Abstract

This study focuses on women academics within the dual career couples category in a HEi in Nigeria. The study explores the experiences of some of this category of women academics and exposes the internal dynamics that characterize intra-group interactions in the academe, and subsequently raises the issue of equitable participation of men and women academics in HEi in Africa. It pays attention to how the dual career woman’s constructed identities intersect her interactions within the university space, and how this in turn impact on her career experience. The study, thus, identifies the areas in which the autonomy and academic freedom of women academics in dual career couple category are possibly undermined. This study draws on primary data gathered through ethnographic methods to analyze how women career advancement can be hindered by the misogynistic ‘micro politics’ at the family level on the one hand, and the larger university community on the other. The study, thus, demonstrates how “gendered relays of power”, (Morley 2003), and patriarchal ideologies within the home spill over and affect the career advancement of some of the women in this category. The paper concludes that the challenge of academic freedom demands more inward examination of the ‘micro politics within’ in order to as well as one’s desire and intentions to continue being a part of it incorporate the interests of all stakeholders within the intellectual community in the struggle for academic freedom and academic democracy in the continent of Africa.

Key Words: Gender, academic freedom, dual career women academics, social and cultural constructions, complexities

Introduction

This paper focuses on dual career academic couples in higher education institutions (HEi) in Nigeria, with particular attention on women academics in this category. Higher education scholars have, increasingly, recognized the gendered nature of the university experience (see for instance Sall 2000; Odejide 2003; Odejide et al 2006; Tamale & Oloka-Onyango 2000; Fashina 2000; Mbow 2000; Chanana 2003; Gaidzanwa 2007; Chesterman et al 2003; Mama 2003; Morley 2003; 2005; Morley et al. 2005; Moultrie & De La Rey 2003; and Pereira 2007). To these scholars, the university is not a gender-neutral environment. Rather, gender disparity within the larger civil society also permeates the university space and determines
women’s positionality. 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 academy (Sall 2000: ix). Currently, much of the literature focusing on gender and academic freedom has under-represented dual career academic couples in their analyses of gender and academic freedom in Africa. Studies like Mbow (2000) and Fashina (2000), for instance, highlighted certain areas in which women’s academic freedom are violated within the university system in Senegal and Nigeria respectively. While Mbow used personal experience to interrogate how religious beliefs impact negatively on academic freedom, Fashina noted the sidelining of gender issues in the academe as ‘unserious’ issue and unworthy of scholarly attention (see also Tamale et al 2000; Ouendji 2000).

To a great extent, dual career academic couples have remained virtually undocumented in the analysis of gender in the university space in the continent of Africa. Of particular interest in this analysis are the women in this category, which constitutes a segment of the 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 within the women academics group but also with the larger implications of not representing their voices. Their absence in the literature, therefore, constitutes a missing link in our comprehension of gender and academic freedom in Africa.

Indeed, dual career women academics’ experience of the HE institution is multifaceted and complex. It is, therefore, necessary to examine these complexities in order to identify peculiar challenges that confront them and, possibly, undermine their autonomy and academic freedom in a way unfamiliar to other women academics. Although case study typology is utilized in this study, for the sake of anonymity, our university of study is termed First Generation University (FGU). The choice of 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 viable for a study of this nature. Second, as an institution that at its establishment was predominantly male-
centric in terms of both students’ enrolment, and academic staff recruitment, the culture of
the university environment has continued to be predominantly misogynistic. The entrance of
women in this institution as academic staff has continued to be marginal, and hence women
positionality whether at the leadership or the social space has also remained peripheral both
vertically and horizontally.

This study explores the experiences of dual career women academics (DCWA),
paying attention to how their peculiar categorization affect their interactions within the
university space, and how these impact on their academic freedom, autonomy and careers. It
also explores how the ‘micro-politics’ within the family and the “gendered relays of power”
(Morley 2003) affect their career experiences. The study identifies the manner in which their
academic freedom and autonomy is violated through cultural constructions implicated in all
these dimensions. The study adopts symbolic interactionist’s perspective in its analysis of
dual career women’s career experience, as the focus is an analysis of 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 describes and explains
larger patterns that may be invisible to individual workers (Hodson et al. 2002: 35). This
study draws on primary data gathered through ethnographic methods to analyze how the
career advancement of some of these women can be hindered by the socio-cultural and
‘micro politics’ within the academe, at the family level, and misogynistic university socio-
cultural landscape. The study, thus, demonstrates how “gendered relays of power”, (Morley
2003), and patriarchal ideologies within the home spill over and affect the career life and
advancement of some of the women in this category. The paper 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.

Academic Freedom and the Socio-cultural Context of the Academe

The university as institution of higher learning was established in Africa as a functional and
vital institution for national development. The university is expected to provide a body of
educated elite to serve the community and the nation (Odejide 2003: 453). As a site for
knowledge production to serve national interests, the university engenders “notions of
citizenship, which open to primarily quantitative change, with regard to the inclusion of certain formerly excluded group (Unterhalter et al. 2003: 363). Although the university has its peculiar cultural system, the cultural landscape of the larger civil society on which the university is established impact significantly on the culture of the university. As Diaw (2007) rightly 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 ideologies remain a reality in the life and practices in the university system and the workings of the institution at large.

By and large, women in the HE institutions in Africa have remained the ‘endangered species’ in the university space. The situation is such that women in HEi in Africa, as late comers into the system, continue to occupy marginal position both in access and decision making (Mama 2003; Odejide 2003; Odejide et al. 2006; Morley 2003; Morley et al. 2005; Chanana 2003; Otunga et al. 2004; Pereira 2007). Indeed, the Victorian notion of the woman has affected and continues to affect in no small ways the definition of the woman in the academe. The socio-cultural landscape of the university has, therefore, remained largely patriarchal and misogynistic. Little wonder that women academics confront socio-cultural impediments in their bid to pursue careers in the academia. Access to leadership positions has not only been demarcated with glass ceiling - and coated with sticky floor - but also demarcated with Plexiglas (Quina et al. 1998; Terosky et al. 2008). Evidently, not only has women’s academic freedom and autonomy been undermined in various ways, particularly through social and cultural constructions, but the violations have continued to be accepted norms, and any attempt by a group or individuals to question such infringements is viewed as non-conforming, with all the prejudices and stereotypical attitudes associated with such labeling.

Indeed, women class condition in contemporary post colonial African society is a product of colonial contact and the capitalist ideologies that are associated with colonialism, which has dichotomized the human society. Within this dichotomization, man and woman relationship is segregated between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, where the ‘self’, the man, remains the basic and foundation of measurement and categorization. The male hegemonic
hold of social and cultural capital, which are the means of intellectual production, (Ukpokolo 2009), and the ideological support which they enjoy in contemporary society, has continued to militate against the woman. It is, indeed, worth noting that in pre-colonial Africa women enjoyed much degree of autonomy and power than obtains today (see Anyanwu, 1993; Amadiume 1987; Oyewumi 1997). In Igbo society of southeastern Nigeria for instance, Anyanwu (1993) noted that Igbo sub-cultures have institutional and ideological positions, which make the involvement of women in cultural production inevitable. He further affirmed that Igbo worldview generally see women as active participants in the evolution of their civilization. Indeed, the colonialists cemented and perpetuated women invisibility in Africa (Van Allen 1976), creating gender disparity that has continued to exist in most African societies to date. The university environment in Africa epitomizes this reality.

Most first generation universities in Nigeria are founded and rooted on this dichotomous gender relationship that is based on binary opposition, particularly as it relates to decision-making, social interactions and utilization of space within the academe. Within the university space, the woman academic is expected to conform to a particular way of ‘being’ that depicts this conventionality. For the dual career women academic in particular, she 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 contentions between her ‘real self’ and ‘acceptable self’ limits her ability to contribute her utmost potentials in the academe, which in a manner constitutes challenges to academic freedom and autonomy needed for the enhancement of her career.

Since the 1990s, the issue of academic freedom has increasingly become topical in 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. Indeed, in many African states, the states’ unduly influences with the academe through the neo-liberal policies that has continued to sweep through the global market economy has had negative impact on political and economic realities in African continent, with detrimental impact on the university. It is in this regard that some of the offshoots of governments’ unpopular policies such as structural adjustment programmes and the neoliberal policies have encroached on the freedom of the university, researchers, and students either overtly or covertly. Academic freedom, viewed 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 includes 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, part of the tenets of academic freedom and social responsibility of The Kampala Declaration, November 1990, is the demand for freedom of the universities to develop and pursue programmes without necessarily being limited by the dictates from the corridors of power outside the university system. Hence, The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility set 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 so much contradictions and loaded with numerous social, political and cultural issues and at times contradictory dimensions, it continues to evolve, leading to its expansive and eclectic nature (Radhakrishan 2008: 185). Part of the issues embedded in these contradictions is gender in the university space.

**Dual Career Academic Couples in FGU**

The term ‘dual career couple’ was coined by a European academic couple 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 couple 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 advertisement 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 paucity of literature on dual career academic couples in Africa, in Europe and America the issue of academic couples are widely discussed in the literature. Among the
research works 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 & Bird 1987). In their study, *Dual Career Academic Couples: What Universities need to Know*, Schiebinger et al. (2008) observed that in the US, the hiring of academic couples moved from 3 percent in 1970s to 13 percent 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 fill their vacant positions.

FGU, currently, does not have any official policy on dual hiring. Findings indicate that most of the dual career academics were hired independently or solo. However, in some cases, one of the partners hired first, usually the male, may have indirect influence on the appointment of the partner, mostly the woman by possibly passing information to the spouse of an advert in the university official bulletin, being a staff of the institution. 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 assumption is neither a common trend nor official position, when such occurs the partner must merit the position being sorted for and be subjected to panel of interviewers with the other applicants where she competes with them and must prove that she is a better candidate for the position she wishes to occupy. In any case she may not be recruited.

Because temporary appointment is not the procedure of staff recruitment in FGU, positions are advertised both in the university official bulletin and the national dailies. This contrasts with Willot (2009) observation of the University of Southeastern 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 and depends largely on the attitude of those in positions of authority in departments, faculties and, most particularly, the university itself (Wilot 2009: 10).

Unlike USEN, FGU does not run temporary method of appointment. This reduces the chances that one’s spouse may be recruited based on the fact the partner is already in the system. Often times, because of the huge resources required to run FGU and lean subventions from the federal government to educational sector, the institution tends to recruit staff of lower ranks ranging from Lecture Grade I downwards despite the fact that such an applicant may have PhD and publications or even occupy higher or equivalent position in the university where he or she is relocating from. This is very much unlike what obtains in many other universities in Nigeria where a fresh PhD holder with one or two publications moves straight to Lecturer Grade I. 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 appointment cannot be unconnected to the fact that the institution has in its employment a pool of academic staff occupying professorial rank and associate professors (predominantly males) that could function as mentors to the younger academics. This in itself has gender implications as more often than not, males tend to mentor males. Nevertheless, hiring higher ranking academics staff may amount to wastage of lean resources (see the table below for gender distribution of men and women in career ranking in FGU which also reflects gender disparity among the academic staff).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total No of Staff</th>
<th>% of Females to Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Prof.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Lecturers</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer I</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer II</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ass. Lecturer</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Academic staff distribution in FGU by 2008/2009 session showing designations and sex (Source, FGU Planning Unit, 2009).

Once recruited, the individual’s success depends mainly on his/her ability to publish in respectable journals and follow the university laid down procedures regarding the number of publications for promotion to relevant positions. The university lays great emphasis on journal articles published in reputable journals outside the country popularly referred to ‘offshore’. Such publications are viewed as possessing much merit due to peer review approach in assessment of the quality of such publications.

In our research, most of the respondents affirmed they were solo hires. According to one of the respondents:

I’m here on my own merit and not because my partner is employed by the university. I was a lecturer in another university when we got married and I had to join him. We were both assistant lecturers in different universities before we got married. So I left my job to join him here. When I got here I couldn’t get employment. I decided to teach in a secondary school while running my PhD and raising our children. About 15 years later I got a job here as an academic staff (Fieldwork 2010).
Some scholars have argued that men assist their partners in getting jobs more than women can assist their partners. According to Schiebinger et al. (2008) “men more than women have used their market power to bargain for positions for their partners” (Schiebinger et al. 2008: 16). Reasons that could be inferred for this could be patrilocal residence pattern in patrilineal societies that demands that the woman moves in to join the husband after marriage.

A number of problems may emerge particularly when couple do the same kind of job, pursue the same career, seek the same aspirations, and interact within the same work space. Issues such as resources utilization, career track issues, competition, career geographical mobility are part of the major issues that dual career couples contend with and if not properly handled could lead to frustration and career instability. In FGU, most women academics in dual career category enter the profession as married women, which suggests that either they met their partners while schooling in the university and the men were already holding a teaching position, gained some social and career grounds before the wives qualified to seek for position as an academic staff. Or even though they were already married before the man got recruited in FGU, the women were not qualified to be recruited as academic staff. For this category of dual career couples, there already a exist gap between the man and the women. Of course there are also few among the dual career couples who started together, but over time the men took the lead. Child bearing and other cultural dynamics are contributory factors in maintaining the gap between couples in dual career marriages in academe. Evidence also suggest that most of the dual career couples in our institution of study are in disciplinary exogamy, which means that they are not in the same field of research with their spouses, being in different departments or faculties.

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 researches. In such situations, they can partner in publications and assist one another in accessing materials and even generate a pool of related library materials from which each can benefit. Hence, dual career couples 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”
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. Fifty-eight percent of academic couples share contacts, mentors, colleagues, and friends compared with one-quarter or less of faculty with stay-at-home or employed partners. This greatly enhances each partner’s research into the other’s circle of mentors, friends, and patrons (Schiebinger et al. 2008: 37, 39).

They, also observed that in 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 indicate that, such conclusion is only valid and possible where there is no evidence of competition among the partners. As a respondent noted, “when the man is on top [higher in career ranking], collaboration is possible” (Fieldwork 2010).

The Complexities of Being a Dual Career Woman Academic

The woman academic in FGU faces diverse challenges like other women academics in universities in Nigeria. Challenges such as career disruptions, lack of institutional networks, detrimental impacts of ‘double shift’ and lack of geographical career mobility are features of women career experiences in the academe (see Ukpokolo 2009). However, there are certain inter-personal and intra-group dynamics that mark the experiences of DCWA that may be unfamiliar to other women academics. The intersections of their peculiar categorization with their interactions within the university space, coupled with micro politics at the home front impact on their academic freedom, autonomy and their careers and make their experiences complex. This section seeks to explore these dynamics and how the DCWA negotiate their multiple identities.
Negotiating the public space

The peculiarity of the experiences of the DCWA raises the issue of the social meanings and counter meanings ascribed to her categorization in FGU. Indeed, the DCWA is conscious of the presence of her partner as an academic staff in the system. This consciousness influences her interactions in the university community. Based on the gendered socio-cultural ideological terrain, she masks the ‘self’ in other to sustain the social image the husband has constructed and is still constructing in the university community. Failure to do this could generate negative stereotype from those she interacts with in the community. Attracting negative labeling must be avoided. Indeed, such labeling portrays such DCWA as a ‘deviant’ from the values and norms of the prescribed sociality within the university community. But the DCWA may prevent herself from getting into this debacle. Hence, to avoid destabilizing the social equilibrium that such dilemmatic condition may generate, the DCWA is most likely to withdraw from the larger social interactions. For instance, she is less likely to visit the university staff club than other women academics, although the space itself is a gendered space. Not because there is an institutional policy legislating against women’s participation in the space. Rather, it has been the ‘tradition’ apparently passed on from ‘generation to generation’. This is obvious to any casual observer. A respondent submitted:

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. See Prof XY [a female professor], she can do some of the things she does on campus because, though her husband is an academic staff, he does not work here. I bet you, if her husband is in this system she would have been a different person from whom she is today. All the women that are vocal on this campus do not have their husbands here. We [DCWA] are highly conscious of our husbands’ position and image (Fieldwork 2010).

DCWA as members of the academic community contribute in sustaining the cultural status quo. The staff club as a male space re-enforces and sustains men’s hegemonic control of space as an avenue of power.

Women academics’ participation in the university life has remained peripheral and for the DCWA, such participation is highly minimal. Many lean on as appendages to their
husbands to access networks when possible to get certain things done. Many respondents noted that because their partners are senior academic staff in FGU, they find it difficult to attend senate meetings, knowing their partners are likely to be in attendance. This in itself raises the question of autonomy and individual identity as an academic. How does she contend with the issues of personal identity construction within the university community? In what form do the cultural constructions and “gender relays of power” (Morley 2003) affect her decisions concerning the construction of her public identity? Public versus private divides are exemplified in the opposing interaction patterns among many dual career couples in FGU. While the DCWA live a private, controlled and protected social life, their male partners explore the public domain, which further gives them some leverage and offers them opportunity to make further contacts that enhance their career opportunities. It is in issues like these that DCWA’s autonomy is often undermined. A respondent stated:

The man should be seen and this is affecting women academics’ utilization of space. For instance, a colleague has been telling me to come to the senate meeting but I continue to put it off. The reason is that my husband is always at the senate meetings and he is widely known on campus, as a professor. 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. If he is at one side of the chambers expressing an opinion, I’m at the other side holding a contrary view, what will the university community think of us? You see what I mean? (Fieldwork 2010).

A major issue that shapes and re-enforces DCWA’s positionality in FGU community is sense of shame. Often times, the DCWA is careful to protect the husband’s social image. Rather than ‘make a mistake’ she withdraws and remains silent.

Indeed, women academic’s social interactions in the university space are influenced by the gendered ideology pervading the university environment. Although officially, there is no formal segregation between men and women interactions, stereotypical attitudinal and unofficial gendered discriminations affect women’s interactions in the formal and informal space. As Morley (2005) noted, “Powerful feelings are activated, e.g., shame, greed, guilt, fear, anger, desire, pride” (Morley 2005: 415). Often times, shame is a regulator of norms. Hence, people are careful to protect their reputations in the academe.
Losing the self, silencing!

The invisibility of DCWA is such that her success may be ascribed to the husband. According to a respondent:

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).

She cited an example of a research grant award which she got (the only person in her faculty) and her male colleagues asserted that it was her husband that wrote the proposal for her. “Even when the partner may not even know of the topic you are writing on, let alone contributing” she concluded.

‘Micro politics’ at home front can be a major constraint in access to academic networks. Collaboration is possible ‘when the man is on top’ as a respondent observed. Even when there is no competition between a dual career couple, colleagues initiate that feeling by talking about their individual outputs and this can raise tensions and crisis at home which can spill over to affect the career of the DCWA. “He can decide to stop you from attending conferences and workshops both within and outside the country”, a respondent commented. The same may apply if the woman is ahead, for instance, in obtaining a PhD. Another respondent submitted:

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

On this campus, I know many women with PhD but it is never mentioned at home. They are doctors in their various offices. Not at home. Though they would want their convocation pictures displayed at home but they cannot. Because their husbands are yet to get PhD. They are in this system (Fieldwork 2010).

Competition between academic partners is rarely obvious to outsiders and women hardly talk about it even when it exists between spouses, particularly among women in dual career marriages. Often times, the man may feel that his position as the head of the family is threatened when the woman seems to take the lead in such career arrangement because of the ‘micro politic’ and ‘relays of power’ (Morley 2003) that are culturally defined and institutionalized in the family structure. For this reason, the woman academic in dual career marriage may slow down her career ambition to ensure that there is career gap between her
and her partner partners so that the man can maintain the lead. A respondent 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? You see? It is abnormal. It is unheard of in this community” (Fieldwork 2010). Salient social and cultural issues like the above may be a contributory factor to women academic’s ‘trailing’ position in dual career marriages in the academe.

*The bitter pills!*

Although dual career couples in academic endogamy may share information concerning career opportunities, men benefit more in career mobility than women. Like other women academics, DCWA is constrained by lack of career mobility, which has detrimental effects on her career development. A respondent commented that because the husband is an academic, when he has access to information that may be of benefit to her, he forwards them to her mailbox. However, she noted that it does not mean 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 issue 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 impact on women’s career (Fieldwork 2010).

Although academic couples understand the nature of job prescriptions in the profession, for instance, the place of geographical mobility in career advancement, most male partners often resort to ‘traditional’ gender-role pattern in taking family decisions concerning the woman’s career. Based on instances like this, many women continue to suffer and are denied of those opportunities that can enhance their careers. Unequal distributions of household responsibilities hinder many women from achieving professional fulfilment. Hence, a supportive husband in a dual marriage relationship may not necessarily allow role overlap in this regard. A respondent noted:

> Most of the time it is the man that is ahead. Cultural problems hinder women. So many restrictions on publishing and traveling affect women’s career.
The man takes the sabbatical and goes outside the country or anywhere in the country that favours him. It is not the same with the woman. She will have to think about the husband and the home. For instance, I’m due for sabbatical but if any nearby university cannot take me, I wouldn’t mind going to a college of education even though the financial benefits and exposure are not anything to write home about. But, instead of losing out by staying at home, I have to consider that.

Again, there are homes where the women cannot use their money to pay for journals because they do not have power over their income, and not because they cannot afford it (Fieldwork 2010).

Another respondent related her recent experience:

I was to attend an academic engagement in another state which I have been planning for about three weeks now. And suddenly my husband came back and told me he has just been invited for a programme outside the country. That put to rest my earlier plans. There was no need to even discuss it (Fieldwork 2010).

Although experiences such as the ones related above could be frustrating, most respondents asserted that they give support to their husbands to achieve their career ambition in the academe. It is not always the case with the men. More often than not, the attitude of the man is determined by the position of the spouse on the career ladder. Again, the man that has reached the peak of his career ladder (professorial position) may be more positively disposed to the wife’s career ambition. Even then, family decisions on career issues do not still follow gender-neutral pattern.

The issue of lack of autonomy continues to hinder women from achieving career success. Inability to take career decisions and the tendency for people to treat the DCWA as extensions of their husbands can violate the right of the DCWA. As a respondent 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 on gaining promotion. The husband’s matter can be used to settle scores with you. The whole thing is very complex. What is due to me I can’t get because my husband is in the system (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 get from such establishment. For instance, if there are vacant positions in a unit and the wife shows interest, the partner may not be positively disposed to recruiting her. An informant commented:

There are cases where your husband cannot bring you in even though he is in a position to recruit new staff. But, in order to avoid being stereotyped as biased in his recruitment of staff, and you are defined with him, his hands are tied (Fieldwork 2010).

Apart from such instances, most times, because wives are treated as extensions of their husbands, many respondents noted that DCWA are less likely to gain certain appointments if their husbands are already occupying similar positions in the institution. Although linking the DCWA with the spouse has some benefits, the autonomy of the woman is jeopardized through such denials where her partner’s position and rewards are substitutes for her rights.

**Implications**

The themes in this section reveal the complexities and contradictions characterizing DCWA’s experience of the academe. The respondents, through their individual stories related how the gendered socio-cultural constructions impact on dual career women academic’s experience of the academe. The themes shed light on the complex and multifaceted nature of women’s attempt to negotiate the university space. Space, whether formal or informal, adds to the individual’s social capital through the network opportunity such encounter generated. Certainly, both the vertical and horizontal disparity inherent in the academe has continued to be perpetuated through social and cultural norms. In HE institutions, our analysis indicates that particular cultural constructions can undermine the academic freedom and autonomy of a group within the system in a manner imperceptibly to casual observers. The peculiarity of FGU is the fact that large numbers of the staff reside within the university environment, so the meanings generated at the public space leads to definitive exchange at the private arena. There is, therefore, mutual re-enforcement.

The dual career women academic lives through her careers in FGU with a constructed identity that masks her true self. The contradictions she embodies is masked as
she portrays herself in accordance with societal expectations, shielding away her ‘real self’ and reflecting ‘what I ought to be’ in order to continue to receive societal acceptance. In her negotiation of space, she discovers that her role is daunting and tasking. As Roper-Huilman (2008) rightly pointed out:

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 (Roper-Huilman 2008: 36).

As the DCWA negotiate the university space, she discovers she needs to mask the ‘self’. But this has implications. As Ropper-Huilman again hinted:

While we each mask ourselves based on our readings of the socio-cultural context and what we think is expected of us in that context, the degree to which this process alienates us from ourselves depends in large part on the degree to which we feel a ‘fit’ within that context. … It is a form of silencing oneself in the interests of others. The extent to which one’s identity performances are valued in the academy shapes one’s ability to contribute to it (Ropper-Huilman 2008: 37).

The ‘self’ of a DCWA is, therefore, a multifaceted self: at every point in her interactions, whether with students, colleagues or contribution to issues in the university community, she is conscious of her complex and dilemmatic situation. She contends between self representation as an academic and ‘mutedness’. In situations where she discovers painfully that she cannot perform 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. The complexities of her ‘being’ further complicates the possibility of her being appointed to prestigious positions or receive rewards in the system. Invariably, social exclusion creates space for the dominant group to continue to consolidate their hegemony.

As boarders and boundaries are becoming more deconstructed in different facets of life, in the academia, let social and cultural structures of exclusion also be deconstructed. Women academics in general, and DCWA should be partakers of the ‘unboundedness’, the envisaged new order, which academic freedom and autonomy promises. Discriminations,
whether socially constructed or systematically designed limits the capacity of the minority, while increasing the power of the dominant group. In the same vein, our mode of interactions whether by choice or imposed on us by socio-cultural constructs and the circumstantial realities of our situations, should be such that deconstructs the brick walls of ‘insider-outsider’ divide in the academe.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that dual career women academics define themselves through the social identity which their partners constructed, and this affect their negotiation of the university space. In attempt to sustain this definition and avoid the sense of shame that accompany stereotypical attitude to ‘deviant’ bahaviour, she denies herself of personal recognition, suffers isolation in order to gain societal acceptance. The undermining of her autonomy is evidenced in the attitudinal cultural constraints that undermine her freedom to use space and gain self esteem. Social meanings are constantly invoked as she negotiates space in the community. Over time she loses that aspect of her that distinguishes her from the collective, her individuality. Isolation, invisibility or ‘mutedness’ as the responses from my informants indicated, tells much about all of us, reflecting the contradictions in academics’ struggle for academic freedom, autonomy and academic democracy in our continent. The socio-cultural ideology under which men and women work, interact and pursue their careers in the academe is disempowering on the part of the women, and contributes in marginal productivity of women academics. Although some of these ideologies may not be addressed through policy formulations, there is the need for the awareness that unleveled playground in the academe distorts our collective identity as academics, those invested with the mandate to generate knowledge that will transform our individual and collective destiny, and the destiny of our continent. The struggle for academic freedom and autonomy is, indeed, our collective struggle. Yet, the differential equation of power both at the home front and at the larger university space contribute in undermining women’s academic freedom and autonomy in Africa.
References


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