and Talita Calitz</i>	177
Chapter 14	Curriculum transformation: Looking back and planning forward <i>Suellen Shay and Thandeka Mkhize</i>	192
Chapter 15	Understanding student experiences through the lens of academic staff development practice and research <i>Sherran Clarence</i>	204
Chapter 16	Students' experiences of university life beyond the curriculum <i>Philippa Kerr and Thierry Luescher</i>	216
Chapter 17	Post-graduation trajectories of young South Africans <i>Jennifer M. Case, Delia Marshall and Samuel Fongwa</i>	232
Chapter 18	Exploring differences in South African graduate outcomes <i>Samuel Fongwa, Delia Marshall and Jennifer M. Case</i>	245
Chapter 19	Destination and outcome trends for graduates from sub-Saharan African countries: Implications for South Africa <i>Ibrahim Oanda and Siphelo Ngcwangu</i>	260
Chapter 20	Engineering graduates in South Africa and Brazil: A common good perspective <i>Renato H. L. Pedrosa and Bruce Kloot</i>	274

PART D: CONCLUSION	289
Chapter 21 What have we learned about pathways to the public good from South African undergraduate education? <i>Paul Ashwin, Vincent Carpentier, Jennifer Case, Delia Marshall, Tristan McCowan, Sioux McKenna, Rajani Naidoo, Rebecca Schendel and Melanie Walker</i>	291
<i>Index</i>	299

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CHAPTER 7

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON EQUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES: MODELS AND STRATEGIES FOR ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY

Vincent Carpentier, Yann Lebeau and Jussi Välimaa

Introduction

Issues of access to higher education have long been discussed in the context of a worldwide move towards a massification of higher education systems. The data reveal persisting inequalities of access to and of success within higher education, even in high participation systems (Marginson, 2016) which raises the question of equity in the management of availability and accessibility of higher education opportunities and of other factors of inequality operating within and beyond higher education systems. Depending on their resources and ideological positions, governments around the world have generally opened up their higher education sector by either allowing the private sector to absorb new demands or by funding the expansion of public higher institutions through various strategies responding to local circumstances or to donors' agendas. The increase in the number of study places has usually gone hand in hand with a diversification of higher education systems vertically (reputational differentiation among organisations of formally the same type) and/or horizontally (sectoral diversification), concealing in most cases the reproduction of prior inequalities within stratified systems (Marginson, 2016).

The chapter examines different strategies adopted in both high- and low-income countries to counter the deepening of inequalities of access within contexts of expansion of higher education systems. Initiatives related to institutional diversification, funding paradigms, and

the diversification of pathways into higher education, will be analysed in their capacity to address the challenge of reaching a balance between accessibility and availability and in their implications on the attainability of higher education opportunities for all segments of societies.

We first discuss the conceptual challenges posed by the notion of social justice underlying policies improving access opportunities to higher education for disadvantaged groups. We propose a framework for conceptualising the connections and tensions between policies of greater accessibility and availability on the one hand and, on the other, empirical observation of the effective attainability of courses and institutions. We then use four national contexts ranging from postcolonial low participation to highly inclusive ‘universal’ systems in order to emphasise the significance of contexts and historical trajectories in the formation and application of social justice agendas of access and participation in higher education.

Conceptualising and mapping the determinants and forms of participation in higher education

Equity and equality and the prospect of high participation systems of higher education

Equality and equity are often mixed with each other as concepts or used interchangeably. However, these concepts are linked to different, but interrelated social phenomena, in addition to having their own academic traditions and political interpretations and uses. According to Oscar Espinoza, the ‘equity’ concept is associated with fairness or justice in the provision of education and takes individual circumstances into consideration, while ‘equality’ ‘usually connotes sameness in treatment by asserting the fundamental or natural equality of all persons’ (Espinoza, 2007, p. 345). Equity is thus a problematic concept and policy paradigm because people understand fairness and justice differently (McCowan, 2016). Politically, the question may be formulated as fairness to whom, and justice in relation to what? According to Espinoza (2007), equity can be approached from three different perspectives. *Equity for equal needs* puts emphasis on giving the same amount of financial, social and cultural resources to all students with the same needs. It may also be interpreted as an aim to provide equal level of educational attainment or with equal educational achievements for students with equal needs. The principle of *equity for equal potential* is related, in turn, to the broad idea that individuals should maximise their potential and therefore, all individuals with similar abilities and skills should have access to higher education. However, the main problem with this approach is how to define ‘potential’ or ‘ability’ of a student. Typically this problem is addressed through standardised testing which, however, favours students from dominant groups, resulting in elitist policies which, in turn, increase inequality (Au, 2009; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The third approach, *equity for equal achievement*, is maybe the most meritocratic approach because it ties students’ past achievements to access to higher education and to their educational performance during their studies.

Equality and equity are therefore rooted in political ideologies underpinning decisions about how to allocate the resources of a society to higher education. Historically, the first comes with the belief that human beings have innate differences which cannot be changed. This reasoning supports a clear distinction between elite (academic) and lower (vocational) educational institutions. A liberal perspective on equity, in turn, is based on the conviction that society should help talented students to advance in their studies. In practical terms, however, liberal policies have often led to policies aiming to impact on the perceived attainability of university education, and to change students' working class values into middle class educational values (Nori, 2011; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005). According to Husén (1974) the most advanced approach to equity is represented by the radical definition of equality based on the idea that society guarantees both the quality of education and the equality of educational outcomes to every citizen, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. According to this definition, popular in Nordic countries such as Finland, the role of society is to provide equal educational opportunities and help to guarantee good educational outcomes for every citizen, regardless of gender, socio-economic background or geographical location (Husén, 1974; Nori, 2011). These different perspectives to equality and equity, sometimes classified as 'sufficitarian' and 'egalitarian' (Brighouse & Swift, 2006; McCowan, 2016) are helpful to understand the variations in the principles and modalities of expansion of higher education systems across the world and their social implications.

Marginson (2016) shows that *high participation systems* are growing in numbers, with substantial transformative effects on both higher education and society. The relationship works both ways as the structures of societies, and in particular their dynamics of social reproduction, impact on and shape the expansion of higher education systems. In this chapter we argue that the connections and sometimes tensions between social structures and expansion policies of higher education are historically situated and country-contingent and that their evolution is complex, rather than reflecting stages of economic development in a linear and static way. We explore them through the lenses of accessibility, availability and attainability.

Operational concepts: Accessibility, availability and attainability (AAA) of higher education

Accessibility refers to opportunities available to enrol in tertiary education programmes and institutions. The expression 'equity of access' refers to policies ensuring that such opportunities are available to all (Salmi & Bassett, 2014) and is used by international organisations and researchers with reference to public interventions geared at eliminating 'disadvantages from circumstances that lie largely beyond the control of the individual but that powerfully shape both the outcomes and actions in pursuit of those outcomes' (World Bank, 2006, p. 78). This approach, based on what Piketty (2014) refers to as the 'illusory nature of merit', still dominates public policies of widening participation, as well as discourses of the dominant groups seeking to defend their privileged status (Burke, 2013; van Zanten & Maxwell, 2015).

The accessibility of higher education in a given country is raised by establishing initiatives to increase the enrolment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, for example outreach activities in communities with poor higher education participation rates (Archer, 2007; Burke, 2013; James, Bexley, Anderson, Devlin, Garnett, Marginson, & Maxwell et al., 2008) or by providing students and their families with the necessary means to counter the effects of their disadvantage. In many countries, governments have introduced policies designed to eliminate identified barriers faced by potential students from lower income strata or other categories of the population facing significant barriers to access higher education through measures such as targeted scholarships and admission quotas (Long & Kavazanjian, 2012).

Availability refers to the number of places within a higher education system (through investments in public sites or the multiplication of alternative providers), and increasing availability often goes together with measures to broaden access to higher education. Because they operate at the point of entry of higher education systems, these strategies translate into growth without necessarily generating equalisation (Marginson, 2016). In Chile for instance, an increased availability at local level was thought to have enabled growth in participation from the lowest household income quintile; there was a ‘rapid expansion of the private sector, which today accounts for about 70 per cent of overall enrolment’ (Salmi & Bassett, 2014, p. 367). Yet, it has been found that the tertiary level enrolment rate for the wealthiest quintile is almost four times higher than the rate for the poorest, and the gap has widened over the last decade (Salmi & Bassett, 2014).

Countries such as the UK and France also present wide gaps between socio-economic groups despite showing higher participation rates than Chile. Participation rates of lower income groups have increased under a combination of widening participation measures and increased availability, but the gap with higher income groups in the attainability of the most rewarding qualifications is not showing signs of narrowing due to the stratification that accompanied the expansion of both systems (Carpentier, 2018; van Zanten & Maxwell, 2015).

Thus, the availability measured in terms of overall provision of places only tells one side of the story. Attainability is a further key concept. A study by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) on the geographical distribution of higher education institutions in England and Wales, indicated some significant ‘cold spots’ (HEFCE, 2014) and revealed how universities and colleges play a key role as economic and social ‘anchors’ in their local and wider communities: students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to travel long distances and the regional proximity is therefore an important dimension of the availability of higher education. Attainability refers to how the perceived selectivity of universities by secondary school leavers affects participation, as applicants tend to ‘judge the attainability of a place in higher education on the basis of their grades and subjects’ (HEFCE, 2015, p. 2).

The unequal attainability of courses and institutions within a system (achievement barriers) usually reflects its level of stratification, as well as significant differences in socio-cultural perceptions of the relevance and likely success of higher education to career plans (James,

2002; Lee, 2014). As will be shown in this chapter, the more higher education systems evolve towards a universalisation of access to higher education (total accessibility), the more stratified and hierarchical they tend to become because the greater availability of places masks striking differences of status among institutions. The attainability of institutions and degrees is therefore in large part generated from within the higher education systems, except where, as in the case of Finland discussed below, a 'determined effort is made by government to match growth with equalisation' (Marginson, 2016, p. 422). But those unequal perceptions and realities of achievement are also products of broader dynamics of class or cultural inequalities. Higher education strategies of access and growth can only partially redress these if designed in isolation from broader policies tackling wealth and income inequalities.

Trajectories of accessibility and availability: How the question of attainability has been addressed in different contexts

Contemporary higher education systems are the historical products of common or specific economic, political, social and cultural forces. Our intention here is to highlight and contextualise the policies and practices that influence accessibility, availability and attainability in selected countries and to locate some elements of convergences and divergences. The cases presented below reflect unique configurations historically constructed by the evolving connections and tensions between social, economic, political and cultural rationales (Carpentier, 2018). They include an archetypical high participation system (Finland), centralised republican models in contrasting environments (Senegal, France), a market orientated approach (UK) and a system combining aspects of centrally controlled quotas (positive discrimination) in a competitive and increasingly deregulated higher education landscape (Nigeria). The countries are intentionally chosen in contrasting groupings along economic development and higher education participation rates. The postcolonial perspective introduced in the cases of Nigeria and Senegal is an invitation to question the relevance of comparative concepts on matters of equity in educational opportunities, and also the underlying modernisation theories still dominating discourses on higher education development.

The Nordic model and the case of Finland: The alignment between AAA

Politically the main challenge in Nordic societies is to create egalitarian societies (Esping-Andersen, 2015). In the field of higher education this Nordic value basis translates into policies supporting equal educational opportunities for all citizens, regardless of their gender, socio-economic background or geographical location. Consequently, Nordic governments have aimed to create higher education systems which have small (or no) institutional stratification, high participation rates and a general good quality of HEIs (Isopahkala-Bouret et al., 2018; Marginson, 2016). Nordic higher education systems have similar basic

structures, with a distinction between universities and vocationally oriented and more regional HEIs, the latter called either Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) in Finland or University Colleges in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

In Finland, key differences between universities and UASs relate to the degree structure (only universities are allowed to confer doctoral degrees) and to research capacities (UASs are expected to do applied research). The Finnish state has been supporting this dual system and aiming to reduce competition between them, with clearly defined visions for UASs and universities. However, for students, universities and UASs are *de facto* competitors because practically all students are qualified for both sectors after completing their secondary education and because both universities and UASs seek to have the best students. However, 'the best student' for universities means a student with an academic orientation, whereas for UASs it means a student with a professional orientation.

The most important factor describing the Nordic approach to higher education is the strong role played by the state in the steering of higher education through funding, legislation and ministerial interventions (Tarkiainen, 2016). Ethically and politically, education, including higher education, is understood and defined as a public service and a civil right, rather than a consumer good. This means that education is free of charge to all citizens from the European Union. Furthermore, in Nordic countries, the proportion of public funding of higher education institutions is among the highest among OECD countries and all institutions are predominantly funded through public sources (approximately 85–95% of the budget). When compared to the OECD average of 30% of higher education budgets covered by private investments, it is evident that Nordic countries are thus rather exceptional cases of publicly supported systems (see OECD, 2014). According to the OECD, public expenditure per student on both public and private tertiary institutions 'varies from about USD 2 000 in Chile to more than USD 17 000 in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden' (OECD, 2014, p. 243).

The 'odds ratio', which 'reflects the relative likelihood of participating in tertiary education of individuals whose parents have upper secondary or tertiary education' (OECD, 2014, p. 93), also indicates the level of commitment of policies aiming to provide equal educational opportunities for all citizens. In Finland, having parents with tertiary level education only increases one's odds of attaining a university degree by 1.4. The ratio is 2.0 in Norway, 2.3 in Sweden and 3.0 in Denmark, while the OECD average is at 4.5. However, there is a big difference between universities and UASs in Finland. The odds ratio for universities is 6.8, whereas for UASs it is very close to one, meaning that universities are more socially selective than UASs (OECD, 2014).

Reflecting on accessibility, attainability and availability of higher education in the Finnish context requires paying attention to the lower levels of the system of education. Finnish basic education is offered in public comprehensive schools where the level of education is said to be uniformly good – at least if we believe PISA studies (Simola, 2015; Varjo, Simola, & Rinne, 2013). This means that all pupils have equal opportunities to continue their studies either in general upper secondary schools or in vocational upper secondary schools. Importantly, both

of these school sectors qualify pupils to continue their studies in higher education (both in UASs and in universities).

Good basic education is important for the attainability and accessibility of higher education and in Finland access to higher education is not restricted by the lower levels of the system of education. The availability of higher education is also influenced by the fact that there is a higher education study place offered to over 80% of the relevant age cohort. However, access to higher education is also based on *numerus clausus*, with limited places per field, and entrance examinations mean that there is hard competition, especially in popular fields. Concerning the impact of the socio-economic background on attainment, the Nordic state seems to successfully mitigate class factors by supporting all students at all levels of higher education. As for gender, Finland has had one of the highest female participation rates since the 1920s and currently more than 50% of the students are female. Accessibility and availability are also related to geographical proximity of higher education institutions. An important Finnish education policy goal has been the establishment of a university or a UAS or both in every corner of the country. This policy goal has been important because Finland is a rather large country (338 000 km²) with a relatively small population (5.5 million). Taking these matters into consideration, it is fair to present Finland, and to a large extent the Nordic model, as an exception among the high participation systems, with horizontal rather than vertical stratification characterising a well-resourced system geared towards ensuring equitable access to wealth for all.

The French republican model: AAA and the tensions between principles and practice

Contemporary statistics show that in France, having parents with tertiary education increases one's odds of attaining a university degree by 6 (OECD, 2014). This is not the most flattering illustration of a republican model of equality built on a meritocratic access to higher education (Charle & Verger, 2012). Two contemporary debates are particularly helpful to understand this French paradox and its implications for the accessibility, availability and attainability of higher education opportunities. The first debate questions the role of the baccalauréat (Bac) in regulating access to higher education. The second questions the institutional differentiation between non-selective universities, the selective *Grandes Ecoles*, and the selective two-year vocational sector (Carpentier, 2018). At the time of writing, the French government is looking at reforming both the Bac content and the automatic access to university it provides, generating intense debates about the mechanisms of access to and selection within higher education.

The Bac was not only created as the examination sanctioning the end of secondary education but also as a qualification guaranteeing access to public universities. The Bac results are therefore a reliable indicator of access to higher education in France. Table 1 shows that participation in the Bac, initially limited to a small elite, grew exponentially in line with the massification of secondary education.

Table 1 The % of age group accessing the baccalauréat 1920–2015

Year	1920	1950	1960	1968	1985	1995	2015
% of age group	2	5	11	20	30	63	77

Sources: Carpentier (2018); INSEE (various years); Ministry of National Education (DEP) (2016)

The ratio reveals undeniable progress but masks persistent inequalities between social groups with substantial implications for accessibility to higher education (Beaud, 2002). Firstly, while overall gender parity has been reached (with differences between disciplines), variations in access between socio-economic groups remain important. Respectively 90% and 40% of the population of the higher and lower income categories hold a Bac (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies [INSEE], 2015). Secondly, the generalisation of access to the Bac has been driven by a differentiation between the traditional ‘general’ and ‘technological’ Bacs on one hand, and the more recent ‘professional’ Bacs whose share rose from 6% in 1990 to 29% today. This academic/vocational divide is not socially neutral as 40% of enrolment in the professional Bac are from lower socio-economic categories compared to 10% from higher income groups. This is important as the professional Bac traditionally leads to less selective higher education institutions. Thus the generalisation of the Bac has improved accessibility to higher education while putting significant pressure on availability. Moreover, the differentiation between the types of Bac signals a perpetuation of the social reproduction through the stratification of the higher education system.

The transition to mass higher education has transformed the structures of availability as evidenced by the decline of the non-selective sector in the share of enrolment from 82% in 1970 to 59% in 2016 (Carpentier, 2018) and the growth of the selective sector affecting both ends of the system. The selective Classes préparatoires and Grandes Ecoles, as well as the business schools and paramedical and social schools have increased their share in enrolment from 12% to 28% (amongst that group the Grandes Ecoles remained stable at 8% reflecting their continuous role in the selection of the elite). The share of the selective two year shorter vocational programmes such as University Institute of Technology (IUT) and the Higher Technical Sections (STS) rose from 6% in 1969 to 14% in 2016 (Carpentier, 2018).

The tensions between accessibility and availability are reflected in attainability. Students from low and high socio-economic categories represent respectively 11% and 30% of enrolment in non-selective universities, 6% and 50% in Grandes Ecoles, 15% and 29% in IUT and 20% and 14% in STS which traditionally enrol more students with the professional Bac (Ministry of National Education [DEP], 2016). The socio-economic disparities in attainability are reinforced by the tensions between intake and resources. Funding per student in Grandes Ecoles is 50% higher than in universities where the ratio of completion of a bachelor degree within the prescribed three years is just 30%, far lower than in any of the selective sector courses (Ministry of National Education [DEP], 2016). Completion rates are also strongly correlated to the types of Bac (and

therefore to social class), revealing a unique tension between accessibility, availability and attainability in the non-selective sector. There is a stark contrast between the multiple demands made on universities and their lack of resources (Carpentier, 2018). Bodin and Orange (2018) argue that university drop out is actually a mechanism of regulation of accessibility to the system. Another significant change in the structures of availability is the increase in private provision to nearly 20% of overall enrolment, suggesting that fees are indeed constraining attainability according to social groups (Carpentier, 2018). The French system of relatively high accessibility (ensured by the Bac) is articulated to a highly differentiated availability with a mix of open and highly selective institutions whose practices and resources tend to make attainability highly dependent on pre-existing socio-economic inequalities.

The British model: The shift from a binary to a unitary marketised system and the tensions between AAA

The connections and tensions between accessibility, availability and attainability of higher education in England have been particularly affected by three key historical changes accompanying the drive towards high participation from the 1960s. The first is a dynamic of expansion with two key phases in the 1960s and 1990s leading to a high participation system with persistent inequalities between social groups (Reay et al., 2005). The second change relates to the process of institutional differentiation of the higher education system. The first phase of expansion was driven by a binary system, while the second phase saw a transition towards a unitary but highly stratified system (Carpentier, 2018). The third key change relates to changes in the level of funding and its public/private distribution. The first expansion was driven by a trend of increasing public funding started after the Second World War, while the second was contemporaneous of the gradual rise in private resources (especially fees) (Carpentier, 2012).

The conditions of access to higher education are historically contingent, depending on government policies and practices towards widening access and participation, as well as the criteria and entry tariffs adopted by institutions during the student admission process. The fact that some universities select using achievements in secondary education (A level results) and extracurricular criteria, while many others recruit students through access courses or with further education qualification, sums up well the impact of differentiation on the accessibility of institutions and courses, also reflected in commonly used expressions such as the distinction between 'recruiting' and 'selecting' universities. The initial participation rate measuring the number in the age group of 18–30 years who entered a higher education course was 32% in 1995 and is around 50% today (Carpentier, 2018). However, the differences between expansion and democratisation have been revealed by the persistence of extensive inequalities in terms of access, participation and outcomes for different social groups. In short, the traditional image of the young, fulltime, white male middle class student has vacated space for more diverse forms of enrolment. However, it is important to note that while social, ethnic and

gender participation rates have all gone up, some important gaps remain. One explanation behind these mixed results might be linked to the question of availability.

Availability of higher education places in Britain has historically been dependent on a system of student number controls, whereby universities were allocated a number of places by the government with substantial fines issued to over-recruiting institutions. As such, availability has at times been alternatively stimulated and constrained by public funding. During the first phase of expansion of the 1960s, the expansion was driven by both sectors of the binary system through the creation by the government of new universities and the increase in places at existing ones, as well as the expansion of the non-university sector run by local authorities. The second phase of expansion from the 1990s was marked by the merger of both sectors in a unified system from 1992 and by the introduction of market logics in higher education (the gradual replacement of block public grants with tuition fees, and eventually to the removal of a number controls in 2015 – the deregulation for international students had occurred earlier). Since that period, availability has not only been driven by supply and upfront public funding, but increasingly by demand with a system of fees and income-contingent loans (especially in England). This regulation of availability by the market was complemented by the government's strategy to encourage private provision. However, it is worth noting that the focus on public debt, which was behind such a policy move, masks the issue of private debt and its potential consequences on sustainability and future availability (the non-repayment of loans which are backed by government might indeed fuel future public debt).

The historical tensions between policy and accessibility and availability have been reflected in differentials in attainability under both free and marketised systems. First of all, there is strong correlation between the secondary school attended, the access route to higher education and the type of university attended. For example, attending a state school or an elite independent school strongly determines destinations within higher education ('access to what?'). Secondly, those inequalities of access are channelled through and reinforced by the stratification of the system. Ross (2003, p. 49) claims that beyond the local sector/university divide, the binary system was also about 'access to a different form of higher education and to offer it to different kinds of students'. This was evidenced by the strong correlation between the background of students and their destination in the binary system (with higher income groups over-represented in universities). The transition from a binary to a unitary system has not altered the strong variations in the attainability of courses and institutions as reflected by the greater concentration of lower socio-economic groups in post-1992 universities. The unitary system maintained a stratification based on the reputation and resources of institutions (Carpentier, 2018). Boliver (2011, p. 240) argues that 'qualitative inequalities in the odds of enrolment in more prestigious higher education programmes and institutions, that is on degree programmes and specifically those at "Old" universities, proved persistent throughout the expansion of both the 1960s and the early 1990s'. Brennan (2013, p. 194) argues that 'the differentiation of higher education in the UK allows the performance of an elite reproduction within a mass system', recognising social mobility but also the key importance of vertical differentiation.

The influence of changes in funding must also be acknowledged. The increased accessibility which characterised the first phase of expansion was driven by the adoption in 1962 of free higher education with fees and grants paid to universities by local education authorities. This coincided with a rise of public funding whose share of income to higher education increased from 50 to 90% from 1945 to 1973, fuelling the construction of new institutions and more places in existing ones in both the university and public sector of higher education (Carpentier, 2012). Free higher education led to undeniable progress in terms of accessibility, although enrolment rates were still low and regulated by differentials in attainability across the populations. This was a rationale used by the supporters of cost-sharing who claimed that free higher education was reproducing inequalities by financing the access of the most advantaged groups through the taxation of all. The shift away from free education started with the introduction of fees for international students in 1967 and full costing in 1981. Cost-sharing was subsequently applied to domestic students with the introduction of upfront fees of £1 000 in 1998 and grants. In 2006, fees in England were increased to £3 000 but deferred and paid through income-contingent loans and grants. In 2012, fees in England rose to £9 000, still deferred but entirely paid by income-contingent loans as grants were abolished. Although the design of those funding systems was geared towards improving attainability, recent developments are asking difficult questions. The simultaneous fee hike and suppression of block funding suggests a shift towards public/private substitution in funding, raising key tensions between funding and attainability (Carpentier, 2012, 2018). Important issues include debt aversion from lower income categories, as well as the collapse of part-time student numbers (Callender & Mason, 2017). The consensus on cost-sharing might have broken down with the tensions it generated between these 3 'A's, as shown by the recent Labour Party U-turn on tuition fees in undergraduate education and by the recent commissioning by the government of a report on student finance.

Postcolonial experiences of equity of access: Nigeria and Senegal

The postcolonial condition extends well beyond the context of the official decolonisation of universities in the 1960s and early 1970s, and covers the development of particularly hybrid forms of higher education in contexts marked by resilient forms of economic and intellectual dependencies and strong tendencies of extraversion of systems and individuals (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; Lebeau, 2008). This confluence generates a new order where imperialism, globalisation and emancipation combine in a new historically located 'geometry of power that is inherently unequal' (Rizvi, Lingard, & Lavia, 2006, p. 255). 'Colonial residues' such as the conditionalities imposed by donors on higher education systems of the Global South until the late 1990s remind us of the contemporaneity of postcolonial realities.

As suggested earlier, the concepts of equality and equity are deeply rooted in the 20th century ideologies underpinning 'modern' policies of expansion of higher education systems. Their universality is questioned here, using trends and characteristics of higher education systems in Nigeria and Senegal. First, the higher education trajectories of those countries have

not followed the steady rise of the worldwide trend. Secondly, when this expansion started to happen, the process of massification showed little evidence of tackling social inequalities of access and participation (Hornsby & Osman, 2014).

The colonial legacy: Extraversion and dependence

When considered from a world comparative perspective, Nigeria and Senegal are immediately striking by their overall low levels of enrolment (currently below 10% GER), despite the early establishment of their higher education opportunities (1930s) by regional comparison, and of strong ties between the first universities established in the 1940s and 1950s and their accrediting institutions in the metropolises.

During its first year of operation in 1957, the University of Dakar enrolled 1 069 students, comprising 368 'French' and 628 'Africans'. African students, organised in the *Association Générale des Etudiants de Dakar* (AGED), began to question the quality of the teaching on offer and the level of qualification of the academics appointed (Singaravélou, 2009). A similar climate of suspicion had accompanied the parsimonious development of higher institutions across British West Africa up until the formal opening of the University of Ibadan in 1948. In both cases the colonial powers had resisted the introduction of the type of universities established decades earlier in the colonies of North Africa and Asia. This had resulted in a steady flow of 'educated elites' towards the metropolises for further education. Returning home with 'proper' higher education qualifications, the elites were unimpressed by what was about to be offered at home. No higher education would be accepted that did not match the standard of qualifications offered in the metropole.

Among other things, this colonial dynamic externalised the values upon which the system was expected to be built (Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000), and made it more receptive to international pressure, and dependent on donor resources. The internalisation of the notion that improvement and change require external support, advice, and often personnel (Samoff & Carrol, 2004) has had a determining impact on policy choices made by countries such as Senegal and Nigeria in the postcolonial era.

Access to what?

The colonial origin of the two systems can be said to have shaped their 'model' of management of access to higher education, with Senegal adopting a republican model of access built upon the Bacca-laureate and Nigeria operating highly selective and meritocratic – although diverse and decentralised – routes into higher education.

However, the postcolonial agendas of the period 1960–1970 (state consolidation and the 'developmental university') and the gradual imposition of new forms of external dependencies by international organisations and bilateral donors progressively eroded the prospect of public equitable higher education systems accessible to the masses.

Nigeria and Senegal have since opened their higher education sector to private providers in an attempt to alleviate the huge political tensions generated by the unavailability of places. In both countries, public universities now sit at the top of impressive pyramids of eclectic types of institutions (public, private, hybrid, international franchises) attracting international students, but are still incapable of absorbing the local demand.

Research has showed that the efforts of the Senegalese government to open up its system of higher education have remained focused on economic measures (bursaries, student accommodation, non-fee policy in public universities) and on a better distribution of higher education institutions across the country in order to address the gender imbalance and the low participation outside the urban environments of Dakar and Saint Louis (Ly, Diallo, Yade, Mbaye, & Biaye, 2007). The Baccalaureate remains the only acceptable access route to universities and as in the French case discussed earlier, the principle of formal equality attached to the 'Bac' restricts the possibilities of broadening the accessibility of higher educational institutions through alternative access routes.

By contrast, Nigeria has always shown more openness towards multiple access routes to higher education, leaving it to universities, and to some extent to state-level administrations, to decide on their requirements. This pragmatic approach benefitted the 'state universities' established from the 1980s, particularly in the most remote parts of the country, while preserving the more elitist recruitment of the federal universities. A model of positive discrimination towards applicants from certain parts of the federation has dominated the admission policy of federal and state universities since 1979 as part of the 'federal character' policy requesting that public authorities, semi-government agencies, institutions of learning and even the private sector should ensure fair and effective representation of states or local government areas or ethnic groups in positions of power, authority, placement in enrolment into schools and so on (Adeosun, 2011).

Despite – or as a result of – this centrally controlled strategy of positive discrimination, the university system has never been able to absorb more than 10% of the qualified applicants since the late 1970s (Salihu & Jamil, 2015). A rigid conception of an 'equity' agenda restricted largely to state-based quotas and ignoring huge inequalities within states led to a situation where the educationally 'disadvantaged' states targeted by the policy have so far been unable to fill in their quota, while candidates from other states were left to seek in the private sector or abroad the educational opportunities denied at home by the policy (Salihu & Jamil, 2015).

It is fair to say that the redistributive logic of the Nigerian equity policy produced limited results as far as reducing the gap in educational achievement between the rich and the poor, urban and rural populations, and between men and women are concerned (Agboola & Ofoegbu, 2010). The gross rate of access to higher education remains at 10%, with parts of the country already well into mass higher education when others barely have any higher education statistical presence. These patterns of inequality also dominate Senegal despite a very different strategy for tackling inequalities of access to higher education.

A study systematically linking wealth, gender and access to higher education in the low and lower-middle income countries of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa shows how strongly restricted access to higher education is correlated to wealth and gender, and even more to the combination of wealth and gender (Ilie & Rose, 2016). The study shows how the higher education participation rates of the poorest groups have barely risen over three decades in these countries (including Senegal and Nigeria).

Thus, while both countries have been hosts of the earliest colonial initiatives in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa, they find themselves in the pool of the lowest participation rates in the world. Malthusian colonial policies on education and the continuities of dependence in matters of university education (Samoff, & Carrol, 2004), combined with broader developmental challenges, have led to a situation where the patterns of gender and social inequalities have remained unchanged in rural areas. Elsewhere, the availability of public higher education continues to pose a challenge to measures of accessibility and it is the rise of the private sector in both cases that fills the gap of attainability at the lower end of the demand spectrum.

Discussion

Scott notes (1995, p. 33) that ‘the transition from elite to mass higher education is a global phenomenon comprising not only the inner dynamics of higher education systems but also deeply rooted secular trends in the character of the states, society, the economy, science and culture’.

The French, English and Nordic models show how the connections, tensions and also contradictions between accessibility, availability and attainability reflect the evolving arbitrations and compromises between political, social and economic rationales. The French and English cases in particular show that the ‘universalisation’ of higher education involves important access and funding strategies, and in turn new patterns of inequality associated with institutional stratification and diverse routes into higher education. These two cases highlight two major tensions between policies of accessibility and availability and their impact on attainability for the most disadvantaged groups: the dilemma of system selectivity in France and the question of reputational stratification in the UK. The Finnish experience, in turn, reveals that public education policies emphasising equality with state intervention can allow high academic quality, be egalitarian in the accessibility of higher education opportunities, and ensure genuine horizontality across qualifications and institutions by ensuring ‘high quality and recognition of diplomas in the broader society’ (McCowan, 2016, p. 15). Historical and spatial contingencies question the inevitability that ‘not all participation in HPS is of equal value’ and that higher education provides a ‘stratified structure of opportunity, from elite universities and high-status professional degrees to the much larger number of places in mass education with uncertain outcomes’ (Marginson, 2016, p. 421).

The cases of Nigeria and Senegal are further challenging the ideas of linearity and ineluctability of stages in the long march towards high participation, and in particular the view that universal expansion occurs when social demands for higher education surpass policy-driven expansion strategies. In colonial West Africa, social demand pre-existed the availability of higher education, and colonial policies actually restrained the attainability of universities and high-level qualifications by developing all sorts of ‘adapted’ educational opportunities dissuading local populations from seeking mainstream higher education opportunities. Ever since, governments have been playing catch-up with social demand in the most urban and economically developed areas, while constraining attainability elsewhere due to ineffective measures of accessibility or inadequate public resources. In a number of contexts discussed in this chapter, marketisation (in the form of private provision or tuition-based funding of public higher education) appears to be appeasing the tension between accessibility and availability, but without challenging the socio-economic determinants of attainability because they fit in, rather than upset the ‘hierarchy of value’ generated by the stratification process (Marginson, 2016, p. 422). These are important issues to consider for countries seeking to equalise opportunities and redress deeply unequal patterns of social mobility through higher education.

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