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Using political metaphors to understand educational policy in developing countries: the case of Ghana and informal communities

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Abstract: This paper suggests that one needs to consider education as inherently political to better understand some of the problems in education policy in developing countries. The paper suggests that using political metaphors as a discursive framework can enhance the understanding of some of the limitations of formal schooling in developing countries. Political metaphors can be an alternative approach to the predominant market metaphors in education policy and can provide valuable insights for future research and policy that go beyond current approaches. By using Ghana as an example, this paper focuses on the implications that strong informal communities and markets can have on formal schooling in developing countries.

Keywords: Development; Discourse analysis; Education; Ghana; Human capital; Policy metaphors

1 Introduction

Education has become more and more reconfigured in market terms on a global scale. In the Western world there has been a domination of market metaphors to guide education

policy. Two metaphors have been predominant in neo-liberal education discourse: the *consumer metaphor* and the *commodity metaphor*. The *consumer metaphor* implies that the pupils and students are consumers of educational products. The *commodity metaphor* frames pupils and students as human capital which requires investments from the state, families and the pupils themselves (Nordensvard, 2010). Classical neo-liberal policy has focused on the consumer metaphor. A classical example is the Structural Adjustment Programmes for developing countries that had a focus on cost-sharing in education (pupils as consumers). It was assumed that deregulation and privatisation of education is the way towards economic growth and poverty reduction. These reforms were seen as pre-conditions for economic loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Laird, 2008). A newer neo-liberal discourse is based around the competition state/investment state where the state uses education to boost the human capital of its pupils and becomes more competitive within a global knowledge economy discourse (Nordensvard, 2010).

While many current education discourses and education policies are predominantly based on market metaphors, the political metaphors often tend to be neglected. Nevertheless political metaphors can be an alternative approach to the predominant market metaphors in education policy and can provide valuable insights that go beyond current approaches. This notion has been taken up by critical pedagogy, which considers education as neither neutral nor non-political. Freire considered education as political in nature (McLaren and Leonard, 1993:27) and argued that it could not be seen as a neutral “mechanical method of instruction” (McLaren and Leonard 1993: 25). Freire indicated that education is “one place where the individual and society are constructed, a social action which can either empower or domesticate students” (ibid). An example of this could be the role of education in creating the nation state. The earlier function of education was to be a “valuable source of national cohesion and a key tool for economic development” (Green, 1997:1). National education was a tool in “the formation of ideologies and collective beliefs with legitimate state power and to underpin concepts of nationhood and national `character” (Green, 1990:77). Education could be seen to protect a current hegemony and suppress competing counter-hegemonies. Hegemony is also linked up to education. Students need to be educated in comprehending the ruling values and knowledge (Giroux, 2003). Such a perspective is not alien to the Sociology of Education where education is used to underwrite not just hegemony, but also predominant institutions. McEneaney and Meyer suggest that education is “the locus” that enables the “construction of shared cultural understandings” (McEneaney and Meyer, 2000:193).

Earlier work in the field of discourses for education policy mostly focused on market-based or rights-based approaches, while other earlier work on political approaches focuses predominantly on education policy in Western countries, such as in the OECD (as outlined above). Nevertheless there is a knowledge gap regarding using political metaphors for education policy in non-Western countries, such as Ghana.

This paper therefore aims to explore how political metaphors can help provide a better understanding of how and why developing countries such as Ghana struggle to implement formal schooling policies. This is relevant for designing and implementing successful future education policies and education research. Political metaphors can provide valuable insights that go beyond current market-based approaches. Political metaphors can, for example, provide alternative insights into why education policies have succeeded or failed by taking non-market and non-rights-based perspectives into account. This is particularly relevant in developing countries like Ghana where the informal economy tends to be prevailing and where informal schooling tends to be common, hence market-based metaphors provide limited insights about how and why education policy succeeds or fails. Education in Ghana must be understood in the light of a fragmented state that is based on informal economic activities such a subsistence farming and competing informal loyalties towards kinship,

ethnicities and religion. Hence, there should be more discussion about the political role of education in education discourses. In line with this reasoning, this paper offers an alternative, more political approach to understanding education policies in developing countries, based on an example from Ghana.

The paper is divided into six sections: the second section outlines the conceptual framework and methodology of the paper, the third section discusses the dominant market metaphors in education, the fourth section outlines political metaphors to help explain some aspects of education policies in Ghana and fifth section discusses formal schooling policy in the light of informal communities and informal markets in Ghana and the sixth section concludes the paper.

2 Metaphors and policy discourse – conceptual framework and methodology

Conceptual framework

This section will elaborate the conceptual framework and the methods used for this study. It will first discuss key definitions, followed by a justification for choosing Ghana as an example for this study and finally an elaboration of metaphors and discourse analysis as a method. The key focus of the paper is on education. Education is defined as “the activities of educating or instructing; activities that impart knowledge or skill” on the side of the teacher and “knowledge acquired by learning and instruction” on the side of the learner (Princeton WordNetWeb, 2012a:1). Education involves the profession of teaching as well as schools as prime institutions for teaching and learning. This paper deals with education from an interpretative policy perspective. Interpretative policy analysis diverges from mainstream positivist policy analysis by focusing on how policy actors interact, “the social meaning of policies and the practices in which this meanings is embedded” (Durnova and Zittoun, 2011:103). Moreover, such a perspective seeks to “develop a deeper, interpretative understanding of policy practices and policy process in general, having extended their scope over time to include perspectives on discourse, narration, governmentality and practice” (Durnova and Zittoun, 2011:103). The main concepts that are used in this paper are politics and the political, as well as market-based discourses like the knowledge economy and political-based discourses like citizenship approaches. Politics is defined as “the study of government of states and other political units” (Princeton WordNetWeb, 2012b:1), while the political concerns these states and political units. The knowledge economy is based around the theory of human capital which according to Marginsson (in Välimaa and Hoffman) is based around two hypotheses: “First, education and training increase individual cognitive capacity and therefore augment productivity” and an “increased productivity leads to increased individual earnings, and these increased earnings are a measure of the value of human capital” (2008: 270). The knowledge economy is an essential part of neo-liberalism. Harvey defines neo-liberalism as an project that aims to “re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and (...) restore the power of economic elites” (Harvey, 2005:19). One of the critical aspects is to free up capital from the constraints of the “embedded liberalism” of social democracy and the Keynesian welfare state (Harvey, 2005:11). Davies and Bransel mention that neo-liberalism emphasizes the choice of individuals to “further their own interests and those of their family” (2007:249 -250). The political perspective of education in this paper is based around the notion of citizenship and human rights. Citizenship as a set of political rights granted to citizens which means rights to participate in political processes of self-governance. “These includes rights to vote; to hold elective and appointive governmental offices; to serve on various sorts of juries; and generally to participate in political debates as Equal community members” (Smith, 2002:105). Citizenship is a “full membership in society” (Holston and Appadurai, 1996:187). Citizenship could be defined as a legal status in a

political community connected with rights (political, civil and social) and to some degree duties (pay taxes and obey the law) (Smith, 2002:105). Human rights could be seen as an expansion of citizenship to become universal and global for all human being. Human rights consider every inhabitant in a country as a right-holder which “implies that all human beings have rights by virtue of being human” (Crawford, 2010: 93).

Ghana

Ghana has been chosen for three main reasons: First, it is a developing country and -as mentioned above- metaphors for education policy focusing on developing countries have hardly been presented in scholarly work. Secondly, Ghana has a reputation for having an exemplary education policy on paper; however it has failed to deliver the expected results. Third, Ghana’s economy is predominantly based on informal markets and communities, which has a strong influence on education policy and its results.

The Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education Programme FCUBE in Ghana was a step towards free and universal formal schooling. The reform of education in 2007 in Ghana meant that free education has been extended from six to eleven years. This includes early childhood and junior secondary school (JSS) (Yamada and Ampiah, 2009:63). The goal of bringing universal primary education has led to a higher spending on education: from 1999 to 2006 there has been an increase in spending from 3.7 to 5.1% of the GDP. Half of this spending is dedicated to basic education (Yamada and Ampiah, 2009:64). Still the attempt to introduce a free basic primary schooling has been marred with difficulties such as increasing dropout rates and low school enrolment. Ghana is often seen as a negative example for the penetration of universal education policy as it has a relatively high rate of children not attending school. It is estimated that in 2007 nearly one million children are not attending school compared to an estimated 4.1 million children enrolled in either primary or junior secondary school. Another estimation is that more than 20% of all children between the age of 6 to 15 have dropped out of school or were never enrolled in the first place (MOESS, 2007).

At the same time, large parts of Ghana are not only plagued by poverty -with 45% percent of the population living on less than \$1 per day- but the economy is predominantly dependent on subsistence farming and informal labour (World Bank, 2011). Hence, communities and the economy are based on informal agriculture and small-scale enterprises. Agriculture amounts for 3/5th of the workforce in Ghana. It is estimated that 90% of Ghanaians work in the informal sector connected to agricultural and non-agricultural work (Palmer, 2009: 67 – 68). Informal apprenticeships dominate by covering roughly 80-90% of all basic skills training in Ghana; the remaining 10-20% of the apprenticeships are undertaken by public training institutions, NGOs, profit organisations etc. Since 2008, the government aims to have more regulated/formalised apprenticeship systems in place (Palmer, 2009: 67 – 68). There is a concern that a growing amount of pupils in both primary and secondary school are outgrowing the demand in a largely informal economy based on agriculture. There are “neither sufficient formal employment opportunities, nor sufficient further formal education and training opportunities” (Palmer, 2009: 67 – 68). This paper will elaborate how the success and failure of education policies in Ghana is partly linked to informal communities and markets. This will be done by using metaphors and policy discourse. This research is relevant for policy futures in developing countries as it proposes a new and alternative approach for understanding education policy and its implementation.

Metaphors and policy discourse

Using metaphors can help understand the limits and problems of different policy discourses. Metaphors can be considered as “a way of comparing two different concepts”

(Jones and Peccei, 2004:46). The strengths and the weaknesses of metaphors are that they attempt to understand one experience in terms of another experience. In one sense all theories and models are metaphorical in their nature (Morgan, 1999:10). Every metaphor is at its core normative, because it promotes one point of view over another. Often metaphors are hard to avoid and become a sort of 'prison of mind'. Metaphors help in our creation of social reality and in one way one uses them as truth-telling. Metaphors do not only describe a social reality; languages partially "create what it refers to" and still linguistic change is also a "part of ongoing social change" (Taylor, 2001:8).

Moreover, using metaphors should be seen as political act. "Just as a metaphor can be the organizing principle underlying new scientific theories, metaphor is also found at the base of any political ideology. It lends coherence and social verisimilitude to all sorts of novel ideas, and is the basis for challenges to the status quo, as well as for its maintenance" (Brown, 1986: 48). Metaphors could be seen as ideological since they define "in significant part what one takes as reality" (Chilton and Lakoff, 1995:56) Charteris-Black argues that metaphors are "central to critical discourse analysis since it is concerned with forming a coherent view of reality" (Charteris-Black, 2004:28).

A discourse analysis approach tends to emphasise "the indexical or situated nature of social categories in linguistic interaction" (Weatherall and Walton 1999: 481). Foucault points to the strong links between language and practice. Discourse analysis tries to overcome the "traditional distinction between what one *says* (language) and what one *does* (practice)"; it stipulates that the discourse constructs the topic. Discourses influence how "ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conducts of others" (Hall, 2001:72). A discourse analysis of educational policy could be understood to "deconstruct how particular texts have come to be structured as they are, and with what social and political implications" (Jaworski and Coupland, 2000:139). Within discourse analysis, metaphors are seen "as devices or units of language that are deployed within particular conversations and contexts" (Cornelissen et al., 2008:12). This sensitivity to context makes this approach suitable "informed interpretations about the specific uses of a particular metaphor in situ that may range beyond psychological or cognitive uses" (Cornelissen et al., 2008:12).

In more critical discourse analysis scholars see metaphors as something more unconscious and psychological; metaphors could also be chosen "by speakers to achieve particular communication goals within particular contexts rather than being predetermined by bodily experience" (Charteris-Black, 2004:247). One could define that politics as a language usage; hence policy could be seen as the "exercise of political power and the language used to legitimate that process" (Codd, 1988: 235). The importance here is the language, and in the production of policies from the state and other political organisations, "language serves a political purpose, constructing particular meanings and signs that work to mask social conflict and foster commitment to the notion of a universal public interest" and "in this way, policy documents produce real social effects through the production and maintenance of consent" (Codd, 1988:237). Often education has been framed within an economic market discourse where education should support economic development and economic growth on both an individual and national level. This will be discussed below.

3 Market metaphors in education

The dominant metaphor for describing pupils has lately been the metaphor of the consumer. This implies that education should be considered in market terms. This could mean that schools provide products and services comparable to the way other institutions provide products and services. Wieleman indicates that "the metaphor of 'the free market', implying competition and the freedom of choice for consumers, has a strong normative impact" on schools and curricula and that "economic considerations in particular are taking

the lead, both in policy objectives (such as expenditure cuts and efficiency) and in the concepts adopted (such as management, productivity, etc.)” (2000:33). This section explores dominant market metaphors.

The metaphor ‘students as consumers’

In market metaphors, the welfare state is often considered as an obstacle for economic growth. Neo-liberal reforms and discourses in education have often created a dominance of economic metaphors to describe pupils and students. A dominant metaphor tends to consider pupils and students as consumers (Nordensvard, 2011). The dominant metaphor seems to be that students tend to buy educational services just as they buy other goods like a CD or a mobile phone. This metaphor suggests that students buy educational services for their own pleasure. Such a perspective would foster an education that caters to what paying students find amusing or scientifically interesting. Blake et al. (2000) argue that education has been degraded to any kind of commodity available for consumption. “[T]he triumph of the market has declared individual subjective choice sovereign and deliberation, by corollary pointless” (Blake et al, 2000:xi). This does not only mean that “educational values are simply what the consumer happens to want, and it makes no more sense to undertake any great inquiry into those values than into preferences in the matter of cars or brands of chicken tikka” (Blake et al, 2000:xi). The agency of the individual is defined through choosing different educational commodities.

The metaphor ‘students as commodities / human capital’

Alongside the market metaphor that pupils and students are consumers, a new neo-liberal metaphor has recently become dominant: the metaphor of pupils and students as human capital. This moves the focus away from the individual agency of pupils towards the role of the state. The logic of the knowledge economy is based around the development and technological application of knowledge. The discourse highlights that schools and lives are no longer separate but they are linked in an organic process where “one feeds back on the other” (Simons and Masschelein, 2008:396 – 397). Education should be a continuous process for fulfilling the needs for a useful knowledge base and economic problems are kept within educational frameworks where people invest into learning (Simons and Masschelein, Ibid). This aspect of looking at humans as assets has also played a large role with Western scholars. Fromm would put it this way: “Modern man is alienated from himself, from his fellow men, and from nature. He has been transformed into a commodity, experiences his life forces as an investment which must bring him the maximum profit obtainable under existing market conditions” (Fromm, 1957: 67).

The role of the state in market metaphors

Often this discourse has been based around the state as an investor and competitor on the global market. This predominant discourse argues that globalisation and the global market have changed the nature of the state. Nation states are not seizing to exist but are rather reconfigured as managers of human capital within a discourse of the knowledge economy. The nation becomes more important in certain topics like the global competition for labor and markets. Forstorp suggests that in this approach questions arise about the nation states as part of the global market and the global competition. “How can we act in order to guarantee that the highly educated workforce will remain in the country or in the union? How can mobility in education be managed so as to optimize the competitive edge of the nation? How can education both be an individual project as well as a project for the enhancement of a cosmopolitan citizenship?” (Forstorp, 2008: 230).

Being a competitive country on the global market has become, next to providing national security, one of the dominant assignments of the state. To be competitive is, according to Fougner, seen as a central objective. Being competitive is also seen as a central means to solve many of the problems the state is confronted with. There seems to be an assumption in the current neo-liberal discourses that when a state is successful in the global competition, most of the other problems will be solvable (Cerny in Fougner, 2006:165 – 167).

The role of education and knowledge in market metaphors

Some organisations such as the OECD argue that one major purpose of education in post-modern times is to generate economic prosperity. “The prosperity of countries now derives to a large extent from their human capital, and to succeed in a rapidly changing world, individuals need to advance their knowledge and skills throughout their lives” (OECD, 2004:3). The state has to manage the human capital to be competitive in the global economy. One explicit example is New Zealand. In a report, the advisory group of the Minister for Information Technology investigated how well New Zealand is faring against other significant knowledge economies where the economy is not just considered an opportunity but also a threat. “If we don't change the way we compete in the global economy our way of life and standard of living are at risk” (Minister for Information Technology's IT Advisory Group, 1999:iii).

“Finland in particular provides an excellent model for New Zealand to follow. It has transformed itself from a commodity-based economy to one that has embraced new technologies. The government has spent a lot of money on education, making information technology a key component of the school curriculum and producing large numbers of technical graduates. Finnish companies have invested heavily in research and development. High-technology as a percentage of Finnish GNP has increased fivefold in ten years.” (Minister for Information Technology's IT Advisory Group, 1999:6)

As states compete with each other, knowledge is a way to achieve advantages in the global market. The economy is here reconfigured not to create the nation state as a hegemonic order, but reconfigured in a new hegemonic order of the global market and globalisation. The state is in this case also an active actor on the market, aiming to become economically successful. The neo-liberal metaphors in contemporary development discourse emphasise investment in human capital as both a strategy to promote economic growth and to reduce poverty. The following section will elaborate alternative perspectives in relation to education in Northern Ghana that do not focus on market-based neo-liberal metaphors, but on political metaphors.

4 ‘Forgotten’ political metaphors?

This section will first elaborate political metaphors for education in general and it will then elaborate metaphors for Ghana and its education in specific.

Political metaphors: The nation state and education

Political metaphors for education seem to be neglected in the contemporary educational discourse. Education has become predominantly an economic matter to produce economic growth but also to reduce poverty. Such an approach neglects important aspects of education and its role in society. Pupils could be seen as citizens of nation states. This puts less focus on the market and more focus on the political environment of nation states. The

relationship between education and the nation state has often been seen as education being a dependent variable to the nation state. The state-building process was often considered violent, where the own state protected from the anarchy that existed in the world outside its borders (Hettne, 2000: 37). There is a dominant perception that the nation state is a child of warfare. The nation state was a construct to wage war (Herbst, 1990; Tilly, 1990).

The function of education in these times was, according to Green, to be a “valuable source of national cohesion and a key tool for economic development” (1997:1). According to Sander one can talk about the direct ideological aspect of education. Education could be seen to create legitimacy of rule (Herrschaftslegitimation) – education should protect an existing social and political order from critique (Sander 2005:15-17). All citizens need to be educated in comprehending the nation state’s ruling values and knowledge or as Gramsci (in Giroux) would have put it: “[e]very relationship of ‘hegemony’ is necessarily an educational relationship” (Giroux, 2003:101). National education was a tool in “the formation of ideologies and collective beliefs which legitimate state power and underpin concepts of nationhood and national `character’” (Green, 1990:77).

“[F]or historical and political reasons, education has been the most national and the most statist of all the social services funded, provided and regulated by the national state. Historically, education has been both parent and child to the developing nation state and schooling, by constructing the very subjectivities of citizenship and justifying the relationship between the state and the people; it has been the most powerful weapon for forming nations.” (Patramanis and Athanasiades, 2004:3)

The role of political power on the development of school systems in the Western world during the eighteenth and nineteenth century is well researched (Boli, 1989; Curtis, 1988, 1992; Green, 1990; Melton, 1988; Miller & Davey, 1990). Most of these researches treat the national school and curricula mostly as a dependent variable to the development of the nation states (Wong, 2007). The classical metaphors for students could be seen in national frameworks of students as citizens and as workers. Education was seen as a cornerstone in progress and growth, for the market and the people. McLaren analyses that the schooling is an act of ritual performance and highlights here two important phases of identities: rituals of becoming a citizen (McLaren, 1986:226) and the rituals of becoming a good worker (1996:135). Apart from constructing the citizen, education was then also responsible for the “production of a disciplined and reliable workforce” (Morrow and Torres, 2000:35-36). If one says, like McLaren, that school curricula and school rituals aims to construct two main identities among its pupils, the role of a citizen (1986:226) and the role of a good worker (1986:135), one will have two different purposes: “the administrative reason of the state and technical reason promoted by the market and industrialism in general” (Peters and Wain, 2003:58). The nation state is the prime focus of education. Even a human right perspective depends highly on a nation state perspective. An example of this could be the human right discourse of education: Human rights consider every inhabitant in a country as a right-holder which “implies that all human beings have rights by virtue of being human” (Crawford, 2010: 93). The main issue with human right is that it is still dependent on the nation state since the nation state is a duty-bearer that is “obliged to respect, protect and fulfil all human rights that they have committed themselves to and, though central government may remain as the ultimate guarantor of such obligations, local governments are also part of the state” (Crawford, 2010: 93). To enforce education as a human right, it is likely that one requires a strong nation state. Hence, the political aspects of human rights approaches to education need to be fully assessed.

Political metaphors for Ghana

Gough and Woods define Ghana as an insecurity regime with institutional arrangements which generate gross insecurity and block the emergence of stable informal mechanisms for protection of individuals and communities. It is reliant on powerful external players and dependent on aid and remittances (Gough and Woods, 2006). Ghana had a troubled relationship in state building especially since it was under English colonial rule. Prior to colonisation the political configurations of the different tribes and communities in Ghana were relatively independent from each other and -in contrast to European nation states- they were more based on mobility, networks, multiple memberships of communities and context-based boundaries (Lentz 2000, 107; Nnoli 1998). Some of these boundaries have been based on tribe identity and/or religion. The colonial rule was favouring some areas and subjects over others, such as the Christian South over the Islamic North, cephalous tribes over acephalous tribes. Ray argues that political sovereignty is asymmetrically and that the different communities have “distinct claims to sovereignty, legitimacy, authority and power” (Ray, 1996:198). There is a division in Northern Ghana between non-centralised societies (acephalous tribes) such as Konkomba communities and centralised (cephalous tribes) groups like the Dagomba and Gonja. The identities and politics between these different nations existed before, during and after colonisation (Compare Kaye and Beland, 2009). The stronger and more organised cephalous tribes undermining the power of the acephalous tribes before the British colonisers arrived. The power of the cephalous tribes was supported by the British which led to a permanent and structural disadvantage for the acephalous tribes. The British colonial government boosted the authority of chieftains as the traditional authority even if some would argue that acephalous tribes were just as traditional. The tensions between these opposing tribe cultures continued after colonial times. One of the biggest issues was that land of the acephalous tribes in the Northern provinces was often administrated by the four dominant cephalous tribes Dagomba, Nanumba, Gonja, and Mamprusi (Compare Kaye and Beland, 2009). This led to a bloody civil war in 1994 – 1995 which at its height left “more than 178,000 people homeless, 300 villages destroyed, towns were ‘ethnically cleansed’, approximately 15,000 people were killed, and tens of thousands of people were left wounded and emotionally scarred” (Kaye and Beland, 2009: 184). It is not only a divided country when it comes to ethnic aspects; religious tend to also divide the country in North and South.

Busia argues that religion has been central in shaping life in Ghana (Busia, 1967). Both Aboabye-Mensah (1994) and Yirenkvi (2000) argue that religion is a primal force in shaping Ghanaian culture, identity and politics. There are three main strands of religions in Ghana which is traditional indigenous religions, Islam and Christianity (Omenyo, 2006). Religion plays a role in both public and private and it facilitates social networks (Heaton, James and Oheneba-Sakyi, 2009:72). Even though Islam and Christianity are dominant; traditional beliefs have infused values and rites within these two dominant religions. “Although heterogeneous, traditional religions included belief in an all-powerful creative force, a variety of other deities and ancestral spirits, and evil spirits or beings” (Heaton, James and Oheneba-Sakyi, 2009:72). For example, in rituals like marriage it is still popular in Ghana to marry in the traditional way and in a Christian way (Heaton, James and Oheneba-Sakyi, 2009:72). Furthermore, there is a disparity between the richer Christian and more urban parts in the South and the more Islamic and more rural North. In many ways religion also divides the country into North and South just as the regions themselves are divided between different tribal cultures. This division also impacted the way education was constructed as the section below will discuss.

Political metaphors for education in Ghana

Education was both seen to serve the purpose of colonial rule on one side and it was also based around the regime of divide and rule in Ghana. Formal schooling was often considered as something the colonials brought with them and this formal education is mainly linked to Christianity (Heaton, James and Oheneba-Sakyi, 2009:74). Bening argues that there have been conscious and systematic attempts in the colonial era to limit schools in Northern Ghana to make sure that there was a pool of unskilled labour to work in the mines and the plantations in the Southern part of Ghana (Bening, 1990). Both the first primary and secondary school were set up over a century later in Northern Ghana than the first schools had been set up in the Southern part of the country (Darkwah, 2010:29). Schooling was then seen as something Western, Christian that was adapted for the South of Ghana. When a secular public education system was established in Northern Ghana, Muslims feared that the secular nature of education would undermine their belief system (Heaton, James and Oheneba-Sakyi, 2009:74) as humanistic values emphasised in secular education might diverge from religious teachings (Sherkat and Darnell 1999).

Folson suggests that formal schooling has provided more opportunities for the people from the South of Ghana, the elite, males and Christians on the back of the North, the poor, rural areas, Muslims and females (Folson, 1995). There is also the argument that Northern schools are more deprived, have lower teacher pro pupil ratio, there are less schools, and school buildings are in a bad condition (Mfum-Mensah, 2009:347 – 348). Atakpa reports that some communities resist formal schools and that these communities see formal school as detrimental to their social, cultural and religious lifestyle (Atakpa, 1996). Atakpa indicates further that Islamic Northern communities consider formal schooling from the government as an attempt to infuse vices into communities' religious and socio-cultural life. The formal school from the state is rivalled by the more popular Quran schools (Atakpa, 1996). Other academics would suggest that by making education a compulsory right it prescribes a Western understanding of childhood that seems to challenge developing countries like Ghana and its informal and moral economy based around kinship and community. Some academics argue that some aspects of child labour such as socialisation and part of the African way of life are important parts of African tradition and culture (Keilland & Tovo, 2006:4). African families tend to stress family unity and solidarity and aim to educate the children to play mature roles in providing for the family's livelihood (Myers, 2001: 40). Admassie argues that "participation in school reduces, first of all, the available time the child has for work at home or in the labor market" (Admassie, 2002: 262).

The problems of schooling in Ghana tend to be a reproduction of a divided and fragmented society without a cohesive nation state to enforce a strong national schooling. The nation state Ghana has not been able to prevent social fragmentation and reducing the power of competing or antagonistic actors and identities. The following section elaborates how a linkage between informal communities and informal economy makes it difficult to create a cohesive state for a national education system.

5 The informal community and the informal market versus schooling – two converging or diverging metaphors?

When looking at political metaphors and economic metaphors for national education in the Western world, one tends to see certain dominant arrangements. The modern Western city is defined by Thompson as a "representative democracy, institutionalized primarily at the level of the nation-state and coupled with a relatively autonomous market economy over which democracy has assumed some degree of regulatory control" (Thompson, 1995:251). In the Western world both the state and the economy are predominantly formal. This means formal citizenship in a formal state and formal workers in a formal economy. These imply

formalised and partially homogenised roles. Moreover, the membership in the nation state is predominant and education has traditionally been seen to support the role of the state.

Wong argues that these scholars “overlook the fact that schools can unleash independent and recursive effects on the political systems and that the state and educational systems can be connected in an *interactive* and *reciprocal* manner.”(Wong, 2007:64) One could stress that the informal communities rely on informal markets that help to fragmentise the nation state. An already weak state is undermined by being not the dominant community which is in stark contrast to the informal citizenship and the informal market that are coupled with informal education and skills. National schooling might need a strong nation state for implementation, but on the other hand a weak state can become even weaker when education focuses on informal identities and informal markets.

The first example of this approach is informal citizenship in Ghana with a focus on kinship groups. Gough and Woods discuss in their seminal work on welfare regimes the nature of informal security arrangements. “[R]ights and entitlements may also be found (...) in the informal domains of social relationships and cultural expectations” which in some cases could be “personalized in a range of clientelist and reciprocal (perhaps kin) arrangements” (Gough and Wood, 2006:1698). These institutional arrangements imply that people rely heavily “upon community and family relationships to meet their security needs, to greatly varying degrees” (Gough and Wood, 2006:1699 – 1700). Gough and Wood argue that these relationships are often hierarchical and asymmetrical and they mention that “formal security” is the “most satisfactory way of meeting universal human needs including those for security” (Gough and Wood, 2006:1709).

The role of gender and education in the informal community and the informal market

Kinship communities tend not only to be understood through age and blood but also through gender. Ghana’s kinship groups could often be characterised to be both a patriarchy and a gerontocracy where gender and age impose certain power structures within the groups (Laird, 2005: 462 – 463). Carr suggests that gender and gender vulnerabilities should not only be seen as social categorisation in Ghanaian families but also as something that is produced and recreated through social practices within households (Carr, 2008:901). Carr argues that men and women “play different roles within particular systems of agricultural production” and they “occupy different socioeconomic positions as a result of these different roles (Carr, 2008:901). Women’s participation in the economy is predominantly in the informal sector and unpaid family activities (Darkwah, 2010: 28 – 29). For example, females often play an important role in Ghana based around female trading activities where older females often engage in doorstep trading. Often this trade is done on the informal market using informal skills that have been acquired through informal education. Female children often help out older female household members in both trading, welfare and menial household tasks (Laird, 2005: 461). Men are more linked to public and formal jobs. Therefore education has often been seen as a male territory. The Ghana Statistical Service reports in 2008 that 27 percent of all males aged between 15 to 64 years are in waged employment compared to only 9 percent of all females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008). Failing to adhere to the dominant kinship community could lead to censure and penalty from kin and community (Laird, 2005:462). Boys tend to be more inclined to get support from both institutions and the family to join formal schooling. Graham argues that the state aims to provide education to females to become better wives to the new batch of professional African middle class (Graham, 1971:72). In the North of Ghana where education altogether is less of a priority, women tend to be more disadvantaged than in other places in Ghana.

The role of the child and education in the informal community and the informal market

In Ghanaian kinship groups, children are not seen as a distinct category or isolated individuals but rather as a transition towards adulthood where children will support the survival of the group through evolved competence and taking opportunity (Bourdillon, 2006:1202). The kinship group is the prime (informal) community and the children act both as its (informal) citizens and its human capital.

The child could therefore be perceived also as informal human capital where children are considered as assets and teaching them skills as an investment into kinship and the communities' wealth. In this sense the child and their skills are part of kinship groups/communities assets. The extended family is a place which distributes rights but also assigns duties to its members. It is informal and reciprocal and the main focus is not the rights of the individuals but rather the cohesion of the community. Scott defines these arrangements in developing countries as a moral economy (Scott, 1976). In places where communities and households are dependent on subsistence farming, rainfall and limited technology, risk sharing is of utter importance. To mitigate risks and hazards like crop failure, illness, water shortage and natural disaster, Scott argues that community and households develop reciprocal exchanges of resources between households and members of households. These exchanges shape the norms and the expected behaviour of the members of the community. Breaking these norms could provoke resentment and resistance (Scott, 1976).

Laird indicates that one needs to understand extended families in sub-Saharan Africa as both productive and reproductive entities which are multigenerational entities (Laird, 2005:462). The members of the kinship groups play active roles in supporting the household with domestic and commercial activities. Important is often the inter-generational roles within kinship groups. Younger children have to provide services to older household member in their pursuit of commercial activities or households activities. Welfare and social security within these kinship groups are dependent on children performing time-consuming menial tasks like collecting firewood and water over longer distance for cooking and drinking. (Laird, 2005:462). "This form of social organisation is underpinned by a value system which emphasises the obligations owed by children to their parents in terms of contributing to the household and providing care during sickness or old age" (Laird, 2005:462). Such a informal citizenship with rights and duties focuses on the blood ties as the prime community. The goals of the individual and the group often merge in more communitarian approaches to society. As soon as they can, children are expected to contribute to the survival of the in-group (Laird, 2005:462).

Many parents do not only see the costs of schooling and the loss of labour, but they also doubt the achieved qualifications of pupils. These formal education qualifications seem to have less value on the informal labour market. "Not only is a diploma increasingly difficult to obtain, but it is no longer a sure way of getting a job" (Bonnet, 1993: 377). Bonnet reports further that many people with university degrees end up in informal jobs and this sends out signals that education is a "waste of time" (Bonnet, 1993: 378). Gootaert and Kanbur argue that many parents find it more sensible for children to quit school and to work for their own and their relatives' survival (Gootaert and Kanbur, 1995: 193). This casts doubts whether formal schooling is really a motor of the economy in this region. This discussion is predominantly of economic nature but it often lacks political dimensions. There is also a lack of an authoritative state that could force children to join national schools. The schools are also not completely free of charge and there are economic interests to keep children as a part of the informal labour market. Arat argues that child labour is "sustained by a triangular foundation formed by three corner players: the employers, parents and the state...[with] governments often turn[ing] a blind eye to the practice because they are willing to welcome

any form of investment'(Arat, 2002: 182). A survey on child labour in 2003 estimated that two thirds of Ghanaian children combined school with work (Akyeampong, 2009:187 – 188). The conflict lies in the fact that children will have to focus on their role as members of kinship groups and communities “to supplement household income, or for their own upkeep” (Akyeampong, 2009:193) and thereby neglect formal schooling.

6 Conclusion

The official estimates suggest that Ghana’s ambitious education policy has not achieved its expected outcomes as between 20 to 25% of children do not attend school despite it being free of charge (MOESS, 2007). From a pure non-political human rights or neo-liberal perspective this development could hardly be fully explained as children are given the formal right to attend schools and no exorbitant fees hinder their attendance. By using a political approach to understand Ghana’s educational policy, the paper has highlighted how informal communities and informal economies tend to influence the outcomes of education policy. This paper has shown one main problem in fully understanding these outcomes: national education policies in Ghana tend to be based on Western models of education which take for granted strong national states, formal economies that require formal qualifications, while Ghana is predominantly based on a weak nation state with competing informal kinship, ethnic and religious communities and informal economies that require informal qualifications. Formal membership in the nation state is undermined by the informal society. This has consequences for education: the majority of education is of practical and informal nature. Women tend to be rather trained for the informal economy than trained for schooling and the formal economy. Moreover; education in Northern Ghana is challenged by child labour for the informal market and on the other side religious or ethnic education that contrasts a national programme. The discussion about national formal schooling often takes for granted Western formal states and Western formal markets; hence its use is challenged in countries like Ghana. Without formal states and employment markets, formal national education can become difficult to implement.

This paper therefore suggests that one needs to understand education as inherently political to better comprehend some of the problems in educational policy in developing countries in the future. This needs to be seen as an alternative approach to the contemporary metaphors linked to the market, such as students as consumers, human capital, managers. This paper indicates that by using political metaphors as a discursive framework one could gain an improved understanding of some of the limitations of formal schooling and education policy in developing countries. These aspects of informal markets, informal communities and weak nation states need to be considered when one evaluates, designs and reforms education systems and education policy in developing countries such as Ghana. Successful education policy needs to be based on the political realities in developing countries like Ghana; hence a new, more politicised approach is needed in the future to gain valuable insights that go beyond current approaches.

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