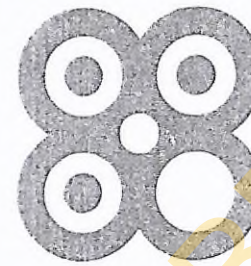




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Academic Freedom and Dual Career Academic Couples: The Complexities of Being a Woman Academic in the University Space

Chinyere Ukpokolo*

Abstract

This study focuses on dual career women academics in a higher education (HE) institution in Nigeria. It explores the experiences of some of these women academics and exposes the internal dynamics that characterize intra-group interactions in the academe. It subsequently raises the issue of equitable participation of men and women academics in HE institutions in Africa. It attempts to understand how the constructed identities of dual career women academics intersect with their interactions in the university space, and impact on their career experiences. Paying attention to the marital institution also, this study explores how these women's academic freedom can be undermined by the power play in this arena, bearing in mind their categorization. The study thus identifies the areas in which the autonomy and academic freedom of women academics in dual career marriages are possibly undermined. Ethnographic methods provided data for this study. The article concludes that the challenge of academic freedom demands more inward examination of the 'micro politics within' in order to incorporate the interests of all stakeholders within the intellectual community in the struggle for academic freedom and academic democracy in the continent of Africa.

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Résumé

Cette étude concerne les femmes universitaires au Nigeria. Elle explore l'expérience de ces femmes et expose les dynamiques internes qui caractérisent les interactions dans le monde académique. Ensuite, l'étude pose la question de la participation équitable entre les hommes et les femmes dans les institutions académiques en Afrique. Elle cherche à comprendre comment les identités construites des femmes enseignantes déterminent leurs interactions dans l'espace universitaire et comment elles influent sur leurs expériences de carrière. En tenant compte de l'institution maritale aussi, cette étude s'intéresse à la façon dont la liberté académique des femmes peut être compromise par les rapports de pouvoir dans cette arène à cause de leur catégorisation. Les données dans cette étude ont été collectées grâce à des méthodes ethnographiques. En conclusion, l'étude affirme que le défi de la liberté académique requiert une introspection sur la 'micro-politique interne' afin d'incorporer les intérêts de tout les acteurs de la communauté intellectuelle dans le combat pour la liberté et la démocratie académique dans le continent Africain.

Introduction

This article focuses on academic freedom and dual career women academics in a university in Nigeria, exposing the internal dynamics that characterize intra-group interaction in the academe. Higher education scholars have, increasingly, recognized the gendered nature of the university experience (see for instance Mbow 2000; Fashina 2000; Sall 2000; Chanana 2003; Odejide et al., 2006; Tamale and Oloka-Onyango 2000; Mama 2003; Morley 2003; and Pereira 2007). To these scholars, the university is not a gender-neutral environment. Rather, gender disparities within the larger civil society also permeate the university space and determine women's positioning. Although some of these studies focus on gender and academic freedom, a lot is still yet to be researched on this aspect of academic experience. As Sall (2000) suggested, there is the need to highlight specific aspects of academic life and issues related to academic freedom and human rights in the academe (Sall 2000:ix). Currently, much of the literature focusing on gender and academic freedom in Africa has under-represented dual career academic couples in their analyses. Studies like Mbow (2000) and Fashina (2000), for instance, highlighted certain areas in which women's academic freedom is violated within the university system in Senegal and Nigeria respectively. While Mbow used personal experience to interrogate the ways religious beliefs impact negatively on academic freedom, Fashina noted the sidelining of gender issues in the academe

as an 'unserious' issue and unworthy of scholarly attention (see also Tamale et al., 2000; Ouendji 2000).

Dual career academic couples, to a large extent, have remained virtually undocumented in the analysis of gender in the university space in Africa. Of particular interest are women in this category that constitute a segment of women academics that have received much attention in scholarship. This, however, does not rule out the peculiarity of their categorization; hence, the need to identify and separate the 'particular' from the 'universal'. Undeniably, dual-career women academics experience the university somewhat differently from other women academics. Their absence in the literature represents not only the undermining of the peculiar experiences of diverse categories of women academics but also a missing link in our comprehension of gender and academic freedom in Africa. Dual career women academics' experience of the university is multifaceted and complex, which calls for the investigation of these complexities in order to identify peculiar challenges that confront them and that, possibly, undermine their autonomy and academic freedom in a way unfamiliar to other women academics. Paying attention to the socio-cultural context of work, this study attempts to understand how the dual career women academics' constructed identities intersect with their participation in the university space, and impact on their career experiences. Obviously, a study of how the socio-cultural context of work impacts on the career experience of workers is necessary in the discourse on HE institutions in Africa.

In the recent past, scholars have drawn attention to the nature of the institutional or organizational cultures in the universities in Africa and their impact on students and academics (see Works like Diaw 2007; Tsikata 2007; Odejide 2007). Like other studies, dual career women academics (henceforth DCWAs) are not within the orbit of these attempts. Focusing on the marital institution also, this study explores how the DCWAs' academic freedom and autonomy can be undermined by the power play in this arena, bearing in mind their peculiar categorization. Finally, the study investigates the strategies women academics employ to contest space. This article concludes that the challenge of academic freedom still demands more inward examination of the 'micro politics within' in order to incorporate the interests of all stakeholders within the intellectual community in the struggle for academic freedom and academic democracy in the continent of Africa.

Research Design and Methodology

For the sake of anonymity, our university of study is termed First Generation University (FGU).¹ The choice of a FGU as the site for this study is informed by two but similar reasons. First, the conservative nature, particularly in its gender ideologies at the informal socio-cultural context of the university, makes

the institution suitable for a study of this nature. Second, as an institution that at its establishment was predominantly male-centric in terms of both student enrolment and academic staff recruitment, the culture of the university environment has continued to be predominantly androcentric. This study adopts a symbolic interactionist perspective, since the focus is on the socio-cultural context of work in the academe. In such a study, Hodson et al. (2002) observed, the focus is not only to explain the work experience from the worker's perspective, but also to describe and explain larger patterns that may be invisible to individual workers (Hodson et al. 2002:35).

The study draws on primary data gathered through ethnographic methods such as key informant interviews (KIIs), participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and career histories. Secondary materials were also consulted. A total of 30 informants were interviewed – 20 dual career women academics; and two retired dual career female professors, which offered the researcher the opportunity to ascertain how social and historical realities have possibly impacted on dual career women academics' experience of the university; and eight men academics out of which six are dual career men academics. These choices were made in order to gain insights into the possible reasons why some men restrain their wives' careers. The data were analyzed using content and interpretive analyses.

Academic Freedom and the Socio-cultural Context of the Academe

The university as an institution of higher learning has its peculiar cultural system, though the culture of the larger civil society on which the university is established impacts significantly on the culture of the university. As Diaw (2007) also noted, the university is not a carrier of a completely neutral knowledge, but houses men and women who are themselves products of diverse cultures and particular memories 'which lead them to define their identity, to create relationships, to break or consolidate prejudices, and transact so as to acquire power or exclude others' (Diaw 2007:17). Nevertheless, the university world is on the one hand particular, and on the other universal. Within these particularities and universalities, gender ideology remains a reality in the life and practices.

By and large, women in HE institutions in Africa have remained an 'endangered species' in the university space. The situation is such that women, as late comers into the system, continue to occupy marginal positions both in access and decision making (Mama 2003; Chanana 2003; Odejide 2003; Odejide et al. 2006; Morley 2003; Morley et al. 2005; Otunga et al. 2004; Pereira 2007). Indeed, the Victorian notion of the woman has affected, and continues to affect, the definition of the woman in the academe. The socio-cultural landscape of the university has, therefore, remained largely patriarchal. Invariably,

women academics confront socio-cultural impediments in their bid to pursue careers in academia. Access to leadership positions has not only been demarcated by a 'glass ceiling' – and coated with a sticky floor – but also demarcated with Plexiglas (Quina et al. 1998; Terosky et al. 2008). Not only has women's academic freedom and autonomy been undermined in various ways, particularly through social and cultural constructs, but the violations have also continued to be the accepted norm, and any attempt by an individual or group of individuals to question such infringements is viewed as non-conforming, with the prejudices and stereotypical attitudes associated with such labelling.

Indeed, women's class condition in contemporary African society is largely a product of colonial contact and the capitalist ideologies that are associated with colonialism, which has dichotomized human society, and man and woman relationships are segregated between the 'self' and the 'other', where the 'self', the man, remains the basis of measurement and categorization. The male hegemonic hold on social and cultural capital, which is the means of intellectual production (Ukpokolo 2009), and the ideological support which they enjoy in contemporary society, has continued to militate against the woman. Most first generation universities in Nigeria are founded and rooted on this gender relationship that is based on binary opposition, particularly with regard to decision-making, access to and control of space as resource for power in the academe. Within the university space, the woman academic is expected to conform to a particular way of 'being' that depicts this conventionality. The dual career woman academic in particular is faced with dual challenges (i) the presence of her partner in the same environment puts much burden on her to ensure conformity, and (ii) the tensions between her 'real self' and her 'acceptable self' limits her ability to contribute her utmost in the academe. In this way, there is a challenge to academic freedom and the autonomy needed for intellectual productivity and career advancement.

Since the 1990s, the subject of academic freedom has increasingly become topical on issues concerning the university, its administration, curricula development, autonomy of knowledge production and vast areas that affect the university and the stakeholders in the system. In many African countries, the state's undue influence in academia through the neo-liberal policies that have continued to sweep through the global market economy has had a negative impact on political and economic realities in African continent, with detrimental impacts on the university. Indeed, some of the offshoots of governments' unpopular policies such as structural adjustment programmes and the neo-liberal policies have encroached on the freedom of the university, researchers, and students, either overtly or covertly. Academic freedom, as defined by *The Kampala Declaration* as 'the freedom of members of the academic community, individually or collectively, in the pursuit, development and transmission

of knowledge, through research, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation, teaching, lecturing and writing' (*The Kampala Declaration* 1990), encompasses multiplicities of issues, one of which is the 'women question'. Although gender was neglected in *The Kampala Declaration* document, academic freedom cannot be discussed exhaustively without the inclusion of gender.

In any case, one of the tenets of academic freedom and social responsibility in *The Kampala Declaration* 1990 is the demand for freedom of the universities to develop and pursue programmes without undue interference and dictates from the corridors of power outside the university system. As the document further noted, academic freedom also implies the liberty to carry out research activities without unwarranted restrictions from any quarter. For this reason, *The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility* sets up a standard bearer 'for the African intellectual community to assert its autonomy and undertake its responsibility to the people of our continent' (*The Kampala Declaration* 1990). Issues thrust up by *The Kampala Declaration* are vast and multiple and affect the system and the stakeholders in the system in varied ways, raising meanings and counter-meanings that must be continuously interrogated. As a concept, embedded in much contradictions and loaded with numerous social, political and cultural dynamics and at times invoking contradictory dimensions, it continues to evolve, leading to its expansive and eclectic nature (Radhakrishan 2008:185). One of the issues embedded in these contradictions is gender in the university space.

Dual Career Academic Couples in an FGU

The term 'dual career couple' was coined by two European academics in 1969 and since then, the term has been widely used and popularized by scholars from various disciplines (see Rusconi 2002). 'Dual career couple' indicates partners who pursue an occupational career characterized by high professional standards, a high degree of commitment and a developmental sequence (Rusconi 2002:2). Married partners can become dual career couples through three methods of hiring: (i) dual hiring when the partners are hired at the same time either sequentially or jointly (ii) independent hiring, when each of the partners responded to separate advertisements without any reference to the partner, and (iii) solo hiring, when each was hired independently and probably at different times (Schiebinger et al. 2008). Although there is a paucity of literature on dual career academic couples in Africa, in America and Europe, issues about academic couples are widely discussed in the literature. Among the research on dual career couples in the United States and Europe are those that focus on institutional policies on dual career hiring, tenure track issue, and challenges of dual career choice (see Bird and Bird 1987). In Schiebinger et al.

(2008) the authors observed that in the US, the hiring of academic couples moved from three per cent in the 1970s to 13 per cent since 2000, and this reflects the interest organizations have developed in dual hiring. To this extent, plans such as spousal hiring programmes and joint-appointment are some of the efforts a number of institutions in Europe and America make to accommodate dual career couples (Rusconi 2002). Increasingly, more and more couples are getting into the work force. The implication is that in no distant future, dual career couple issues will become significantly relevant globally as institutions attempt to recruit new staff to fill their vacant positions.

The FGU, currently, does not have any official policy on dual hiring. Also, the institution's academic planning unit does not have official records of the number of dual career academic couples at the university. This reflects the fact that the issue of dual hiring has not gained official acknowledgement at the university. Evidence from my fieldwork indicates that not less than 80 dual career academic couples,² scattered across different disciplines, currently work in FGU. In Medicine, there are more cases of disciplinary endogamy than in other disciplines. Findings also indicate that the majority of the dual career academic couples in the institution were hired independently. However, in some cases, one of the partners hired first, usually the man, may have an indirect influence on the appointment of the partner, by possibly passing information to the spouse of an advertisement in the university official bulletin. A colleague once commented on such influence as 'the husband brought her in'. In other words, the husband probably influenced the appointment of the wife. This, of course, is an assumption. Although such an assumption is neither a common trend nor an official position, when it occurs the partner must still merit the position she applies for, be subjected to recruitment interviews with other applicants, and must prove that she is the best candidate for the position she wishes to occupy. Otherwise, she may not be recruited.

Some scholars have argued that men assist their partners in getting jobs more than women do. In their research, Schiebinger et al. (2008) for instance, conclude that 'men more than women have used their market power to bargain for positions for their partners' (Schiebinger et al. 2008:16). One of the reasons that could account for this feature is the patrilocal residential pattern in most cultures that demands that the woman joins her husband after marriage. This gives the man the responsibility of negotiating for position for the relocating wife. Another factor is the global problem of gender discrimination in the work place that affects the recruitment of staff. More often than not, the recruitment panel is dominated by men, which could have implications for hiring. The 'glass ceiling' and the 'plexiglas' issues mentioned earlier restrict many women from getting to the top in the work place, hence denying them

the opportunity of being key players in decision making. These can work against women and affect their ability to bargain for positions for their partners.

Because a temporary appointment is not the procedure for staff recruitment in FGU, positions are advertised both in the university official bulletin and in the national dailies. This contrasts with Willot's (2009) observation of the University of South Eastern Nigeria (USEN) where he noted that informality characterizes academic appointments. According to him:

Very often an individual – sometimes a postgraduate or ex-student or non-academic member of staff – will be contacted by an academic because there is a vacancy in their department. If the person is qualified and influential people within the department are happy for them to join, they will enter the university. To get around administrative procedures related to advertisements and interviews, new academics will often receive temporary appointments initially, which are 'regularized' later. There is a general belief that recruitment is now much more based on connections than previously, a change that began during the financial crisis and subsequent era of austerity and structural adjustment during the 1980s (Willot 2009:10).

Since unlike USEN, the temporary appointment method is not the practice in FGU, it reduces the possibility that one's spouse will be recruited on the basis that the husband is already in the system.

Often, because of the huge resources required to run the university, and lean subventions from the federal government to the educational sector, the institution tends to recruit staff of lower ranks ranging from lecturer grade downwards despite the fact that such an applicant may have a PhD and publications, or even occupy a higher or equivalent position in the university where he or she is relocating from. This is unlike what obtains in many other universities in Nigeria where such an applicant could bargain for a higher position. Based on this and other related reasons, there is the assumption that career mobility is faster in other universities in the country than in FGU. The reason for the institution's mode of recruitment cannot be unconnected to the fact that FGU has in its employment a pool of academic staff occupying professorial rank (predominantly men)³ that could function as mentors to the younger academics. Thus, hiring high ranked academics may amount to wastage of lean resources. Once recruited, the individual's success depends mainly on his or her ability to publish in respectable journals and follow the university's procedures regarding the number of publications for promotion to relevant positions.

A number of problems may emerge when couples do the same kind of job, pursue the same career, foster the same aspirations, and interact within the same work space. Issues such as resource utilization, career track issues,

competition, and career geographical mobility are part of the major issues that dual career couples contend with, and if not properly handled could lead to frustration, career instability and, at times, crisis in their marriage. Currently in FGU, most DCWAs entered the academic profession as married women, which suggest that either they met their partners while at the university and the men were already holding teaching positions, gained some social and career grounds before the women qualified for positions as academic staff. Or, even though they were already married before the men got recruited in FGU, the women were not qualified to be recruited as academic staff. For some others, they were qualified at the time but there were no recruitment opportunities in their fields. For these categories of dual career academic couples, there already exists a gap between the men and the women. Of course, there are also some who started their careers together, but over time, the husbands took the lead. Child bearing and certain cultural dynamics are contributory factors to the emergence and sustenance of a gap between couples in dual career marriages, with women in the 'trailing' position. Evidence also suggests that the majority of the dual career couples in our institution of study are in disciplinary exogamy.

Dual career couple can have certain advantages as a result of the kind of partnership they enjoy by being in the same profession, particularly if their partnership is that of academic endogamy. However, partners who do not work in the same department may still be in related fields that could engender collaborative research. In such situations, they can partner in publications and assist each other in accessing materials and even generate a pool of related library materials from which each can benefit. Hence, a dual career couple who share the same career line can benefit immensely from each other. As a respondent noted, 'when your husband is a lecturer too, he helps you to network within the university' (Fieldwork 2009). In their study of dual career academic couples in the US, Schiebinger et al. (2008) concluded that:

Partners share intellectual interests and discuss their academic work with each other. Sharing professional networks stands out as perhaps the greatest career gain for academic couples compared with other couple types (Schiebinger et al. 2008:37, 39).

They also observed that in the academia 'where power and privilege still often divide along gendered and racial lines, access to multiple circles of knowledge and influence can potentially boost careers' (Schiebinger et al. 2008:39). However, my research findings suggest that such a conclusion applies where the play of power in the home front does not interfere with career aspirations or where there is no evidence of competition between the partners.

Complex and Multifaceted Identities: Dual Career Woman Academic in the University Space

The dual career woman academic in FGU faces diverse challenges like other women academics in universities in Nigeria. Challenges such as career disruption, lack of institutional networks, detrimental impacts of the 'double shift', and limited geographical career mobility are features of women's career experiences in the academe (see Ukpokolo 2009). However, there are certain intra-group dynamics that mark the experiences of the DCWAs that may be unfamiliar to other women academics. The intersections of their peculiar categorization with their participation in the university space, coupled with the 'micro-politics' in the marital institution impact on their academic freedom and careers, and make their experiences complex. This section explores these dynamics and how the DCWAs contest space.

Negotiating the Public Space

The university space, both formal and informal, constitutes an arena for self-definition. Apart from creating an identity in one's chosen field, the social arena significantly accentuates self-identity and can impact considerably on one's intellectual productivity through the networks such encounters generate. As Bagilhole noted, informal networks 'bring mutual career benefits through collaborations; information exchange, contacts for research resources, career planning, professional support and encouragement' (Bagilhole 2007:25), and can be relevant in promotion decisions. Academics, generally, negotiate the university space, establishing alliances and professional contacts. Self-definition leads to categorization. Whether one is located at the 'centre' or 'periphery' depends on what one makes of the space, how one is defined within the space, and the meanings and significance implicated in these dimensions. The peculiarity of the experiences of the DCWA borders on the social meanings and counter-meanings ascribed to her categorization in FGU. As Stets et al. noted, societal meanings and norms about social categories 'serve to guide behaviour (2002:145). The DCWA is conscious of the presence of her partner as an academic in the system, and this influences her interactions in the university community. Being aware of the gendered attitudes that characterize informal institutional culture, the DCWA masks the 'self' in order to sustain the social image her husband has constructed and is still constructing in the university community. This portrait of the 'self' as the 'other', is acceptable and ideally suitable for the social category that controls power and still seeks to control more power. The DCWA knows that failure to recognize the gendered power play in the social arena could generate negative stereotypes, such as labelling, from those with whom she interacts in the community. Such label-

ling portrays the DCWA as a 'deviant' from the values and norms of the prescribed sociality within the university community.

In her negotiation of space, the DCWA discovers that her role is daunting and tasking. As Roper-Huilman (2008) rightly submitted:

Negotiation of multiple identities, particularly by people who have multiple non-dominant identities, exacts a painful toll on those doing the negotiating. This toll takes time and energy away from women faculty members' abilities to contribute their scholarly expertise in ways that would benefit the institution and the larger society (Ropers-Huilman 2008:36).

The 'self' of a DCWA is, therefore, a multifaceted self: in her interactions, whether with students, colleagues or her contribution to issues in the university community, she is conscious of her complex identities which affect her performances, including her scholarly contributions. She contends between self representation as an academic and 'mutedness'. In situations where she discovers painfully that she cannot manifest the 'ascribed' identity creditably, she withdraws and remains silent, compromising her individuality for societal acceptability. To avoid losing favour in the social space, it pays off to remain less visible in the public space, or else be labelled. Findings indicate that many of the DCWAs that 'dared' to conduct themselves contrary to the 'prescribed' rules of sociality in the past were labelled and, at times categorized. Typically, in such a socially 'segregated' society, consciously or unconsciously, people do not want to be categorized into a 'group' or identified as part of a non-dominant group. According to a retired DCWA (professor), 'Some men tried to discourage their wives from associating with some of us that were vocal then. They said we were untameable' (Fieldwork 2010). 'Untameable' connotes 'uncultured', 'untrained', 'unrefined', or a 'lack of social decorum'. A male academic reasoned:

Even when a man is not concerned about the actions of the wife, other men outside will interfere saying, 'Can't you check your wife?'... These people will not want the 'virus' that has infected their colleague's wife to infect their own women too. And the husband may reprimand her. This can make the woman to become passive (Fieldwork 2010).

In this way, male colleagues collude in the subordination of their colleagues' wives. Such collusion has the implication of check-mating the willingness of DCWA to actively participate in the Senate, for instance, or be vocal in the university community generally. Hence, places of decision-making such as the Senate may be avoided by some DCWAs. For instance, a Senior Lecturer noted that because her husband is a professor in FGU, she finds it uncomfortable attending the Senate meetings because as she noted:

My husband is always at the Senate meetings and he is widely known on campus ... If I get to the Senate and I need to contribute and my husband holds contrary opinion, what do I do? Unless if I get there I will keep quiet ... You see what I mean? (Fieldwork 2010).

Findings indicate that most of the DCWAs that attend such gatherings are 'observers'. According to one of the retired professors, she once asked a DCWA why she never spoke at the Senate meetings, and she responded: 'When the big elephant has spoken, the baby elephant keeps quiet', implying that there was no need for her to speak after the husband had spoken in the meeting. This raises the question of autonomy and personal identity of the DCWA. How does she contend with her social identity as an academic within the university community? A male academic hinted:

The idea is that this is supposed to be a male gathering ... even with all our learning, with all our education, our exposure ... In this university, men still want to feel that it is a man's world. I'm not saying that it is right, but that is the reality on ground (Fieldwork 2010).

The perception that women ought to be silent in the public space affects DCWA's interaction pattern and their ability to participate maximally in the intellectual community. The public versus private divide is, thus, exemplified in the opposing interaction patterns among many dual career couples. While many DCWAs live private, controlled and protected social life, most men explore the public domain, which further gives them some leverage and opportunities to make further contacts and establish alliances that could enhance their career opportunities.

Undeniably, a major issue that shapes and re-enforces DCWAs' interactions in FGU community is sense of shame. According to a male lecturer:

At times, they [DCWAs] try to protect the image of their husbands, so that when they [the husbands] get to the staff club or any place, other men will not say 'aa.aaaa.aah your wife has done it again today ... she disturbed the whole of the Senate' (Fieldwork 2010).

Rather than 'make a mistake', the DCWA withdraws and remains docile, sustaining the gendered ideologies pervading the university community. Although officially there is no formal segregation between men and women interactions, stereotypical attitude and unofficial gendered discrimination affect women's participation in both formal and informal spaces. DCWAs are very conscious of the social meanings or stigmatization which 'unacceptable' conduct in the university community could generate. Hence, the tendency to remain less visible in the space.

Apart from the formal spaces, informal spaces such as the university staff club have continued to be predominantly the men's preserve, particularly with regards to the participation of DCWAs. Although a few women academics whose husbands do not work in the system occasionally visit the staff club, most DCWAs tend to avoid the arena, except a few that occasionally go there in the company of their husbands. A male academic who is also an emerging scholar gave the reason why the wife accompanied him regularly to the staff club:

I take my wife to the staff club to give her exposure. I know it is not common for women to be there but I want her to feel confident in any environment (Fieldwork 2010).

Attitudinal barriers constitute a challenge to many women's participation in both formal and informal spaces in HEIs, causing many to lose self confidence or become apathetic. There is therefore the need to confront and break through these barriers. In FGU, there is no institutional policy legislating against women's participation in any space, or affirmative action in place to encourage their participation. Women's absence in certain spaces is simply a matter of 'tradition', apparently passed on from 'generation to generation'. A DCWA elaborated:

Check the people that go to the university staff club. You can hardly see a dual career woman academic there except she goes with her husband. Few women academics that go there don't have their husbands in this system. You know, you are so careful not to hurt your husband's social image. As a result, you live more isolated and withdrawn life than other women academics (Fieldwork 2010).

Most DCWAs, as members of the university community, contribute in sustaining the social status quo by 'playing according to the rules'. Hence, both the staff club and the Senate as male spaces reinforce and sustain men's hegemonic control of space as a resource for power. Invariably, social exclusion creates a space for the dominant group to continue to consolidate their hegemony. Findings from the retired DCWA indicate that at the earlier periods in the history of the institution, many DCWAs were able to engage in the 'struggle' for the control of public space through their active participation in the life of the institution, particularly at the Senate, (but not staff club). A retired dual career female professor observed that the presence of expatriates somehow affected women's interactions at the time: seminars, tea parties organized by academics were opportunities for men and women academics to interact, including dual career couples. Nevertheless, she noted that cultural notions of the place

of the woman in private space were also widely prevalent, as some of them were labelled for being vocal in the community.

Findings also indicate that there is the tendency to ascribe the success of DCWAs to their husbands, which informants believe, in a way, reflects the perception in the society that women are incapable of rational inquiry. An informant commented:

People believe that it is the man that assists the woman even when they are not in the same field. The woman's success or achievement is ascribed to the man. They believe you are riding on your husband's back, no matter how intelligent you are as a scholar (Fieldwork 2010).

An informant cited an example of a research grant award which she received (the first and the only person in her faculty then) and her male colleagues concluded that it was her husband that wrote the proposal. A retired DCWA reported that in their time, when one was promoted, colleagues congratulated the husband, 'for giving the woman the support'. According to her, the male colleagues would say to the husband: 'Of course, we must thank you. If you did not give her support she wouldn't have gone so far'. When you get promotion, they thank him ... Even when the man is not supportive, the woman gives the impression that he is (Fieldwork 2010). Experiences of many DCWAs in this study also revealed the tendency for people to treat the DCWA as extensions of their husbands, which at times can violate the right of the DCWA. As a female informant reasoned:

People could use your husband as template and begin to create problems for you. If the man is well known or does not have good character, they will use that to associate you. The way they see the man is the way they see you, and this has implications (Fieldwork 2010).

For dual career couples in academic endogamy, the partner's position as the head of unit or department can limit the benefits the partner could obtain from it. For instance, if there is a vacant position in a unit and the wife shows interest, the partner may not be positively disposed to recruiting her to avoid being stereotyped as biased. 'You are defined with him. So, his hands are tied' (Fieldwork 2010). Because wives are treated as extensions of their husbands, many informants also noted that DCWAs are less likely to gain certain choice appointments if their husbands are already occupying similar positions in the institution. A retired DCWA stated:

There was a time my husband was in the Council and I wanted to be in the Council and people were surprised that my husband was there and I was interested. 'Is it for their family?' they were asking (Fieldwork 2010).

Of course, she lost in the election to the Council. Although linking the DCWA with the spouse has some benefits, the human rights of the woman are jeopardized through negative attitudinal dispositions and denials of rewards, particularly where her partner's position and rewards are substitutes for her rights.

The Marital Institution and Dual Career Woman's Academic Freedom

The power play within the marital institution can be a major constraint to DCWAs' careers. Collaboration is possible 'when the man is on top', an informant observed. Even when there is no competition between partners in a dual career marriage, colleagues could induce such an attitude by discussing their individual outputs. This can raise tension and create a crisis at home and subsequently spill over to affect the woman's career. Some informants reported that instances of an 'embargo' on international conference attendance are prevalent in some homes. This points to the reality of restraining the woman's career, and depicts the undermining of DCWAs' academic freedom. Others pointed to a 'financial squeeze' as another mechanism some husbands employ to control their wives' career advancement. Competition between spouses in the academia is rarely obvious to outsiders. Often, the man's leadership position in the family seems to be threatened when the woman takes the lead because of the 'relays of power' (Morley 2003) that are culturally defined and institutionalized in the family structure. For this reason, the woman academic in a dual career marriage may 'slow down' her career aspirations to ensure that there is a career gap between her and her spouse in what an informant termed 'voluntary step down when she gets the heat' (Fieldwork 2010). An informant hinted:

The core value that men should take the lead is still much present with the academics. So, it makes the woman uncomfortable to be on the lead (Fieldwork 2010).

Another informant asked an instructive question: 'How do you address a couple "Dr" and "Prof" so and so in an academic environment when the man is still a Senior Lecturer and the woman is already a professor? A.a.aaaaaaah You see? It is abnormal' (Fieldwork 2010). An informant said that she got her PhD few months before her husband but maintained that she must not be called 'Dr' till later, though according to her, her husband was not against her being addressed by the title. Obviously, salient social and profound cultural inhibitions may be contributory factors to women academics' 'trailing' positions in dual career marriages in the academe. A retired DCWA stated: 'To a large extent, the man made more progress in dual career marriages. If you catch up with him, it shows he is not working' (Fieldwork 2010).

Findings also indicate that spouses in academic profession do not have equal access to career opportunities. Husbands tend to benefit more in career

mobility than wives. An informant commented that because the husband is an academic, when he has access to information that may be of benefit to her, he forwards it to her mail box. However, she noted that it does not mean that she has his express permission to utilize such information. For such husbands she hinted:

They [the husbands] mean well but they want you to look at it in the context of your responsibility at home as a wife. If, for instance, he forwards issues on scholarships and fellowships, I know he simply wants me to be aware of it and not that I could go away from home for three months or a year. So, it is not practical. The issue of career mobility, you see. Culture impacts on women's careers (Fieldwork 2010).

The implication is that unequal distribution of household responsibilities hinders many women from achieving professional fulfilment. Again, a supportive husband in a dual career marriage may not necessarily allow role overlap. A DCWA noted:

Most of the time it is the man that is ahead ... So many restrictions on publishing and travelling affect women's career (Fieldwork 2010).

Evidently, men often resort to 'traditional' gender-role patterns in taking family decisions concerning the woman's career. Consequently, many women are denied those opportunities that can enhance their careers as they lack autonomy in career decisions. Many female informants also noted their inability to avail themselves of the opportunity offered by sabbatical leave to gain exposure like their spouses as a result of their roles as mother and wife. Performance of these identities and their cultural definitions conflicts with their identity as academics and impact negatively on their careers. Another DCWA related her recent experience:

I was to attend an academic engagement in another state, for which I had been planning for about three weeks. And suddenly my husband came back and told me he had been invited to a programme outside the country ... There was no need to even discuss my earlier plans ... He is gone (Fieldwork 2010).

The question then is: Which of the partners privileges his or her career in dual career marriages and why? From my research, most of my informants (both men and women) noted that the husband's career takes priority over the wife's. This corroborates the findings of Schiebinger (2008) where 68 per cent of the male survey respondents reported that they consider their own careers more important than those of their partners (see Schiebinger 2008:35). In my research, only 18 per cent of my female respondents stated that their husbands gave equal priority to both careers. Interestingly, these respondents are made

up of retirees and few emerging scholars. Incidentally, for the retirees, their husbands shared the same perspectives with them as they were both vocal in the university community when they were in the institution. When asked why most men give priority to their careers, most of my male informants stated that because they contribute more to the family income, their careers should take precedence, though they also affirmed that they would not want their wives to earn more than they do. A male informant reasoned that economic power helps men to create male hegemony, hence the need to reduce the woman's economic power and sustain the man's.

A DCWA noted that there are homes where DCWAs cannot use their money to pay for journals because they do not have power over their income and not because they cannot afford it, and this affects their productivity. A male academic also reasoned:

Maybe there is a fear; there is this men ego ... 'I want to be the head; I don't want my wife to be above me' ... No man wants to be under a woman ... The fear could be there. Men want to be the major bread winners to feel secured at home. Our culture and our religion seem to support this ... Maybe the fear is unfounded, but the fear is there nonetheless. I have seen men who would deliberately frustrate the woman ... because of the fear in them (Fieldwork 2010).

Economic power reinforces social power, and this could be a source of threat to many men's sense of security and control when their wives become major income earners. Men and women are enmeshed in social and cultural practices that have become part of their lives. Women's attempts to think or act otherwise could create problems in their marriages. Surprisingly, most of the female informants asserted that they give support to their husbands to achieve their career ambition, unlike most men. The position of the wife on the career ladder, more often than not, determines the attitude of the husband. The husband who has reached the peak of his career ladder (professorial position) may be more positively disposed to the wife's career aspirations, or where there exists a wide gap between the husband's position and that of the wife, with the man occupying the higher position. Even then, family decisions on career issues do not follow a gender-neutral pattern.

Findings also reveal that religious circles, where most men and women academics participate, contribute to women's limited agency in university public life. In recent decades, with the spread of Pentecostalism, church denominations are planted in many locations both within and around FGU. Women are admonished to be submissive in these churches. Submission includes exhibition of restraints in challenging constituted authority whether in the public space or on the home front. Women academics seem to be conforming to this mode of behaviour. Exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of female

students in a Nigerian university, Odejide (2007), for instance, noted the obvious gendered hierarchy that is pervasive in both the university's student religious fellowships and student politics, which she observed is characterized by a gendered hierarchy popularly attributed to traditions that the female and male students have internalized. Findings from the current research have not differed significantly. In both Christian and Islamic religious gatherings, women are expected to be self-effacing. Mainstream leadership positions in many orthodox churches are men's preserve. This situation, in recent times, is coming under criticism. In Sowunmi (2009), the author documented Biblical evidence that support women's inclusion in the Holy Order, and objected to the use of the Bible by some to justify women's exclusion. She further argued that women's exclusion in many church denominations globally is based on sexism, a practice, she noted, that lacks Biblical backing under close scrutiny. An informant noted that women's absence in the mainstream church leadership could, possibly, affect the kind of issues that are viewed as relevant of teaching in many churches. Issues such as family life and work that may address women's 'double shift' and women's career challenges may not be reflected in popular church teachings – a situation which some believe could change if women are allowed into mainstream church leadership.

In any case, DCWAs in consonance with other women academics have devised means of managing the complex socio-cultural reality of their career lives. The next section addresses the strategies women employ to negotiate the university space and the extent to which they have succeeded.

Contesting Space and Forging through the 'Plexiglas'

Despite the challenging social and cultural impediments confronting dual career women academics in FGU, some women academics at different historical periods of FGU devised diverse approaches in attempts to bring women's voices into the university public space. Some of the first sets of DCWAs (now retirees) employed the strategy of coalition building. An informant reported that, at the Senate, they constituted themselves into a group of four academics, an informal group, as a strategy to make their voices count and to challenge issues raised. Through the agency of some of these women at that time, women's voices were not totally silenced in the community. One of them submitted that though most men colleagues were not comfortable with women speaking in the public, members of the group, to a large extent, enjoyed their husbands' support as they were also vocal in the university community. This gave them the encouragement to forge ahead. Coalition building provided them a mechanism to contend, contest and navigate the space despite the cultural constructions that undermine women's voices, albeit some suffered stigmatization.

Larger women groups outside the campus were also useful. Informants mentioned such groups as Women in Nigeria (WIN), the National Association of Women Academics (NAWACS), the Women's Research Centres, among others, as 'providing viable instruments for the articulation of women academics' voices, and a platform for discussions and debates on gender issues. Although the 'group of four' in the Senate no longer exists, others have continued to be useful. Diverse issues, ranging from 'sexual harassment', 'gender equity and development', to 'women in higher education', and so on, are some of the issues that have been discussed on such platforms in recent times. In such programmes, principal officers of the university such as the Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and the Dean of Students are key invitees. Women believe that, over time, legislation against these socio-cultural constructs that continue to hinder both the participation of female students and all categories of women academics will find a way into the university policy. Also, scholarly publications have provided women academics with vehicular means of contesting space in FGU. Many women academics in the institution that engage in higher education studies use scholarly publications as tools to bring to the fore the issue of women's positionality in academia. Surprisingly, signs of change seem to be emerging. In 2007, the university inaugurated a Gender Mainstreaming Project Committee. Included in the mandates of the committee are the preparation of a gender policy for the university, and the establishment of a Gender Mainstreaming Office in the institution.

Currently, the committee is working on the development of a gender policy. This is a welcome development and an indication that voices from the fringe have made impact in the university mainstream. The expectation among women academics is that this development will usher in a transformative gender policy for equitable male and female participation in FGU in no distant future. Nevertheless, breaking through micro-politics at the family level has continued to be problematic for DCWAs. The intersections of the internal dynamics of the private space and the DCWA's career necessitate choice making which many DCWAs are unwilling to make. Consequently, many who successfully resolve the private fail to resolve the public and vice versa. However, for the few whose husbands share their perspective, the resolution of both becomes easier. The role of the religious institutions in sustaining many women's lack of political will to break through certain social and cultural norms implies that most women are unwilling to agitate for change at the home front, a situation which finds support in the religious circles where men and women interact. Invariably, a lot of DCWAs are thus caught up in the dilemma of resolving the public and private spaces interface. For some, the strategy is privileging one at the expense of the other as the need arises.

Conclusion

This article has tried to reveal some of the complexities characterizing DCWAs' experience in academe. Findings offer insights into the socio-cultural context of work in many HEIs in Africa, coupled with how power plays in the marital institution impact on DCWAs' careers. It seems that particular cultural constructions can undermine the academic freedom and autonomy of a group within the system in a manner imperceptible to casual observers. The undermining of DCWAs' autonomy is evidenced in the attitudinal cultural constructions that violate freedom of expression and utilization of space in the university milieu and the strategically devised means to check her career advancement at the home front. Over time, she loses her individuality for the collective. Stigmatization, invisibility or 'mutedness', as the responses from my informants indicated, reflect the contradictions in the academics' struggle for academic freedom, autonomy and academic democracy in our continent. The socio-cultural context and ideologies under which men and women work, interact and pursue their careers in the academe, damage the marginal productivity of many women academics.

The Way Forward?

- There is a critical need for transformative gender policy that can engender attitudinal change in the universities in Nigeria. The reality in most universities, presently, distorts the collective identity of academics, those invested with the mandate to generate knowledge that will transform our individual and collective destinies, and the destiny of our continent. Also, increasing the number of women academics can create a more gender responsive work environment in the university.
- Most informants suggested that there is a need to discuss the issue of women academics' participation in the university space, either in workshops or seminars, not in a confrontational manner, but in a collegial way – a case of 'let us reason together'. Religious leaders of centres on campus also need to attend such programmes. As a male informant stated, the issue of the careers of women academics has caused friction in many homes. Discussing this issue in a very rational, collegial manner could foster gender equity.
- Many male informants are worried that many women who have risen to high positions in their careers tend to be boisterous at home and this creates fears in many men. Some men, therefore, employ defensive mechanisms to restrain their wives' careers. These

informants advised that successful women should not view high status as instrument of competition with their husbands.

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Notes

1. In Nigeria presently, there are 27 federal universities out of which five belong to the first generation university category. One of these five was selected for this study, and termed 'FGU'.
2. Although official data on the number of dual career academic couples in the institution are not available; through fieldwork, the researcher was able to arrive at a total of 85 dual career academic couples.
3. The Table below reflects academic staff distribution in FGU by 2009/2010 session, indicating designation and sex (Source: FGU Planning Unit). The gender implication of this distribution is that with more men in the higher positions, the possibility that men tend to mentor men puts women at a disadvantage, and consequently, marginalizes them in decision making by virtue of their numerical strength and position in career ladder.

Academic Staff Distribution in FGU

Designation	Male	Female	Total No. of Staff	Percentage of Female to Male
Prof	188	28	216	13
Associate Prof.	54	18	72	25
Senior Lecturers	258	93	351	26.5
Lecturer I	189	88	277	31.8
Lecturer II	141	69	210	32.9
Ass. Lecturer	60	31	91	34.1

4. The wife is a PhD student in FGU and at the same time a teaching assistant in the institution.

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