Research Paper

Public Mantras, Private Murmurs: Gender and Teacher Education in The Gambia

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Contextualization

Quality teachers are acknowledged as key to a quality education system (Hargreaves, 1992: Burke, 2002: UNESCO, 2008) with initial teacher education (ITE) recognised as a pivotal period in a teacher's personal and professional development (Burke, 2002: Gardner, 2011). Much thought goes into training teachers in subject content knowledge, methodologies and philosophies of education, the 'what?', 'how?' and 'why?' of teaching. However, little consideration tends to be given to the 'who?' of teaching; who teachers are and how this influences what happens in classrooms. This paper will focus on a central aspect of who teachers are; their gendered identities as men teachers and women teachers.

Abstract: *Despite teachers being seen as crucial agents of change in the eradication of inequality via education, gender tends to hold a marginal position in initial teacher education programmes (Coffey & Acker, 1991: Skelton, 2007).This qualitative research aims to centralise issues of gender in teacher education by exploring Gambian trainee teachers' experiences of gender in their pre-service training. Using a post-structural framework based on the concepts of power and performativity, it examines the overt and covert gender training that Gambian trainee teachers receive and how they reflect on it. It explores the struggle that trainee teachers face in navigating the gap between public discourses of gender equality evident in government and college policy, and the private discourses of differentiated gendered roles that reflect Gambian family life. It examines how issues around language and understandings of the nation contribute to this conflict. It concludes by suggesting that gender training programmes must engage more meaningfully with the private or domestic sphere realities of trainee teachers' lived experiences if they are to contribute to the transformation, rather than the reproduction, of traditional gender norms.*

Introduction

Quality teachers are acknowledged as key to a quality education system (Hargreaves, 1992: Burke, 2002: UNESCO, 2008) with initial teacher education (ITE) recognised as a pivotal period in a teacher's personal and professional development (Burke, 2002: Gardner, 2011). If Parker Palmer's (1998) famous maxim "We teach who we are" is true, then examination of teacher identity; "who teachers are", is essential to an understanding of how teachers can contribute to the reproduction of traditional social roles, or the promotion of social transformation. Gender is a central aspect of teacher identity and experience, but an aspect that tends to be under-researched (Skelton, 2007).

In her book on the supply, conditions and professional development of women teachers, Gaynor (1997: 30) iterates the importance of addressing issues of gender in teacher education programmes when she states: "if efforts are not made in teacher training to

eliminate inequalities in the system, then prevailing stereotypes and gender-biased attitudes are likely to endure for some time to come".

This paper listens to the voices and experiences of trainee teachers (TTs) to develop a better understanding of both female and male Gambian TTs' gendered experiences of their training, the ways in which their gender influences their identities as teachers, and the implications of this for gender training programmes in ITE.

Conceptualising the Narratives

The research on which this paper is based took place in Gambia College, The Gambia's only teacher training institution, between April and May 2012. The researcher was familiar with this context having worked in the college as a teacher trainer from 2007 to 2009. Qualitative methods of focus group discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews were conducted with pre-service trainee teachers (TTs) in their first year of training. The sample group of 30 TTs (16 male and 14 female) reflect the varying ages, ethnicities and levels of experience of their cohort.

FGDs were chosen as a tool to explore the ways in which TTs interact when discussing gender issues, and to look for issues that prompted consensus and those that elicited disagreement, while individual interviews allowed for exploration of the 'patterns of language' or discourses that individual TTs use when discussing gender.

The narratives from the FGDs and individual interviews were recorded, transcribed and then coded, to identify key themes. This data was then analysed using a post-structuralist approach (Weedon, 1997: Bulter, 1999) of discourse analysis focussing on the concepts of power and performativity. This mode of analysis was chosen as it can be used to "consider… the way in which… inequalities are constructed, made factual, and justified in talk" (Silverman, 2001: 178)

The concepts of power and performativity were utilised to encompass structuralist 'second-wave' views of power; the notion that the nation is a patriarchal entity designed to reinforce the status-quo and reproduce the economic and social structures that allow the masculine to dominate and restrict women to the private sphere, as well as post-structuralist notions of performativity; that through discourse as well as actions, the repeated 'stylization of the body' (Butler, 1999: xv), we position ourselves at differing levels within power hierarchies.

The analysis conceptualised 'gender' as fluid and relational rather than a male/female binary (Weedon, 1997: Hughes, 2002) and examined the role of language and discourse in the construction of teacher and gendered identities, with language and discourse understood to be the site where "our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed" (Weedon, 1997: 21). Post-structuralism contends that language does not reflect human experience but rather "constitutes social reality for us" (Weedon, 1997: 22). "[M]eaning is produced within language rather than reflected by language" (Weedon, 1997: 23), with the language and discourses that TTs use to describe gender constructing and perpetuating the unequal gendered power structures that they inhabit. This research, therefore, focused on these notions of power and performativity with the aim of 'unpacking' and exploring these constructed realities.

This research drew on previous research based around gender and teacher identity, as well as research on how gender 'plays out' in the classroom. Of particular note is Baxen's (2010) post-structural examination of teacher identity in the context of South Africa's HIV/AIDS discourse, which explores "how teachers are positioned and position themselves in the classroom when they teach sexuality and HIV/AIDS" (Baxen, 2010: 19). Baxen (2010) disputes the view that the classroom is a neutral space. She explores teachers and gender in

the classroom by drawing on the work of Butler (1999) and describing teaching as both performance and performative; "teaching is *doing*, but it is also the repetitive act of doing that manifests its existential and practical presence" (Alexander et al., 2005: 4 cited in Baxen, 2010: 111).

Teaching therefore "is constituted in relations of power" (Baxen, 2010: 112) that are "subordinating as well as producing" (Butler, 1997:2). In this way teachers are portrayed as "fundamental to producing the discourse and, by implication, have the power to act in subversive ways to disrupt, transform and/or insert a different discourse (in as much as they are constituted by it)" (Baxen, 2010: 112). Teachers here are seen as central to the development and transformation of discourses that can constitute power in one group over another.

Chege (2006: 35) explores the ways in which the school and classroom "emerged as a significant space where teachers' identities were continually produced as gendered and sexual" (Chege, 2006: 35), while Braun (2011) examines issues surrounding teachers' gendered identities in classrooms in the UK when she discusses the gendered bodily experience of physically walking into a classroom; "walking yourself around as a teacher" (2011: 282).

In this conception of teaching, the classroom becomes the battle ground where epistemologies are disputed and knowledge is both produced and challenged; "Rather than classrooms being viewed as spaces where teachers deliver an uncontested body of knowledge or a place where teachers create enabling environments in which children learn, classrooms become discursive sites for the production of contestable bodies of knowledge; where productions, constituted in relations of power, are themselves conflictual" (Baxen, 2010: 113). The classroom is a gendered 'borderland' (Braun, 2009), which teachers must navigate. It is this navigation of the 'borderland' that this research will explore.

How do trainee teachers' 'teacher identities' and 'gendered identities' interact?

In discussing the discourses of 'child-centred' teaching methodologies at Gambia College, Jessop and Penny (1998) described the "rhetoric" versus the "reality" of child-centred learning which was evident. This paper suggests that these conflicts at Gambia College, between rhetoric, the public discourse; what people think they should say, and reality, the private discourse; what they really believe, can also be applied to gender. The rhetoric/reality contrast evident in this research is reminiscent of Argyris and Schon's (1974) "espoused theory"; the theory that people believe their behaviour is based upon, and "theory in use"; the theory implied by how they behave – the difference between 'talking the talk and walking the walk'.

With reference to these contradictory discourses, the school is a contested space. It is both a public space, governed by public policy discourse, where English is the official language of instruction, as well as a domestic space, being placed within the community, with local languages used between children and informally between children and adults to communicate. Teachers work in the "borderland" (Braun, 2009) negotiating between these two normative discourses, as they are both public figures, employed as civil servants, and domestic figures, as they are *in loco parentis.*

These contradictory discourses emerge on examination of the ways in which TTs speak about gender and gender equality. The majority of TTs in the sample group began discussions about gender by claiming that men and women are equal at Gambia College and in Gambian society.

> *We are all the same. And we see each other as the same.*

Male TT, FGD 1

> P1: *We are not treated differently.*
>
> P2: *We are all treated equally.*
>
> P3: *We all have the same opportunity to learn.*

Male TTs, FGD 2

> *We are all equal. We can do everything. What male can do female can do it.*

Male TT, FGD 2

This discourse regarding 'sameness' and 'equality' appears to be the agreed 'party line', a public discourse that encapsulates the 'equality-speak' of public policy and gender class mantra. However, it was recognised by all participants in the research that males and females play different roles in society.

> *In Africa our tradition is men will go out and find something like feeding and women also supposed to be at home looking after the children and doing other domestic works*

Male TT, Focus group 2

This indicates an understanding of equality that is 'separate but equal', with 'equality' understood to mean equal access to resources and education. Equality is seen in terms of access *to* education, rather than *within* education, or *through* education (Wilson, 2003: Subrahmanian, 2005: Greany, 2008), as evident in the statement below which dismisses the notion that men and women are equally capable, '*that is impossible'*, but are 'equal' because both men and women can '*do those things like education'.* This indicates an understanding of gender based on parity; 'equal numbers', rather than a more complex understanding of gender as relational and fluid (as held by post-structural feminists) or relating to societal power structures (as held by structuralist feminists) (Unterhalter, 2005).

> *I was told that gender is not only focusing on female. It was on both sides, male and female, not whatever man can do, female can do, because that is impossible, we all know that what man can do female cannot do it, but equal in the sense that both of us can do those things like education.*

Male TT, FGD 2

'Equality', then, is restricted to the public arena, to '*things like education'* that are affected by public policy and subject to time bound targets like the MDGs and EFA. 'Gender equality', therefore, is a bureaucratic concept, something which is 'performed' to the outside world but not internalised.

Following initial answers which utilised the language of gender equality; *"the same", "treated equally", "they are just our sisters" (male TTs, Focus group 1),* some male TTs went on to describe gender identities as fixed, unitary and unchangeable, displaying hostility to the invocation of 'gender' as an attempt to change the unchangeable. This indicates that lurking below the public declarations of gender equality lie traditionalist private discourses that position women as subordinate to men.

> *Men and women we are born different. We are different. It's only when you come in time in society making both men and female to be somehow equal but we can never be equal. Men are different from women. That's how it is.*

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Male TT, Focus group 2

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> *This thing gender is what is trying to make us the same. In our traditional ways there are some differences because there is special work for females and likewise the male also but now as people are becoming aware, now they are trying to associate things not to differentiate them.*

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Male TT, Focus group 2

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The phrase *"this thing gender"* implies that gender is foisted on traditional societies from outside, while the dismissive statement *"That's how it is"*, implies that change is not only unnecessary, but that the attempt to claim that women and men should be *"somehow equal"* is swimming against the current and a waste of time. The positive reference to '*people … becoming aware',* however, indicates that education may be having some progressive influence.

Alongside the public discourse of equality; 'w*e are all one',* therefore*,* there lies a contradictory private or domestic discourse in which binarised gender roles and responsibilities are not just normal, but also right; *"naturally created from God"* (Female TT, FG 3)*.* Public declarations of gender equality are 'performance' of a public persona. They are a mantra recited for the benefit of outsiders. More private discourses of gender difference emerge through TTs' choice of words only when probed.

The contradiction in understandings of gender equality was also evident in the female focus groups. In one focus group, female TTs spoke quite emphatically about how women must step beyond traditional roles, particularly in relation to domestic work.

> *But for me I believe we should share equal responsibility. There is no work that is attached to only women. It is only the way we are brought up. So if I am to change, I will share responsibility, despite the fact that this cooking, laundering, sweeping and the like. If I should do it why not you?*

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Female TT, Focus group 3

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The traditional roles of women are described as restrictive, in comparison to the 'freedom' that men experience.

> *Women overexert themselves in domestic work while men are free without doing anything.*

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Female TT, Focus group 3

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However, when asked to list the characteristics that make a good wife, these same women equated 'decency' with embodying the ideal traditional wife. They also indicated through their pleasure at describing such a person, and by calling the only married woman among them '*lucky',* that they aspired to such an ideal;

> *P1:   You have to be decent. Decent, you have to take care of the house. For example, when the husband go out for work, before he come back, you have to take care of the place, sweep the place, have nice smelling.*

> P2:   *Make the environment clean –*
>
> P3:   *Your husband, whenever he goes for work, he will be in hurry to get back home.*

Female TTs, Focus group 3

While on the one hand, these TTs appeared to desire change in the traditional ways of doing things, they also desired to fulfil their traditionally designated roles. This is reminiscent of the metaphor, "The ropes which bind women are the hardest to cut, because they are woven with so many of our own desires" (Taylor and Alexander, 1980, cited in Coward, 1999: 40).

The inconsistencies in desires articulated by these female TTs echo the "ambiguities, dilemmas and contradictions entailed in schooling" (Unterhalter 1999: 62) for women. By entering higher education, female TTs have demonstrated aspirations to live lives different to those of their mothers, but at times the process of separating themselves from what is familiar proves too difficult and they fall back on ideals of traditional performative femininity; 'doing woman, doing wife'. The organisational discourse of Gambia College, that views "being present in a classroom as somehow transformative" (Unterhalter, 1999: 51) positions education as innately 'empowering'. It "ignores the complexities of social positioning, *habitus*, gender, and classed expectations [within higher education, and] ignores psychic narratives/internalised oppression regarding worth, self-efficiency, and confidence" (Morley, 1999: 231), as well as the impacts of these factors on women's experiences of education. The social and cultural costs incurred in rejecting traditional femininities outweigh any benefits received, as the prize of '*empowerment*' promised by accessing higher education has not materialised. Women, therefore, find refuge in traditional roles; while their public identities desire change, their private sphere identities retreat into tradition.

Wendoh and Wallace (2006: 15) describe the mismatch between what African NGO workers claimed to believe regarding gender and how they behaved, when they described people who "ostensibly subscribed to [progressive] gender concepts, but [who] were found to be skeptical and were just repeating the terms in order to access donor funding, or 'masquerading' – pretending to understand and support new gender terminology and concepts while rejecting them because they clashed with their own beliefs or position in society".

This echoes the ways in which TTs speak about gender. They experience a bureaucratic attachment to public declarations of gender equality, 'performing' them to outsiders, such as donors (and to me, as a white researcher). This attachment is time bound, tied to externally imposed targets and goals such as the MDGs' deadline of 2015. Their emotional attachment to the traditional ways of doing things, however, is imbued with a sense of timelessness, invoked through the use of words such as *'always'* and *'never'* when speaking about traditional gender roles.

However, the term 'masquerader' (Wendoh & Wallace, 2006) jars when applied to the TTs in this study, as it implies conscious deception, when many of the TTs who participated in this research seemed to be unaware of the contradiction between the public and private discourses on gender and gender equality; between what they purported to believe regarding gender equality, and what they revealed when probed. The role of language here is key. English, the public language of gender equality, is used in Gender class and when discussing gender equality, while local languages; the lingua franca of tradition and 'African-ism' are used in the private sphere. These two modes of communication; English and local languages, seem to produce parallel realities, with the attitudes and identities formed through one immiscible with the beliefs and perspectives constructed through the other. If, as poststructuralists believe, we construct our identities through language, is it possible that TTs

are constructing dual and contradictory identities through their bilingualism; as progressive believers in gender equality when communicating publicly in English, and maintainers of traditionalist discourses when speaking in local languages, in the domestic sphere?

Some TTs recognised the difficulty that teachers faced in navigating the gap between conflicting public and private discourses. The exchange below has been quoted at length as it illustrates the difficulties teachers face in trying to embody the public discourse of gender equality, while being embedded in the private, domestic discourse of innate, differing gender roles and responsibilities. A female TT asked me, the researcher, as an outsider, how to address the disconnect between the public discourse in which she has become fluent through her education, and the private discourse held by *'everybody [she] left at home'*.

> *P1:   My question is, for us though we thank God that we are in school, we are educated we know some concepts about gender but if you take a look at behind at home they find it very difficult to understand about gender issues, so how can you explain it to them best, that males should share the same responsibility, to make them understand and to change for good?*
>
> *EM: That's a really good question. I think the best way is by example. If you show your children that your husband is also helping with the housework, then your sons will do the same and then when they get married they will help their wives.*
>
> *P1:   But me, I am not married. I don't have any children but parents and brothers and sisters, and everybody I left at home. How are you going to convince them to do the sort of work that I am doing? I know change is a gradual process. I think it's important.*
>
> *EM: I think that starting with children is important, so with your brothers, when the small boy is sweeping you could say "Good boy, continue sweeping".*
>
> *P1:   But they might try to stop me, they will say, "Hey you want to make this boy a girl". They might try and stop me. For my younger brother he is so used to me. Whenever I am cooking I will call him in the kitchen and he will help me. My mother is saying, "Hey, you want to make this boy to be a girl", and she will send him away.*
>
> *Female TT, FGD 3.*

Here, she is asking me to tell her how to live 'gender equality'. She is asking me to make it 'vivid' for her, just as she made her private sphere experiences vivid to me through her narration. The ease with which she deflects my ineffectual suggestions reflects the impotence of more 'progressive' public discourses to pierce traditional private sphere beliefs.

The language used throughout this narration, implies that education has separated this TT from her family; her family has not only been physically '*left at home*' as she attends Gambia College, but has also metaphorically been left *'behind'* within a traditional discourse that she has moved beyond. As a teacher she is positioned in disputed territory, being neither fully immersed in the public discourse, nor fully at home within her tradition. The awkward repetition of the phrase *"Hey, you want to make this boy to be a girl"* implies the impossibility of meaningfully translating her mother's understanding of the world from her local language into English.

The above exchange demonstrates the difficulties that TTs face in trying to negotiate between the public and private discourses of gender equality. Gambia College doesn't provide them with a space in which to navigate these complexities. The space of 'equality' is an emptied out space, a vacuum populated only with meaningless jargon and terminology; black words on a white page. It is the differentiated roles of the private sphere that are linked to concrete existence; the public language of equality lacking the power, the colour, and the vibrancy of lived experience.

The distance felt by the TT above from those she has *"left at home"* is reminiscent of Braun's (2009) description of the distance felt by some British teachers from working class background from their families, on entering what is (in the Western world) a middle-class profession. Teachers inhabit a no-man's land where they attempt to reconcile contradictions such as "The exercise of authority and control versus caring for pupils and the conduct of professional relationships with pupils that involve both closeness and distance" (Braun, 2009: 37). Teachers, in The Gambia, straddle contradictory national and gender discourses. While they are key agents in the public discourse of gender equality due to their importance in achieving MDG (Millennium Development Goals) and EFA (Education for all) goals, they are also agents of enculturation, training children in the private sphere behaviours and attitudes they need to be accepted in Gambian society.

The public discourse of gender equality is one strongly promoted throughout Gambia College. However, with the private/domestic discourse of natural differences in roles and responsibilities being so closely linked to discourses of national and linguistic belonging, these private discourse norms are aggressively policed within communities. Both male and female TTs spoke of being ridiculed or chastised by family or community members if traditional gender roles are not adhered to. Male TTs spoke of having their masculinity questioned if they engaged in traditionally 'female' activities.

> *Talking about cooking, and sweeping the house and also washing the kids clothes, that one if a man do it, at times, they will come and laugh at him, they will tell him "Don't you have your wife?" so that you can feel bad about doing that kind of work. It will be hard for you.*

> *Male TT, FGD 1*

These norms become internalised to the point that 'self-policing' begins, with gender norms crystallising into identities. As Robeyns (2007: 59) describes, "the expectations of others will influence our behaviour and mould our preferences … Adopting an identity that conforms with gender norms will avoid the pain of feeling ashamed". This is demonstrated by the quote below.

> *There are some men who have feeling ashamed, who are thinking if I do this job, or the other job, my fellows will laugh at me or they will tell me as somebody who is not having fit for his wife.*

> *Male TT, Focus group 1.*

As TTs, these men have been given public messages that men and women can share responsibilities, yet in the domestic sphere, the private messages that they receive through the responses of their peers tell them otherwise.

Throughout the FGDs and individual interviews conducted for this research, when speaking about gender, participants repeatedly made reference to a 'Gambian' or 'African' identity to explain why things are as they are; *"In Africa we believe …", "You know in the Gambia … ", "In the Gambia here …"* etc.

These references to *'Africa'* and *'Gambia'* occurred most commonly when discussing the differentiation between men's traditional roles in the formal workplace and women's traditional roles in the domestic sphere of cooking, laundering clothes, sweeping and taking care of children.

> *Because early in the morning in the Gambia, the men or the husband will leave the home and he's at work until he comes six o'clock and he's back at home. So you have the woman there, taking care of everything, doing all sorts of jobs.*

Male TT, FGD 2

The desire to so strongly 'place' themselves when discussing traditional gender roles indicates TTs' need to locate themselves within a particular gendered identity. Madame Ndow, the Head of School of Education and gender lecturer, indicated the strength of the link between norms of national belonging, "Gambian-ism", and acceptance of traditional gender norms when she related having her nationality questioned by students due to her promotion of feminism.

> *At the beginning when they come it is very difficult, all from different walks of life, different homes where they don't believe in all what I am talking about. So the first time, is always a bit challenging, you hear a lot of arguments. Sometimes students will ask if I am a Gambian or not because they cannot believe that it is a Gambian who is talking about these things*

Madame Isatou Ndow, Head of School

The public discourse of gender equality, then, is outward looking, linked to international goals such as the MDGs and EFA. It is the version of the nation that Gambians project to the outside world. In contrast, the private discourse of differentiated gender roles looks inward to the essence of "Gambian-ism" and understandings of oneself within the nation.

The policing of gender roles also connects strongly with national and linguistic identities, with language strongly implicated in the regulation of children's gendered behaviour and identities, as language and 'naming' are used to embarrass children into adherence.

> *In our society when you see a boy just behaving like a girl. So when people see it, they say you are 'goljiggen'. It means you are boy/girl. That is our Wolof language. … No parent wants his son to be called a 'goljiggen'. That is why in our society when we see a boy sweeping we punish the boy so that he will know that the broom is not for him.*

Silla girl, Female TT.

> *When a child a boy playing with doll or painting his fingernail the family members may try to disturb him, distract him from those things, you know, insulting him to make the individual not do those things again … When you are laundering at home, a boy, they will say "Look at you, you are Fatou or Binta". They start giving him female names and other things.*

Male TT, FGD 2.

Queen also describes how 'naming' is used to ensure that norms are adhered to in the case of FGM;

> *But if you don't do it they will label you again. They will call you certain names like 'Sonima', which is Mandinka language meaning 'you are not circumcised. You are not disciplined. You don't know anything'. That is the name they will give you.*

Queen, Female TT.

The existence of the Wolof word *"Goljiggen"* and the Mandinka term *"Sonima"* indicate how language and naming are used as a means of control. Imposing a female name, 'Fatou' or 'Binta', onto a boy links action with identity in a very concrete way, teaching the boy that certain actions bestow certain gender identities. Local languages and ethnic identities become inextricably linked with the private, domestic discourse of separate roles, while English, the official language of policy, and language of instruction in schools and Gambia College, represents the public discourse.

Dillabough (2000: 166) discusses the ways in which allusions to 'the nation' are used to maintain the status quo of imbalanced gender relations within education, and thus society; "the ways in which their [women's] identities are constructed in relation to imaginary notions of 'the nation' are likely to affect the ways in which female educators interpret their roles as workers". The term 'imaginary' is central; the sense of 'African-ism' of 'Gambian-ism' that is constructed through the maintenance of unequal gender roles, is 'imaginary' in that it harks back to an imagined pre-colonial past. Feminism is 'un-African' only in that it is viewed as a Western concept. It is evident that the 'Gambian-ism' that is portrayed in opposition to gender equality is 'imaginary', as alternative but valid national identities, have been excluded from this notion of 'Gambian-ism". An example of this is the Serer culture (of which 2% of the Gambian population belong), which was traditionally matriarchal, with women owning and controlling the community's livestock.

Changes in gender relations and the fight for gender equality, therefore, can be seen as a threat to an 'imagined' Gambian culture, and therefore rejected; "valued tradition includes the low position of women … can be defended as cultural, and therefore immutable" (Greany, 2008: 557). Okin (1999) discusses the difficulties between balancing a respect for culture with a desire for gender equality, and concludes that women's rights should not be considered subordinate to the maintenance of culture and tradition; "group rights [to practice culture and tradition] should not trump the individual rights of its members" (1999: 11). "The growing tension between feminism and […] concern for protecting cultur[e]" (Okin, 1999: 10) makes any challenges to traditional gender roles and responsibilities and understandings of gender, that go beyond the formal equality speak of the public sphere, highly contentious, as promotion of a feminist agenda can be viewed as an attack on Gambian identity.

The inextricable link between traditional gender identities and national and linguistic identities, and the role of language in constructing gendered and teacher identities, emerged as key issues in this research. Wendoh & Wallace (2006: 16) assert that in order to transform gender relations in Africa, change makers must "locat[e] gender ideas within the critical African institutions of the family, … and the wider community". The policy of using English as the sole language of instruction during Gender Studies lessons at Gambia College, mean that attitudes regarding traditional identities that are bound up with local languages are not challenged as gender messages remain solely in the public sphere, connected only to the TTs public 'teacher' identity, and not to their private sphere 'Gambian' identity. The sole use of English to articulate these ideas means that they remain separate, and cannot permeate TT's lived reality of family and community, which can only be expressed through local languages. Wendoh & Wallace (2006: 16) also declare that "gender equity and gender relations need to be translated into … local understandings of how to allocate resources, who

should do what, who has which rights". The word "translated" in this statement can be read literally as well as metaphorically.

Conclusion

Through this analysis it is clear how inextricably TTs gendered identities are tangled with their national and linguistic identities. If "what [teachers] do is complexly intertwined with who they are" (Baxen, 2010: 113), teacher education must view TT's as complex individuals with fluid and interconnected individual identities. They must explore and nurture 'who they are' if they are to transform 'what they do'.

Braun (2009: 37) asserts, "teaching as a profession often finds itself pitted against and in-between contrasting and oppositional discourses". Teaching is thus a "borderland profession" (Braun, 2009), as teachers inhabit the contested space between the public and private spheres, between public identities constructed through English, and private sphere identities formed through local languages, between the sense of the nation as a bureaucratic entity and as an emotional connection, between core beliefs and the persona that is projected to the world. The school as borderland "becomes a site … apart from the mainstream … a new frontier, holding a promise of change where borders are fuzzy and porous" (Braun, 2009: 196). The school space therefore, while fraught with challenges, also offers space in which the status quo can be subverted and transformed, if teachers are given the skills and compunction to do so.

By providing a forum in which the intrinsic importance of the contribution that women make to Gambian society can be recognized and women's access to education can be promoted, Gender Studies courses in ITE can create a space in which traditionalist gender norms and accepted ways of doing things can be challenged. However, focusing solely on the public sphere and "work[ing] *with* rather than *against* the status quo" (Manion, 2011: 2 -3), can lead to the reproduction rather than transformation of traditional gender roles. Gender training at ITE must engage with the realities of family and community that make life meaningful for TTs, otherwise they are simply providing TTs with information without a context in which, and a language with which, to use it, explore it and interrogate it.

This paper has served to problematize gender within teacher education and explore how it influences the promotion of gender equality in The Gambia. It has raised more questions than it can answer and further research is needed to explore how teacher education can unpack private sphere discourses so that teachers can transform rather than reproduce traditional gender norms. Further research is also needed to explore how gender training programmes in teacher education can delve below TTs' public sphere personas, to allow them to interrogate their own identities and positionings within society.

The impermeable membrane between the public discourses of gender equality and the private discourses of the domestic sphere prevents progressive gender messages from instigating action. They remain rhetoric, mantras chanted within public policy discourse, that have little relevance to the daily reality of Gambian men and women. This chanting of mantras attempts to mask the private murmurs that police gender identities. However, attempting to 'drown out' traditional views with public statements only drives them deeper into the core of people's identities. Instead, gender training programmes in ITE must engage with the complexities of the ways that people are living and give them a new language in which to murmur; a language that doesn't repress but instead transforms and empowers.

To return to Parker Palmer's maxim, if teachers teach 'who they are', then initial teacher education must give teachers a new way of being, if it is to be truly transformative.

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