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Schooling and Domestic Transitions

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SCHOOLING AND DOMESTIC TRANSITION(S): SHIFTING GENDER RELATIONS AND FEMALE AGENCY IN RURAL GHANA AND INDIA

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Transitions to adulthood are usually defined by markers such as leaving school, starting a first job, leaving the parental home, forming a first union, marrying and having a first child. Youth policy remains strongly influenced by these linear transitions, and by the metaphor of a 'pathway' from school to work and adulthood, taking little account of poverty, and the significance of micro-social changes within personal relations, which in many rural cultures have considerable importance in transitions to adulthood.

This paper utilises data on social and human outcomes of schooling, collected under the aegis of the RECOUP programme of research in the rural north of Ghana and India. Micro-reconstructions of gender roles/relations associated with communication, autonomy and decision-making are shown to have subtle implications for the transformation of young people's lives. The findings suggest that education may have unexpected and often complicating effects on 'domestic transitions', particularly on the private/intimate spheres of gender relations. Transition studies need to reconsider how independent action is framed within strong patriarchal cultures.

Introduction

In this paper we consider the applicability of contemporary approaches to transitions into adulthood for young people living in poverty in the global South. Theoretical approaches to transitions in industrialised countries include sociological/demographic analyses which focus on life-cycle events and which are somewhat structuralist in approach, developmental psychological approaches concerned with individual adjustments to the new challenges of becoming an adult; and post-structuralist approaches which explore shifting identities and identifications of individualising youth. It is often argued that young people experience more variable and longer transitions to adulthood than previous generations (see, for example, Mortimer and Larson 2002). In some societies, people in their teens and twenties experiment with different lifestyles and intimate relationships, and may change residence many times (Arnett 1997). They may explore through 'myriad choices' other ways to reach adulthood, and 'affect societies' futures' often unknowingly, and in ways unconnected to political struggles or social movements:

> Adolescents are not passive recipients of macro-societal change, they are actors within it. In some cases they create it. Adolescence is above all a period in which youth are required to be agents, to find their own paths, and within the set of constraints and opportunities available to them, to mould themselves in ways that enable them to obtain the adulthoods they desire (Mortimer and Larson 2002, 15).

The World Development Report (2006) argues that today family-building is key transition alongside work, health and well-being, and citizenship. Similarly Coles (1995) highlights the importance of what he calls young people's *domestic transitions* from their family of origin to family of destination (alongside work and housing transitions). These transitions within the private/domestic sphere have become particularly important as new challenges are posed to existing family customs, cultural practices and forms of authority.. In the rural settings of low-income countries, adjustments in domestic transitions have considerable importance for youth. As formal schooling spreads more widely into such cultures and communities, it problematises the existing pathways into gender roles and responsibilities and, by so doing, opens spaces for young people, especially young women, to craft new kinds of adult gender relations.

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The aim of this article is to explore the domestic transitions of youth particularly in the context of poverty. We bring together data from two very different rural contexts - northern Ghana and northern India - which demonstrate that, in both rural contexts, schooling has started to play a part in reshaping gender relations. Individual/community and parental decisions about young people's transitions to adulthood are being challenged in small but significant ways by those young women who have attended schooling. Our research identified the social spaces within which young women start to consider new forms of gender relations, and occasions when they display apparently autonomous actions, in some senses outside the control of their elders. This *relational agency* is associated with action rather than passivity. For girls, even thoughts of independence or desires for egalitarian gender relationships may be important signals of potential social change. We begin by outlining recent reconceptualisations of youth transitions within the literature.

Reconceptualising Youth Transitions

Much mainstream sociological work on transitions to adulthood has looked at marker-events such as 'leaving home, finishing school, getting a full-time job, becoming financially independent, supporting a family, marrying and becoming a parent' (Hartmann & Swartz, 2006, 3) and their social meanings. Similarly, much recent debate is about how far these events are changing (being postponed or disconnected) under conditions of late capitalism and post-modernity in a Western context. Thus a recent book on transitions to adulthood in Europe (Corijn & Klyzing, 2001) concludes:

> Cohorts were not in all countries in the same stage of the process of postponement of the education/work transition and of the start of the union and family formation. Moreover the postponement rates differed. Neither were these cohorts in the different countries in the same stage of disconnecting events such as leaving the parental home, starting a first union, first marriage and first parenthood from each other. A postponement of an event in general went along with a disconnection of the event from a particular age.[1]

In this context, Te Riele (2004, 244) comments that: 'The assumption of linearity in much policy and media discussion of youth transitions specifically suggests that young people

follow a linear trajectory from full-time education to full-time work'. It involves a particular conception of adulthood, 'that young people make one transition to adulthood, and that adulthood is a clearly defined status—a destination at which one "arrives"' (Wyn & White, 1997, 96). There is increasingly no simple and clear 'arrival' at adulthood, yet policy on youth often presumes a single transition that follows one line. Te Riele (2004, 245) argues that many of adulthood's markers are 'reversible and impermanent' and that a 'yo-yo' better symbolises 'the ups and downs of fragile and reversible transitions' (EGRIS, 2001, 104).

Other challenges to linear transition models are found in the study of youth transitions in the European context. Attention is now drawn to the effects of 'individualisation' (Beck 1992, 87), the uncoupling of young people from existing identities and positionalities, and to new ways in which young people find their identity and frame their life choices (e.g. Ball, Maguire and Macrae 2000; Furlong and Cartmel 2009). In this context, despite the fact that the young person is engaged constantly in a process of self-construction, in a reflexive biographical project, the young person may return to a dependency on adults, particularly parents (Furlong and Cartmel 2009). Transitional studies that focus on work and the labour market may fail to recognise the significance of those 'vestigial structures and values of family and locality' (Ball et al., 2000, 143). Even though in the Global North, the individual is more likely to be the focus in the post-adolescent period, families are still very important in 'forming social perspectives and generating resources for identity formation' (ibid., 143). Transition studies need to recognise not only the process of individualisation but also that the family is still a 'key source of belonging' and a highly significant element in social and educational lives.

Other transformations of youth transitions have been triggered, for example, in the export through modernised schooling systems of, what de Waal and Argenti (2002, 14) describe as an arbitrary Western concept – that of youth with a chronological cut-off. A single juridical age of maturity has been introduced into many African countries, often conflicting with existing sequences for maturing individuals. For men these might have involved moving from child to single man to warrior to labourer to married and self-supporting adult to becoming an elder. For women, socialisation into adulthood was sequenced through the statuses of girl, wife and mother. Mass formal institutionalised

schooling introduced by colonial and post-colonial governments has taken place without any detailed consideration of the effects on such transitions to adulthood. Equally, in *Growing Up Global*, Lloyd (2004) reminds us that transition research needs to take into account that youth – in a limbo between childhood and adulthood – are most vulnerable to poverty. What happens between the ages of 16 and 30 affects their lives in ways that often seem to be irreversible. Globally youth, especially those from the poorest families, are most likely to experience violence, little or low income, to be homeless, to face dangerous diseases such as AIDS, to be outside formal institutions (even education), to be unemployed, to be called up to fight wars, to be the target of criminal activity and drug cultures, to have little participation in civic and political life and less likely to vote.

These debates suggest that any study of domestic transitions needs to take account of the complexity associated with age and gender status, with poverty and with shifting cultural processes which redefine agency and personhood. A key aspect of domestic transitions is the movement of young adolescents into complex, dynamic adult relations. Such relations are embedded in sexuality relations and gendered divisions of labour within the home and community. Young people's engagements within the personal and domestic sphere may well be shaped by their schooling, offering opportunities for new forms of individual agency. Similarly the negotiations of young men and women over marital relations can be affected by the very fact of young women becoming educated. The negotiations and decisions over who to marry and when, when to have children and how many, are central to transitions processes. The World Bank (2006,145) focuses on 'preparing youth … [to] plan childbearing, have a safe pregnancy, and raise healthy children' because of the positive effects these can have on 'productivity and savings, which affect economic growth and poverty reduction'. Summarising the possible effects of education in this field, the World Bank state that: 'better educated parents plan safer childbearing and invest more in their children's education and health … [they] are more likely to marry later and have more say in whom and when they marry. Some also attribute the decline in arranged marriages and the shift of marriage decision-making from parents to young people to the increased education of women' (ibid, 147).

Below, we explore these micro-transformations within gender relations in two domestic settings: firstly in northern Ghana, and then within marital homes in northern India.

Micro-Transformations in Gender Relations in Northern Ghana

The research team in northern Ghana explored the impact of schooling on Dagomba youth living in a northern farming community in two villages where only two generations of youth had experienced a full cycle of formal schooling. We surveyed 300 households and conducted an in-depth intergenerational study of 12 households. Interviews in Dagomba were conducted by local researchers with 21 male and female siblings (aged 15-30), their mothers and fathers (or equivalent), and with 6 elders/gatekeepers. The study explored the impact of schooling on youth in three different pathways: those with none or incomplete primary schooling; those who had completed 9 years of primary schooling (P1-6) and Junior High School (JHS 1-3); and those who had at least attended some secondary schooling (SHS 1-3, technical/ vocational, commercial schooling, higher education). The interviews focused on self-protection and well-being; livelihood and entrepreneurialism; and citizenship and empowerment.

The starting point for this study was how womanhood and manhood were understood, as both biological stages and social roles. The level of schooling achieved by a young person can make a difference to the age at which they thought such transitions occur. For example, of the young men and women who were educated to post-basic levels, most thought that the average age to achieve manhood was 18, the age associated with the end of secondary schooling. Of those who had little or no schooling, most found it difficult to mark the transition to adulthood; two of the four male youth in this category thought that exit from boyhood occurred as late as 22-23 years. Most youth said that "seeing is believing," referring to the evidence of changes in the male body as indicators. Similarly, girls were seen to become women when they could have children, know how to take care of them, and support the family. Most secondary school male students cited 13-16 years as the age when girls left behind their childhood: only one male youth gave an age as high as 18. Significantly, the three secondary educated girls – who were exceptional in their community due to their level of education – chose 16-20 for the inception of womanhood, ages that would prolong the time between schooling and marriage and first childbirth.

Despite such variations in the perceived transition ages, when asked about what constituted a 'good' woman and man in their community young people continued to argue

that male roles were mainly defined by how they provided for the household and their economic activities. Men acquired higher social status since they were recognized as heads of families, the main bread winner; their roles were defined by this social positioning and their economic role as the main "provider" for the family through farming. For a boy, manhood was marked by a gradual initiation into more complex farming activities, beginning with watching and caring for small animals such as goats and then cows. Boys then worked on the farm with the family head of household to carry out physically challenging farm tasks such as the clearing of large tracts of land, planting etc. They also moved into manhood by learning different community skills such as handicrafts, roof repair and some were selected to learn how to defend the community.

Transitions into womanhood were often equally clear-cut. Women were seen to be responsible for carrying out household chores and take part in sowing, harvesting and carrying food crops home from the farm gate. A girl's ability to fetch and carry a large basin of water by herself was also an indication that she had matured into a woman. Women were thought to support the family through gathering wild fruits such as shea nuts, harvesting of groundnuts and harvesting from farm residues which helped them earn income to augment their husband's earnings. However, such complementary activities also provided women with some level of independence to help them take care of the household, care for children and solve their own problems.

According to most of the youth we interviewed, the transitions from boyhood to manhood and from girlhood to womanhood were a part of a natural cycle associated with sexuality. The community marker of manhood was signalled by the boy taking a first wife and being able to take care of her by being strong enough to farm large plots of land. For girls to achieve womanhood, they needed evidence of their physical potential to have children along with social knowledge of how to be a "wife." A girl ready for marriage was someone who had begun her menstrual cycle, and demonstrated sufficient physical maturity to give birth. These embedded notions of adulthood shaped gendered interactions between male and female youth, parents and other community members since early marriage and childbearing were common.

The effects of even a little schooling?

Gender relations amongst youth have been affected by schooling, although its effects were hard to distinguish since many youth dropped out, others repeated years and schooling attendance was patchy. In the twelve families, young people had been taught little directly about adult gender relations at school: few young women remembered learning anything about menstruation or health. Nevertheless, schooling appears to have subtly affected young women's ability to make their own decisions, and to have their voices heard within the family. They often said that a major benefit of schooling for themselves and their families or community was that knowledge in general empowered them and enhanced their decision-making capacities, giving them more 'common sense'. They thought the understanding, wisdom and discipline they learnt were manifested in their ability to make decisions in life and to solve life problems. For example, male and female youth with secondary education claimed that literacy was a powerful instrument within the relations between the sexes. Literacy allowed them to write letters in secret, to hold relationships with the opposite sex without the surveillance of others, to communicate (for example a marriage proposal) without fear of disappointment since they did not have to show their feelings face-to-face. It helped them achieve more agency in the private sphere.

Several mothers noticed that becoming an adult was differently shaped if men and women communicated in a more open way. They admired educated couples who knew how to treat each other and supported each other in the upkeep of their family. They thought that education promoted better, more equitable and cordial relationships between men and women. This is a highly significant change where, as Mutala explains, women were barred from initiating any relationship with a man or the marriage process, they were expected to be silent in front of a man, and to respect and obey their husbands:

> …a woman's voice is not supposed to be heard. …. when it comes to …may be somebody picking a partner what happens is that they always expect the man to talk and the woman bowing down her head, signifying that she is shy, she can be a good wife and all that….., so once the woman talks …then they just see you to be a spoilt girl, a girl who will be a very troublesome person to the husband and all that (Mutala Baani, male, 30, university educated).

The local understanding of matrimony was that a man marries a woman and brings her to his house, and that a woman submits to her husband. Even if the woman is richer than the man, honour and respect for the husband is a social requirement. Schooling seems to have changed these private relations. The parents we interviewed said that young women were gaining some agency in finding a partner. All the mothers reported that they had had little choice when they married since their partners were chosen by their parents or foster parents. Some said they themselves were given out to marriage without any courtship – a tradition described as *gbai nti* (catch and give). In the past, older interviewees said, girls never showed their love for men openly. Nowadays, by contrast, some young women in the study had become pregnant and run away from their homes to stay with the father of the child. Although many parents were unhappy about this new phenomenon, they were having to accept girls' impatience when it came to marriage. Yet the balance of power remained in some respects. As one young woman said, a man would never accept a proposal from a woman because he would then be vulnerable to being 'turned out by her.' And as one young man commented, 'If a woman marries a man to her house, we'll terribly insult him' (Alawi Ali, 26, SHS).

The effects of schooling were also to be found in how a married couple communicated and negotiated their finances, related to one another, made decisions about the number and spacing of children, and gave each other support without quarrelling openly or insulting each other:

> Any man who has not gone to school knows nothing at all. After giving his woman maize, he expects food without giving chop money. Uneducated men don't buy clothing for wives unless there is a special occasion like death of wives, mother or father. (Leila Issahaku, mother, non-schooled)

This mother also argued that 'When there is a problem between educated women and their husbands, they know how to talk things over. They have learnt it from school' (Leila Issahaku, mother). Other parents also argued that educated men treated their wives well and educated women would know how to space their children so that they could take good care of them. Educated women's husbands were said to refund money their wives spent on food.

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The transition from girlfriend to wife was still understood through well-established moral frames. Seven of the ten young men spoke of the danger that a woman who does not conform to her husband's wishes could be branded 'as a woman of no character'. Her husband's family might exclude a woman who ignored this from her matrimonial home. Many young women were keenly aware that they should become 'responsible wives to their husbands and children'. However, the notion that a woman is meant for the kitchen appeared gradually to be changing among educated youth. Household activities such as cooking, collecting water and firewood, washing dishes, and sweeping were previously seen as solely female roles. Two young men (one with post-basic schooling and one with basic schooling) said they took part in these activities because they did not see any difference between the sexes. They complained that society discourages men from undertaking domestic tasks, and any man seen doing them would be teased. Schooling had taught them that both sexes can do the same tasks:

> Maybe the boy will sweep the yard but otherwise the woman does everything, when a girl comes from school she is expected to go for water and if it is time to cook she does it, if she still can't cook they will ask her to come and watch or fetch water for them or otherwise she is going to be involved in cooking till food is ready (laughs). After meals the girl will wash the dishes. If she is going to be free it is after 9 p.m. While the boys are stroking, the girls are suffering in the house. We have seen that the girls suffer too much. (Iliyasu Imoro, male, 28, basic schooled)

Paradoxically this shift in allocation of domestic tasks had a potentially greater impact on the more educated male youth than on the more educated girls, since when boys gained more independence domestically they could travel for work without a wife or mother to take care of them. As one of the young women put it, 'in our house, they are students so when they go to school they will not sit waiting for food, which nobody would cook.' (Suweba Wunpini, female, 18, basic schooled).

Adult gender roles appeared to become more interchangeable between men and women, particularly amongst those who had been educated past primary levels. The parents described how young women were expected to contribute more financially to the raising of the children, and family. One of the parents described this change positively, commenting, 'Women can now have their own farms because we are now in a monetary

economy. Originally it was not permissible for a woman to have her own farms. This is an improvement in our culture' (Yamusah Baani, father, no schooling).

In sum, Dagomba young men and women seemed to be shifting gender expectations, particularly in relation to the opposite sex when single, but also when married. At co-educational schools, where males and females relate freely with their classmates, new patterns of communication and gender relations are being established. From the JHS level, such relationships are mostly platonic and academic, assisting each other in assignments and class work. At the SHS level, relationships seemed to be more intimate, after puberty. Although the processes of individualisation were not easily reflected in our interviews with young women, they recognised the importance of shifting female choices, and the development of communication and agency. The micro-spaces opened up through literacy, sharing of gender prescribed activities, acquiring the social status of 'being schooled,' offered young women some limited opportunities to influence their sexual relationships and marriage. Schooled youth appeared to be able to better articulate their needs, and have their opinions respected. The opposition to these changes, however, should not be underestimated. The most highly educated parent in our sample argued: 'man has been made to lead. Women have several limitations; women are very partial, usually in favour of girls and their mothers' (Adaani N. Nuhu, father, university educated). Nevertheless, schooling is beginning to challenge the practice of gender roles, and some gender boundaries are weakening as a perhaps unintended result of formal education.

We turn now to the experiences of young married women in Northern India, another highly gender bounded rural society. Here we see even more deeply into personal and intimate spheres where young women find themselves living with the family of husbands they had not necessarily chosen for themselves.

In north India there are strong beliefs about marriage and the role of the young wife. Young women in north India usually have very low inputs into key decisions about each of the areas that are regarded as key to these transitions (Dyson & Moore, 1983, 45). As a girl enters puberty, her parents often become concerned with protecting her honour from any imputation that might reduce her marriageability (Mensch, Bruce, & Greene, 1998). Being married is an important watershed in a woman's life: she ceases to be a girl and becomes a

woman, normally moving to her husband's place of residence to live out her adult roles and responsibilities. Virtually all women in rural and urban north India are still married in their mid to late teens. In Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, over 50 per cent of women aged 20-24 in 2005-06 reported that they had been married under the legal minimum age of 18 (Government of India, 2007).

As in northern Ghana, within this domestic/housing transition were examples of the effects of schooling. In most of north India the first few years of a young woman's married life are usually spent sharing a common hearth with her mother-in-law. Women hope that motherhood will result fairly quickly after marriage: a woman who is not pregnant within two years or so after marriage will be under pressure to get medical or other advice for what is seen as 'her' problem. At marriage, women usually must leave paid employment outside the home and end their education. Thus the age at marriage and the decisions associated with marriage are key indicators of how women become adults. Focusing on marriage decisions provides a key means of understanding how domestic transitions to adulthood were being transformed. A young woman – especially one with more schooling than her mother-in-law – may be better able to use the 'weapons of the weak' (Scott, 1985) to influence complex and shifting decision-making patterns in their affinal households than to make outright challenges to the existing order.

Data were collected from two rural sites in India, one in Dewas, Madhya Pradesh [MP] and the other in Alwar, Rajasthan. The sites included areas where poor populations had some schooling to class 10 or above, available over the past 15 years or so. In each site a household census collected baseline data on household structures, schooling experiences, migration, ownership of a range of consumer goods, landholding and farm animals, and work patterns. Our research team interviewed 32 young women aged between 20 and 29 with at least one child under 6 years old, for whom issues of fertility and child health were current or recent concerns. Fourteen of these, from the relatively more privileged households within the poorer social groups, had at least 6 years of schooling. Of the remaining 18 women, only four had completed primary school (5 years). Evidence from Pratham (2007) and others suggests that in north India, fewer than 5 years of schooling provides little or no likelihood of literacy or numeracy skills that might remain until adulthood.

The young women were all too old to have benefited from the Government of India's 'Education for All' programme, but girls and boys had been expected to be schooled for 5 years, and where possible, for 8 years. The stories of the young women who ended up with less schooling than this were replete with accounts of poverty, of orphanhood, of disrupted childhoods through parents' divorce or separation, or the impacts of illness and a father's alcoholism. But even those with more stable family backgrounds might be forced to end their schooling because of the absence of a school at the next grade within or close to the village.

Below we consider two key aspects of transition to adulthood for these young women: first, how rural young women were involved in decisions about who and when to marry, and where to live thereafter, looking particularly at the differences between those with at least 6 years of schooling and those with less or none; and secondly, how these young women negotiated relations within the affinal (marital) home, especially with their mothers-in-law, who were powerful actors in family and household decisions.

Decisions around marriage: what difference does schooling make?

As in Northern Ghana, in rural Dewas and Alwar there is a general discourse that girls cannot influence whether or not they get married, when their marriage takes place, or to whom they will be married. A boy and girl should not meet and talk to each other, even in the presence of others, before elders decide on a marriage. It is unseemly for a girl to raise objections about the boy whom her parents have selected. Although the unschooled respondents had followed this pattern, they were aware that girls in towns, or who were educated for longer, might have the opportunity to see the man they were to marry. As Santosh (Dewas, 1-2 years of schooling, married at age 16) put it, 'If I was educated then I would have said that I will not marry now … I was illiterate … wherever mother-father says I should marry, there would be fine.' While there are some effects of even 8 years of schooling for rural young women, the tiny numbers of women in the sample with 10 or more years were much more able to influence the timing of their marriage and choice of partner. For example, Kripa said that she was not ready for marriage when her wedding was arranged, but 'In villages mother-father do not ask. And one feels so shy that one cannot tell anything in front of the parents' (Kripa, Dewas, 9th class, married at 15). But

the idea is also gaining ground that education should make a difference to how a woman is married:

> I do complain to my parents. This time [when I visited them] also I fought and came back. Since I got married, all my desires became useless. I told my mother that you are educated and even then you got me married early. Then the children were also born quite early. (Manju, Alwar, 10th class pass, married at 17)

Young women who had more say over when and whom to marry (and whether they could continue schooling up to the legal minimum age of marriage of 18) also had some scope to negotiate gender relations within the marital home.

Negotiating the Marital home

The domestic transition from wife to daughter-in-law represents an important space in which young women might find their voice. Schooling (if sufficiently lengthy) made subtle differences to gender relations – involving husbands, and mothers-in law. Most rural marriages in our sample were followed by a period – sometimes lasting for many years – when the new couple cohabited with the husband's parents. In this period, her mother-in-law was usually the most significant member of the new household for the younger woman. The two women spent many hours together, developing a division of labour. The older woman educated her daughter-in-law in cooking styles, religious ceremonies, or dress habits, and expected to have a major role in life events, such as how to treat children's illnesses, or where the younger woman would give birth. If the young couple resided separately from the husband's parents, such expectations were less strongly felt: indeed, if a young woman wanted to get more control over her day-to-day life, she may have incited a division of the household.

Most young women with little or no schooling had entered their affinal homes in their early teens. They took responsibilities in the house, and also worked for wages in the fields. They understood their roles very clearly. As Kamla (Dewas, no schooling, married at 12 years) said with disarming bluntness, 'My mother-in-law is greedy because I manage to do all the work. Today also she said "Kamla, do a lot of work!" ' Kamla worked as a labourer and also cooked and cleaned and looked after the children. Women like her were

aware that the household work would not be possible without them and their wages were also crucial – but they rarely controlled how the money was spent, because the mother-in-law or to the husband took control of such decisions. Thus young women with little schooling could rarely translate this potential power into substantive influence elsewhere in their lives. They were carefully insulated from monetary transactions, and even if money was in their hands, they still needed permission for spending even small amounts. On the whole, then, rural uneducated women spent extended periods living in joint households, where the wife could voice her own anxieties or concerns only with difficulty. They reported that their mothers-in-law and husbands took most decisions, and the women were not involved, at least openly.

The transition experiences of the better educated young women had similarities to that of their less educated peers, yet the impact of education on their relations to their husband and his parents was significant. As these more educated women settled down in their affinal households, they reported more negotiations involving their husband's parents, and their husband. In these households, young women were not the only ones with schooling, with the husband and occasionally his father educated at least until class 10; but the mothers-in-law were often illiterate. This gave the educated bride some sources of bargaining power. Nonetheless, more educated women disclaimed responsibility for any family disputes or the division of a joint household into nuclear units. Yet even after such a split, the husband's mother might play a major role in decisions. But more often, even if the wife had no direct control over money, she might regard her husband's earnings as available for her to spend. And educated women might be consulted when there was a need for numeracy and literacy tasks.

A major difference between these women and those with least schooling was the husband's role. For women with more schooling, the husband-wife relationship seemed different in subtle ways. They went to the markets together, they appeared to talk more often – about fertility matters, for example, or when the wife was upset about something in the house. Yet for most of these women, the mother-in-law remained ever-present in and around the household, whereas the husband was there briefly, and these young women had to negotiate their own space with her. Some of these more educated young women were willing to stay within the household walls and allow others to do all the outside jobs for them.

Most mothers-in-law in joint families seemed to be comfortably in control of their households, though some were rather dominating, sometimes unpleasantly so. But some mothers-in-law blended strictness and support, seeming to understand that, if their daughter-in-law had 8 or 10 years of schooling, this had a value in itself as well as by bringing future returns (such as contributions to helping with tutoring the young woman's own children).

One route to more agency in negotiating transitions for these women was somehow to move to live in town, either before or after marriage; but schooling is neither necessary nor sufficient for this to happen. One young uneducated woman living in urban Dewas had seen her husband before getting married: she had rejected several young men on sight alone, saying they were too dark. Two relatively well-educated women from a rural background, now living in a relatively poor urban neighbourhood, had been sent to town for schooling and lodged in a household with two sons. They chose the young men whom they married without parental involvement but the boys' mother then contacted the girls' natal family to explain the growing relationship and negotiate an acceptance.

In sum, evidence from the Northern Indian study also suggests that schooling is (albeit only slowly) contributing to transformations of male and female adulthood by promoting autonomous thought and behaviour. While the ages at marriage may be delayed by schooling, schooling is often still curtailed by the decision to get women married – a decision over which few of the prospective brides are able to exercise much influence themselves. For these women, the markers of marriage and a new home – with their mother-in-law first, and only later with their husband – were very rarely seen as impermanent and reversible: but employment – if it comes at all – is indeed unstable and often short-term. In this respect, however, in the job markets of north India, while schooling is a necessary element in acquiring a job with some security, it is by no means sufficient, and young educated women are as likely to be in insecure and poorly-paid jobs as their less-educated sisters.

Youth experience very different transitions to adulthood in different parts of the world. Within those different patterns, however, education can disturb, reshape and even reinvent

available transitions. Not only is the end of schooling itself a threshold which young people have to cross to become adults, but schooling - particularly for women - also delays marriage and first childbirth and helps reconstruct what adulthood means. Few poor young people move easily from schooling to formal employment; but many are moving into regularised sexual relationships, getting married, having children or establishing new homes. Educated young people in such rural communities may be 'actively fashioning new social orders' (de Waal 2002, 18-19), often through subtle, micro changes in gendered intergenerational relations.

As Ball et al. (2000, 144) point out 'the choreography of decision making within families is complicated'. They quote Brannen's (1996, 115) insight that 'The household domain, which is a key arena in which transition to adulthood takes place, has been ignored' (op.cit., 144). The extension and desequencing of youth transitions in the sphere of work and leisure in the global North have provided new spaces in which young people can develop different living styles and establish new types of identity that appear to be free from the constraints of previous generations (Furlong and Cartmel 2000, 70). Some of these new spaces have been found in the changes in the family, home and domesticity, suggesting that these too are 'arenas of action and centres of choice' (Ball et al. 2000,148). The home provides an affective space within which young people define themselves.

The impact of schooling on the home in our study suggests that far more research is needed on how young women in poverty contexts 'escape' (Ball et. al., 2000, 150) their normative biography. Transitions into family-building and marital roles in both sites were not risk free or easy, nor were successful transitions likely to be distributed in equal fashion. Similarly the effects of schooling on such transitions are complicated and highly dependent on the experience, the teaching and the use of schooling knowledge within patriarchal gender relations. For some, as we have seen, the experience of attending school is sufficient to dislodge conventional gender ideas; for others it provided youth with the confidence to start to forge a new identity as a woman, a wife or a mother. Our evidence suggests that schooling is creating spaces and opportunities for individual and family choices and opening up different gender pathways in the private sphere. Such micro-level shifts may or may not be significant publicly and politically, particularly for those policy-makers concerned about youth. The continuities in transitions are more obvious than the

disruptions, and change – when it comes – is almost always partial, hesitant and negotiated. At least for the north Indian young women we studied, it is hard to identify transitions that are 'fragile and reversible' (EGRIS, 2001, 104): for example, marriage is still largely seen as an irreversible step. In contrast, in the Ghanaian community we researched, schooling may bring changes in the relations between the sexes, albeit in a very controlled manner.[2] Such changes are subtle but noticeable by the older generation as well as the young people themselves.

Our paper highlights the importance of situating any discussion of educational impacts on transitions into adulthood and out of poverty within the framework of personal gender relations. Marriage, childrearing and male-female marital relations remain dominant both in rural Northern India and Ghana. These small-scale studies tentatively suggest that young women have started, whether subtly or defiantly, to claim their rights to earn a living and support their family and their rights to personal agency. They seem to want a form of 'volitional adolescence' where they have the rights to choose the nature and the timing of their transition to adulthood. Particularly for girls, secondary schooling may have subtle impact on shifts in social relations even if young women do not achieve social and economic independence but remain visible in highly surveyed and controlling environments.

Just as 'traditional' models of transitions that imply simple stages and linear, unidirectional steps (Furlong and Cartmel 2010) are now challenged in the global North, so too is there is a need to challenge Western assumptions and their interpretations of transitions in the global South. Transitions to adulthood have been seen, at least in many African contexts, as a 'cumulative process of social integration into family and community' that differed from the individualistic singular, linear and seemingly more stable transitions to adulthood that have dominated Western paradigms in the past (Nsamenang 2002, 63). The introduction of formal schooling may shift those transitions towards the more individualised independent-minded and autonomous patterns of the global North, complicating adolescence whilst at the same offering new freedoms in terms of relationships, affinities and new relational worlds. The voices of young people we interviewed suggest the importance of exploring the process of becoming adult, and the visible and subtle ways in which those newly educated might differ from their peers.

Acknowledgements

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[1] See Martine Corijn, http://www-les-lundis.ined.fr/Abstracts/martinecorijnEN.html
[2] Northern Ghana still has the fewest number of girl children attaining and completing upper primary school across Ghana. Fewer northern Dagomba girls reach junior high school and beyond compared to any other cohort in the country.