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## **Higher Education Pathways: South African Undergraduate Education and the Public Good**

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*Higher Education Pathways* is an interesting read for higher education practitioners and educational researchers, especially those interested in access and historians. This informative book offers the reader insight into higher education's transformative influence on people and society in a historically segregated system such as South Africa. Divided into three parts, the book begins with a historical context about the South African higher education and the damaging effects of apartheid, especially for Black and coloured students. Next, the authors provide understanding around access and institutional culture. Third, the authors discuss student experiences, outcomes and implications of the current system.

One of the most salient topics in this book is the pervasive inequality prevalent in South Africa. Readers will learn how inequality stemming from colonialism and apartheid impacts social life and education for South Africans. The book also covers the period when students were protesting South African higher education system with the movements – #RhodesMustFall (RMF) and #FeesMustFall (FMF).

Chapters 2 through 5 of *Higher Education Pathways* discusses the relationship between higher education, the state and society as well as funding. The authors detail the different policy timeframes emanating from

South Africa's democratic period and how it has shaped the political economy of public higher education. Additionally, these policies have created concerns regarding accessibility plus the relationship between higher education and the labor market in South Africa. Furthermore, the authors explore undergraduate education and the notion of "public good" as well as the relationship to social inequalities, poverty and educational outcomes. The authors discuss the overarching purposes higher education service and the societal contributions made by South African graduates from poor backgrounds.

In the second part of the book, chapters 6 details the different perspective South Africans have regarding accepting the cost of higher education based on positive future results. In Chapter 7, the authors compare issues pertaining to accessibility, availability and attainability in higher education systems across the continent and world. The authors review and compare higher educational systems in Finland, France, Senegal and Nigeria.

The authors in Chapter 8 use the Capability Approach as a framework for considering the kinds of educational experiences best for human well-being and fulfilment. Within this framework, the authors take a closer look at black students from rural and township areas and how they overcome hardships. The authors then review the data regarding how these students' educational experiences might potentially contribute to social transformation in society.

In chapters 9 through 11, the authors provide readers with a literature review synthesizing the ways students engage with South African education and form a sense of identity; connections between institutional culture and academic changes at universities; and student experiences. Within the review, the authors compare the literature to gauge whether existing theoretical assumptions within international works applies to South African education.

The third part of *Higher Education Pathways*, Chapters 12 and 13 examine issues of access. In Chapter 12, readers will explore how low-income students navigate their education without financial assistance. Also, readers will explore the student voices in the #FeesMustFall protest, a movement stemming from displeasure with access to South African higher universities.

Chapters 14 through 16 provide readers with data regarding curriculum structures and transformation intended to provide equitable education for students such as academic staff development and social experiences for students. The authors detail a drab experience, where students perceive the university as a place of personal struggle and campus life causes anxiety.

Offering a different perspective, chapters 17 through 20 cover the experiences of university graduates. In Chapter 17, the authors review literature including results from labor force surveys and graduate destinations studies, which reveals race persistently influences graduate employment.

In Chapter 18 and 19, the same authors take an in-depth look at two narrative studies regarding student experiences before and during their time

at the university. In Chapter 19, the authors compare the graduate employment trends in several sub-Saharan African countries.

Lastly, in Chapter 20, the authors focus on the graduate outcomes from engineering in South Africa and Brazil to gain understanding about how undergraduate education contributes to the public, or common, good of society.

In conclusion, *Higher Education Pathways* is a must-read for anyone interested the nuances of higher education, including disparities and systemic issues, institutional culture, inequality in access, student experiences, social movements and changes to curriculum. Although focused on South Africa, data from this book could be used to make a comparison to higher education in America, as there are many similarities such as unequal access and systemic issues worthy of discussion. A weakness of the book is a lack of detailed next steps for this research. The author provides a very general suggestion for remaining work needed around this subject, but not enough for a reader to effectively contribute to the field. Also, there are several references to education “transforming society,” but little specifics about what this really means. However, despite those minor weaknesses, *Higher Education Pathways* is a good-read.

### **Author bio**

**Kanika N Jackson** is a doctoral student studying Higher Education Administration at Morgan State University. She is also a Coordinator of Intercultural Engagement at the Community College of Baltimore County and an Adjunct Professor of Communication at the University of Baltimore and Towson University.